

SPECULUM MATRIS: DUODA'S MANUAL

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Dhuoda (c. 803–843), wife of the Carolingian noble Bernard of Septimania and dedicated mother of two sons, William and Bernard, displays remarkable humility in her approach to writing and is startlingly honest in her use of personal voice. Her lengthy letter offers advice, worldly and spiritual, to her elder child William. In this letter, which she titles “*liber manualis*,”¹ Dhuoda writes about herself and her hopes for both her sons. This paper will explore the two genres — the handbook or *manualis* and the mirror or *speculum principis* — that inform Dhuoda’s letter, as well as her success at overcoming anxiety about writing in these traditionally masculine modes through distinctly female, particularly maternal, authority.

Dhuoda’s historical context may elucidate her reasons for writing. Her family’s history must be placed in the context of the conflicting ambitions of Charlemagne’s descendants. She lived a generation removed from Charlemagne and faced the court of his heir, Louis the Pious, with its notorious political scandals. Dhuoda’s husband Bernard, a second cousin to Charlemagne, served Louis as chamberlain and gained from him oversight of the Spanish marches and the duchy of Septimania. Yet Bernard, himself prey to ambition, was unable to negotiate safely the struggle for the throne waged among Louis’s sons by his first wife, Irmingard — these are, Lothar, Pippin, and Louis — and the son by his second wife, Judith — that is, Charles. The

sides in this dynastic struggle shifted constantly as did Bernard's service: he first supported the emperor Louis, then Pippin; ultimately he was forced to support Charles, later known to history as Charles the Bald. To Charles, Bernard sent his and Dhuoda's son, William.² Serving as his father's pledge of loyalty, William became Charles's vassal at age fourteen.

Much is known about Bernard's illustrious family³ and much is rumoured about his actions in histories and chronicles.⁴ Little, however, is known about his wife Dhuoda, and nothing about her family background or even her homeland. Because of the Germanic roots of her name, philologists speculate that she hails from the northern part of the Frankish kingdom.⁵ Yet historians who argue for Dhuoda's southern heritage note that after the birth of her son William, Bernard sent Dhuoda to Uzès, a town in southern France near Nîmes, to oversee his estates. While it was typical for a nobleman to leave supervision of his land to his wife while he concerned himself with politics, the task would certainly have been easier for a woman who was a native of that region.⁶ Because Dhuoda chose to write in Latin, rather than a telling dialect, her roots remain mysterious.⁷

What we know with certainty Dhuoda tells us directly in the preface and final chapter of the *Manual*: that she was married in the eleventh year of the reign of Louis the Pious at the royal palace at Aachen, that is, in June of 824 (*Praefatio* 1–6); that she gave birth to William, to whom she addresses the manual, in the thirteenth year of Louis's reign, that is, on 29 November 826 (*Praefatio* 6–9); that her second son (later named "Bernard" after his father) was born on 22 March 841 and that her husband took this child away from Dhuoda before he was baptized and before she knew his name (*Praefatio* 14–22); that she began her book soon after this loss on 30 November 841, and completed it two years and two months later on 2 February 843 (XI.2.3–8). Immediately after recounting the departure of her second son, Dhuoda spells out in her typically understated way what is evident from this chronology: that she is prompted to write by physical separation from her children. She explains to William,

Sed cum diu, ob absentiam praesentiae vestrae, sub iussione senioris mei, in praedicta, cum agone illius iam gaudens, residerem urbe, ex desiderio utrumque vestrum hunc codicillum secundum parvitatis meae intelligentiam tibi transcribi et dirigere curavi. (*Praefatio* 23–27)

[Yet I have lived a long time in this city under the command of my lord, enduring the absence of your presence. While I now rejoice in his [Bernard's] campaigns, I have taken care to write and send this little book to you, according to the smallness of my intelligence, out of longing for the two of you.]

For Dhuoda, the recent loss of her baby and the two year separation from her adolescent child prove to be a painful but powerful incentive to write.⁸

Perhaps Dhuoda's life away from her family afforded her the freedom for other companionship⁹ and for study. Certainly Dhuoda was a learned woman. She quotes the scriptures and church fathers not quite literally but familiarly. She is fond of wordplay, especially the type of etymologies familiar from Isidore of Seville's work, and of number symbolism. She composes Latin in both prose and verse¹⁰ and sometimes uses words of Greek derivation (*agonizatio*, 1.1.13; *dyndrum*, 3.1.28). Dhuoda describes her method of composition as *contextus*, "woven together": "Ars namque huius ex parte libelli, quanquam ex diversis librorum voluminibus sit utiliter contextus" ("For the learning of part of this book is usefully woven together from diverse volumes" 9.1.1–2). Yet it is clear from Dhuoda's earlier quoted description of longing (*Praefatio* 23–27) that her strongest emotion is not love for her husband or love of learning, but concern for her sons. Like Herchenefreda who sent letters of advice to her courtier son Desiderius 200 years earlier,¹¹ Dhuoda sends advice that she hopes will prove useful, *utilis*. This hope — that her words aid William — Dhuoda expresses time and again (*Incipit textus* 8; *Incipit liber* 6; etc.).

