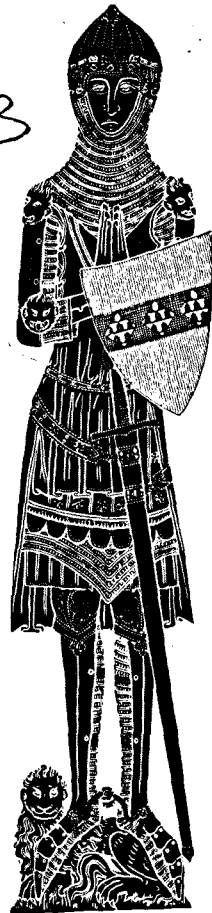


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The personality of Guibert de Nogent reconsidered

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Uncertainty over Guibert's reasons for writing his autobiography, the De vita sua, has prompted attempts at psycho-historical analyses of his personality. Such studies, in particular those of Benton and Kantor, have tended to rely overheavily on over-simplified psycho-analytical models and ignore cultural, historical and religious factors. An appreciation of such factors, however, does much to improve our understanding both of Guibert's personality and his reasons for writing. On the other hand, psycho-history is not to be dismissed as a worthless aid to the writing of history. With the application of suitable safeguards, as the work of Dom Jean Leclercq has demonstrated, it can form a most useful addition to the historian's armory.

Guibert, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Nogent-sous-Coucy in the diocese of Laon, France, was born around 1053 near Clermont-en-Beauvaisis of lesser noble stock. At birth, difficulties in his mother's labour and fears for the child led to his being dedicated to the religious life. Eight months later, Guibert's father died and his mother, scorning remarriage, was left to raise her children alone. Between the ages of six and twelve, Guibert was trained as a clerk by a tutor, whom his mother appointed. When Guibert was twelve, his mother retired to live the life of an anchoress outside the monastery of Saint Germer de Fly, and his tutor followed her example by becoming a monk. Left alone, Guibert spent some months in close contact with his lay cousins before deciding to become a monk himself, entering the monastery of Fly. There he remained for forty years, concentrating, after a flirtation with the Latin classics, on works of biblical exegesis, a task for which he had initially received encouragement from St Anselm of Bec. Around 1104, he was elected abbot of Nogent, where he remained until his death in about 1125. His literary works, besides those of exegesis, included a note on preaching (*Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat*; MPL 156: cols. 21-32),¹ a tract on the Virgin Mary (*Liber de laude Sanctae Mariae*; MPL 156: cols. 537-78), a tract on the cult of relics (*Liber de pignoribus sanctorum*; MPL 156: cols. 607-80), a history of the First Crusade (the *Gesta Dei per Francos*; MPL 156: cols. 679-838)² and an autobiography (the *De vita sua*; MPL 156: cols. 837-962).³

Guibert's *De vita sua*, modelled on Augustine's *Confessions*, was one of those few works of the eleventh and twelfth centuries—along with Otloh of St Emmeram's *Liber de*

temptatione, Suger of St Denis' *De rebus in administratione sua gestis*, Herman of Cologne's *De sua conversione*, Giraldus Cambrensis' *De rebus a se gestis* and Abelard's *Historia calamitatum*—which may be defined as an 'autobiography'. Indeed, this period, which has been described as the era of the discovery of the individual (Morris 1972), witnessed the genesis of the western European autobiographical tradition. However, while it is generally clear why most of the above authors wrote their autobiographies—Suger to preserve an account of his administration for posterity, Herman to give a didactic account of his conversion from Judaism, Giraldus to proclaim his suitability for the see of St David's, and Abelard, it would appear, to pave the way for a return to teaching in Paris—the reason for Guibert (like Otloh) setting quill to parchment is by no means certain, particularly since most of the second half of the autobiography appears to be devoted to contemporary history. This uncertainty has prompted attempts at approaching Guibert's work from a psychological, or rather psycho-historical, angle in order, it is hoped, to reach a fuller understanding of his personality and thus of his reasons for writing. This essay will attempt an examination of the two main psycho-historical studies of Guibert, that of John Benton in the introduction to his translation of the *De vita sua* (1970:7–33), and that of Jonathon Kantor (1976:281–303), and then explore the possibility of a reassessment of Guibert's personality from a non-psycho-historical angle, before going on to consider the wider question of the worth of the psycho-historical approach, which has met with fierce opposition from some quarters.

