

The illustration is a medieval-style painting. In the center, the Virgin Mary is depicted in a long, flowing white gown with a blue mantle. She holds a white lily in her right hand and has her left hand resting on the head of a man kneeling before her. The man is wearing a dark tunic with a red and black diamond pattern and is looking up at Mary with an expression of awe or devotion. In the background, to the right, a group of men in white robes are watching the scene. To the left, there is a large, ornate golden altar or shrine. The overall style is characterized by soft, blended colors and a focus on religious iconography.

JAN M. ZIOLKOWSKI

READING THE JUGGLER OF NOTRE DAME

Medieval Miracles and Modern Remakings



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2022 Jan M. Ziolkowski



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work for non-commercial purposes, providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that he endorses you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Reading the Juggler of Notre Dame: Medieval Miracles and Modern Remakings*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0284>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations.

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0284#copyright>. Further details about CC BY-NC-ND licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0284#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800643680

ISBN Hardback: 9781800643697

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800643703

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800643710

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800643727

ISBN XML: 9781800643734

ISBN HTML: 9781800646698

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0284

Cover image: Leon Guipon, 'Lightly down from the dark descends the Lady of Beauty' (1907), published in Edwin Markham, 'The Juggler of Touraine', *Century Magazine* (December 1907), p. 231.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

4. The Pious Sweat of Monks

A. Cistercian Miracles of Monks Working

The erstwhile French abbey of Clairvaux in the kingdom of Burgundy was established by the future Saint Bernard and twelve of his followers in 1115. The members of this monastic order, which followed *The Rule of Saint Benedict* but branched off from the Benedictines, came to be called Cistercians. They had the additional byname of white monks, in acknowledgment of the contrast between the undyed woolen habits with cowls they wore and the black ones donned by Benedictines. To go one step further, these same religious have also been known, in acknowledgment of Saint Bernard, as the Bernardines.

Whatever we choose to name them, the Cistercians, particularly those in Clairvaux and foundations situated to the east of it, told, retold, and [collected exempla](#). Their commitment to the genre was indefatigable: they made this form of storytelling their own. The interest of the monks lay not in all short anecdotes but rather in those that illustrated the wonderful deeds of those who founded their order and that related the commensurately wondrous events involving their brothers from after the earliest days of Cistercianism down to their own time.

Often when Bernardines delivered sermons outside their cloisters, they had the additional objective of converting lay listeners to become monks. Tales along these lines helped to enliven preaching and other genres of public speaking while simultaneously imparting Christian conduct and values: the relationship between promulgating exempla and practicing exemplary behavior is far from casual or coincidental.

Beginning in the final quarter of the twelfth century and continuing into the first few decades of the thirteenth, white monks of subsequent generations devoted themselves to creating exempla, communicating them in speech and writing, and collecting them. The importance of these accounts to documenting and molding the cultural and spiritual worldviews of monks, clerics, and lay people in the Middle Ages from the twelfth century on would be hard to overstate. The results are fascinating to study.

Among other things, the short narratives give glimpses of the complex interactions that played out in monastic life between oral and written retelling. The stories were often treated as common domain, to be appropriated freely for use without citation.

No such thing as copyright existed. This communal and traditional quality may hold particularly true when they were produced by Cistercians about their order, since in a sense they belonged to the whole movement rather than to any individual monk within it. By the same token, the anecdotes take us to the heart of how members of a monastic society envisaged the past, present, and future of their collective institutional enterprise. Small changes in the characters and emphases within such tales could (to get at the heart of the paradox) speak volumes. Last but not least, the exempla sometimes inspired later hearers or readers to relive or at least to believe that they were reexperiencing variations upon the original inspirational occurrences. In turn, these encores of miracles and visions engendered fresh spoken reports and further literary or historical records. A seemingly endless loop of wondrousness rolled on.

The exempla generated by white monks in the heady foundational period of the order and assembled afterward by their successors foretold much that evolved decades later, when public preaching, promoted and refined above all by Dominican and Franciscan friars, surged in importance, and obliged sermonizers to master new tools and techniques. The followers of both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic were inspired to follow Jesus by living the apostolic life. They wished to dwell communally in fraternity and to go forth preaching the Gospel.

In the transition from the Cistercians to the friars, the illustrations were reshaped in response to evolving sensibilities. The narratives were massaged so as to achieve applicability not solely to the spiritual development of recluses but more broadly to the virtuous behavior of Christians in many other walks of life. As such stories burgeoned, they absorbed other types of tales. In turn, they were reused by authors working across many different genres. Among other things, these accounts fulfilled pivotal roles in the energetic exchange of material and motifs among social strata, in this instance clerics and lay people. Exempla broke free from confinement in monastic quadrangles and circulated on city streets, among courtiers, and in vernacular literature.

To circle back to the twelfth century and to the white monks, the exempla, miracles, and visions from the early days of the Cistercians were comparable to the Gospels for adherents of the order who were striving to live up to the ideals and standards of the original apostolic life. The founding fathers (and brothers) nurtured a heady desire to transform themselves and those around them through the way of living in their order, and they sought proof that heaven held their shared mission in special favor.

Among the celestial beings whose affirmation the white monks hungered to have, the Virgin was paramount. She was felt to have bestowed many blessings on a movement that paid her special favor. Among these benefits, she was attested to have shown herself in [repeated apparitions](#) to the brethren of Clairvaux in the second half of the twelfth century. The members of the community set their hearts on the direct contact with the heavenly beauty, bliss, and balm that Mary could furnish them: they dedicated all their churches to her in her capacity as queen of heaven. Above all, they yearned for the validation that her showings delivered. The miracles, along with the

exempla celebrating them, were a Q.E.D. that the Mother of God singled them out for favor by assuming the role of being their special champion. The Cistercians went so far as to call her *advocata nostra* or “our advocate.” In other words, they regarded her as their in-house lawyer.

