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Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. viii + 230 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$59.95 US (cl). ISBN 978-0-8122-4752-7; \$59.95 US (eb). ISBN 978-0-8122-9194-0.

Review by Cary Howie, Cornell University.

The cover of Jennifer D. Thibodeaux's book is the famous scene from the Bayeux Tapestry (the twelfth-century narrative textile depicting the Norman Conquest of England) in which a tonsured man touches the face of a woman while, beneath them, a naked guy spreads his legs to show his large and uncannily symmetrical genitalia, beside some kind of phallic object (a toadstool? a candle? a hilt?) and a dragon breathing fire out of both ends. The graphic designers at Penn have replaced the tapestry's original caption—UBI UNUS CLERICUS ET AELFGYVA (or, Carl Poydum's translation, "Look here, it's a clerk and Aelfgyva!")—with the author's name.^[1] The substitution is a canny one, inasmuch as it compresses into one name (the author's) the not-quite-names that belong to the participants in the scene of sexual scandal depicted in the tapestry. (For, as Poydum, perhaps among others, suggests, "a clerk"—or, as Thibodeaux would have it, "a cleric"—is about as determinate as "Aelfgyva," which, he proposes, might be an all-purpose name for everywoman, the equivalent, he says, of "Kitten" for a cool cat from the 1950s or, I'd add, "Mary" for a gay man of only slightly more recent vintage.) That is to say: the book puts front and center, right there on the cover, an equation that is also an effacement: UNUS CLERICUS ET AELFGYVA, a cleric and a generically addressed woman, conjoined now only through the cleric's large hand on Aelfgyva's face. But the effaced conjunction--ET--under the author's name also raises the question of what it means to be a clerk or a cleric, to have a certain professional name as well as a personal one, and how these names are both something given and something claimed, and in every case constituted through relationships with others.

The "manly priest" this book describes is, in other words, manly because of the conjunctions in his life, some of them effaceable or otherwise capable of being decoupled (women and children being, in this case, a bit like a train car relinquished at a station, to the surprise of the napping passengers) and some of them ineradicable (among them, I would say, desire). The question of how to conjoin, and with whom or what to couple, is the question of this book. It occasionally emphasizes the rhetoric of masculinity (as in the title) but it is just as importantly, perhaps even more importantly, concerned with the rhetoric of separation, of decoupling, that comes--then as now--so often to accompany the sacred, which is, after all, traditionally what is set apart. Thibodeaux's book documents the erasure of certain clerical conjunctions (to lay patterns of living, to biological families) and their replacement by others (to more monastic models of embodied living, to the ecclesial institution as a surrogate family).

The Manly Priest shows, roughly in chronological order, the emergence, from the late eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, of mandatory celibacy for clergy of all kinds and the use, by both proponents and opponents of clerical celibacy, of the rhetoric of masculinity. So what seems to have made a cleric a man? (All clerics were, of course, biologically male, a fact nonetheless accompanied by no small anxiety,

as one could infer from the countless medieval French narratives in which cross-dressing women pass as men within religious settings. Thibodeaux's argument limits itself, however, to Latin, non-literary sources.) "Religious writers of the reform period in England and Normandy conceived of manliness as an epic battle for sexual self-control," Thibodeaux writes (p. 40). That is to say, reformers such as Anselm of Bec/Canterbury, Arnulf of Lisieux, and Gerald of Wales offered a model of clerical celibacy as a virile alternative to behavior judged manly by secular society, including the transmission of wealth from father to son (as documented in chapter three, "The Marginality of Clerical Sons") and actually or potentially violent recreation, including sports and gambling (as documented in chapter six, "Policing Priestly Bodies").