In the introduction to his *Self and society*, Benton, heavily influenced by Freud's belief that the essential features of the character have developed by the age of five, claims that the key to Guibert's character lies in his childhood influences (21). Guibert's character, therefore, is seen as dominated by a permanently unresolved struggle between a code learned from the knightly class, which glorified ambition, sexuality and violence, and a code instilled by his mother, which emphasised a deep christian faith and sexual purity (22–3). On the one hand, so Benton believes, the 'knightly' code encouraged Guibert's ambition and carnal longings. On the other hand, the 'maternal' code encouraged Guibert's striving for absolute chastity and a deep religiosity. The importance of Guibert's mother, Benton argues, was all the greater because Guibert never had before him a model of male independence (23):

Without a father to approve violations of his mother's moral code and without playmates to dare him to break rules or admire him for getting away with something, Guibert . . . made the values he learned from his mother . . . a part of himself.

Thus, it is claimed, Guibert took his mother as his ideal in life and sought to imitate what he saw as her perfection.

Benton regards Guibert a a reformer, but an ineffectual one (24):

Guibert was a reformer at heart: he writes as one who wished to reform and purify, and yet he differs greatly from those strong men [such as Anselm, Bernard and Hildebrand] who were actively engaged in changing the church and the world. Guibert was a weaker and less effective man than he wished to be. He shrank from conflict and met challenges by retreat; when forced into difficult situations, he dissimulated to avoid trouble.

Benton believes that Guibert's ability to

act had been sapped by the internal strains imposed by what Freud defined as 'narcissism' (namely self-love) and what he also defined as a 'castration complex' (namely an irrational fear of castration).

On the one hand, any love which Guibert might have had for those around him was not returned: his mother had not loved him enough not to withdraw to Fly; his father had died when he was young; he had no companions as a child. Guibert's love, therefore, came to be turned in on himself and he became narcissistic, delighting in praising himself and condemning others (26):

In the end, he seems to have turned his love inward upon himself, to have developed what Freud called narcissism. In spite of his professions of sin and weakness . . . the reader will be struck throughout this book by Guibert's high regard for himself. This self-satisfaction is coupled with his continual criticism of others. With the exception of his mother and a few exemplary monks and saints, no one else in the book comes off well.

On the other hand, the aggressive side of Guibert's character, allowed no means of expression, also turned inwards and produced in him a fear of punishment and mutilation which, placed alongside the influence of his mother on his attitude to sex, strongly indicates that Guibert suffered from a castration complex (26):

Is it not likely that Guibert grew up with a deep seated fear that the doctrine that 'it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body go into hell' would be applied to him literally?

Quoting the *Gesta Dei per Francos*: "In all things I have written and continue to write, I have banished all else from my mind, thinking only of my own advantage and caring not at all to please others" (MPL 156: col. 749), Benton (27) concludes that

Guibert wrote solely for himself, exorcizing his castration complex in his accounts of slaughter and sexuality, and his narcissism in his attacks on others and praise of himself.

Benton's insistence on the importance of childhood influences to a proper understanding of Guibert's personality is commendable; however, it is arguable that he occasionally over-emphasises their importance. Thus, while sex and worldly success were no doubt important to eleventh-century French knights and certainly Guibert was tormented by ambition and carnal desire, in Book One, chapter sixteen, of the *De vita sua* he writes (Benton 1970 (82):

With the gradual growth of my young body, as the life of this world began to stir my itching heart with fleshy longings and lusts to suit my stature, my mind repeatedly fell to remembering and dwelling on what and how great I might have been in the world . . .

and so, it would appear, suggests that his sexual desires and ambition were largely the products of his puberty. After his adolescence, certainly, Guibert's references to his own sexuality are rare, and his concern with ambition dies out completely.

