

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Making Saints, Making Selves: Narrative, Rhetoric, and Agency in the Diocesan Inquest into Jeanne-Marie de Maillé (1414–1415)

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Abstract

Drawing on the witness statements compiled as part of the fifteenth-century diocesan inquest petitioning for the canonization of Jeanne-Marie de Maillé (1331–1414), a French holy woman and mystic, this paper argues that the inquisitorial process of saint-making offered an opportunity for deponents to make use of authoritative legal spaces for their own social and religious ends, and that through their use of rhetorical and narrative devices, deponents could use this contact with institutional mechanisms to perform acts of self-construction and self-authorization, over and above the formal requirements of the process. Through an examination the statements of two witnesses – one a canon of the Basilica of St Martin, and the other a bourgeoisie laywoman – this paper illustrates that deponents could make use of a wide range of narrative strategies, from deploying the evidence of gossip to negotiate their own social position, to rhetorically crafting their own experiences in order to comment on and establish their own piety and devotion. The use of these strategies highlights the complexity of the interaction between individuals and institutions, and the multiple possibilities that were enabled by engagement with the machinery of the cult of saints.

Keywords: Saints; Canonization; Inquisition; Identity; Narrative

1. Introduction and Methodological Concerns

“And that when the deceased lord the Duke of Orleans made passage through the town of Tours, for he was to go to Bourg in Gascony, the witness shuddered greatly at the danger and harshness of the armed men appearing in the company of the said Duke: and lest any of these violent men whom she feared should be lodged in her home, she commended herself to the said lady [Jeanne-Marie of Maillé], and after doing this none were lodged in her home, notwithstanding that the said lord

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Duke was lodged in the house of the King of Sicily, near the house of the witness. Moreover, she states that the doors of her neighbors were completely broken by the said armed men, and that all the neighbors came to their home for refuge, firmly believing and hoping that this was due to the intercessions and merits of the said lady.” Testimony of Isabelle la Jaudeé, a devotee of Jeanne-Marie of Maillé.

This testimony, taken from a deposition in the diocesan process for the canonization of the French holy woman and mystic Jeanne-Marie of Maillé (†1414), demonstrates the possibilities that participation in the legal machinery of canonization presented to witnesses.¹ While such processes were intended to gather evidence for the sanctity of a deceased individual, they also afforded witnesses the opportunity to craft a narrative within a culturally authoritative context, and make use of the discursive space of canonization as a forum for self-construction. Isabelle’s testimony primarily showcased Jeanne-Marie’s efficacy as a saintly intercessor who preserved the safety of both Isabelle and her property. However, the inclusion of the additional details of the suffering of her neighbors, and their refuge within her house tells us as much about Isabelle (and how she wanted to be perceived) as it does about Jeanne-Marie. This testimony crafts a picture of a woman both more devout, and more spiritually competent than her neighbors, and one who was a source of trust and authority within the community. Isabelle took the opportunity provided by her deposition to construct herself, as much as she constructed a saint.

This point leads to the central arguments of this paper. The first, what might be thought of as the big-picture argument, is that testifying in a canonization (or diocesan) process was a moment of opportunity for the witness as much as for the procurator. It allowed them a space to perform a narration within a culturally authoritative institutional context. Secondly, I will demonstrate that when considering the narratives of witnesses in canonization proceedings it is crucial to focus on the precise rhetoric and narrative structure used to portray the events being narrated, and that these elements formed the means by which deponents could exercise agency within a tightly controlled context of authority, and take advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by the deposition. Stories operate not just through recounting of events, but through the emotive and imaginative force that the accounts bring to bear, and this force is created by rhetorical devices and narrative strategies. As in Isabelle’s testimony, the narrative structure of the deposition could be used as a means of talking about the witness, as much as the saint. Therefore, in order to understand how deposition narratives functioned within a wider social and religious context (both for the procurators

¹Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale de Tours, MS 1032 is the only surviving contemporary manuscript of Jeanne-Marie’s canonization process. References are provided to the specific witness deposition within this manuscript, and the folio number. All translations are my own. For Isabelle la Jaudeé’s deposition, see Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 4v–5v. The Latin is as follows: “Et quod dum defunctus Dominus Dux Aurelianensis fecit transitum per villam Turon. pro eundo apud Burgum in Vasconia, illa testis perhorrescebat plurimum dangerium & austeritatem gentium armorum, in comitiua dicti Domini Ducis existentium: & ne quis hospitaretur in domo sua, illorum videlicet armatorum quorum violentiam metuebat, se recommendauit dictæ Domine, & post recommendationem nullus se hospitaui in domo sua, non obstante quod dictus Dominus Dux fuisset hospitatus in domo Regis Siciliae, prope domum istius testis. Insuper deponit quod ostia vicinorum suorum per dictos armatos fuerunt totaliter fracta, & quod omnes vicinæ venerunt ad refugium in domum suam credens firmiter et sperans quod hoc fuit intercessionibus et meritis dicte domine.”

and the deponents), we must consider *how* the witnesses chose to evoke a scene, rather than just the scenes they chose to relate.

The arguments of this paper will be based on the testimonies of two witnesses drawn from the diocesan process for Jeanne-Marie de Maillé, held in Tours from April 1414 to May 1415.² Jeanne-Marie was a Franciscan-affiliated noble laywoman born in 1331, who, following the death of her husband in 1362, lived a life of poverty, charity, and holiness – including many miracles and mystical visions – in and around the Touraine until her death in 1414. A preliminary local process (from which these testimonies are drawn) was begun immediately after her death and sent to the papacy, but resulted in no further action or development of her case until 1871, when Pope Pius IX issued a decree of beatification. Despite this papal inactivity, Jeanne-Marie was revered as a saint in Tours and the surrounding area from her death until the late nineteenth century, demonstrating the vitality and independence of local cults and devotions, as well as the fact that not all understandings of sanctity depended on institutionally determined criteria.³

My arguments contribute to a new approach within the field of canonization studies.⁴ Recent scholarship by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Robert Bartlett has moved toward an understanding of miracle accounts as narrative constructions.⁵ Katajala-Peltomaa's work offers the first cohesive methodological consideration of the narrative analysis of canonization material. She asks how personal assertions by witnesses can be detected in canonization testimony, and argues that attention to the rhetorical elements in depositions "offers new possibilities for reading canonization processes and enables a new investigative angle into the lived religion of the laity."⁶ My hope here is to go beyond methodological considerations, and to examine what

²For the process of papal canonization, and the practicalities involved in organizing a diocesan investigation, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 33–57. Preliminary diocesan investigations (as opposed to papally-sponsored *inquisitiones in partibus*) have yet to receive much scholarly attention.

³For the continued devotion to Jeanne-Marie, see André Vauchez, "Notre-Dame-de-l'Hermitière: mutations et continuité d'un culte populaire du XV^e au XIX^e siècle," in *Homo religiosus, Mélanges en l'honneur du professeur Jean Delumeau* (Paris: Fayard, 1997); André Vauchez, "A Holy Woman During the Hundred Years War: Jeanne-Marie of Maillé," in *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices; Edited and Introduced by Daniel E. Bornstein*, trans. Margery J. Schneider, ed. André Vauchez (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 215.

⁴It should be noted that the conception of legal texts as "fictions" and narrative constructs is not new. The foundational work is Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), but medievalists have also embraced Zemon Davis's ideas, particularly in regards to court hearings – see Jeremy Goldberg, "The Priest of Nottingham and the Holy Household of Ousegate: Telling Tales in Court," in *Town Courts and Urban Society in Late Medieval England, 1250–1500*, eds. Richard Goddard and Teresa Phipps (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), 60–76; Shannon McSheffrey, "Detective Fiction in the Archives: Court Records and the Uses of Law in Late Medieval England," *History Workshop Journal* 65, no. 1 (2008): 65–78 and Ross Balzaretti, "Spoken Narratives in Ninth-Century Milanese Court Records," in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, eds. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006), 11–37.