Dhuoda's letter borrows elements from two traditional genres, the handbook and the mirror. It imparts lessons in faith as does the moral guidebook compact enough to be carried in hand, and therefore called *manuale* or *manualis*. The Latin term is a translation of the Greek word *enchiridion*, the title Augustine chose for his handbook which gained great popularity among the Carolingians and which Dhuoda several times quotes (8.10, 8.11, 8.12). The bulk of Dhuoda's letter catechistically imparts lessons on the nature of God (1.1–7), the Trinity (2.1), faith, hope, and charity (2.2), the gifts of the Holy Spirit (4.4, 6.1, 6.4), the beatitudes (4.8, 6.1, 6.4), prayer (8.1–17), and the psalms (11.1). Yet Dhuoda advocates for William not only service to God but also a noble life on earth, and in this sense her letter follows the conventions of the mirror, or *speculum principis*, a genre greatly expanded by her Carolingian contemporaries Alcuin, Smaragdus, Jonas, bishop of Orleans, Sedulius Scottus, and Hincmar of Rheims.¹² Like the manual, the mirror imparts spiritual lessons, but it adapts the lessons to the specific need of the layman it addresses, usually a member of the high nobility. Dhuoda hence emphasizes the struggle between the virtues and vices her son must face in this life (4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7), with a particularly maternal emphasis on preserving his virginity (4.5.60), as well as on William's duty to his king, his lord, and his leaders (3.4, 3.8, 3.9).

In the Carolingian age the terms *manualis* and *speculum* were used interchangeably. By examining just the opening sections, we see that Dhuoda refers to her letter with a variety of nouns, among them *libellus* (*Incipit* 38), *manualis* (*Incipit* 9), *libellus manualis* (*Incipit* 47), and *opusculum* (*Prologus* 18). Her use of the prepositional phrase *specietenus* (*Incipit* 10, *In nomine* 8) — literally meaning “in appearance” — figuratively suggests an image held in a mirror.

The manual and the mirror are unabashedly didactic genres. In addressing his friend Laurentius, Augustine writes, “vis enim tibi, ut scribas, librum a me fieri quem enchiridion, ut dicunt, habeas et de tuis manibus non recedat” (“For it seems to me, as you write, that you wished me to compose a book which would be an enchiridion, as they call it, which you could hold and which would not be too heavy for your hand”).¹³ Augustine conceives of his *Enchiridion* as an extension of himself which, even when he could not be present, would always be with the student to answer questions. Authors of the *speculum* generally envision for their works a dual purpose: that the mirror present an ideal image of the good Christian ruler and that by contemplating that image, the reader would gain a sense of the health (or sickness) of his soul.

Dhuoda embraces these serious intents as she plays with the etymology of *manualis*:

ad salutem animae et corporis tui cuncta tibi scriptitata cognosce. Quod volo ut cum ex manu mea tibi fuerit directus, in manu tua libenter facias amplecti eum opus, et tenens, voluens legensque stude opere compleri dignissime. Dicitur enim iste formatus libellus Manualis, hoc est sermo ex me, opus in te, et ut ait quidam: *Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit, Deus autem incrementum dedit.* (*Incipit textus* 42–48)

[Recognize that the whole book has been written for you, for the health of your soul and your body. I hope that when my hand has put the work in order for you, you willingly will hold it in your hand, and that grasping it, desiring it, and reading it, you will strive to complete the book in worthy action. It can be said that this little handbook is so shaped that the lessons come from me and the action takes place in you. As a certain one said, “I planted, Apollo watered, but God gave it growth.”]

Dhuoda shares the same didactic goals as Augustine and the Carolingian authors of the *speculum*, but her reason for writing is intensely personal. Having been separated from William for two years, she poignantly and punningly claims that the *manualis* would touch him when her hands could not: “ex manu mea . . . in manu tua.” As she addresses her son, Dhuoda turns to Paul in I Corinthians 3:6. Dhuoda’s use of Paul’s botanical image

underscores her biological connectedness to William. With the weight of scriptural authority behind her, Dhuoda asserts her own maternal authority while ascribing all growth to God, as Paul had done. Dhuoda's strong sense of purpose and maternal authority is evident from the very opening of her text, the "incipit textus":

Praesens iste libellus in tribus virgulis constat esse erectus: . . . id est Norma, Forma et Manualis. Quod utrumque hae partes locutionis in nos specietenus continentur cuncta: Norma ex me, Forma in te, Manualis tam ex me quam in te, ex me collectus in te receptus. (*Incipit textus* 5–12)

[This resolute little book stands firmly on three branches . . . These are the rule, the form, and the handbook. All of these parts of speech appear to be held together in our mirror. The rule from me, the form in you. And so the handbook moves from me into you, gathered together by me and assumed within you.]