Again, while undoubtedly Guibert's mother was of importance to the moulding her son's personality, the extent of her influence may reasonably be questioned. In fact, some of Guibert's attitudes were not shared by his mother: his emphasis on the spiritual worth of poverty met no echo in her; while Guibert's piety emphasised God's love and forgiveness, that of his mother stressed God's wrath and a sense of sin: "She had . . . conceived a fear of God's name at the very beginning of her childhood. She had learned to be terrified of sin . . . from dread of some sort of blow from on high" (Benton 1930:64). Nor is it wholly true to

say that Guibert found in his mother an ideal of perfection. Certainly he hoped to live up to her standards, but Guibert was nevertheless aware that his mother had failings. He condemned her attempt to secure him a clerical living, so succumbing to "thoughts that were of the world" (53), and with a delicate irony chided her over-scrupulous piety which allowed her no peace of mind.⁴

Two further considerations would also seem to question the importance of Guibert's mother to her son's personality. First, Guibert did indeed have contact with a model of male independence in the shape of his knightly cousins, joining in their games after his mother's withdrawal to Fly and so coming to break her code (Benton 1970:76-7):

Possessing a perverted liberty I began without any self-control to abuse my power, to mock at churches, to detest school, to try to gain the company of my young lay cousins devoted to knightly pursuits by cursing the appearance of a clerk, to promise remission of sins and to indulge in sleep in which previously I was allowed little relaxation . . .

Second, it may reasonably be questioned whether Guibert portrayed his mother entirely accurately. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, had emphasised the importance of Monnica, his Christian mother, to his conversion from paganism. It would seem reasonable to suggest that Guibert, in seeking to imitate Augustine, might have tried to assign a similar importance to his own mother, and suitably tailored his material.⁵

Benton's belief that Guibert was the victim of narcissism and a castration complex is, I suggest, no less the result of a tendency to over-emphasise. Benton argues that a mother who could leave her twelve-year-old son to

become an anchoress cannot truly have loved him. However, besides the fact that a twelve-year-old in the middle ages was considered an adult, Guibert wrote of his mother's departure (Benton 1970:74):

When on the way to that monastery [Fly] she passed below the stronghold where I remained, the sight of the castle gave intolerable anguish to her lacerated heart, stung with the bitter remembrance of what she left behind. No wonder indeed if her limbs seemed to be torn from her body, since she knew for certain that she was a cruel and unnatural mother . . .

and these words must surely indicate both a tremendous love for her son on the part of Guibert's mother and a great reluctance to leave him, a reluctance, we learn, only overcome by a divine command (Benton 1970:73). If Guibert had no father whom he could love, he appears to have found a satisfactory substitute in his tutor who fully returned his affection: "...he made it quite plain that he loved me as well as he did himself. With such wonderful care did he devote himself to me . . . that he was thought to guard me as a parent" (49). That Guibert loved and was loved by those around him must inevitably cast doubt on Benton's diagnosis of narcissism, and, furthermore, I can see no good reason to doubt Guibert's protestations of humility, the importance of which he would have recognised, for it was regarded by St Gregory as an essential part of the making of a good monk.

Benton's attribution of a castration complex to Guibert is no less difficult to accept wholeheartedly. Benton equates Guibert's supposed fear of mutilation (for which, however, he produces almost no evidence) and his mother's influence on his attitudes to sex with a castration complex. The doubts

voiced about the extent of the mother's influence and the paucity of materials in the *De vita sua* on sexual mutilation, however, necessarily militates against any but the most hesitant application of that equation.

In the light of the above considerations, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept Benton's belief that Guibert wrote to exorcize his narcissism and his castration complex. In the case of the *De vita sua*, at least, Guibert claims to have written for the edification of his readers and to provide materials for sermons,⁶ and in view of the foregoing, I can see no good reason to doubt him. Certainly Benton's model could not easily be extended to include Guibert's works of exegesis or his tracts on sermons and the Virgin Mary.

In a sense, Benton appears to regard Guibert's personality in two lights: on the one hand, it is believed to have been dominated by a struggle between the 'maternal' and 'knightly' codes; on the other hand, it is believed to have been debilitated by narcissism and a castration complex. This second line of argument, I suggest, though an interesting one and attractively presented, ultimately lacks a sufficient body of evidence to make it acceptable or convincing. The first hypothesis, however, though in need of qualification, is valuable for the emphasis it places on the importance of childhood influences. Though it is difficult wholly to accept that the 'knightly' and 'maternal' codes were directly responsible for Guibert's ambition, sexual desires, chastity and piety, it is, I think, reasonable to suggest that his experience of the knightly world did leave him with a certain sympathy for it (indeed, he put forward a very positive view of it in the *Gesta Dei per Francos*) and encouraged a

greater understanding of the world around him, while the example of his mother—for all her faults—gave him a yardstick by which to judge his contemporaries.