The *exemplum* of concern to us tells of one of these miraculous manifestations. Once, as the brothers were in a field reaping, one of them who was sitting apart caught sight of three females descending from the hills who passed amid his colleagues as they toiled. An unknown person appeared beside the viewer and revealed to him that the lead woman was the Virgin, accompanied by Elizabeth and Mary Magdalene.

The apparition of Mary was exceptional, even more for being amplified by the presence of her distinguished companions. But the story holds still greater relevance to us because of a supplementary motif that it soon acquired. While in transit, the Mother of God soothed the harvesters by fanning them, wiping their sweat, or both. The narrative does not specify whether the laborers were choir monks or, like the jongleur in “Our Lady’s Tumbler,” lay brothers. In any case, the tale underpins the view that hard toils by monks can garner holy rewards from the Virgin.

So far as the evidence now available enables us to infer, this miracle was penned on parchment first by a person writing under Prior John of Clairvaux and second by Herbert of Clairvaux. Further versions proliferated in the aftermath of Bernard of Clairvaux’s canonization in 1174, perhaps because the Cistercians longed for exempla that would help inspire and guide them in their chosen life, perhaps because the push to have their founder sanctified left them with both a capacity and a craving for composing, compiling, and circulating dossiers of writings to promote their order, or perhaps because of both impulses.

In the next stages of the Cistercian transmission, Abbot Gevard of Heisterbach recounted the anecdote to Caesarius. His listener, after being moved by it to renounce the world, take vows, and become a brother of the same German monastery himself, composed his version. At roughly the same point, another white monk, Hélinand of Froidmont, recorded the vision but described it as having been experienced by Abbot Petrus Monoculus (aka Peter the One-Eyed) of Clairvaux. Even later, the tale apparently circulated in oral tradition at the abbey of Villers in present-day Belgium before being accorded the durability of written form in the *Vita Abundi* or “Life of Abundus.”

Let us now explore the texts systematically. For what should we be alert? The sweat is no mere incidental. Though these exempla may be devoid of jongleurs and images of the Virgin, they show us lay brothers galore, apparitions of Mary, and gestures on the part of the latter to console the former as they pour out perspiration while laboring. Some of the anecdotes are written both by and for Cistercians, others by them for potential recruits who are solicited to come from the outside world into the monastery—and not merely into the cloister but also into the farmlands that generated food and funding. Can these little tales give any insight into the author and audience of “Our Lady’s Tumbler”?

1. *The Clairvaux Compilation*

The *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense* or, put into English, *The Clairvaux Compilation of Exempla and Visions*, produced between 1165 and 1174, was likely the first major compendium of exempla that the Cistercians assembled. Known for short now as the *Collectaneum Clarevallense* or *The Clairvaux Compilation*, this miscellany was a team effort and not an individual one, though its production was probably overseen by a single person, *Prior John of Clairvaux*. Even less in the Middle Ages than in many other eras, no bright line ran between initial creation and subsequent creative reuse: in other words, it can be hard to differentiate between a first-time composition and a later compilation. Although never copied, the manuscript apparently served over the next few decades as a reference work or primary source to be consulted or quarried by later monks who maintained and advanced *the miracle genre*.

The exemplum in *The Clairvaux Compilation* recounts how Mary manifested herself among the brothers of Clairvaux during harvest time. It bears mentioning that the toponym of their institution, referring to enlightenment both literal and figurative, means "Bright Valley." On this special occasion the Mother of God, attuned to the environment, looks appropriately resplendent in her own person and attire.

The tale as disclosed here has at its nucleus the Virgin, whom the compiler wished to portray in her guise as an extraordinary patron and protector to the monks of his order. Incidentally, he highlights her beautiful and dignified appearance, with a glancing reference to the brightness of her dress. In recapitulating the miraculous occurrence, he homes in on Mary's role in shielding the reapers from demonic temptation. He also presents her as an overseer, who wishes to verify that the monks under her oversight honor their obligations to their lord—or, more accurately, their Lord—by completing their labors. His account lacks the element of solace: the perspiration of the laborers is mentioned prominently, but so far as we are told, the Virgin does nothing to assuage it.

How the Blessed Mother of God Visited the Monks of Clairvaux during Harvest Time

This was a most beautiful sight, most worthy of everlasting memory. It took place in the time when according to the custom of the Cistercian order, monks had been engaged in gathering crops in conformity with *the tradition of blessed Benedict*. Just like others, the brothers of Clairvaux devoted their effort to this work. I learned about the event from the account of a man from our order.

As some were sweating away one day in this exertion, one of them was standing at a distance. Looking with keen eyes, he saw in front a very radiant woman in respectable and bright dress, with two other most attractive individuals of the female sex. Coming with marvelous dignity and respectability, they were making the rounds of the assembly of monks, and they behaved toward them as secular men appointed by their lords are accustomed to behave in watching over the harvest. In reality, they kept watch over them, not that they held them under suspicion for pilfering the crops but that unseen pilferers

of saintly toils not presume through some temptations to commit pilferage upon the produce. For they ever lie in ambush against the devout acts of good people. If we did not have God's watchfulness around us, we could in no way endure the wickedness of their harassment.

That brother beheld for a long time and marveled to himself what it was that he perceived, especially since it was inconceivable that women should be present among an assembly of monks, especially Cistercians. Then lo and behold! an unknown person, venerable and almost apostolic, stood near him, saying, "Why are you marveling? I will tell you the mystery of the woman whom you perceive. She is the thousandfold blessed Mother of God, ever a virgin, Mary, advocate of monks, who has come to visit her harvesters with the other saintly women upon whom you are looking, clearly Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene and other saints whom you do not see. She endeavors to do this often, or rather constantly, and for the sake of visiting the assembly now present, to display her presence, which is welcome for the marvelous affection of her love.