⁵Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, "Narrative Strategies in the Depositions: Gender, Family, and Devotion," in *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes: Structures, Functions, and Methodologies*, eds. Christian Krötzel and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018), 227–256; Robert Bartlett, "Medieval Miracle Accounts as Stories," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (May 2017): 113–127.

⁶Katajala-Peltomaa, "Narrative Strategies in the Depositions," 229.

such elements, once detected, can tell us about the tactical acts of social production that witnesses undertook within the normative legal framework of canonization. My analysis will center the agency of deponents, and explore why, as well as how, they might make use of narrative and rhetorical tools.

Bartlett's article raises important points concerning the contexts in which miracle stories were produced, and helpfully highlights the narrative nature of miracle accounts and the possibilities of studying them from this angle. However, Bartlett also imposes a restrictive binary on his sources, suggesting that miracle narratives fall into one of two categories: "the weaker, more generally persuasive, sense, calling that the literary approach, [and] the approach that sought to show that someone was a saint by more formal rules, calling that the forensic."⁷ This categorization stems from Bartlett's argument that "the indispensable task for a miracle account is to construe a sequence of events as miracle," and his attempts to distinguish how this might be done.⁸ In understanding the purpose of miracle source this way, Bartlett commits to viewing them from an institutional perspective. Such an analysis fails to take into account the dynamics of power and agency present within the judicial context of an inquisitorial deposition. For deponents, miracle stories were often about far more than the construction of the miracle. The present discussion will demonstrate the artificiality of such a literary-forensic distinction, through detailing the wide variety of work that miracle narratives perform that has nothing to do with the miracle itself, and the role that "literary" features such as rhetorical and narrative embellishment can play even in more restrictive and probative judicial contexts.

Any argument based on the precise rhetoric and narrative used within an inquisitorial context must take into account the structured and coercive nature of that setting.⁹ In most cases, when situated before an inquisitorial tribunal, whether in a heresy investigation or a canonization procedure, a witness was not given free rein to narrate. Their responses were elicited and shaped by a series of questions (the *articuli interrogatorii*) that governed the topics on which they were invited to speak, and then clarified and specified by follow-up questions and requests for further proofs or details, before ultimately being translated into Latin and written down as a literary account. This process has been regarded by historians as top-down imposition of power, rendering the witness subject to the mechanisms of institutional authority that "deconstruct" the *vox populi*,¹⁰ or that process and reshape the narrative "from the folkloric culture of the layman to the clerical culture of the monk."¹¹ Indeed, John Arnold has gone so far as to suggest that since it is only thanks to the sources of inquisition that we can access the deponents at any level, we can think of them as being produced only as "confessing subjects,"

⁷Bartlett, "Medieval Miracle Accounts as Stories," 115.

⁸*Ibid.*, 115.

⁹The literature on this problem is vast. For a representative discussion, see Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 107–108; Caterina Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11–26; John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2–15; Stephen Justice, "Inquisition, Speech, and Writing: A Case from Late-Medieval Norwich," *Representations* 48 (1994): 1–29.

¹⁰Gabor Klaniczay, "Ritual and Narrative in Late Medieval Miracle Accounts: The Construction of the Miracle," in *Religious Participation in Ancient and Medieval Societies: Rituals, Interaction and Identity*, Vol. 41, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Ville Vuolanto (Roma: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2013), 210.

¹¹Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 29.

constituted in the “context of power” that invites them to speak.¹² All of this leads to a particular problem: how can we be sure that the rhetorical and narrative elements in a given testimony stemmed from the deponent, and were not imposed by notaries or procurators? Scholars of canonization and saint-making have tended to be less attentive to this aspect of canonization than historians focusing on inquisitions into heresy, and it is from this latter area of study that we can suggest some answers.¹³

A useful reading strategy is offered by the work of Caterina Bruschi, who presents a view of the inquisitorial process as being shaped by both deponent and inquisitor, and thus that rather than being engaged in a positivist effort to strip away the “filters” of institutional process, we can instead begin with the text as a whole, and from there consider the respective contributions of deponent and inquisitor, as well as notaries and early modern editors.¹⁴ Bruschi’s analysis of the depositions of witnesses in inquisitions into heresy focuses on the “surplus” – the events or elements (what we might term the plot beats) that stand out from the general formulaic repetition of responses to the *articuli*. For instance, in our initial example of the testimony of Isabelle la Jauδέé, the details of her friends and neighbors sheltering in her home form the “surplus” (as information that is not required by the *articuli*), and are also the elements of the deposition that undertake Isabelle’s identity work. By identifying these “surplus” details or events, Bruschi suggests that we can discern some elements of the oral narration that lead to the construction of the inquisitorial text.¹⁵ Retaining Bruschi’s conception of inquisitorial sources as a single, multi-vocal text allows us to understand the process as a space in which the words of the deponents remain present, if not unaltered, and to develop Bruschi’s approach by shifting our focus away from the broader subject matter of the depositions and toward the individual narrative and performative choices.

The two witnesses that I will focus on here came from very different milieus. The first is Master Jean Tennenot, a Canon of the Basilica of St Martin and sometime associate of Jeanne-Marie. Master Tennenot was around fifty-five when he appeared before the procurators, and appears to have known Jeanne-Marie since around 1384, when he was studying civil law in Angers. His deposition is one of the longest in the process, some 3300 words in the Latin, and covers both his own experiences and interactions with Jeanne-Marie, and (much more extensively) the experiences of others he had heard about and could relate to the panel. In a marked contrast, our second witness, Richette Tranchant, was “a citizen of Tours” and on February 11, 1415 gave a reasonably substantial deposition (c. 1500 words in Latin) containing several short narratives concerning miracles Richette witnessed as a devotee of the living saint. These witnesses offer us contrasting perspectives on both the socio-religious image of the saint, and the

¹²Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 7, 74–110. Arnold has recently stepped back somewhat from the position of the entirely context-constructed “confessing subject,” but his work remains foundational and a significant influence on the author’s approach to these sources.

¹³Scholars of canonization have tended to answer this problem with reference simply to the importance of accurate transcription in papal assessments: see for instance Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 51–55, and Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century: Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9. An important recent exception is Nicole Archambeau, *Souls Under Siege: Stories of War, Plague and Confession in Fourteenth-Century Provence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021) which both approaches canonization depositions as stories, and offers extensive analysis of the importance of the experiences of the deponent in shaping their testimony.

¹⁴Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc*, 13.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

process of providing a narrative deposition. One was male, the other female. One clerical, one lay. Master Tennenot was of relatively advanced age when he deposed, whereas Richette was only thirty-six. Jean is described as “licensed in both courts” while we have no indication that Richette was in any way educated.¹⁶ I will consider each witness in turn, looking at the rhetorical strategies and motifs they employed. In doing so, I open the door to an analysis of canonization depositions that highlights the ways in which deponents positioned themselves relative to the procurators, the saint, and each other, as well as arguing for the idea of the deposition as a performative opportunity for the deponent, one that allowed them to narratively and rhetorically formulate their own experiences in a way that achieved their own social or religious goals.