Dhuoda here assumes the role of teacher who establishes the rule ("Norma ex me") which she charges William to prove within himself ("Forma in te"). The manual preserves the rule through an image or a reflection of both the teacher and student ("in nos specietenus").¹⁴ The handbook is the means to the teacher's goal and the student's learning; it is also a mirror reflecting images of the mother and child whom distance has separated.

While showing an awareness of the tradition of the *speculum*, Dhuoda never uses that noun for her work. In fact, *speculum* does not come into use as a generic title until the twelfth century.¹⁵ Nonetheless Dhuoda's use of mirror imagery indicates the source of her authority. Dhuoda asserts that as the author of William's life she knows him better, cares for him more deeply, and can instruct him more soundly than any other teacher. Her *speculum* would reflect not simply "moral counsels" but a mother's love and a child's duty:

Ortatrix tua Dhuoda semper adest, fili, et si defuerim deficiens, quod futurum est, habes hic memoriale libellum moralis, et quasi in picturam speculi, me mente et corpore legendo et Deum deprecando intueri possis, et quid erga me obsequi debeas pleniter inveniri potes. Fili, habebis doctores qui te plura et ampliora utilitatis doceant documenta, sed non aequali conditione, animo ardentis in pectore, sicut ego genitrix tua, fili primogenite. (1.7.14–24)

[Your Dhuoda is always here to encourage you, son, and if I, failing you, were to depart, as will someday happen, you will have this little book of morals as a reminder of me. Just as you would look upon a reflection in a mirror, you will be able to see me, reading with my mind and body and praying to God. You will be able to discover fully what rules you must fulfill for my sake. My son, you will have teachers who instruct you in many more useful

lessons than I do but they do not have equal status with me or have hearts burning in their breasts as I, your mother, do, my firstborn child.]

To the standard gloss of the book as a mirror of morality, Dhuoda adds her own interpretation: the book as a mirror of a mother's love and a child's duty. Reading the manual, William will be able to see his mother as a reflection in a looking glass ("quasi in picturam speculi") and come to understand the obligations he must fulfill for her sake ("quid erga me obsequi debeas pleniter inveniri potes"). Dhuoda's claim that William owes obligations to his parent has biblical precedent which Dhuoda cites elsewhere in reference to her husband,¹⁶ but her assertion that her maternal status is greater than that of learned doctors — "doctores . . . non aequali conditione . . . sicut ego genitrix tua" — is, as far as I know, born entirely of personal conviction. Dhuoda argues that their relationship as mother and child obliges William to study the lessons in the manual.

In the prologue, Dhuoda employs her first comparison of the manual to a mirror. Here she visually expands the image, creating a domestic scene, to stress William's obligation to her:

vel certe inter aliquas ex parte in speculis mulierum demonstratio apparere soleat vultu, ut sordida extergant, exhibentesque nitida, suis in saeculo satagunt placere maritis, ita te obto ut, inter mundanas et saeculares actionum turmas oppressus, hunc libellum a me tibi directum frequenter legere, et ob memoriam mei. . . . (*Prologus* 10–16)

[Surely some women are in the habit of showing themselves in mirrors, so that they can wipe dirt from their faces, and by presenting themselves gleaming, are busy pleasing their husbands in this world. So I wish that you, weighed down by mundane deeds among the throngs of this world, frequently read this little book in memory of me, which I have written for you.]

Whether the image of the wife washing her face in the mirror reflects Dhuoda's personal habit or her observation of others,¹⁷ it clearly draws upon female experience.

Dhuoda elsewhere uses specifically maternal images. Comparing the eight beatitudes with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, Dhuoda explains the simplified spiritual lesson she gives William in terms of a baby's digestive needs and his learning to climb stairs:

Et non ut solido cibo capax, sed in similitudine lactis degustans, per gradus ascendentium paulatim, ex minimis ad maiorum facilius scandere valeas, cibumque gustare supernum. . . . Tanquam parvula parvulum in Christo lac potum dedi, non escam. (6.1.7–16)

[As yet you cannot digest solid food, but are nourished by milk, so in time you will be able to ascend steps more easily, a few at a time, from the lowest to the highest, to taste the food of heaven Although I am the smallest among the small, in Christ I give you milk to drink, not solid food.]

This imagery relies in part on Paul's words in Hebrews 5:12 and I Corinthians 3:2, but the power of the image derives from Dhuoda's view of herself as her son's primary nourisher: "lac potum dedi, non escam." Whereas she once met all William's physical needs, she now applies the metaphor of that physical relationship to his spiritual needs. To further explain her purpose in writing, she turns to the metaphor of birth and simply tells William, "velut genitrix secunda mente et corpore" ("I am your mother a second time, now of your understanding as before of your body" 7.1.7–8; cf. 7.2).