If Benton declined to present a "scientific psychological study" (21) of Guibert's personality, Kantor, who believed Guibert "precise in psychological detail . . . sensitive to the delicate configurations of unconscious life" (Kantor 1976:285), made a deliberate attempt to develop what he regarded as Benton's "implied psychological approach" (Kantor 1976:283) into a "full psychological consideration of Guibert's personality" (283). (It is, however, important to recognise that both Benton's and Kantor's approaches, which are almost entirely dependent on Freud, are in fact not so much psychological as psychoanalytical, a fact which appears to escape both authors. I shall return to this point later.)

Using Freud's definition of religion as an 'universal obsessional neurosis', demonstrated in the sublimation or repression of impulses in an attempt to end feelings of guilt, as a point of departure, Kantor (300) comes to regard Guibert's personality as having been dominated by a crushing sense of guilt. This guilt, he argues, had three sources:

(1) First, Guibert inherited from his schizoid mother, a woman who was simultaneously both whore and saint, a permanent inner struggle between ambition and a desire for the religious life, which in turn encouraged a sense of guilt (285-8): "We can trace back to Guibert's mother those opposing impulses that tortured the monk throughout his life: his ambition to glory and his submission to God. These antipodal impulses may help to explain Guibert's devastating sense of sin".

(2) Second, Guibert suffered from what Freud defined as an unresolved Oedipus complex and he retained permanently an unconscious sexual desire on the one hand for his mother: "Guibert's relationship to his mother was de-sexualised in an imperfect way, and . . . in his adulthood there was an intransigent substrate of erotic feelings in his unconsciousness that persisted from his oedipal stage" (288), and on the other hand for the Virgin Mary (the Universal Mother) (288-9, 293-5): "his [Guibert's] erotic and phallic wishes . . . seem to be headed directly at the figure of the Virgin" (289), which was a source of unending neurotic guilt. (Indeed, the essentially feminine orientation of Guibert's unconsciousness, Kantor argues, was responsible for his retreat into the monastic life, for he was unable to tolerate the masculine environment of twelfth-century France (290-1).)

(3) Third, Guibert was psychologically unable to cope with the social, political and economic changes affecting French society in the twelfth century, falling victim to feelings of guilt in accordance with the tenets of Erikson's psychology of reactionism, which holds that whenever individuals perceive that their socio-economic status is in danger, they unconsciously behave as if yielding to temptation had produced the threatened change, and feel guilty at their weakness (295-6).

As a development of Benton's study, Kantor's presentation of Guibert's personality is naturally subject to similar criticisms. Thus, Kantor's claim that the mother's schizophrenia encouraged both Guibert's ambition and piety is, surely, challenged by Guibert's own suggestion that his worldly ambition was only an adolescent phase and

by the apparent difference between Guibert's religiosity and that of his mother. Moreover, the evidence presented to substantiate the charge of schizophrenia against Guibert's mother is ambiguous: to be "beautiful yet chaste" (Benton 1970:38) is no contradiction in terms and Guibert's only comment on her wearing an hair shirt under fine clothes was that it was "unexpected" (Benton 1970:72).

Kantor's attribution of an unresolved Oedipus complex to Guibert is no less difficult to accept. Freud's model of the Oedipus complex entails not only sexual desire for the mother but also a desire to kill the father. Kantor, in broadly ignoring the possibility of violent impulses on Guibert's part towards his father or rather, since his father had died when Guibert was but a baby, towards any substitute father, surely effectively invalidates his use of the Oedipal model. Moreover, little or no evidence is produced for Guibert's supposed sexual feelings for his mother. Certainly Guibert loved his mother and emphatically tells us so, but this is no good grounds for suspecting sexual desire. Nor is any real evidence of Guibert's supposed desire for the Virgin produced. Though he does show a great love for the Madonna as his "refuge in every need" (Benton 1970:99-100) and believed himself her special servant, the relationship, I suggest, owed more to the feudal than the family model, Guibert as a baby "given up to the religious life in the service of God and the Lady" (Benton 1970:42).