II. The Testimony of Master Jean Tennenot

The testimony of Master Jean Tennenot is broadly structured around the *articuli interrogatorii* employed by the procurators. *Articuli* in canonization processes formed a set of questions devised by the procurators and put to deponents to structure and direct their testimony, and to enquire about specific aspects of the sanctity of the putative saint.¹⁷ They were normally divided into sections dealing with different elements of sanctity: the life and virtues of the saint, miracles *in vita*, miracles *post mortem*, and so on. The *articuli* employed in Jeanne-Marie’s process are unusually short (ten articles), and can be broadly divided into three sections: three articles dealing with Jeanne-Marie’s life and merits, with a particular focus on poverty (I–III), three dealing with her miracles (VI–VI), and three concerning her visionary and mystical experiences (VII–IX), with the last article (X) confirming her final miracle of bodily rejuvenation after death.¹⁸ The overall direction of Jean’s testimony was dictated by these *articuli*: he responded to the articles in order, meaning his testimony deals with virtues, miracles, and visions in turn. The narrative strategies employed within these sections differ slightly, and the ways in which Jean delivered each element of his testimony suggests that both he and the procurators had specific goals in mind for these narratives. I shall focus primarily on the first two sections to paint a comprehensive picture of the ways in which Jean engages with the diocesan process dealing with Jeanne-Marie’s virtues and miracles. The third section, concerning visions, is interesting in its own right, but does not display significantly different narrative and rhetorical strategies to the preceding two, and therefore can be considered an extension of them for my purposes here.

Upon reading Jean Tennenot’s response to articles I, II, and III of the diocesan process, the first fact that strikes the reader is how little of the narrative records Jean’s own direct experiences or observations. He detailed Jeanne-Marie’s piety and devotion while she was living in the Franciscan convent of Angers with Isabella of Avaugour (the “lady of Mayenne”) around 1384, saying that “from that time she was and had been

¹⁶Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 5v: “*in vtroque Iure Licentiatius*.”

¹⁷For the development and use of *articuli interrogatorii* in canonization proceedings, see Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 49.

¹⁸For the *articuli interrogatorii* used in the diocesan enquiry into Jeanne-Marie de Maillé, see Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fols. 2v–3r. As a point of comparison, the canonization process for Delphine de Puimichel (1363) contained nearly one hundred questions. The brief nature of the *articuli* in Jeanne-Marie’s case likely stems from the proceedings being a preliminary diocesan hearing, rather than a papally commissioned *inquisitio in partibus* – as a document designed to prompt the opening of an official process, such precision was not required at this early stage.

continually contemplative, and had unwearingly led a holy and contemplative life.”¹⁹ Jean’s initial contextualization of his testimony puts him in Angers during this time, and a frequent visitor to the convent, yet, when asked how he could detail Jeanne-Marie’s holy life at this time, he deployed the evidence of gossip, albeit specifically sourced: “he says that he had neighbors and friendly countrymen, serving the said lady of Mayenne in the said house of the Minors, and that they were daily seeing and perceiving the contemplative life of the said Lady of Sillé [Jeanne-Marie],” and having further described Jeanne-Marie’s devotion to alms-houses and the care of lepers, he told the procurators that “his neighbors related all these things to him, and likewise the brothers of the said place, with whom he had extensive acquaintance.”²⁰ Still later, providing evidence of Jeanne-Marie’s noble birth, he relied on both collective opinion (*fama*) by stating that this fact was “known and evident,” and the testimony of one Inhellus, a knight of Angers, as well as his “noble neighbors.”²¹

This reliance on *fama* was not only an act that contributed to the success of the process but also one that performed acts of self-construction by reinforcing the status of a learned, reliable authority Jean claimed for himself at the beginning of (and throughout) his statement through his emphasis on his own education and training.²² As André Vauchez has noted, over the course of the Middle Ages, canonization efforts increasingly required the existence of a demonstrable public cult before the papacy would officially launch an investigation.²³ In this context, Jean’s emphasis on *fama* was in part a feature of the judicial context in which he spoke – it reflected the requirements of the procurators and the process, justifying the diocesan investigation and forming part of an argument for a further papal commission. However, this judicial need also provided an opportunity for Jean to perform his own social identity as a learned, authoritative witness, by demonstrating his familiarity with the legal requirements of canonization.

Furthermore, as identified by Chris Wickham, *publica fama* (which Wickham equates directly with gossip) such as that related by Jean, also has another function: “it defines group identity.”²⁴ Wickham’s merging of the analytical categories of gossip and *fama* is extremely useful here, as it allows us to perceive the social operations of Jean’s rhetorical choices, and how they impact his own identity despite his absence from the narrative. Wickham argues that gossip and oral exchanges concerning shared memories (in so far as the two are different) play a major role in constituting a social group, and that “the group is actually constituted by who has the *right* to gossip about outsiders – or even absent insiders.”²⁵

¹⁹Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 5v: “*esset iugiter contemplatiua, vitamque sanctam & contemplatiuam indefesse duxisset.*”

²⁰Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 5v: “*dicit quod habebat vicinos & amicos compatriotas, in domo dictorum Minorum predictæ Domine de Meduaua seruientes, & quotidie videntes & percipientes vitam contemplatiuam dictæ Domine de Seilleyo.*”

²¹Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 6r: “*suis vicinis nobilibus.*”

²²Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 5v: “*ipse erat studens in ciuitate Andegauensi in facultate Iuris ciuilibus.*”

²³Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 47; see also Katajala-Peltomaa, “Narrative Strategies in the Depositions,” 238, for difficulties that could result from devotion to an unofficial cult and the contradictory requirements of confining devotion to canonized saints and the need for a popular cult before a process of canonization could be initiated.

²⁴Chris Wickham, “Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry,” *Past & Present* 160, no. 1 (1998): 11.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

If we, following Wickham, expand our definition of gossip to include much broader categories of speech, including that given in the context of a witness deposition, it is apparent that despite the first impression of Jean's testimony as being primarily the second-hand report of the doings and sayings of others, he was in fact the (or at least a) main character. The crucial fact that he presented was not only that there was a common consensus amongst people that Jeanne-Marie lived a virtuous and holy life, but that he, Master Jean Tennenot, was able to speak for the opinions of all these people. By attending closely to who exactly supplied the reports that Jean provided to the proctors, we learn how Jean placed himself, and what social groupings he identified with. As discussed, Jean appealed to both general opinion, but also specific groups and people: "neighbors and friendly countrymen serving the said lady of Mayenne," "the brothers of the said place," "his noble neighbors: in particular and especially the noble and powerful Lord Inhellus, knight of Angers." Jean went still further, however. Bringing his own experience to bear for the first time in his narrative, he buttressed his statements concerning Jeanne-Marie's noble descent with the observation that "he saw. . . that Kings and Princes, Dukes and Barons who came for the purposes of devotion. . . as the King of Sicily, Count de la Marche, and many others who called her and her parents kindred."²⁶ The event of his deposition provided him with a forum for authorized self-construction where he can display his group affiliations through socially-connected speech. He was part of the in-group, and privy to the opinions and actions of not only the "good and wise" of the diocese of Angers, but also noble and powerful knights, and the major nobles of the Touraine and beyond. Even more significantly, he was able to speak to this within an institutional setting, one accepted as authoritative within the broader culture, thus lending weight and institutional verification to his speech act by situating it within a judicio-legal context, according to it the status and prestige of "evidence," as opposed to mere hearsay.²⁷

Having addressed Jeanne-Marie's life and virtues, the second section of Jean's testimony discusses miracles performed either by Jeanne-Marie in person, or at one remove following a petition or prayer to her. Once again, none of the events in Jean's narrative actually happened to him or derived from his personal experience, and much the same comments could be made as above concerning the function of this narrative device. What is more interesting here, however, is the format and sources that Jean employed to discuss Jeanne-Marie's miracles. In order to narrate miracles performed at Jeanne-Marie's intercession, Jean relied almost completely on letters from Marie of Brittany, the Lady of La Guerche and Countess d'Alençon (1391–1446). These letters were written by the countess in support of the diocesan process, and detailed (according to Jean): a prisoner freed from hanging after commending himself to Jeanne-Marie; the