Seeing that this order, not heedlessly, prefaced [her name as title of honor](#) to itself for her to act as its patron, on this account she visits them while patronizing them very particularly as her own, and with affection commends them to the Lord God, her son, as what she holds dearest."

After he said these things, the famous vision vanished, but the faith and truth of what was said ought to remain with us forever.

2. Herbert of Clairvaux, *Book of Visions and Miracles at Clairvaux*

The exemplum became a mainstay whenever authors ventured into lore about remarkable events in the glory days of the French monastery. [Herbert of Clairvaux](#) was a brother there from 1153 to 1168/69. Later abbot of Mores in Champagne, he was appointed finally as archbishop of Torres (today Porto Torres) in Sardinia, where he stayed until his death, about 1198. His output, to judge by his extant corpus, was restricted to miracles and visions. The [Book of Visions and Miracles at Clairvaux](#), written in 1178 or thereabouts, is his only work to survive in its entirety—and the last phrase is somewhat of a misnomer, since on departing for his archbishopric he left less a finished text than an unfinalized draft in a bundle of quires.

In picking out his content, Herbert gave what would seem to be a deliberately wide berth to material included in the *Collectaneum*. Although he relied upon the earlier collection for the basics of the exemplum in which the Virgin materialized before the monks of Clairvaux as they reaped, he was anything but slavish in a retelling that held obvious importance for him: he places the exemplum [at the very opening of his text](#).

In preparing the ground, Herbert departs from Prior John and his team by not leaving the informant for the exemplum incognito. Instead, he identifies the beneficiary of the apparition as having been a monk called [Reinaldus](#) in Latin, which would equate to Renaud in French. In this exposition of the incident, Herbert focuses his energies on describing Mary's appearance and characterizes her objective as having been not so much administrative oversight of the harvest as moral support of her cherished

community. Additionally, he conjures up vividly the original context in which he was told the vision: a much older brother shared it in private with him when he was not far beyond his novitiate. In effect, we can discern the transfer, across generations of monks, of an episode that does honor to Cistercianism as a whole, while corroborating the faith of individuals within the order. This is tradition, both oral and written, in action.

About the Monk of Clairvaux
Who Saw the Blessed Virgin Mary
Visiting Her Harvesters in the Field

In the monastery of Clairvaux there was a monk named Reinaldus, a God-fearing man of virtuous simplicity who retained his innocence from his infancy all the way to old age and who though he lived in worldly dress for thirty years before his [profession](#), all the same did not live in worldly style, but ever intent on works of piety was concerned to [glorify and bear God in his body](#). For among the other good deeds that he did wholeheartedly, he also dedicated the wholeness of his body to the Lord, by whose assistance from his mother's womb all the way to the day of death he passed by the temptations of lusts and [the foulnesses of the flesh on an undefiled path](#). Having received the monastic habit in the monastery of [Saint Amand](#), he spent more than twenty years in a saintly way of life there, where he gave everyone no small example of his saintliness.

Then, blazing with greater passion for virtues, he transferred to the house of Clairvaux out of zeal for God; yet beforehand he had been forewarned by many revelations. How many toils, and how many troubles that blessed man endured from the brothers of that order, as they envied his fortunate actions and desired to divert him from a plan of this sort, I refrain from saying, as I wish to consider the weariness of readers. Having been received in Clairvaux, he girded himself manfully on the spot for new [warfare](#) and from being a veteran soldier he showed himself to us anew as the bravest recruit by mortifying himself all through the day [in toils, keeping vigils, fasts](#), and other services to saintly discipline. He had a zeal for praying unceasingly and a marvelous abundance of [tears in prayer](#).

One day, then, when he had gone forth with the others to the work of harvesting wheat, he separated a little from the group and began to gaze upon the harvesters, considering with great delight of mind to himself as well as marveling that out of love for Christ so many wise, noble, and frail men should subject themselves to toils and hardships, and should take upon themselves with so much eagerness the burning heat of the sun, as if they were plucking the sweetest-smelling fruits in a garden of delights or were banqueting at a table filled with quite elegant dishes. Then, with his eyes and hands raised up to heaven, he rendered thanks to the Lord that he had allied him, though unworthy and a sinner, to so saintly a multitude.

As he turned these and similar things over and over in his mind, and scarcely restrained himself in the boundlessness of his happiness, lo and behold! three women, respectable like married ladies, suddenly appeared to him, shining with rosy faces and bright white clothing. One of them who was preceding was gleaming in her clothing, comelier in her features, and taller in stature. They came down from the nearby mountain and drew near to the assembly of brothers harvesting crops on the side of that mountain.

Upon seeing them, he was agitated and astonished out of extreme wonderment, and he burst forth into words of this sort: "Lord God," he said, "who are these women, so beautiful and respectable, who against the custom of other women appear before our community?"

As he was saying such words, a man, covered in hoary hair deserving of respect and a white garment, stood near him and said to him, "The greater, who precedes the rest, is the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ, Mary; the others who follow are Saint Elizabeth and Saint Mary Magdalene."

When he had heard the Mother of the Lord named, his whole heart trembled for devotion to the name of her whom he loved passionately, and again he asked, saying, "And where is she going, my lord, where is Our Lady going?" The man responded to him, saying, "She is coming to visit her harvesters." Having said these things, the person who was speaking suddenly vanished.

Having seen this, the man of God was the more stupefied within himself. Turning his eyes back to the saintly Mother of God and to her companions, he concentrated with astonished sight upon them. Proceeding with measured steps, they came one after another to the community. When they had entered, they began to walk separately from one another here and there among the monks and lay brothers, as if for the sake of an official visit. When they had done this, at length they disappeared from the eyes of the one who was gazing, and they retreated to the heavens from which they had come.