Any challenge to Guibert's supposed Oedipus complex and hence the feminine orientation of his unconsciousness implies a challenge to the explanation Kantor gives for Guibert's entry into the monastic life.

Guibert may have been attracted by the possibility of peace offered by monachism, but if Guibert could not tolerate the masculine environment of twelfth-century France, why then did he write of it in such detail in the *De vita sua* and the *Gesta Dei per Francos*? If Guibert's only hope of equanimity lay in the 'feminine' environment of a monastery, how can his visits to Amiens, Crépy-en-Valois, Langres, Laon and Soissons and his mixing with the upper lay and ecclesiastical classes of Picardy be accounted for? Did not the monk as the *miles christi* need as many masculine virtues as the lay warrior, and was not the monastery a spiritual battleground upon which to prove these virtues?

That Guibert could have not inconsiderable social contacts outside the cloister naturally undermines the belief that Guibert was unable to cope with the changes taking place in contemporary society. Guibert may have been a bitter opponent of the Laon commune and a sharp critic of the local nobility and episcopacy, but in general his criticism and opposition are based on moral, rather than social, economic or political grounds, a consideration which must militate against the effective application of Erikson's psychology of reactionism.

Kantor sees the key to Guibert's personality in an overwhelming sense of guilt, produced by an internal struggle between ambition and piety, an unresolved Oedipus complex, and an inability to accept changes in the world around him. However, there are in the end, I suggest, too many significant difficulties involved to allow even a qualified acceptance of Kantor's argument, however coherent and articulate it is and however

potentially rewarding a full psychological consideration of Guibert's personality might be. There is no really conclusive evidence for agreement with the sources indicated for Guibert's supposed guilt, and such a difficulty ultimately leads one to question Kantor's wisdom in so rigidly applying to Guibert's faith Freud's definition of religion as a 'universal obsessional neurosis'.

In considering the psycho-historical or, more accurately, the psychoanalytical-historical approach adopted by Benton and Kantor, it is interesting to reflect on both the depth of their understanding of psychoanalysis and the balance struck between psychoanalysis and history.

In fact, Benton's and Kantor's understanding of psychoanalysis is limited. They base their investigations of Guibert's personality on Freud's teachings and largely ignore both the modifications of Freud's contemporaries, Adler and Jung (though the importance Guibert attached to dreams and the detail in which he described them suggests that he would be an ideal subject for a Jungian study), and the improvements of modern psychoanalysts. Indeed, their very use of psychoanalytic theory in this instance may be called into question. Psychoanalysis is a technique used to cure disturbed minds, depending, for its effective application, on personal contact between subject and analyst over a period of time in the environment of a surgery, with the analyst conducting the examination on his own terms, guiding the conversation and the subject's revelations. In the case of Benton's and Kantor's analyses of Guibert's personality, however, there was no opportunity for such personal contact, nor for the guiding of Guibert's revelations and

certainly no chance of curing the mental disorders of a man dead for eight hundred and fifty years!

Even if the application of psychoanalytic theory in this instance is here accepted as valid, there remains another objection to Benton's and Kantor's presentations of Guibert's personality. Both men are professional historians and only amateur psychoanalysts. Yet, impressed, it would seem, by the apparently easy answers provided by psychoanalytical models, both Benton and Kantor come to approach their subject more as psychoanalysts than historians and, lacking the sensitivity of the professional psychoanalyst, come to rely overheavily on these models. The consequence of this is serious errors in perspective. Thus Kantor, for instance, can accuse Guibert of quasi-Oedipal desires for the Virgin Mary and so forget, it would seem, both her place in catholic theology as the Mother of Heaven who intercedes for the sinner with the Father, and the charged language of medieval devotion derived from the *Song of songs*.

A final criticism of Benton's and Kantor's psycho-historical or psychoanalytical-historical analyses of Guibert is that, in a sense, they do not cast their nets widely enough. Both concentrate on the 'inner man' to the exclusion of the 'public man'. No real attempt is made to apply psycho-history to reach a fuller understanding of Guibert's thought or of his relationship to his environment. Benton and Kantor would almost appear to regard psycho-history as incompatible with the study of Guibert's cultural, historical and religious background, though such a study, surely, forms the very stuff of history. Indeed, it is precisely in this background, I suggest, that the key

to Guibert's personality is to be found, and at the very least its examination should resolve many of the anomalies which the application of psychoanalytic theory would appear to entail.