²⁶Master Jean Tennenot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, folio 6r: "*Nuperque vidit. . . quod Reges & Principes, Duces & Barones, qui veniebant caussa deuotionis. . . vt Rex Siciliæ, Comes de Marchia & plures alij, qui eam parentem & consanguineam vocabant.*"

²⁷For courts as culturally normative institutions, and the ability of users of the system to exploit this, see Raisa Maria Toivo, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society: Finland and the Wider European Experience* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 94–101 and McSheffrey, "Detective Fiction in the Archives", 66; for the importance of the category of 'evidence' as opposed to 'fact,' see Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 93–124; for the authority of the canonization process as a socially accepted guarantee of the reliability of testimony, see Laura Ackerman Smoller, "From Authentic Miracles to a Rhetoric of Authenticity: Examples from the Canonization and Cult of St. Vincent Ferrer," *Church History* 80, no. 4 (December 2011): 777.

delivery of the countess from the difficult birth of her youngest child following her invocation of the saint; the healing of both the countess and her son (the former from a swollen cheek and eye, the latter from his rheumy eyes) through the use of an ointment made for them by Jeanne-Marie; the curing of a prisoner through the use of the same ointment; and finally the repair of a young couple's marriage through Jeanne-Marie's curing of the husband's jealousy.²⁸ None of these is a particularly unusual miracle for a canonization process – they cover the usual bases of healing, liberating of prisoners, and treatment of negative emotions. What is noteworthy, however, is that when questioned upon articles IV and V of the process, Jean, who had been acquainted with Jeanne-Marie for at least thirty years, and had a close personal relationship with her, rather than offering accounts of miracles that he himself or those he knew personally had witnessed, instead referenced the account of one of the most prominent noblewomen of France.

An explanation for this curious decision can be found by considering the operation of gender in the production of witness testimony. Katajala-Peltomaa has detailed the subjects of witnesses' testimony in the processes of Thomas Cantilupe (1306) and Nicholas of Tolentino (1325), and noted that it is almost invariably men who were asked and testified concerning the life and virtues of the prospective saint, whereas women's testimony was largely confined to miracles.²⁹ Given the greater value of testimony concerning the details of life and virtues over that addressing miracles, Katajala-Peltomaa suggests that it was preferable for the testimony of men of social and religious authority to focus around these specific aspects of sanctity, as their words were given greater weight and significance.³⁰ Furthermore, Rachel Koopmans, in her extensive study of English miracle collections, detects a significant element of gendering concerning who told what kind of story. She finds that only 22.8 percent of the miracle stories related by religious men concerned healing or bodily miracles – conversely, 44.6 percent related to dreams and visions.³¹ Koopmans relates this to issues of authority, arguing that the easily verifiable nature of healing miracles (as opposed to the personal and private experience of a vision) made them more available as narratives to women, whose status as reliable witnesses was far more suspect and unstable than that of men, particularly religious men.³² Thus, the types of narrative both employed and elicited within the setting of a canonization process can be considered largely gendered behaviors. By conferring his healing miracle narratives upon the countess d'Alençon, Jean preserved for himself the more traditionally masculine narratives of virtue and vision, narratives which relied on his superior authority as a clerical man within a judicial setting. Such tactical distribution of narrative type allowed Jean to continue to occupy masculine discursive territory, while still displaying both his social connections and knowledge of Jeanne-Marie's widespread miracles and his importance as a key witness to her sanctity. Jean's rhetorical moves demonstrate the importance of narrative techniques as practical ways in which deponents could present their experience and knowledge in response to the *articuli* to achieve specific aims. By narrativizing the

²⁸Master Jean Tennegot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 6v–7r.

²⁹Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 35–36.

³⁰Ibid., 34.

³¹Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, 40.

³²Ibid., 41.

countess's testimony as part of his own speech, Jean staked a claim on the events as evidence, while sidestepping the feminine associations of testimony of this nature.

However, Jean not only provided the countess's narrative within his own, but glossed it. We are in the fortunate position (which Jean may or may not have anticipated) of having access to the letters sent by the countess d'Alençon to the diocesan process, and can therefore compare the two narratives, the countess' original and Jean's reiteration of it, and see how they differ. To Jean's credit (or possibly that of the notaries) the two narratives broadly accord in both substance and rhetoric. Jean successfully related the details provided by the countess and added very little. However, what he did add is of considerable interest. Consider the following two passages. In each case, the first version is taken from the countess d'Alençon, and the second from Master Jean Tennegot.

The countess d'Alençon: "I was heavy with child and gravely ill, and the women were afraid lest the child might have died in my womb, and that thence I might perish: at which I was truly very sick and weak, and the child more so. But when I began to struggle to give birth, and the term had not yet arrived, I feared that the child might come to light, and so I immediately began to call on the help of that good Lady [Jeanne-Marie], on the very day of her death: and as soon as I called on her, all that pain and torment which I had had before, turned for me into hope and certain faith. And a little after, the child turned in itself, pressing to descend at that moment, I felt absolutely no pain, but well afterwards: and the child was strong, and was baptized by the grace of God and that good Lady. And after childbirth I found myself completely healthy."³³

Master Jean Tennegot: "it also reports in the same letter, that she was gravely ill and troubled, for the fruit or last-born child was transverse in her womb, and two months or thereabouts before the time of birth there was movement in her womb, so that there was more hope of her death than life: but she remembered the said Lady of Sillé, to whom she by her devout pledge vowed her last born child and commended herself. And immediately she was ready to give birth easily and as if without pain: and she found herself healthy and unharmed from birth; which happened on the next day after the passing of the said Lady."³⁴

³³Letter from the Countess d'Alençon, Acta Sanctorum (AASS) Mars III, 765: "*Item prole grauida eram, & valde ægrotabam metuebantque mulieres ne infans esset in vtero meo mortuus, & ipsa inde mortem oppeterem: quæ sane admodum ægra & debilis eram, fœtus autem multo maxime. Cum autem cœpi ad pariendum cõniti, & necdum terminus aduenisset, verebar vt in lucem veniret proles: itaque continuo cœpi inuocare auxilium bonæ illius Dominæ, ipso mortis eius die: moxque vt eam inuocaueram omnis ille dolor & cruciatus, quem antea habueram, versus mihi est in spem certamque fiduciam. Pauloq; post inuertit se infans: in ipsoque vrgentiori articulo nullum prorsus dolorem sensi, sed bene postea: infans autem robustus fuit, & baptizatus per Dei gratiam & bonæ illius Dominæ. Et post puerperium plane sanam me reperi.*" The countess's letter is given in Middle French in the MS. However, the final two folios have been lost, so the Latin AASS version has been used here. Based on the extant sections of the letter in the MS, the Bollandist translation appears accurate.

³⁴Master Jean Tennegot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, 6v: "*Item refert eisdem litteris, quod ipsa grauiter ægrotante & vexata, & pro eo quod fructus seu posthumus in aluo erat transuersus, & ante tempus pariendi per duos menses vel circiter in ventre suo motus, vnde plus sperabatur de morte ipsius quam de vita: sed quod fuit recordata de dicta Domina de Seilleyo, cui se cum fructu seu bb posthumo suo deuote per votum vouit, & se suppliciter recommendauit. Incontinentique faciliter parturiijt & quasi sine dolore: & ipsa a partu enixa se sanam & incolumem reperit; quod contigit die crastina post transitum dictæ Dominæ.*"

And the illness of the countess' son:

The countess d'Alençon: "After her [Jeanne-Marie's] death, my son suffered most seriously from his eyes, which, when I had put on some of the aforesaid ointment, were completely healthy on the following day, and he felt no discomfort at all afterwards, except a very slight amount."³⁵

Master Jean Tennegot: "Also her eldest son who was frail in his eyes, and rheumate or water descending from his brain clouded his eyes, and he had been in this infirmity for a long time, and could not be cured: but the same Lady of Alençon, remembering again the aforesaid Lady of Sillé, anointed the eyes of the said child with the aforesaid ointment, and immediately he recovered his health."³⁶