Next, the man of God stood planted and could not be stirred from the place until the miracle was ended. His way of life, to be emulated, and his daily increases of virtue showed how much he gained from a visitation of such a kind and how much he grew in love of God and of his most blessed Mother. He received many other revelations from God, which all the same, to avoid the [taint](#) of vainglory, he preferred to keep silent rather than to tell. For he suppressed in silence for almost eight years even the one recalled above. A short time ago, that is, forty days (if I remember right), he, unwilling and in a way coerced in such a situation, disclosed it to me, though unworthy.

One day we were both speaking in private about the salvation of our souls. Knowing him as a just and saintly man and one visited often by God, I dared to inquire and to seek something from him, in that confidence with which I loved him and felt that I was loved by him. So for love of Christ and his mercies, I began to beseech him from the depths of my heart and to press strongly that to the honor of God he should make known to me some one of his revelations, namely, that one by which he judged I would be most edified. Constrained then by such beseeching, he recounted to me the vision told above. But with what emotion, at last? God himself is witness, with how much [fear and trembling](#), with how much overflowing of tears he brought it forth, in such a way that groans and sobs bursting forth from the bottom of his heart would cut off his voice in speaking quite often as if in that very hour he was perceiving the vision itself.

3. Hélinand of Froidmont, *Chronicle*

Among various records of the occurrence that have been transmitted, the anecdote of Mary with her companions as she made her way among the monks reaping was retold by [Geoffrey of Auxerre](#). Another composition survives, this one from an abbey of white monks in Germany, that contains a related vision, in which the Virgin carries a vessel in which she has accumulated drops of sweat from her monks as they

exerted themselves in the fields. This version is the work of [Engelhard of Langheim](#), a Cistercian who passed away in 1210. He served first as prior of the cloister after which he is named and later as abbot of another community in Austria. Afterward he returned to Langheim, where he remained until the end of his days. The abbey, destroyed repeatedly since then, stood in what is now the district of Klosterlangheim in Lichtenfels. The last-mentioned Bavarian town is located on the river Main in Upper Franconia, not far from Bamberg and Coburg. Among other writings, Engelhard produced for the nuns of Wechterswinkel, the first nunnery of his order in Bavaria, a book of miracles that is brimming with exempla and visions, including this one. He brings us at least to the outskirts of the thirteenth century, which could be considered the golden age of the white monks.

In fits and starts between the 1180s and 1215, a Cistercian called Conrad of Eberbach amassed the [Exordium magnum Cisterciense](#) or *The Great Beginning of Cîteaux*, extant in more more than forty whole or fragmentary manuscripts. He tapped heavily into Herbert's *Book of Visions and Miracles at Clairvaux*, and by his own admission drew on it wholesale for the text of this same episode. Since his Latin is nearly verbatim identical with his predecessor's, printing the same translation a second time would have no utility; but because Conrad's magnum opus has all along benefited from broader currency than Herbert's, it is well worth saying a word about both author and text.

When Conrad died in 1221, he held office as abbot of Eberbach. This monastery was not distant from Mainz, the city on the Rhine. The cloister was the oldest daughter house to be established by Clairvaux within what is today Germany. In acknowledgment of this service, Conrad received the last component of his now-conventional name. Even so, his paramount claim to fame arises from his attachment to Clairvaux. In *The Great Beginning of Cîteaux*, he unfolds a lively and loving account of the order. In it he mines learning and lore picked up at the end of the twelfth century during his approximately three decades in the "bright valley." While still there, he put together the first four "distinctions" or books of his great work. His stint fell during a period when elderly community members who had been at the abbey during the heroic early years might still have been alive to report on the happenings. Certainly many brethren would have heard about famous episodes.

The apparition of Mary among the reapers also surfaces in the [Chronicon](#) or *Chronicle* by Hélinand of Froidmont. He takes his second name from the monastery in Beauvais that he entered. In [his pre-monastic life](#) he is often reputed to have made his living as a *trouvère*, the French word for a type of poet who belonged to the same motley crew of entertainers that encompassed jongleurs. After abandoning that profession to become a Cistercian, this prolific author did not forsake the vernacular altogether. On the contrary, he left a French poem on death that he composed in the monastery: the topic would hardly have been much of a crowd-pleaser in his career as a popular entertainer. But his native tongue became a sideline for him in his literary output: after making his profession as a monk, he operated primarily in Latin prose. The learned

language is the medium of his vast world chronicle. Of its original forty-nine books only twenty-three survive.

Writing sometime between 1211 and 1223, Hélinand inserts our exemplum into what may be regarded as a loosely historical collage. True to tradition, he described the wondrous apparition as having befallen the brethren of Clairvaux while they brought in the harvest. Unlike his predecessors, he fixed the date, with some equivocation, in 1184. Further, he specified that the monk who experienced the vision was none other than Petrus Monoculus, the one-eyed head of the abbey who guided Clairvaux from 1179 until his death in 1186. [Helinand's source](#) was the miracle collection associated with the *Vita Petri Monoculi* or *Life of Peter the One-Eyed* by Thomas of Rueil. The attribution of the miraculous event to the monocular abbot [persisted for centuries](#).

Across the assorted iterations of the exemplum, authors evidence little stability in the identities they assign to the [two women](#) who accompany Mary: here they are Saints [Mary Magdalene](#) and [Mary of Egypt](#). Among other departures from preceding versions, Hélinand's succinct presentation omits the motifs of bright whiteness, sweat, and cooling or fanning with fabric.

In a time of harvesting, he had gone forth with the brothers to work. As the monks then took a break in silence, the abbot saw three most beautiful women coming among the brothers. One of them stood out marvelously from the others. Then the abbot went to encounter them, and said, "Surely you are very brazen, who thus come among us. Don't you know well that a woman ought not to come among us, that is to say, among monks of our order?" Then the one more radiant than the rest said, "I ought indeed to come among my people. For I am the mother of Lord Jesus Christ, Mary, who come to visit my harvesters; and this is Mary Magdalene, and this is Mary of Egypt." Upon hearing this, the abbot fell at her feet; when he wished to embrace them, she disappeared.

4. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue of Miracles*

Caesarius, born about 1180, earned his education in the German city of Cologne and its environs. In 1199, he donned the monastic habit to become a Cistercian in Heisterbach, in the Siebengebirge on the east bank of the middle Rhine, eight and a half miles from Bonn. Before doing so, he deferred his conversion briefly so as to go as a pilgrim to Our Lady of Rocamadour, the locus of many reputed miracles, among them ones closely related to "Our Lady's Tumbler" (see Part 1, Chapter 4). Upon wending his way back from pilgrimage, Caesarius entered the monastery after which he has been named. He stayed there with barely any interruption until his death about 1240.

Beyond writing extensively, Caesarius served his community as master of novices. In reflection of this occupation, his *Dialogus miraculorum* or *Dialogue of Miracles*, composed between 1219 and 1223, presents itself as an exchange between a probationer and the author himself, in his magisterial office. Designed to convert lay people and to educate those already monks, it is [replete with exempla](#). In fact, it comprehends a staggering total of 746 such illustrative stories. The anecdotes are grouped into twelve thematic

clusters, which the author labels "distinctions." The seventh such grouping is devoted to Marian miracles. With its range, its impressive number of short narratives, and its approachability to readers at even the earliest stage in their monastic vocation, the dialogue enjoyed considerable success and survives in more than a hundred codices.

The full title given to our exemplum in the *Dialogue of Miracles* is "[On the Entrance into Religious Life of This Little Work's Author](#)." The tale deals with a miracle, by now familiar, that befell brothers of Clairvaux while reaping. In it, the author tells how prolonged conversation with Gevard, [second abbot](#) of the Cistercian monastery after which both of them are named, motivated him to make his profession as a monk. The pivotal moment in the encounter between the two men occurred when Gevard told the legend that is translated here. The event recounted is called a vision rather than a miracle or exemplum. In it, the brethren are toiling hard to bring in the harvest. The Virgin Mary, her mother Anne (displacing Saint Elizabeth, who filled this niche in preceding versions), and Mary Magdalene come not to verify that the brethren are discharging their duties but rather to recognize their effort and reward it by wiping away their sweat, fanning them, and ministering to them in other ways.

Beyond anchoring in his own life the exposure to Gevard and to the exemplum, Caesarius's narration indicates clearly to readers when the actual miracle would have transpired, since [King Philip II of France](#) took the military action described in October of 1198. The author also gives us a good idea of where he was when he heard the story: Walberberg is located roughly halfway between Cologne and Bonn. The triangulation, both chronological and geographic, is very accurate. By twelfth-century standards, the geolocation cannot get much better.

In the first paragraph, Caesarius describes how his first contact with the miracle came through hearing it more or less as an exemplum in preaching or, to be more precise, in one-on-one mentoring. Gevard of Heisterbach told him the story as they traveled together to Cologne to the abbey of Walberberg. The abbot resorted to the narrative after failing in other attempts to win Caesarius over to take vows. But the oral is flanked by the literary: at the beginning and end of the second paragraph, the author acknowledges that a written form of the legend already existed.

In the time when King Philip first laid waste to the diocese of Cologne, it happened that I was going with lord Abbot Gevard from Walberberg to Cologne. And when on the route he encouraged me with much urgency to enter religious life and was not succeeding, he related to me that splendid vision pertaining to Clairvaux.

In this vision it is read that when at a certain harvest time the monastery was harvesting in the valley, the Blessed Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, together with her mother Saint Anne and Saint Mary Magdalene, came down from the mountain, as a certain saintly man who was standing opposite looked on. They descended into the same valley in great brilliance, wiped the sweat from the monks, supplied air by fanning their sleeves, and did the other things that have been set down there in writing.

I was moved so greatly by the account of this vision as to promise the abbot that if God should yet inspire in me the will, I would not come to any monastic house except to his to enter religious life. Then I was morally bound by a vow of pilgrimage to Notre

Dame of Rocamadour, which had a very great hold on me. When after three months it had been fulfilled, I came to Heisterbach, with none of my friends knowing and with only the mercy of God guiding and urging me, and as I had taken into my head from words, I showed in deeds, by becoming a novice. Almost the same thing happened to our monk Gerlach of Dinge.

NOVICE: It will not be useless for those who are still in this world to hear such things for the sake of the example they provide.

5. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Eight Books of Miracles*

Caesarius's *Libri VIII miraculorum* or *Eight Books of Miracles*, composed between 1125 and 1127, survives incomplete, probably not having been finished. It contains a second miracle that takes place, we can infer from details in the one that precedes it, in Loccum Abbey, founded by the Cistercians in 1163. The monastery still exists, in the town of Rehburg-Loccum in the German region of Lower Saxony. This brisk anecdote ventures nothing about harvesting, fieldwork, or fanning, but it likely presumes perspiring monks and certainly depicts the Mother of God in action wiping their faces, sweaty or not. In this instance the gesture appears to be a sign of favor that may reward the brothers for past conduct, while simultaneously predicting what is to come, since at least one of the two denied this distinction leaves the monastery.

Likewise concerning a Certain Monk of the Same Monastery,
Who Saw Saint Mary Go Around at Vigils,
and Wipe the Faces of Every Single Monk,
with Only Two Omitted

A certain other monk from the brethren of the same place, a man worthy of such great grace, on a certain night saw Our Lady go around the choir of singers and wipe the faces of every single monk, with only two omitted. Of them one soon renounced his monastic vocation; what became of the other is unknown.