Above all, Guibert should, I believe, be regarded in terms of his vocation as a monk: he had been a child oblate so intent on becoming a cleric that he had once declared: "If I had to die on the spot, I would not give up studying my lessons and becoming a clerk" (Benton 1970:50). At the age of thirteen he fell in love with the monastic way of life: ". . . from the moment I entered the monastery church [of Fly] and saw the monks sitting there, I was seized by a longing for the monk's life which never grew cold" (Benton 1970:77), and he remained a Benedictine for the rest of his life. Thus, any consideration of Guibert's personality must surely recognise Guibert's love of the monastic vocation and hence its influence on him.

It was, then, as a monk who had sought to overcome his self-will through the self-discipline of the three Benedictine vows of poverty, obedience and chastity that Guibert launched his attack on greed, ambition and lust, whether his own or that of others. It was as a monk, who in accordance with the Benedictine Rule had renounced the world, that Guibert stood above family ties (retaining a love only for his mother), above the knightly environment into which he was born and above contemporary events such as the Laon communal revolt. Guibert's cultural influences—the Bible, the Fathers and the classics—were those of all Benedictine monks. Guibert, like many of his contemporaries, was particularly fond of the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job and Proverbs (though, unusually, he had no special fond-

ness for the *Song of songs*). Like many other monks, he had a great admiration for Augustine (the *De vita sua* was modeled on the *Confessions*, and in it he cites *Concerning heresies*, the *Enarratio in Psalmum* and *On Christian doctrine*) and for St Gregory, the spiritual father of medieval monasticism. Like many of his predecessors, including St Benedict himself, Guibert abused but nevertheless used the classics. Guibert's literary output, especially his works of exegesis and history, was typically monastic; his style was greatly influenced by the liturgy.

However, there are some facets of Guibert's character which were not so much the product of Benedictine monasticism as of a reaction against it. The Benedictine Rule is a rule for beginners. St Benedict had deliberately rejected corporeal austerity, the ideal of self-improvement and an individual spirituality in favour of monks forming a spiritual family, the individual subsumed in the community, which was dedicated to the service of God in the celebration of the liturgy. In Guibert, I suggest, is to be seen an example of a monk no longer content to remain a beginner. Flying in the face of tradition, Guibert rejected the Benedictine 'family', unable, I suspect from his attacks on so many fellow monks, any longer to tolerate impious fools gladly, and dismissed the accompanying rounds of duties as spiritually stagnating. Instead, he sought through his personal prayers in the *De vita sua* to establish an individual relationship with God; he sought self-improvement through the self-knowledge gained in confessing his sins in the autobiography (Benton 1970:37):

How could I catch even a glimpse of Thee if my eyes were blind to see myself . . . if I do not know what is good, how shall I be able to know what is evil, much

less forswear it? If I know beauty, I shall never be frightened by foulness. Both matters are therefore apparent, that I should seek knowledge of myself and, enjoying that, I should consequently not fail in self-knowledge . . .

He sought a harsher asceticism than the Benedictine vows allowed, praising the noble-turned-monk Evrard for (Benton 1970:56-7):

. . . such contempt of his person that the meanness of his apparel, the humility of his looks and the emaciation of his limbs would have proclaimed him not a count but a rough peasant. And when he was sent through cities and towns on his abbot's business, he could never be induced of his own accord to endure even once to set foot in the castles which he had relinquished.

In his demands for corporeal austerity, self-improvement and an individual spirituality (and it should be noted here that he also had a liking for Pauline texts), Guibert came very near to echoing the aims of the New Orders. Indeed, Guibert devoted the whole of chapter eleven of the first book of the *De vita sua* to an account of the foundation and early days of the Carthusians, who are praised particularly for their poverty: "The less their store of worldly goods, the more they toil laboriously for that good which does not perish but endures for ever" (Benton 1970:61).