Clerical gender, additionally, is bound up, for Thibodeaux, with clerical hierarchy, or, as she puts it in the introduction, "When contextualized, celibacy laws become a part of a larger initiative to reconceive the religious male body and, in doing so, elevate and separate the priesthood from the laity" (p. 11). Her first two chapters, "The Manly Celibate" and "Legal Discourse and Clerical Marriage," lay out the case for reform of an Anglo-Norman clergy accustomed to marriage and/or concubinage, as various councils began, particularly at the beginning of the twelfth century, to suggest, and ultimately require, that celibacy, once unique to monks, become normative for all men in religious orders. I say "and/or" advisedly: Thibodeaux points out that whether one refers to clerics' women as wives or worse depends in large part on who is doing the referring, and to what end: for example, one major difference she notes between two successive councils of Westminster (in 1102 and 1108) is that, in the report of the latter council, "of the numerous, lengthy directives regarding clerical unions, not one uses the term *uxor* (wife) to describe the female partner of a priest" (p. 54).

Thibodeaux's third and fourth chapters, "The Marginality of Clerical Sons" and "The Natural Right of a Man," elaborate the thorny problem of the male offspring produced by non-celibate clergy, especially in a society accustomed in large part to professional succession of fathers by their sons, as well as the pushback from married clergy and their allies against the newly imposed culture and rhetoric of clerical celibacy. In the process, Thibodeaux glances at the problem of personal responsibility for sin (she cites a letter from Pope Paschal II to Anselm in which the pope admits that "guilt clings" to the sons of clerics "not through any sin of their own"; p. 79) and engages at greater length with the rhetoric of sodomy, particularly as it is deployed by defenders of clerical marriage. She summarizes the argument of a defense of clerical marriage in the following terms: "By prohibiting clerical marriage, 'the naturalness of marriage to one woman,' he [the author] argued, clerics will go on to engage in 'unnatural' (*contra naturam*) practices, which may include 'cursed sodomitical fornication' (*execrabilis sodomitica fornicatio*)" (p. 99). Thibodeaux infers from statements such as this one a "perception by the secular clergy that their critics, those behind mandated celibacy, were sodomites" (pp. 100-1), an understandable inference, even as it perhaps underestimates the sheer *rhetorical* force that sodomy had, at least since Peter Damian, come to bear when churchmen found something they wanted to denounce as strenuously as possible.

Meanwhile, chapters five and six, "The Expansion of Religious Manliness" and "Policing Priestly Bodies," go into great detail about the administrative procedures developed for the enforcement of restrictions on clerical behavior, most compellingly, to my mind, the "canonical purgation" (*purgatio canonica*), according to which an accused cleric could be absolved of his alleged offense only by the oaths of seven, and in some cases up to twelve, witnesses of good repute. Although Thibodeaux's analysis steers clear of more modern philosophical frameworks for similar phenomena (e.g., Foucault's, above all) it nonetheless gives, in these pages, a fascinating example of a kind of *mise-en-abîme* of discipline, as canonical purgation produced one kind of publicly self-controlled body only through the support of other bodies already recognized as adequately self-controlled.

This book contains a plethora of proper names, and the reader should be warned that many of them look alike. Serlo of Sées (a reformer) gives way to Serlo of Bayeux (a defender of clerical marriage), and Anselm is occasionally of Bec and occasionally of Canterbury, not to mention the long lists in chapter

three documenting clerical nepotism. But all of this unvarnished detail does serve Thibodeaux's argument well: as she begins to argue in her final chapter and conclusion, the crisis over clerical marriage in the Middle Ages arose in tandem with the evolution of ever more specialized administrative practices for documenting, and overseeing, what priests were doing. Her book, in other words, is also, as I've begun to suggest, an exercise in the history of discipline: that is, the history of attempts to regulate conduct through administrative incentive and enforcement, through sheer technocratic—including rhetorical—control. If Thibodeaux is explicitly interested in how self-control came to define the clerical body's masculinity, following upon monastic models of struggle against the ever-unruly flesh, she is less explicitly but no less forcefully interested in how self-control came to define the Church's administrative relationship to men who may have seen themselves less as its chosen and called servants (to evoke one sense of vocation) than its employees, plain and simple. In our still more technocratically overdetermined age, Thibodeaux's painstakingly documented argument could not be more relevant. We have never had complete control over our bodies, but there is something especially unnerving when that control is not usurped so much as filched, invisibly or visibly, by institutions (e.g. the Church, the University) claiming a higher calling. Thibodeaux's *The Manly Priest* reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of those sticky fingers.