6. Pseudo-Caesarius of Heisterbach, "The Virgin Mary's Vessel of Sweat"

A third piece associated with Caesarius of Heisterbach, albeit wrongly, is labeled explicitly as exemplary in its caption: "An Exemplum concerning a Monk, to Whom the Virgin Mary Revealed How Great a Reward Good Brothers and Sisters Will Have for Their Toils." A punchier title might be "[The Virgin Mary's Vessel of Sweat](#)." Although the short narrative has been printed as belonging to Caesarius's *Eight Books of Miracles*, it is now denied his authorship. However we entitle it, it is currently classed as Pseudo-Caesarian.

This exemplum relates to the other in describing the Virgin herself, who is as so often associated with bright light, as having visited monks engaged in fieldwork and having collected their sweat. The location is left indeterminate, beyond being (supposedly) somewhere in France.

On a Monk,
to Whom Saint Mary Revealed How Much of a Reward
Good Brothers and Sisters Will Have for Their Toils.

In a certain monastery located in France there was a commoner, a good and religious man advanced in age. When he was sent in due time for things needed in the cloister and came so late to the monastery that the dormitory was closed, he settled himself to sleep in the chapterhouse on a certain bench so as not to disturb the sacred quiet among the brothers.

But the Virgin Mary, daughter and mother alike of the highest king, held up to her saintliest nostrils a glass vessel, and with two most beautiful virgins, who were carrying two exceedingly bright lamps, she appeared to the man and asked him beforehand if he was sleeping. He responded that he was not sleeping, asking of her why even in nighttime she would presume to show herself in such a place against the order's custom.

She said, "Look, I am she to whom you, all things that are in this house, and everything which is to be found throughout the order belong. For today I was with my monks in the field, and I collected their sweat in this little vessel, which is the [sweetest of odors](#) to me and my son. For this toil indeed I will repay them with the greatest reward."

Then that man said to her, "Why, saintliest lady? Is our toil so great, which comes about out of necessity rather than devotion?"

In return, she said, "[Have you not read](#), that pleasure has punishment and need produces a crown? For everything that you do, if done out of necessity on behalf of me and my son, I claim for me, I accept everything, and I repay it with a worthy reward."

Having said these things, the Blessed Virgin was received into heaven. And that good monk afterward reported to his brothers what he had seen and what the Virgin Mary had said concerning them.

7. Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Abundus*

Another miracle from the first half of the thirteenth century fits squarely within the family of exempla about Cistercians at work whose perspiration elicits comfort from the Virgin and her companions. The white monk named Abundus, who died in 1237, had a sighting of Mary. This mega-Mariophile held true to his name by experiencing the Mother of God in an abundance of visions. As the brethren were toiling over the harvest, he saw the Virgin, in the company of the Magdalene, caress and cool them by fanning them with her sleeve and patting away with it the perspiration from their sweat-drenched faces. Abundus's vision is reported in an unfinished life by [Goswin of Bossut](#). Within his monastery, this hagiographer held the office of cantor, which

required both physical and compositional skills in writing as well as proficiencies in singing, and he perhaps also served as librarian.

Both Abundus and Goswin were brothers at Villers, which had been founded from Clairvaux in 1146–47. At the time the great abbey was in the Netherlandish region of Brabant; now its ruins are in Belgium. During a key stretch from 1197 to 1209, the Brabantine monastery had as abbot a man from Cologne who at the time of his election served as prior of Heisterbach. Through its connections with Clairvaux and Heisterbach, the community, even more than most ones of white monks, would have had good reason to be awash in exempla relating to Marian apparitions.

The Life of Abundus 14

In harvest season one day the monks were occupied, according to the stipulation of the Rule, in [gathering in the crops](#) in a field. Owing partly to their determination but especially to the heat of the fiery sun, which at that time spread over the earth more than usual, they were tormented as if in a frying pan. When everyone took a break at the nod from the prior, [the man of the Lord](#) took his break a little apart from the rest, to [pour out his heart like water before the face of his Lord](#).

Suddenly it happened that he saw two women coming through the field right to the community of monks taking their break. At the same time, he saw standing near him a man unknown to him. With a nod he asked him who these women were who had come and why they had come. From him he [received a reply](#). He said that it was the mother of the Lord, Mary, who had come to visit the community and that the other, her comrade, was [Mary who is called Magdalene](#).

And what did the mother of piety and mercy do? Taking compassion on each of the monks, she approached each of them, and soothing and cooling, by fanning the face of each one with the sleeve of her mantle, dispelled the sweat from them. When this had been done, with right hand raised and making the sign of the cross over the whole community, she blessed everyone. And so, going away together from that place by the route on which they had come, they retired.

None of those who were present, excepting [the man of God](#), is reported to have seen this vision. From that day all the way to the end of the harvest, our harvesters attained during work time so agreeable a coolness that the sun was felt to have moderated for them its heat, out of respect for the mother of the Lord.

8. Johannes Herolt, *Storehouse with Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Written out in the second half of the thirteenth century amid assorted miracles of the Virgin in a [Cistercian codex](#) is [another version of the story](#) that takes an almost polemical tack in favor of the white monks. To quote verbatim a summary offered by a late nineteenth-century [cataloguer of the manuscript](#), “The vision is seen by a monk who had left the Benedictine for the Cistercian order, but who found the life in the latter too toilsome for his taste.”

Though the white monks continued to make use of the miracle in the thirteenth century for their purposes, Dominicans also coopted it for use in preaching. Taking it from his Bernardine predecessors, a friar incorporated the exemplum into the collection of miracles of the Virgin known as the *Mariale magnum*. The telegraphic Latin title could be expanded and translated as *The Great Marian Miracle Book*. The short narrative, thanks to being present in this grand compendium, spread even more rapidly and widely than it would otherwise have done. Vincent of Beauvais, a member of the mendicant order who worked as a lector in theology at the Cistercian abbey of Royaumont, was well positioned to serve as a bridge between the two groups. His iteration of the exemplum quickly won considerable traction. Johannes Gobi the Younger, another Dominican who lived from 1300 to 1350, produced a famous collection of exempla entitled *Scala coeli* or *Heaven's Ladder*. In it, he relied heavily upon Vincent of Beauvais and *Caesarius of Heisterbach*. Like them, he composed a version of the narrative of *Mary and the harvesting monks*.