Both accounts are, as mentioned, largely the same. However, Master Tennegot described the afflictions of both the countess and her son slightly differently, terming her unborn child "transverse" (*transuersus*) and diagnosing her son's infirmity as "rheumate or water descending from his brain" (*rheumate seu aqua descendente a cerebro*). In offering these additional details, Jean made use of a rhetorical intervention to emphasize his learned and clerical status, drawing attention both to his efficacy as a witness, and the respect due to him as a result of this social status. Jean's descriptions are far more medicalized and precise, tending to diagnostic specificity, rather than the more general and conventional "suffered most seriously" and "the term had not yet arrived" employed by the countess. Jean thus used his narrative to gloss and reinterpret the countess' own experience within a more medicalized and expert register. In doing so, he reinforced his own position as an authoritative and expert witness not only in terms of his understanding of the illnesses afflicting the countess and her son, but also in terms of his precise knowledge of the situation. He presented himself as closely linked to the countess' family, and able to relate precise details of the case to the procurators. Additionally, we can note the slight increase in detail and severity in Jean's description of the situation: during the birth of her son, there was "more hope of death than of life" for the countess, and her son's eye condition "could not be cured." These descriptions reflect the increase in procurators' concerns with attempted medical cures in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century canonization processes, which has been detailed by Laura Ackerman Smoller, who argues that such questions were designed to ensure that the cure was unquestionably miraculous, rather than the delayed or unforeseen result of medical intervention.³⁷ Such additions serve to heighten the stakes for the subsequent cures, building up narrative tension to emphasize Jeanne-Marie's efficacy as a saintly intercessor, and again displaying Jean's familiarization with the requirements for proof of miracles in canonization hearings.

³⁵Letter from the Countess d'Alençon, AASS Mars III, 756: "*Post obitum illius filius meus vehementissime laborauit ex oculis, quibus cum ex vnguento prædicto imposuissem aliquid, sequenti mox die totus sanus fuit, neque exinde incommodum vllum, nisi leuissimum, sensit.*" See above, n.29 regarding this letter in the MS.

³⁶Master Jean Tennegot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, 6v: "*Item de filio suo primogenito, qui tener in oculis erat, & rheumate seu aqua descendente a cerebro oculi sui caligabantur, fueratque per longum tempus in ista infirmitate, nec poterat sanari: sed ipsa Domina de Alençonio, Dominam prædictam de Seilleyo rememorans, vnguento prædicto oculos dicti sui liberi liniuit, & in continenti sanitatem recuperauit.*"

³⁷Laura Ackerman Smoller, "Defining the Boundaries of the Natural in Fifteenth-Century Brittany: The Inquest into the Miracles of Saint Vincent Ferrer (d. 1419)," *Viator* 28 (January 1997): 345–346.

The way in which Jean incorporated the countess' letters into his narrative is also significant. He began by assuring the reader and the procurator of both the veracity of the letters, and his own diligence and social connections in ensuring this fact. Jean related that he "saw, understood, read and felt certain letters on parchment, having been written, as it first appeared, in the hand of the noble and powerful Lady the Countess of Alençon – when these might have been endorsed as authentic by a legal clerk of the court or that of the garrison of Argentan, called Colin Cervain, whom the witness was associated with."³⁸ Having established the validity of the letters (both for his own purposes and the satisfaction of the judicial requirements for evidence), he gave the details of the miracles as related above, and then returned to the question of the truth of this testimony, which he believed to be true "because he knew the family of the said Lady of Alençon and her life and character, by experience so much as by faithful testimony and report: whose life, character and conduct are approved by all who have knowledge of it."³⁹ The countess' narrative was incorporated into Jean's testimony, and bracketed by assurances that he believed it to be true, and that this could be proven by his own social connections to both the countess and the legal and clerical machinery of the region. Master Tennegot was able to use his status (both social and narrative) to rhetorically appropriate and re-present the testimony of the countess within his own narrative, employing it as an opportunity to speak to elements of Jeanne-Marie's profile of sanctity that would normally be more fitting for others without compromising his own status, and to demonstrate once again his own social position and connections.

III. The Testimony of Richette Tranchant

Having seen the ways in which rhetoric and narrative can be used to support and extend existing social status, I now turn to a slightly different use of the space of canonization. Richette Tranchant enjoyed none of the social advantages or elevated status within a judicial forum that Jean Tennegot sought to use for his advantage.⁴⁰ Despite this, she spoke before the procurators and the notary at some length, and detailed three narratives concerning miracles she witnessed while forming part of the social and devotional circle of Jeanne-Marie de Maillé. The first narrative begins when Richette "arose at dawn from her bed" to pay Jeanne-Marie a visit.⁴¹ Having arrived "very early in the morning," she found Jeanne-Marie's door closed, and sat to wait outside.⁴² While doing so, she heard a young child within the room telling Jeanne-Marie that he had

³⁸Master Jean Tennegot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 6r: "*vidit, tenuit, legit & palpauit quasdam litteras in papiro, manu propria nobilis & potentis Dominæ, D. Comitissæ de Alençonio, vi prima facie apparebat, scriptas; cum approbatæ fuissent in fine per tabellionem authenticum Curie seu Castellaniæ de Argentonio, vocatum Colinum Ceruain, cuius ipse testis notitiam habebat.*"

³⁹Master Jean Tennegot, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 7r: "*de origine dictam Dominam de Alençonio ac ipsius vitam ac mores, tam experientia quam fide dignorum testimonio & relatu, nouit: cuius vita, mores & conuersatio ab omnibus de ea notitiam habentibus plurimum comprobantur.*"

⁴⁰For the theoretically subordinate status of female witnesses within legal proceedings, see James A. Brundage, "Juridical Space: Female Witnesses in Canon Law," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 147–156, though Brundage does suggest that this theoretical understanding was not always reflected in practice; see also the comments in Wickham, "Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry," 15–16.

⁴¹Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: "*ista testis diluculo surrexit a lecto suo.*"

⁴²Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: "*quod valde erat mane, reperit ostium cameræ clausum.*"

heard the saint speaking with her deceased handmaiden during the night – this prompted Richette to open the door and confront Jeanne-Marie about this, saying that she had heard from others that Jeanne-Marie “had seen souls move out of purgatory and go to paradise,” and she asked Jeanne-Marie “that she would say to her if this were true or not,” a fact that Jeanne-Marie eventually confirmed.⁴³

This is a short narrative that contains no direct speech and no witnessing of a miracle in-person. Nevertheless, Richette made use of rhetorical detail to perform extensive identity work for both herself and Jeanne-Marie, and open her deposition from a position of authority. The repeated emphasis on the earliness of the hour, as well as Richette’s “sitting on the steps” when she arrived at Jeanne-Marie’s room cast Richette as a devout follower, as does the idea that Richette had heard other people discussing Jeanne-Marie’s visionary gifts.⁴⁴ In including these details, which are outside the judicial function of the deposition, Richette emphasized her own position as a devotee of the saint, a theme which will reoccur throughout her testimony. In this way, the authoritative cultural context of the diocesan process was effectively appropriated by Richette to serve as a forum for her oral-textual performance of her desired socio-religious identity and status.

In addition to using these details to make a claim to social capital via her own performance of piety, Richette was also making a claim about her own status as a witness, and thus creating meaning and value in her words within the judicial context in which she was performing. As Katajala-Peltomaa has argued, “to give a good image of oneself – to depict oneself as a devout Christian. . . was also to claim authority for one’s words, to appear as a trustworthy witness.”⁴⁵ It is, however, instructive to note the different ways that our witnesses attempted to achieve this same goal, and the different rhetorical self-constructions they employed to do so. Where Jean emphasized his own education, and his position at the center of well-informed social networks, Richette focused on her direct proximity to the saint, as well as her “moral” status as a good Christian. While Katajala-Peltomaa’s astute observation serves as an excellent summary of the aims of many deponents, attention to the narrative tactics of Richette and Jean reveals the diverse ways in which deponents could undertake acts of self-construction.