By incorporating such specifically female imagery and revealing so clearly her aspirations, Dhuoda creates a text far more autobiographical than any other Latin *manualis* or *speculum*. By refashioning the genre to fit her personal needs, Dhuoda presents William not only with a mirror of moral counsels, but also with a reflection of his mother. Even Christine de Pisan, who five centuries later experimented in this genre with her *Enseignements moraux* and *L'Epître d'Othéa*,¹⁸ reveals little of her personality when compared to Dhuoda. Fraught with a mother's expectations and fears, Dhuoda's manual is the clearest example of the union of personal voice and purpose among the writings of early mediaeval women.

Cast in the traditional albeit revised form of the moral guidebook, the manual reveals a tension between Dhuoda's anxiety about writing and her authoritative message. In the prolegomena and the first book alone she refers to herself as *ignara* (*Epigrama* 15), *indigna* (*Epigrama* 63, 1.2.36), *misera* (1.1.16), *imperitissima* (1.1.22), and *indigna fragilisque ad umbram* (1.2.4), *una ex insipientibus* (1.5.4), and *situla fragilis* (1.6.1). Even the structure of the letter indicates the anxiety Dhuoda experienced in writing and in assuming the role of *auctor*. The opening of the manual breaks down into an unusually dense series of complex parts, each with a formal heading. In sequence the headings read, *Incipit textus*, *Incipit liber*, *Epigrama*, *Incipit prologus*, *Praefatio*, *Incipiunt capitula*. Finally begin the lessons, which comprise eleven books. No other Carolingian manual shows as complex a structure.¹⁹ Peter Dronke has argued that this sequence shows Dhuoda's hesitations about assuming the role of teacher, while at the same time it constitutes "the writer's way of gaining assurance toward that role, of getting her bearings in it."²⁰

Dhuoda apparently faced similar difficulties in bringing the manual to a close, in letting go of her link with William. Book 10 initiates a complex series of leave-takings. These begin with a poem, entitled *De temporibus tuis* (10.1); a second poem, *De versibus ex litteris compositis tuis* (10.2); a *Post verba praescripta* (10.3); a chapter entitled, *Ad me recurrens, lugeo*, in which Dhuoda refers to her infirmities (10.4.8–9) and asks William to pray for her soul (10.4.6–7), to pay the debts she has incurred protecting Bernard’s lands (10.4.50), and to care for her younger son, Bernard (10.4.53–55); a chapter entitled *Nomina defunctorum* that lists the names of William’s deceased relatives; the verse *De epitaphio* (10.5) that Dhuoda asks him to place on her tomb; and in book 11, a final lesson on the psalms (11.1), and an ultimate chapter listing the dates of Dhuoda’s composition (11.2.2–6), with her parting words to William — “Vale et virge, nobilis puer, semper in Christo” (“Farewell and flourish, my noble boy, always in Christ,” 11.2.1–2) — and with her concluding statement, “Finit hic, Deo gratias, liber Manualis Wilhelmi, in eo quod ait Evangelium: *Consumatum est*” (“Here ends, thanks be to God, the manual for William in the words of the Gospel: It is finished,” 11.2.11–12). Whether Dhuoda quotes John to claim an authority like the Evangelist’s or to suggest that she, like Christ, has completed her work, the phrase resonates powerfully. Just as the beginning and ending of the manual were difficult for Dhuoda to compose, so is the entire writing process. She coins her own term to describe the labour of writing, *agonizatio* (1.1.13), which she bases on the Greek noun *agon*, a struggle.

As in the above examples, the humility formulae Dhuoda applies to herself sometimes clash with her absolute confidence in her ability to sustain William. Protesting her ignorance, Dhuoda nonetheless claims maternal *auctoritas*. Her lessons on the nature of God, for example, end with her testimony of faith: “Ego enim genitrix tua, licet vilis secundum parvitatem et capacitatem sensus intelligentiae meae, talem credo illum qui est Deus benedictus in saecula” (“For I am you mother, and however vile I am because of the smallness and capacity of my understanding, nonetheless I believe this about God who is blessed for all eternity” 1.6.30–33). While Dhuoda here asserts her faith as the basis for her authority, at times she has nothing to assert but her belief in the authority of motherhood: “Dhuoda quanquam in fragili sensu, inter dignas vivens indigne, tamen genitrix tua, fili Wilhelme, ad te nunc meus sermo dirigitur manualis” (“However weak I am in understanding, living unworthily among unworthy women, nonetheless I am your mother, my son William, and to you I now direct the teaching

of the manual,” *prologus* 5–8). The long verse epigram which functions as a prayer and as Dhuoda’s invocation yields the most striking example of Dhuoda’s low sense of self-esteem and high sense of authority. Repeatedly Dhuoda defines herself as too weak for the task for which she seeks God’s aid:

Quanquam ignara, ad te perquiro sensum . . .
Ad te, ut valuealeo, poplito flexu
Gratias refero conditore largas. (*Epigramma* 15, 22–23)
[However ignorant I am, from you I search for understanding . . . to you I
give abundant thanks on bended knee, as best I am able in my condition.]