Moving into the second half of the fourteenth century, we encounter another Black Friar in the person of Johannes Herolt. Probably born around 1380, he held office in the second quarter of the fifteenth century in the German city of Nuremberg in both the Dominican cloister as prior and the female convent of St. Catherine's as confessor, preacher, and general vicar. Death befell him in Regensburg in 1468.

Herolt's prolific activity as a preacher and *writer on preaching* extends over much of the first half of the fifteenth century. He acquired, and may even have granted himself, the Latin byname *Discipulus*: he struck a stance as a "student" in describing his sermons as "not refined compositions and deductions such as you might expect from a teacher, but only the plain words that a learner would use."

In keeping with his role in an order of preaching friars, Herolt made his reputation through sermons, which he published mainly in Latin but also in German. His first bestseller, composed in 1418, was entitled *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* or *Sermons for Sundays and Saints' Days*. Subsequently he wrote many further works comprising sermons or otherwise connected with sermonizing.

He is counted among the most successful compilers of exempla in the late Middle Ages. His collections exercised influence long after the Reformation. Two of his, both now dated 1434, are given billing in their titles as *promptuaria* or "storehouses" of these short narratives. The first was the *Promptuarium exemplorum secundum ordinem alphabeti* or *Storehouse of Exempla following Alphabetical Order*. It features 643 illustrative tales told in full and another 224 cited only by title. The second was his *Promptuarium de miraculis Beatae Mariae Virginis* or *Storehouse of Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. This assemblage offers one hundred Marian miracles.

Our miracle, customarily numbered 7, appears early in the second collection. For this compendium of Marian materials, the Dominican draws upon many sources. In this case, Herolt is indebted to Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* or *Historical Mirror*, which in turn owes to Hélinand of Froidmont's *Chronicon*. In this version we

encounter such familiar elements of the story as brightness, white clothing, sweating monks, and (also likely white) towels.

A knight, having put off his *knightly belt*, entered the Cistercian order in Clairvaux. Once upon a time at harvest, having gone out to labor with his brothers, he was told to sit there and rest, because he was full of years and had not been accustomed to *work with his hands*. Sitting thus, he struck his breast, taking it ill that he did no work while the rest labored, and thus talked with himself: “Wretched weakling! What wise and noble men according to the flesh are working here who, if they wished to enter on worldly paths, would have a great name, and you sit here all day so very delicate, you who have grown old in evil days, while they before you bear the burden and heat of the day, youths of gentle birth and breeding though they may be.”

Thus, talking with himself, he saw in a vision descending from a hill above a white-clad company led by a very beautiful woman, and before her two others carrying towels in their hands. This lady coming with her company saluted the brothers with a holy kiss and took them into her loving embrace, and by the hands of the two companions who went before her, she wiped away with the towels the dust and sweat from the brows of the monks.

The knight, seeing this and ignorant that it was Mary, the Mother of God, gnashed with his teeth against the brothers, saying to himself: “What sort of brothers are these, and what sort of religion is this, where women are admitted not only to their presence and converse, but even to their embraces and kisses!” While he was thinking such thoughts, one of that white-clad band approaching said: “Why do you ignorantly imagine such things, old man? This lady whom you see is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who has come to see her reapers, comforting and helping them as her dearest sons.” The knight was edified and consoled by the reassurance of this vision in Mary, the Mother of God, and his brothers, and labored with the strength of that spiritual food, making a good end of his life.

B. Gautier de Coinci, *The Miracles of Our Lady*: “A Monk of Chartreuse”

Carthusian monks belong to an order established in 1084 by Saint Bruno, together with six companions, in a foundation that became known eventually as La Grande Chartreuse. From this motherhouse near Grenoble in France they derived their name. By folk etymology, any one of their monasteries can be called a charterhouse in English. This emphasis on the particularity of the communal living space makes sense, among other things because Carthusian architecture is distinctive: the brethren spend much of their time in individual cells that look out on a common cloister where they gather to worship. Their way of life, fusing the eremetical and the cenobitic—that is, the solitary and the communal—is defined by dedication to contemplation of God. Owing to their emphasis on silence and reliance on *conversi* or lay brothers (who had responsibility for manual work of agriculture and herding), their brand of monasticism reveals obvious resemblances to Cistercianism.

The narrative that follows is accorded status as a separate miracle in some manuscripts of Gautier de Coinci's *Miracles* as well as in the current standard edition of them, but some experts hold that our tale should not be counted separately and that instead it forms a *coda* to "The Miracle of Our Lady of Saydnaya," the miracle that precedes it. Saydnaya is the location of a monastery on a mountain in Syria, not twenty miles from Damascus. Internal evidence supports the supposition that the two texts form a unity. One such moment occurs in "The Monk of Chartreuse" when the poet refers twice (lines 86–87 and 95) to the central crisis in "The Miracle of Our Lady of Saydnaya," in which an icon of the Virgin emits an oil with miraculous healing properties.

In literary style and rhetorical structure, Gautier fails to wrap up "The Miracle of Our Lady of Saydnaya" with the wordplay with which he customarily concludes these narratives. In contrast, he caps "The Monk of Chartreuse" with nine lines that ring changes on derivatives of the French word *fin* for "end." The disparity between the two pieces in this regard buttresses the inference that within the overall structure of the *Miracles*, the poet did not envisage our story as being entirely autonomous, but instead as a pendant to its predecessor.