It may be asked what purpose Richette saw this deposition fulfilling for the process? After all, she did not witness Jeanne-Marie’s vision, and we are given very little in the way of specific details concerning the vision itself, or what exactly the young child witnessed. However, the narrative form in which Richette presents her questioning of Jeanne-Marie provides an answer to this. When Richette initially confronted Jeanne-Marie and asks her about the child’s words, Jeanne-Marie simply “gave thanks and praises to God for what had happened.”⁴⁶ It is only after Richette pressed the issue, and brought more specific details regarding Jeanne-Marie’s gifts into the conversation (as well as deploying the evidence of public fame in a similar manner to that of Master Tennegot) that Jeanne-Marie admitted in detail to what she has seen, and was even drawn to provide a specific setting and performative context for the visions (“on the

⁴³Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: “*viderat animas a purgatorio exire euntes in paradisum ipsi Dominae supplicando, quod sibi diceret si hoc esset verum nec ne.*”

⁴⁴Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: “*tunc ista testis sedit super gradus dictae cameræ.*”

⁴⁵Katajala-Peltomaa, “Narrative Strategies in the Depositions,” 231.

⁴⁶Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: “*Et tunc ipsa Domina, ipsi testi verba sua dirigendo, inquit, quod gratias & laudes Deo referret de hoc, quod erat.*”

first day of the feast of All Souls, Vespers for the Dead having begun”).⁴⁷ This inclusion of specific detail by Richette served to satisfy the judicial requirements for the precision of testimony, but also to enrich the narrative, aiding in the “storification” of this episode. Rather than a simple statement of fact (“Jeanne-Marie told me she had a vision of souls moving out of purgatory”), the narrative establishes the setting of the act, and then enriches it with further details of Jeanne-Marie’s behavior – she “entered into such contemplation, praying to God the Most High with sighs and weeping.”⁴⁸ This use of supplementary detail, identified by Bruschi as a significant feature of popular narrative schemes, both increases the immediacy and emotive impact of the scene, and also functions as a “reality effect,” suggesting the accuracy and truthfulness of the narrative.⁴⁹ Furthermore, by including the substance and details of her conversation with Jeanne-Marie rather than simply stating the main thrust of the interaction, Richette engages in what Simon Yarrow has termed “a process of constructing reality through narrative” – by vividly crafting a scene within the narrative, Richette draws the audience into her account, enmeshing them within the scheme of meaning-making that she attaches to these events, and enhancing her own status as a narrator and member of the community.⁵⁰ Here it is precisely the detail supplied in the narrative that lend it its efficacy as a vehicle for communicating not only Jeanne-Marie’s sanctity, but also Richette’s status as a pious and prominent member of the community and Jeanne-Marie’s circle.

Richette’s depiction of this scene was not intended to explore the visions themselves in detail – such details would not have been of interest to the procurators, nor would they have served Richette’s purposes. Instead, by employing the narrative device of Jeanne-Marie’s deflection and evasion (regardless of how accurate an account of the event this is), she fitted Jeanne-Marie into the humility topos, what Aviad Kleinberg has called the “unself-conscious” nature of sainthood – thus emphasizing her virtues, and removing the possibility of any claim that Jeanne-Marie employed her visions for her own self-aggrandizement.⁵¹ We can see a similar agenda at play in the use of the “young child” who served as the device by which Richette became aware of the vision event. This knowledge was disseminated entirely by chance, and indeed against the wishes of Jeanne-Marie, who “said to the child that he should be silent, and that he did not know what he was saying.”⁵² The rhetorical framing of events positions Jeanne-Marie as reluctant and unwilling to publicize her gifts – qualities that were required of sainthood, and particularly mystical sainthood, which required close adherence to the principles of spiritual discernment, foremost of which was modesty and humility.⁵³

⁴⁷Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: “*quod pro certo vna die festi omnium Sanctorum, Vesperis Defunctorum inceptis.*”

⁴⁸Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v–24r: “*intrauerat in tantam contemplationem, Deum altissimum cum gemitibus & ploratibus orando.*”

⁴⁹Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc*, 23.

⁵⁰Simon Yarrow, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21.

⁵¹Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 42.

⁵²Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 23v: “*Et his dictis ipsa Domina dixit dicto infanti vt taceret, & quod nesciebat quid dicebat.*”

⁵³For the requirement that those receiving mystical visions conform to expectations of humility, virtue and obedience, see Dyan Elliott, “Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of

Having concluded her first narrative, Richette moved on to recount a pilgrimage undertaken by Jeanne-Marie, along with “the witness and many others” to the chapel of the Blessed Virgin at Planche-de-Vaux, some twelve miles North-West of Tours.⁵⁴ Richette gave a vivid description of the final length of the journey, setting the scene of a secluded chapel, “located far from the road in a wood, and . . . approached by a track. . . there was no other path.”⁵⁵ As Jeanne-Marie embarked upon this narrow path, she was struck and knocked to the ground by some unseen force (Richette gives us Jeanne-Marie’s direct speech here: “Who knocks me back?” cried in a high voice)⁵⁶ and was seriously injured, so much so that she had to be carried to the chapel by Richette and a Franciscan from her entourage. Jeanne-Marie and her party spent three weeks in the chapel, during which it was feared Jeanne-Marie would die. However, one night Richette awoke, and “it seemed to her that the glory in the chapel was great that it was as if it was the hour of noon, and that the blessed and glorious Virgin Mary stood before the said Lady Marie de Maillé.”⁵⁷ The following morning, Richette expressed joy at the experience and recounted the vision to Jeanne-Marie, who then revealed that she had been healed.

Richette informed the procurators that the injury suffered by Jeanne-Marie was so serious that “it could not be cured by the intervention of physicians if not by the grace of God.”⁵⁸ The standard formulation of this statement, as well as the presence of similar statements elsewhere in the process suggest that this assurance was given in response to the procurators’ further questioning of Richette concerning the injury, rather than forming an integral part of Richette’s own narrative. The overall shape of the narrative here is one that conforms to the standard structure of a miracle cure, noted by Bartlett and others.⁵⁹ The injury is suffered, and Richette’s narrative presents the setting as isolated and secluded, with the only available help being the spiritual succor offered by the chapel. The afflicted suffers until recovery seems hopeless (“more hope of death than life,” another phrase employed several times throughout both the depositions and the *Vita* of Jeanne-Marie, and encountered earlier in Jean’s gloss on the countess d’Alençon’s letter) and then is miraculously saved by divine intervention.

However, this rhetorical presentation fractures slightly in Richette’s final words. Nowhere in her narrative did she mention any attempt to apply a medical cure for Jeanne-Marie’s injuries, until she deployed “physicians” in her last statement (possibly

Asc,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002): 26–54 and Rosalynn Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999), 34–40 and 42–46.

⁵⁴Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*ista teste cum pluribus alijs comitante*”; for detail on this chapel and its role in Jeanne-Marie’s cult, both in the Middle Ages and subsequently, see Vauchez, “Notre-Dame-de-l’Hermitiere.”