Guibert's sympathy with the spiritual renaissance which came in the wake of the Gregorian reformation extended beyond an admiration for the Carthusians, however, to tangible support for the newly developing forms of veneration and expressions of Christian faith. Thus his tract *De laude Sanctae Mariae* reflected and promoted the blossoming cult of the Virgin Mary. Thus the *Gesta Dei per Francos* praised those *milites christi* who sought to save their souls by re-

claiming the Holy Land from God's enemies. Moreover, as benefitted a one-time pupil of Anselm of Bec, Guibert went on to make demands for the purification and evangelisation of Catholicism. In the *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* he set out guidelines for the most effective delivery of sermons to the masses. In the *De pignoribus sanctorum* he called for a careful control of the cult of relics and vigilance in guarding against its abuse.

Guibert's attempt at a greater personal faith, his sympathy with contemporary spiritual movements and his desire to purify the Catholic religion all indicate a tremendous desire on his part for a close union with God. However, it would seem that such a union, once achieved, was only temporary (which might account for Guibert's dislike of the mystical *Song of songs*) (Benton 1970:99-100):

Then I . . . began to cry, O Lord, for that pious solitude of the mind in which Thou art wont to abide, to approach the mother of that heavenly kingdom, Mary, mother of God, my only refuge in every need, and to aim at her the embracing love of my inward fervour. Then, by the sweet savour of Thy close friendship, I first learned the true meaning of singleness of will, of its purity, of an unbending resolve to be forever humble. What shall I say, Lord, of how fleeting was the existence of that paradise, how short the period of calm and uncertain the taste of such sweetness.

Unable to sustain this mystical flight, Guibert substituted for it an awareness of his moral responsibility before God.⁷ He came to see it as his overriding task in life to reform the morals of those around him and to warn them of their duty to obey the divine commandments, so that they might avoid damnation. In this light it appears that the *De vita sua* was written not simply as an exercise in individual piety but also

very much in order to edify its readers and to provide materials for sermons. The autobiography is thus in part a vehicle for Guibert's moral goal. Guibert's own personal desire for a closer union with God was matched by a demand for all to enter into a more intimate personal relationship with the Lord.

The last important factor in the formation of Guibert's character was, I believe, the influence of the pagan classics. Guibert, living during the early years of the twelfth century renaissance, witnessed a great increase in awareness of the classics in his lifetime. Though, like many before him, Guibert had come to reject the classics as encouraging "ridiculous vanities" and "poisonous licence" (Benton 1970:87), he was nevertheless, I suggest, deeply affected by them. Study of the poets Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Lucian and Juvenal, the historian Sallust, the dramatists Plautus and Terence and the stylists Cicero and Quintilian had produced in Guibert a knowledgeable and refined man.

Guibert inherited from the classics a style of writing and a way of thinking. Guibert took delight in literary elegance and sought to rival his models, consciously imitating them or adapting their expressions and devices to striking effect. More important, Guibert was instilled by the classics with a certain outlook on life. From them he took his moral appreciation of beauty (Benton 1970:38-9):

Beauty . . . is but an empty show. Still . . . beauty has the higher title to praise of every sort the more desirable it is, so long as it hardens itself against the temptations of lust . . . If Sallust Crispus had not thought beauty devoid of morality worthy to be praised, he would never have said of Aurelia Orestilla 'in whom good men never found ought to praise except her beauty' . . .

if whatever has been eternally established by God is beautiful, then all that is temporarily fair is, as it were, a reflection of that eternal beauty.

From the classics also, Guibert received his capacity for observation and the historian's desire to discover the truth, two traits fully illustrated in his account of the Laon revolt. From the classics he inherited a love of hyperbole which encouraged him to laud the good and condemn the bad in the strongest possible terms. From the classics, finally, Guibert derived his ironic sense of humour and sense of the ridiculous, revealed, for instance, in his treatment of the reputedly uncorrupted body of St Edmund (Benton 1970:225):

In England, King Edmund, the most blessed martyr, has been a great miracle worker, both formerly and now. I refrain from speaking of his body, still uncorrupted and with the colour not of a man but of an angel, which excites our awe because the nails and hair are still growing as if he were alive. But there is this to be said, that being in such a miraculous condition, he suffers himself to be seen by none. In our time a certain abbot of his monastery wished to know for himself whether the head that had been cut off at his martyrdom had been reunited to the body, as was commonly reported. After fasting with the chaplain, he uncovered him and saw what I described above, that the flesh had nowhere fallen in and he had all the appearance of a sleeper. To his danger, he learned all this by sight and touch; with one at the head and another at his feet, he pulled to see how he was and determined that the body was solid. But soon after he wasted away with a permanent palsy of both hands.