Yet while Dhuoda describes herself as “ignara,” the very form of the prayer undercuts this representation of self, for the first letters of each line form an acrostic that reads: “DHUODA DILECTO FILIO UUILHELMO SALUTEM LEGE” (“Dhuoda sends greetings to her beloved son William. Read!,” verse epigram). Dhuoda is certainly not the first Carolingian writer to embroider her name in a text. Through the verse acrostic “Radbertus levita,” the Benedictine theologian Paschasius Radbertus, for example, signs both his “De corpore et sanguine Domini” and his “De fide, spe, et caritate” with the formal title deacon (“levita”).²¹ Dhuoda’s message, however, is unusually specific. Lest William (or any reader) miss the acrostic, Dhuoda not once but twice gives precise instructions on how to read it.²² The acrostic thus functions as a warm greeting to William, but also as a playful and clever indication of a woman’s learning and her assumption of the role of teacher, evident in the final imperative, “LEGE.”

As Dhuoda advanced further in her writing of the manual, her confidence apparently grew. She refers to herself less frequently with humility formulae than in the opening books. Her fondness for acrostics, however, surfaces strikingly at both the opening and close of the letter. She begins the poem of 10.2 by yet again encouraging William to study the manual: “Ut valeas, vigeas, optime prolis, / Dicta conscripta a me tibi directa / Legere ne pigeat” (“To grow strong, to thrive, best child, do not hesitate to read what I’ve written for you” 10.2.2–5). The remaining verses of the poem summarize Dhuoda’s lessons by highlighting the dual system of values inherent in the genre of the *speculum*, eternal salvation (10.2.6–9, 10–13, 18–21, 30–33, 46–49) and noble life in this world (10.2.14–17, 22–25, 26–29, 34–37, 38–41, 42–45). This poem, in effect a precis of the manual, acrostically spells, “VERSI AD VVILHELMUM F[ilium].” The acrostic epitaph which follows in 10.6 reads “DHVODANE,” a simple ablative reminding the

reader of the author. Dhuoda reinforces the intimate connections between mother and child and author and audience by weaving into the text at its start and at its end her and William's names.²³

Dhuoda places on William two further obligations. Near the opening of the manual she first charges him with the care of the child she cannot raise:

fratremque tuum parvulum, cuius modo inscia sum nominis, cum baptimatis in Christo acceperit gratiam, insinuare, nutrire, amare, ac de bono in melius provocare ne pigeas, atque hunc codicellum Manualis a me comprehensum, et in tuo nomine conscriptum, cum perfectum loquendi vel legendi acceperit tempus, illi ostende, et admone legendo; caro enim et frater tuus est. Admoneo vos iam quasi utrosque ego Dhuoda genitrix vstra. . . . (1.7.25–32)

[And when your little brother, whose name I do not know, accepts the grace of baptism in Christ, take pains to be close to him, to nourish him, to love him, and to stir him from good to better. When he reaches the age at which he can speak and read, show him this little manual which I have composed and inscribed with your name, and urge him to read it. He is your flesh and your brother. I remind both of you: I, Dhuoda, am your mother.]

Dhuoda here reminds William of his biological tie to the young Bernard, a tie that carries corresponding ethical obligations: “caro enim et frater tuus est.” At the same time she poignantly reveals her concern for the child whose name she does not as yet know — “cuius modo inscia sum nominis” — and reminds the two boys of their unique relationship with her: “Ego Dhuoda genitrix vestra.” Toward the close of the manual, Dhuoda again reminds William of her younger boy: “Quadrans in quatuor iam habes annos usque perductos. / Si proles secundus tot tempus haberet, / In sui personam illi alium transcriberem libellum” (“In four years you will have completed a quarter of your life. If my second son should have as many years, I would compose another book for him” 10.1.2–4). She charges William with both the care of his brother and of the manual, which is Dhuoda's only bridge to her children. The pain she feels in separation from her infant is obvious, as is the seriousness of the task she places on her elder son. Dhuoda passes on to William a charge the church fathers placed on woman in her role as mother, the teaching of reading and moral instruction of the child.²⁴ Dhuoda's manual testifies eloquently to one woman's willingness to embrace that role.