⁵⁵Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*quæ capella sita est longe ab itinere in vno bosco, & incessit ad dictam capellam per vnum tramitem seu per vnâ viam strictam. . . sed oportuit adire, quod non erat alia semita.*”

⁵⁶Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*qui me pulsât per retro?*”

⁵⁷Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*visum fuit sibi, quod in illa capella esset tanta claritas acsi esset hora meridiei, & quod benedicta & gloriosa Virgo Maria stabat ante dictam D. Mariam de Mailliac.*”

⁵⁸Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*quod nisi gratia Dei interueniente medicorum iuuamine sanari non potuisset.*”

⁵⁹Bartlett, “Medieval Miracle Accounts as Stories,” 118; Klaniczay, “Ritual and Narrative in Late Medieval Miracle Accounts”; Laura Ackerman Smoller, “Miracle, Memory, and Meaning in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer, 1453–1454,” *Speculum* 73, no. 2 (1998): 433.

at the prompting of the procurators), to emphasize the miraculous nature of the cure. The testimony of one of those physicians, Aegidius de Aubuis “an expert in the art of surgery”⁶⁰ also features in the dossier speaking to the same incident, and he further confirmed Richette’s statement that the cure could only have come about with “the intervention of a divine miracle and the help of God,”⁶¹ though Aegidius focused more on the speed of the cure than its possibility. In his narrative, he arrived to treat Jeanne-Marie for a second time (detracting from Richette’s sense of isolation and wilderness) when he found her completely recovered. Aegidius’ testimony sheds some light on the deliberate rhetorical constructions in Richette’s account, and allows us to see what the purpose of these might be. First, the only characters who appear in Richette’s statement are herself, Jeanne-Marie, an unnamed Franciscan, Jeanne-Marie’s confessor (Martin de Boisgaultier) and the “others” who accompany Jeanne-Marie to the shrine. Of these, only Jeanne-Marie and Richette are active participants – the rest serve as little more than narrative devices (helping carry Jeanne-Marie to the shrine) or set dressing (simply being present). What Richette certainly did not include in her account was anyone arriving or leaving the chapel, which Aegidius de Aubuis did on at least two occasions. Furthermore, Aegidius told the procurators that he had “been ordered to heal the said Lady and repair her rib.”⁶² In his earlier testimony, Aegidius related how Marie of Blois (wife of Louis I of Anjou, and a very prominent noblewoman) “commanded (*mandauit*) the witness [Aegidius] to be sent for and ordered that he should visit Lady Marie de Maillé” in 1384, to tend to an injury Jeanne-Marie had suffered from a madwoman with a stone.⁶³ Marie of Blois was clearly a benefactor of Jeanne-Marie, and supported her with (amongst other things), the provision of medical aid when required. Aegidius’ continued use of “ordered” (*mandatus*) when discussing treating Jeanne-Marie at Planche-de-Vaux, suggests that on this occasion he was once again commissioned by Marie of Blois, then living in Tours, to provide medical aid to Jeanne-Marie.⁶⁴

For this to have been the case at Planche-de-Vaux, Marie of Blois must have been aware of Jeanne-Marie’s injury, which would have necessitated comings and goings from the chapel, occurrences which Richette elected not to mention in order to maintain her narrative construction of religious seclusion. The employment of this strategy by Richette illuminates the importance of rhetoric in supporting the individual agency of the deponent. Didier Lett has seen canonization records as a device that uses the tools of inquisition to subordinate individual or personal memories to the hegemony of collective consensus, a consensus that is generated by the act of interrogation and cross-referencing on narrow and discrete topics.⁶⁵ However, Richette used her rhetorical construction of this scene to advance a personal interpretation of events, one that was not supported by other testimony, yet still one that found a voice within the process.

⁶⁰Aegidius de Aubuis, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 18r: “*in arte chirurgiæ peritus.*”

⁶¹Aegidius de Aubuis, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 19r: “*fieri non potuit nisi diuino miraculo & Dei auxilio interueniente.*” Note that folios 19r – 20v are missing from the MS – the text is preserved in AASS Mars III, 759–760.

⁶²Aegidius de Aubuis, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 19r: “*mandatus pro medicando dictam Dominam & reparando suam costam.*”

⁶³Aegidius de Aubuis, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 18v: “*quædam fatua, maligno spiritu vexata, suscepit vnum grossum & ponderosum lapidem, & irruiit cum illo lapide in dictam Dominam.*”

⁶⁴For Marie of Blois see Vauchez, “A Holy Woman During the Hundred Years War,” 211–212.

⁶⁵Didier Lett, *Un procès de canonization au Moyen Âge. Essai d'histoire sociale*. Nicolas de Tolentino, 1325 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 10 and 234–235.

The exacting requirements of the canonization inquisition in terms of re-producing witness testimony allowed witnesses to use particular rhetoric to employ the process as a tool for the promotion and preservation of personal memory, and subvert its attempts to produce a homogenous monologic narrative.

Richette continued to use her status as a narrator to construct an identity for herself as both a devout follower of Jeanne-Marie, and a good Christian herself. It was Richette and an unnamed Franciscan who carried Jeanne-Marie to the chapel, despite the presence of Martin de Boisgaultier, who might have been expected to undertake this duty (and indeed did so on several other occasions). Richette also emphasized the difficulty and discomfort of the situation – she suffered for her devotion, making her bed “on a small amount of hay and straw that had been found” in order to remain with Jeanne-Marie, reinforcing the heightened sense of seclusion crafted by the narrative.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is Richette who experienced the divine vision on this occasion, placing herself in the role of one of the elect, a “particularly devout Christian,” as Katajala-Peltomaa notes in reference to the recipients of divine cures.⁶⁷ Richette used her discursive opportunity tactically to again claim spiritual prestige, casting herself as enmeshed within the saint’s own pious practices, to the point where Jeanne-Marie’s sanctity almost “overspilled,” and Richette herself became the recipient of a miraculous experience.

Richette also continued to present Jeanne-Marie as modest and humble, and unwilling to admit or reveal the divine favor that bestows sanctity upon her. When Richette awoke from her night’s sleep, joyful at having received the vision of the Virgin Mary, Jeanne-Marie’s initial reaction was to offer a more restrained and borderline mundane explanation for the experience:

“And then the witness told the Lady herself of her vision, step-by-step: to which the Lady responded that it was because she was lying in the chapel of the Blessed Mary. Nevertheless the witness deposits that that night the Lady was healed, because in the morning she arose safe and sound, and gave thanks to the Most High Virgin Mary before the altar, saying that the Lady [the Virgin Mary], who can do all things, had healed her from her infirmity.”⁶⁸

Jeanne-Marie once again played down the supernatural occurrence, before ultimately admitting to the miracle once it is apparent that others had noticed her recovery. Richette’s narrative and rhetoric give us a devout and devoted follower, witnessing the divine favor of a humble and unassuming saint.

The complex rhetorical crafting of Richette’s testimony prompts a reconsideration of the approach to miracle stories adopted by Bartlett. Bartlett proposes a taxonomy of miracle stories divided into two categories: the “literary,” which includes hagiography, sermons, and exempla, and the “forensic,” which encompasses those narratives derived

⁶⁶Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*ista testis & alij assistentes ipsam Dominam super modico fœni & straminis, quæ ibi repperant, cubauerunt.*”

⁶⁷Katajala-Peltomaa, “Narrative Strategies in the Depositions,” 243.