For all that, "The Monk of Chartreuse" can be read on its own in its relation to the original medieval poem of "Our Lady's Tumbler." The resemblances between the two have long attracted comment. Both protagonists strip off layers of clothing, perform physically demanding activities as a devotion and perhaps as a penance before a Madonna, sweat profusely, and receive succor from the Virgin Mary without realizing it. The two devotees are seen by another member of their communities. Yet the differences should not be understated. The jongleur is a lay brother who engages in acrobatic dance, whereas the Carthusian practices repetitive genuflection. The first is seen by not only another brother but also the abbot. Most important, the Cistercian acrobat dies and remains the focus of the quasi-hagiographic ending, whereas the brother of the charterhouse yields the floor to the fellow monk just recently his spectator, who soon passes away. On the question of priority, no firm decision can be made as to whether Gautier knew the earlier poem, a Latin text or oral tradition related to it, or a Latin text or oral tradition telling in some form the story of a monk of Chartreuse.

By any reckoning, "The Monk of Chartreuse" is short. The narrative ends at line 65, after which ensues a distended moralization nearly equal in length that reaches a close only at line 136. Even the story proper contains a substantial parenthesis (lines 46–56) in which Gautier takes to task those who are insufficiently devoted to the Virgin.

Gautier's "A Monk of Chartreuse" is *Miracles* Book 2, no. 31 ("De un moigne de Chartrose").

There was a monk of Chartreuse
who loved the Virgin, God's wife,

so much (just as I have discovered)
 that his soul occupies a great place in paradise.
 5 Day and night, he lingered often
 in the sanctuary after the monks
 to impose self-discipline, to pray,
 to kneel, to worship
 the Mother of God before her image,
 10 whom he loved greatly with a tender heart.
 His great devotion caused him
 to make so many obeisances
 before the image on bare knees
 that very often he was all covered in sweat.
 15 Weakness did not hold the upper hand over him,
 nor was he soft in imposing self-discipline.
 He worshipped the Mother of God so much
 that sweat very often ran down
 the length of his face,
 20 so much that it happened (it is my opinion)
 that one of his companions took notice of it.
 One night he spied what he did
 at such length in the chapel.
 He saw him go, all in tears,
 25 before a very lovely image,
 and then take off his shoes.
 When he had uncovered his knees,
 he genuflected before the image
 many times, to the ground,
 30 and made so many bows and bobs
 that he was all covered in sweat and all dripping.
 He saw him perform a good fifty or one hundred
 obeisances in a row.
 Then he sees descend from the sky
 35 (this is seen by him) a young girl,
 so very white, so very beautiful,
 that new-fallen snow did not have any edge on her.
 With a very delicate facecloth,
 much brighter and much whiter
 40 than new-fallen snow is on a branch,
 she wipes and dries so pleasantly
 the monk's face, which is all covered in sweat,
 that just from seeing such a sight
 he is so greatly cheered
 45 that it seems to him that he was lucky to be born.
 It seems to me, by Our Lady,
 that he is too lame and limping
 to secure the profit of his soul
 who hears this miracle,

50 if he does not desire greatly and does not try greatly
 to make such bows and bobs,
 for these are great achievements for the soul.
 For God's sake, let us apply ourselves
 to bow bows performed this way.
 55 The Mother of God very soon applies herself to love
 him who bows such bows.
 The one who saw this served the Mother of God
 most willingly and most devoutly
 so long as he was alive.
 60 He did not live long after
 he had seen this event.
 At the end he did not conceal
 his vision from his prior,
 and in private, and keeping his counsel,
 65 he revealed it to the monk.
 For I counsel this miracle
 to my friends and proclaim to all
 that in the end they should not love
 their knees as much as those do.
 70 When the body is cold in the knees,
 then the soul is in a very hot bath.
 Regarding our living flesh, it is not a concern to us
 if it is hot or cold, to save our soul:
 let us go often to greet
 75 the sweet lady before her image.
 The miracle of this good monk,
 who immediately after matins went
 without fail before her,
 ought to urge on all honest fellows.
 80 He who goes often to pray
 before the image of Notre Dame
 satisfies his soul well with *galantines*,
 pike fish, sea bass, or game.
 It behooves us to recall often
 85 this nun, the saintly woman:
 her good faith caused the liquid
 to rise and come out of the icon.
 Her good faith puts
 firm belief in my heart.
 90 No one, no matter if Jew or infidel,
 has thinking so feeble
 that, by *Saint Peter*, he ought not be made
 a true believer by such miracles.
 Since God makes a rock bleed
 95 or makes oil come out of a wooden panel,
 he can well make the sun be born from a star

and a virgin girl give birth to a child.
Since God, who is so great, powerful, and high,
wished to be born from his servant girl,
100 the sun that enlightens all things
issued from the star.
Since God makes both flower and rose
issue from a bush or a thorn,
he is indeed mad who dares to have doubt
105 about anything that his power accomplishes.
He who is in doubt
about the holy incarnation
will never look God in the face.
Since God in his great knowledge
110 created and made everything from nothing,
a person who is stunned and is amazed
by the wonder, marvel,
and miracle that he wishes to perform
indeed has squinting eyes of the heart,
115 indeed is [blind](#) and indeed one-eyed.
God is of such very high estate
that he made out of nothing and created
the world and all that there is,
and made of a virgin his mother.
120 She is the gleaming and bright star
who shines throughout the whole world.
May the Mother of God, the pure Virgin
whom we call the [star of the sea](#),
make our hearts so wakeful
125 for serving her and loving her
that our souls can see
at life's end the bright sun
which receives them in shelter.
We all will see him at the end
130 if we serve her with all our heart,
the bright star, pure and fine,
who purifies all and refines all,
so finely refines our finish
that can see without finish
135 this sun which is so fine.
Amen, amen, here I have finished.