Dhuoda is equally emphatic in instructing William in his second obligation, carrying out her burial: “Quod volo, et quasi ad praesens totis flagito nisibus, ut in loco in quo fuerim sepulta, super ipso tecto sepulchri quod meum operuerit corpus hos versiculos iube transcribi firmitim” (“What I want, and insist on with every effort as if I were present, is that on top of the

tomb in which I will be buried and which will cover my body you order these verses to be inscribed,” 10.6.4–7). Dhuoda insists that William place on her tomb the epitaph she has composed for herself. In this poem she exhorts all who go by her grave to pray for her: “Omnis aetas et sexus, vadensque / Et revertens hic, rogo, dicite ita: / Agios magne, eius dilue uncla” (“All who pass by and return this way, whatever your age and sex, I beg you, recite the following prayer: Great Creator, loose her chains” 10.6.24–26). Dhuoda is unwavering in her humility and her faith, especially as she contemplates her end, and she is ever full of instruction. Through her epitaph she will address those reading it and extract prayers from them: “Ne hinc pertranseat quis, usque dum legat. / Coniuro omnes ut orent” (“No one will pass by here without reading: I take an oath so that all will pray” 10.6.33–34). There is a sense at the close of the manual that Dhuoda, having given her sons all she is able to give in written form, has made peace with the world and is in fact ready to meet death. For a brief moment Dhuoda is able to think of children beyond her own in need of instruction. With a sense of this possibly larger audience, she writes William: “Sed et istum Manualem quem legis, qui legerit unquam, verba quae subtus secuntur meditetur ipse” (“Whoever reads this manual which you are reading, let them also reflect on the words that follow below” 10.6.10–11). Dhuoda’s appeal has proven as powerful to recent readers as it must have been to her children.

A historian of childhood has claimed that the most substantial change in childrearing from the Roman to the early mediaeval period is the “nurturant role of the mother.”²⁵ Dhuoda’s letter proves to be a forceful testimony to this change. It is therefore perplexing, given her emphasis on motherhood, to find that Dhuoda refers only once to the Virgin Mary (3.10.130). It is also disappointing for modern feminists, given her obvious strength of character, that Dhuoda consistently describes herself as weak. Yet this letter, written during a particularly bleak and violent age for women,²⁶ positively asserts the most instinctive female values. Dhuoda’s manual does so as it realistically meets the challenges of a Christian secular life, in an age when most clerics were advocating retreat from the world. Augustine, a son who deeply loved his mother Monica,²⁷ feared that attachment to family would distract him from his goal of salvation. Dhuoda convincingly makes the opposite case, that familial love, and in particular maternal love, can be the means to salvation. It is only fitting that Dhuoda’s manual throughout mirrors a mother’s love for her children.²⁸

NOTES

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¹ The full title of the work is “*liber manualis Dhuodane quem ad filium suum transmisit Wilhelmum.*” All references to this text are cited from the edition of Pierre Riché, *Dhuoda: Manuel pour mon Fils*, Sources Chrétiennes vol. 225 (Paris, 1975). This edition includes an introduction, critical text, notes, and a complete facing-page translation into French by Bernard de Vregille et Claude Mondésert, S.J. I have consulted the earlier edition of Edouard Bondurand, *L’Éducation Carolingienne: Le Manuel de Dhuoda* (Paris, 1887), which also gives a French translation and the partial edition of Jacques Mabilon included in PL 106.109–118. James Marchand has translated selection of Dhuoda’s manual into English in his essay, “The Frankish Mother: Dhuoda” in *Medieval Woman Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens, Ga., 1984), 1–29, as has Marcelle Thiebaux in her anthology, *The Writings of Medieval Women* (New York, 1987), 65–79. The translations which appear in this article are my own.

² The battle of Fontenay was fought in 841 between Louis’s warring sons, Charles and Louis against Pippin and Lothar. Charles proved victorious, and Bernard who had sat out the battle refusing to aid him, would try to make amends by sending his first son William as hostage. See Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor* 3.2 in *Histoire des Fils de Louis le Pieux*, ed. Ph. Lauer (Paris, 1926). In 844 Bernard would die at the hands of King Charles. History recounts that Bernard, aiming to increase the Spanish marches, came into direct conflict with the king, who held this land as his own. Captured at Toulouse, Bernard died at a public execution. Legend gives Bernard a more interesting end. Having made peace with Charles, he kneeled to do homage in the monastery of Saint Saturnius near Toulouse. Perhaps doubting his own paternity, Charles offered Bernard his right hand while stabbing him with his left, no doubt remembering the charge of adultery waged against Bernard and his mother Judith in 831. Judith and Bernard had publically defended themselves against this charge of adultery years earlier. According to Nithard’s *Historiarum* 1.4, Judith declared her innocence to the church and state at a royal assembly at Aachen on 2 February 831. Bernard came out of hiding in May of that year to challenge his accusers to a trial by combat, but none came forward to accept the challenge. The innocence of both was publically accepted, but as this legend concerning Bernard’s death testifies, privately doubted. In her manual Dhuoda makes no allusions to sexual misconduct on Bernard’s part, but she is acutely aware of the political danger he faces, and she entreats William to pray often for his father’s safety (8.7).

³ William, Dhuoda’s first-born, is named after his famous paternal grandfather, William Count of Toulouse, whom history knows as St William of the Desert.