⁶⁸Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*Et tunc ista testis visionem suam ipsi Domine seriatim enarrauit: quæ Domina respondit hoc fuisse, eo quod in capella B. Mariæ cubata erat. Verumtamen ista testis deponit, quod ea nocte ipsa Domina sanata fuit, quod in mane sana & incolumis surrexit, & Altissimo Virginiq; Mariæ ante altare propter hoc gratias reddidit; dicendo, quod Domina, quæ potest omnia, ab infirmitate sua eam sanauerat.*”

from more “formal” contexts such as judicial enquiries.⁶⁹ Bartlett usefully emphasizes the fact that it is “important to be aware of the context in which miracle stories were being written down and collected,” but his imposition of a polarized duality between “literary” and “forensic” accounts does not hold up.⁷⁰ Under this categorization scheme, where should Richette’s miracle accounts be placed? They come to us in a formal legal context, where the procurators (at least) were concerned with the canon law definitions of sanctity, and Richette’s testimony formed part of a legal case, approached “forensically.” Yet despite this, there are features in Richette’s narrative that could easily be termed “literary” – vivid descriptions, extraneous details, building tension before the release of the miraculous cure. Do we see in this narrative only the “colder light” of the canonization process?⁷¹ Other examples from Jeanne-Marie’s dossier alone could be multiplied, but Bartlett’s suggestion that the lack of strictly “literary” features in canonization depositions separates them from more learned miracle sources by such a gulf is to fail to recognize the continuity of narrative construction between the two sources. Witnesses in canonization processes did not set out to tick a set of boxes, or to dutifully list criteria imposed by the church. Rather, just as more learned hagiographers, they bought their own lived experiences with them and “storied” them in ways that both fulfilled the criteria and questions of the format in which they were narrating, but also preserved the essential emotive core of their accounts, expressed through narrative construction and rhetoric. To reduce this to a “forensic” account is to elide the agency and experience of those who sat before the procurators and brought their experiences into conversation with the bureaucracy of papal sainthood.

Richette’s third and final narrative continued her work of self-construction, as well as saint-making. Jeanne-Marie and her party remained at the chapel of Planche-de-Vaux, where Jeanne-Marie “preached and spoke of many spiritual things,” so much so that her followers forgot to collect bread for supper.⁷² Having no luck obtaining any food from anyone living near the chapel, Jeanne-Marie advised them to search the chapel itself for “any leftover bread from lunch.”⁷³ Richette found a small amount (“not sufficient for two people”), but when the meal had finished there still “an abundance remained, flowing freely.”⁷⁴ In this narration, Richette inverts her previous construction of the narrative setting. Where Planche-de-Vaux was previously a secluded and inaccessible place where Jeanne-Marie’s injury was reliant upon divine healing in the absence of human assistance, here the chapel has neighbors (*vicinos manentes prope dictam capellam*), Richette was accompanied by her husband, and Jeanne-Marie was delighted by the number of people who join them for dinner. This serves two purposes – firstly, it calls to mind more insistently the obvious Biblical parallel of the two occasions of the loaves and fishes, and casts Jeanne-Marie in a Christological model of sanctity, positioning her within what Thomas J. Heffernan has called the “single

⁶⁹Bartlett, “Medieval Miracle Accounts as Stories,” 115.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 118.

⁷²Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24r: “*Et quia dicta Domina prædicabat & loquebatur de pluribus spiritualibus, non fuerunt recordati quærere panem pro cœna.*”

⁷³Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24v: “*si quod residuum panis de prandio reperirent.*”

⁷⁴Richette Tranchant, Tours, Bm Tours, MS 1032, fol. 24v: “*quem repererat pro duabus personis sufficere non potuisset*”; “*de illo pane largiflue & abundanter remansit.*”

authenticating norm” of religious, and specifically saintly, activity.⁷⁵ Secondly, it provided a greater illustration of Jeanne-Marie’s saintly performance – one is, after all, only a saint if others deem it so, and so by multiplying the number of witnesses to this patently Biblical miracle, Richette broadened the audience for Jeanne-Marie’s performance of sanctity, and attempted to illustrate a wide *fama sancta* for her. It is debatable if she succeeded in this last aim, as no other witnesses in the trial speak to this particular event, and so the presence of a large number of corroborating accounts remains solely within Richette’s narrative.

Viewing Richette’s testimony as a whole, it is apparent that the narrative construction of the deposition, and the specific rhetoric that Richette chose to frame and describe the events that she related had a considerable impact on both the elements of sanctity attributed to Jeanne-Marie in the deposition and Richette’s self-presentation. Jeanne-Marie’s sanctity is re-enforced by Richette by confining it within accepted narrative devices, such as humility, denial, and modesty, as well as by pushing specific cultural references, such as the strengthening of the Biblical parallel in the feeding of many people with a small amount of food. Furthermore, these narratives offered Richette the opportunity to present herself in a specific way, both in terms of her relationship to Jeanne-Marie, and in her role as a good Christian and resourceful woman. We see her particular devotion in the emphasis on her early rising to visit Jeanne-Marie, and in the hardship and discomfort she endured to remain near the saint. Her identity as a good Christian was advanced by her witnessing of a holy vision, and her resourcefulness shown by her seeking out and finding bread for the meal. These are judicial accounts, but ones that allow deponents space and authority to present themselves, the saint, and their lived environments in formats that imbue them with new and specific meanings through their employment of specifically chosen narrative and rhetorical strategies.

IV. Conclusions

Master Jean Tennenot and Richette Tranchant were two contrasting witnesses who approached and interacted with both the saint and the diocesan process from different perspectives and positions. Master Tennenot presented himself as a conduit for the opinions of the wider population, particularly the “wise and good,” and demonstrated throughout his testimony his familiarity and connections with Jeanne-Marie’s support and patronage amongst the aristocracy. He does not personally feature a great deal in his narrative, and his first-hand accounts of interactions with Jeanne-Marie are confined to a few mentions of anecdotes imparted to him by the putative saint, despite an association that seems to go back at least thirty years. Jean’s claims to narrative status derive from his social status – his position as a male clerical figure allowed him to speak with authority and represent the opinions of the local population faithfully, and without need to appeal specifically to personal experience to verify his claims. Jean’s use of rhetorical tools was designed to buttress his social position and connections, showing off his links to and knowledge of the noble and aristocratic milieu which formed an important element in Jeanne-Marie’s case for sanctity. He did not need to rely on personal, direct experience to prove the legitimacy of his speech. By contrast, Richette’s narratives are immediate and personal, dealing in-depth with her first-hand interactions with

⁷⁵Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

Jeanne-Marie, and the impact that those interactions had on her view of Jeanne-Marie's sanctity, and her own personal devotion and faith. Richette used her rhetorical and narrative devices to establish a position of authority for her speech based on her social identity as a good Christian (through devotion to the saint and receipt of miracles), and her legal identity as a trustworthy witness, based on the specific details given in her accounts.

This paper began with two central arguments, one broad and general – that canonization depositions offered opportunities as well as constraints for the deponents, and one in-depth – that it was the personal selection of narrative and rhetorical strategy by the deponents that allowed them to operationalize the opportunity afforded them by the deposition for their own specific goals, whether those be personal, social or religious. A close reading of the depositions of Jean Tennegot and Richette Tranchant has revealed some of the ways in which rhetoric could be deployed, even within the legalistic and carefully structured environment of the late medieval canonization trial, to shape the testimony in ways that – while not undermining or detracting from the purpose of the trial – broadened the scope and efficacy of the deposition beyond just the putative saint and the concerns of the procurators, and incorporated the aims and concerns of the witnesses as well. It is this realization that leads inexorably to my “big picture” argument. When witnesses sat before notaries and procurators to speak of the lives and miracles of the saints, this was not a one-way street, a rote response to pre-set questions. In being asked to tell a story, and given narrative status, the witnesses were handed power to shape both understandings of their saintly figure and sanctity more generally, and also themselves as social actors and members of their communities. Jean took the opportunity to portray himself as someone with links to the very highest rungs of fifteenth-century French society. Richette advanced an interpretation of herself as a close confidante and follower of Jeanne-Marie, so much so that some of Jeanne-Marie's holiness and sanctity spilled over onto her, and she experienced a vision of her own. Crucially, these stories are of course not “just” stories. Jean and Richette were not speaking to their families or friends, or in an informal, neutral setting. The performative context of these stories, and the textualization and adaptation of them from performed oral narrative to notarized written text elevates them to the status of evidence, lending weight and authority to Jean and Richette's narratively constructed identities. It was not only saints that were made in canonization proceedings.

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