From the classics, therefore, Guibert received his sense of aesthetics, his sense of humour and his enthusiasm for life, all of which served to make him in many ways a very human figure. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that Guibert's mining of the classics for his own personal good shows him to have been a closet monastic humanist.

It would appear that to appreciate

Guibert's historical, cultural and religious background is largely to exclude the *Sturm und Drang* which Benton and Kantor suggest filled his existence. Guibert appears to me to have been a monk deeply in love with his vocation and in turn deeply influenced by it, in many ways a typical Benedictine but nevertheless sympathetic towards the demands of the New Orders and the post-Hildebrandine spiritual revival for a close individual relationship with God, and a moralist passionately concerned for the salvation of his fellow men. Yet there is another, lighter, side to Guibert. If he was a stern moral reformer, he also had an eye for beauty, a sense of fun and a certain zest for living. The Guibert of the *De vita sua* was a mature, well-balanced man who, if he did not feel fulfilled, was at least content with his station in life.

Despite the criticisms which I have leveled against Benton and Kantor and my belief that the key to Guibert's personality lies in his cultural, historical and religious background, I do not wish to suggest that the psycho-historical approach in general is without merit. Rather, I suggest that any use of psychological, psychoanalytical or even psychiatric models should be qualified by an awareness of the dangers involved in their overzealous application; that psycho-history is best taken out of the hands of the individual psycho-historian (indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a scholar equally competent in both history and psychology or psychoanalytic theory) and should be entrusted to historians and psychologists or psychoanalysts working in collaboration; that cultural, historical and religious truths should be used as criteria for judging the credibility of psycho-historical findings; that

psycho-history should not be limited to a study of the 'inner man' but should contribute also to an understanding of the subject's thought and his relationship to his environment. Bearing these considerations in mind, there is no reason why psycho-history should not become a useful tool—though never more than an auxiliary one—to the historian.

A good example, surely, of the successful application of psycho-history to the analysis of the individual personality is Jean Leclerq's recent (1976) study of St Bernard. Working in collaboration with a psychoanalyst, a psycho-linguist, a general practitioner and several psychologists, Leclerq was able both to give expression to several previously ignored areas of Bernard's thought (Bredero 1979:84), and to present the saint for once in a human, rather than a religious, light, removing him from his monastic surroundings and placing him in the outside world (85, 88). However, Leclerq was careful to compare psycho-historical findings with the fruits of previous non-psycho-historical research on St Bernard (84); psycho-linguistic analysis of Bernardine texts was accompanied by literal interpretation (84, 88); psychological models of behaviour were compared with Bernard's actual actions and experiences (84). Such a scrupulous balancing of psychology and history makes Leclerq's study an attractive and convincing one. It stands out, therefore, not only as a worthwhile addition to our understanding of St Bernard but also as proof of the potential usefulness of psycho-history and as an invaluable yard-stick by which to judge other psycho-historical essays. One cannot avoid the suspicion that Guibert would have received from Leclerq a treatment rather

different from that meted out by Benton and Kantor.

In conclusion, therefore, it would appear that in Guibert's case psycho-history, at least as practised by Benton and Kantor, generally leads no nearer to an understanding of his personality, or to an understanding of his reasons for writing the *De vita sua*. Though psycho-history, in the right hands, can be a valuable technique for the historian, and the extent to which Guibert laid bare his soul in his autobiography makes him an attractive psycho-historical subject, it should be recognised that the key to Guibert's personality lies in his cultural, historical and religious background. Only when this has been subjected to the same intense scrutiny as that, for instance, of St Bernard, I suggest, may a profitable return be made to the psycho-historical approach.

Notes

¹ The *Liber quo ordine* in fact forms the preface to Guibert's commentary on Genesis, the *Moralia in Genesin* (MPL 156: cols. 19–338).

² See also the *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens Occidentaux* 4:115–263. Paris, 1879.

³ Translated into English by J. F. Benton (1970).

⁴ Compare Hallenstein 1934:32.

⁵ Compare Hallenstein 1934:26.

⁶ Compare Benton 1970:11.

⁷ Compare Hallenstein 1934:12–13.

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