The book's pleasures remain, however, primarily in the details. I was particularly charmed by William of Malmesbury's approving description of how an early twelfth-century archdeacon-turned-bishop fought "manfully (*viriliter*)" against his rebellious body: "Nonetheless," in Thibodeaux's paraphrase, "after his episcopal consecration, the archdeacon began to experience genital swelling, 'with immeasurable flatulence' (it was believed that excessive gas could cause erections!)" (p. 35). If the clerical penis, in this anecdote, becomes a kind of troublesome balloon, connected physiologically and fantasmatically to the rest of the lower body—and I only wish these connections were teased out a bit further in Thibodeaux's exposition—so, too, do clerical genitals become explicitly linked to the abdomen, although in a much differently gendered way, by Serlo of Bayeux in an eleventh-century satirical poem. Here, Serlo accuses an abbot of gluttony, saying: "you bear the bulk of a pregnant woman's belly." For Thibodeaux, Serlo thereby shows the abbot's "failure at meeting the standards of ascetic manliness; pointing out his lack of self-control suggested his effeminacy" (p. 104). If the clerical body is, as Thibodeaux repeatedly suggests, an ideally controlled one, a body—I would say—subject to a nearly endless discipline, here the figure of that discipline's failure is the knocked-up monk. Thibodeaux's reading stops with her diagnosis of "effeminacy," but her anecdote begs to be brought to term: the pregnant body is, after all, a very particular kind of feminine body; it is a body expanding out into the world, a body characterized for Serlo by its "bulk." It is a conspicuous body, as well as a perversely generative one. The satire here is all about how a belly stuffed with food and a belly stuffed, so to speak, with a child are both signs of vulnerability: someone or something has gotten in there, and the surface of the body betrays this invasion.

There is one last sign of invasion that I'd like to address: every now and then, in this book, a woman appears. It doesn't happen often, but, when it does, the effect is powerful. For example, Thibodeaux tells this story about what could happen when a priest was ordered to abandon his wife or concubine:

"When Arnulf [a mid-twelfth-century bishop of Lisieux] sent two priests to the parish [of Hamon, who "had held a concubine for over thirty years"] to warn him again and attempt discipline, 'the mother and the daughters assaulted and atrociously laid impious hands on the two priests [he] sent.' The men were eventually able to escape, 'as if from the teeth of she-wolves' (p. 60)."

Even if the rhetoric of "impious hands" and "assault" comes awfully close to the kind of talk that circulates elsewhere in the book, and in medieval culture, around sodomy, the portrait of women fighting back, however bestially, is a welcome one. These women change shape almost as soon as they appear—they become "she-wolves," almost as though echoing *Bisclavret* and other twelfth-century werewolf-stories—but their fleeting appearance is an open and explicit rebuke of "discipline." Finally,

one of the most moving moments in the book occurs at the very beginning of Thibodeaux's conclusion, when she names a handful of the women with whom later clerics were involved. Keep in mind that, as I've said, this is a book positively bubbling over with names: one particularly dense account of clerical nepotism reads like an attendance sheet at the first meeting of a large, all-male lecture course (pp. 71-72). But suddenly, here at the end, three women's names appear--Rogera, Flori, Galienne--and, in contrast to the long lines of Rogers and Williams and Gerards and Gisleberts, they stand out vividly. Clerical masculinity needed women as its support or its foil, but, in moments like this, Thibodeaux reminds the reader that women had names, too, and those names stand out precisely for their small but legible differences: an "a" at the end of Roger, in this way, providing the kind of easily elided witness that a mere conjunction--"et"--provides in the panels of the Bayeux Tapestry.

NOTE

[1] Pyrdum's thoughts on this, as on so many things, are a hoot. See: <http://www.gotmedieval.com/2008/12/the-mystery-of-ælfgyva-mmm-tapestry-marginalia.html>. Accessed on 30 August 2016.

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