⁴ For the charge of adultery and abuse of power waged against Bernard, see Nithard’s *Historiarum* 1.3 (at n. 2); Paschasius Radbertus, *De vita Walae* 7.2 and 8.4 in PL 120:1615–18; and the *Annales Bertiniani*, “anno 831,” ed. G. Waitz, *MHG Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* (Hanover: 1883).

⁵ Riché (at n. 1) 21–23.

⁶ Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia, 1981) 98.

⁷ One’s dialect can indicate much during this formative time for vernacular languages. Contemporaneous with Dhuoda’s manual are the Oaths of Strasbourg, a treaty sworn to by the sons of Louis the Pious, Louis the German, and Charles the Bald, against their brother, the Emperor Lothar on 14 February 842. Each brother took the oaths in

language accessible to the soldiers of the other, with Louis swearing in French and Charles in German. The oaths were recorded by Nithard in his *Historiarum* 3.5. The German oaths, which were imperfectly understood by the scribe, appear in Rhenish or Middle Franconian dialect; the French version stands as the earliest document in the *Romana lingua*, or the French language which has become distinct from Latin. This linguistic evidence indicates that if Dhuoda had chosen to write in her vernacular tongue, we would have a sense of her native dialect and birthplace.

⁸ I interpret the phrase “ob absentiam praesentiae vestrae” as referring to William and his brother on the basis of the preceding paragraph, in which Dhuoda discusses the fate of the younger child. For an alternate reading of this passage as referring to Dhuoda’s husband and William, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), 48–49. Recent critics have made much of Dhuoda’s “unhappy” marriage. The tone of sympathy is evident in Marcelle Thiebaut’s comment on pp. 66–67 of her analysis:

Bernard’s treatment of his wife would certainly have intensified her wish to placate him. Married to Bernard . . . in June 824, Dhuoda was whisked away to the little southern town where she was compelled to live out her days. Bernard visited her infrequently enough to father two sons. . . . Bernard took both sons from her — William when he was fourteen, and the infant Bernard before he was baptized. Parted from her children, and an outsider to the events at court, Dhuoda must have sought comfort in writing this treatise

On p. 2 of his introduction to Dhuoda’s manual, James Marchand writes even more dramatically:

Just these bare facts already enlist our sympathy for Dhuoda, but when we place them in their historical framework they permit us a glimpse of the tragedy which her life must have been. The story of her marriage and life with Bernhard of Septimania . . . reads like a dime-store novel.

Despite these critics’ sensitive readings of the manual, they voice complaints Dhuoda never makes by reading into the autobiographical details that she reveals. Dhuoda’s letter displays absolute loyalty to her husband. In the manual she refers to Bernard respectfully as “my lord” (“senior meus,” *Praefatio* 23). She advises William to follow loyally (3.1, 3.2) and to pray (8.7, 11.1.113–19) for Bernard. At the end of the manual she begs her son, after her death, to pay the debts she has incurred for Bernard (10.4.43–53).

⁹ In the epigram Dhuoda refers to a “consors amica fidaque” (*Epigrama* 30–31), but it is impossible to assign a fixed meaning to the oblique reference.

¹⁰ Scholars have criticized Dhuoda’s Latin as barbaric, but in *Women Writers* (at n. 8) Dronke comes to her defense:

Her Latin is indeed unorthodox and at times incorrect, whether by classical norms or by the standards of Charlemagne’s *litterati*; it is also intrinsically difficult, because of Dhuoda complex and subtle awareness. Her modes of expression, when they are ungainly, uncertain or unclear, are so chiefly because she was urgently striving to say something in her own way, something that was truly hers. And she does so successfully, I would argue, in that despite — and even because of — the limitations of her Latin, the language she had learnt but never felt fully at ease in, we can still find in her writing a person whom, once we have perceived and understood her, we could never blur with any other, or ever forget. (36)

¹¹ Dronke (at n. 8) 29–30.

¹² For a survey of this genre, see Lester K. Born, “The *Specula Principis* of the Carolingian Renaissance,” *Revue Belge de Philologie d’Histoire* 12 (1933): 583–612.

¹³ *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide, spe, et caritate* 1.4, ed. E. Evans in *Aurelii Augustini opera*, CCSL vol. 46 (Turnholti, 1981).

¹⁴ Dhuoda later ignores the tripartite structure of “norma,” “forma,” and “manualis” she establishes in the *Incipit textus*.

¹⁵ Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror Imagery In Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge, 1982), 2–4, 48.

¹⁶ For example, Sirach 3:3, 3:6, 3:7, 3:5, and Leviticus 20:9, all of which Dhuoda cites in 3:1.

¹⁷ In his *Etymologiarum* 19.31.18, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), Isidore of Seville defines a mirror in the following way:

Specula sunt in quibus feminae vultus suos intuentur. Dictum autem speculum vel quod ex splendore reddatur, vel quod ibi feminae intuentes considerent speciem sui vultus et, quidquid ornamenti deesse viderint, adiciant.

[Mirrors are those things in which women gaze at their own faces. About a mirror it is said that it either returns an image brightly or that the women gazing in them study their own reflections, see what ornaments are lacking, and add them.]

Although both Isidore and Dhuoda use women in their examples of viewers in the mirror, Dhuoda’s image otherwise bears no likeness to Isidore’s.

¹⁸ According to Enid McLeod, *The Order of the Rose: the Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan* (Totowa, N.J., 1976), 173, Christine probably wrote *Les enseignements moraux que je Christine donne à Jean de Castel mon fils* in 1377 when her son Jean left home to be trained in the household of the Earl of Salisbury. She probably also composed *L’Epître d’Othéa*, dated 1399 or 1400, with Jean in mind.

¹⁹ Alcuin’s “De virtutibus et vitiis liber,” addressed to Count Wido of the Breton March and probably dating from 800 begins with an “epistola nuncupatoria” immediately followed by twenty-six chapters of lessons (PL 101:613–38). Smaragdus’s “Via regia,” composed between 812 and 815 for Louis the Pious, adopts a similar structure, with an “epistola nuncupatoria” followed by thirty-one chapters of lessons (PL 102:934–70). Jonas of Orleans’s “De institutione regia,” dedicated in 834 to King Pippin, reveals a slightly more complex beginning: It opens with an “epistola eiusdem ad Pippinum regem” and a poem entitled, “versus breviter digesti,” which are followed by seventeen chapters of lessons (PL 106:279–306). Sedulius Scottus’s “Liber de rectoribus Christianus,” a work which postdates Dhuoda’s, has the most complex structure among the Carolingian manuals. Composed between 855 and 859 for Lothar I’s son, King Lothar II, the book begins with a poem, a prayer, and an “incipit capitula”; each of the twenty chapters of lesson that follows appears in Boethian *prosimetrum* form (PL 103:291–331). Hincmar of Rheims, who served as archbishop of Rheims 845–882 and as the chief political advisor to Charles the Bald, returned the genre to a simple form. His “De regis persona et regio ministerio” starts with a “praefatio” in prose followed by thirty-three chapters of lessons, also in prose (PL 125:833–56). None of these works approaches the complex structure of Dhuoda’s manual, with its serial opening, eleven books subdivided into chapters, and serial ending.

²⁰ Dronke (at n. 8) 39.

²¹ See PL 120:1261–62 and 1387–88.

²² Dhuoda first instructs in verse, “Lector qui cupis formulam nosse, / Capita perquire abta versorum. / Exin valebis concito gradu / Sensu cognosci quae sim con-scripta” (“The reader who desires to know the formula should search the capital letters in

order. Therein you will be able to discern by progressive steps what is written," *Epigrama* 80–83). She later adds in prose, "A littera D. delta incipe legendo, M. moyda hactenus conclusa sunt. Finiunt versi" ("Begin by reading from the letter "D," delta, up to the "M," moyda, where it ends. The poem is finished," *Epigrama* 88–89).

²³ Thiebaut (at n. 1) 68.

²⁴ For example, see St Jerome's letter 107.4, "Ad Laetam de institutione filiae" in *Select Letters of Saint Jerome*, trans. F.A. Wright, the Loeb Classical Library (London and New York, 1933).

²⁵ Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries" in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York, 1974), 115.

²⁶ Dhuoda's sister-in-law, the nun Gerberga, met a particularly violent end at the hands of Louis the Pious's son, Lothar. Because Bernard supported King Louis against his rebel son, Lothar takes revenge on Bernard's family. According to Nithard's *Historiarum* 1.5 (at n. 2), Lothar has Gerberga executed as a witch by having her thrust in a barrel and drowned in the Saone: "Gerbergam more malefactorum in Ararim mergi praecepit."

²⁷ In the *Confessionum* 5.8.14, ed. Lucas Verheijen, O.S.A., CCSL Vols. 13–14 (Turnholt, 1981), Augustine recounts leaving Carthage to teach in Rome, presumably to work with less disruptive students, but actually "pro salute animae meae." Augustine describes having to lie to and dupe his mother so he could leave. Like Aeneas fleeing Dido, he fled Carthage at night leaving a lamenting woman on shore. Throughout the *Confessionum* Augustine warmly refers to Monica's concern for his spiritual welfare (2.3, 3.11, 3.12, 6.1, 6.13), and he writes of her character with extraordinary affection when he reflects on her death (9.8–9.13).

²⁸ According to the entry for the year 850 in the *Annales Bertiniani*, Dhuoda's son William was captured and put to death in Barcelona, which he had earlier seized with a force of soldiers; he was 24 years old at his death. According to the annal for 864 Bernard, Dhuoda's younger son, was caught attempting the ambush and murder of King Charles the Bald; he was put to death at 23 years of age.