Introduction

In 1203, a long-standing quarrel between two powerful local lords in central France erupted in a startling incident of aggression that was both actual and symbolic. Peter of Courtenay, count of Nevers and Auxerre, had for some time attempted to assert jurisdiction over land held by the bishop of Auxerre, Hugh of Noyers. Tension rose between the two authorities until Peter ravaged a church under Hugh's protection and blinded one of the bishop's vassals. As a result, the bishop excommunicated the count and placed his lands under interdict, allowing no services except baptism for infants and last rites for the dying. The incident would have been simply one of many tense interactions between episcopal and secular authority in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries[1] had Peter not responded in a manner that shocked his contemporaries.

While Peter was residing at Auxerre, a child died but, because the interdict was in effect, could not receive a burial in consecrated ground. The mother, distraught by her inability to bury her child properly, turned to the secular authorities for help. According to a chronicle of the bishops of Auxerre, Count Peter, "stirred up by the persistent shouting and tears of the child's mother, had [the body] buried in the bishop's very bedchamber, before the bed of the lord bishop, in reproach against him and in contempt of God."[2] This act of defiance against the bishop's interdict and the count's subsequent exiling of the bishop from the region provoked a response from the papacy. In indignant letters that he wrote to King Philip Augustus, the archbishop of Sens, the exiled bishop, and the count, Pope Innocent III mentioned both the act of burial ("you wished to convert his house into a cemetery") and the earlier violence.[3] When Innocent reminded Philip Augustus that the bishop's effective work in eradicating heresy from the region was abandoned owing to the bishop's forced absence, efforts to reconcile the two parties began.[4] With the assistance of his uncle, the archbishop of Bourges, Count Peter formally made ritual amends whereby he sought to undo the symbolic act of derision. Peter "dug up the grave with his own hands, removed the already stinking and putrid body of the dead [child], which greatly offended the nose, since it had already lain there for several months, and carried it on his own shoulders from the bedchamber to the cemetery, barefoot and wearing only linen, like a peasant."[5]

These pungent details reveal much more than a conflict between secular and religious authority. The incident reminds us of the social consequences of interdict, a public act that could wreak havoc in the private lives of all who lived under it. In retaliation against the interdict and the clergy's refusal to bury the child, Peter reemphasizes the blurring of public and private as he transforms the most private space into the public, turning a bedchamber into a graveyard. The fate of the child's remains momentarily becomes the focal point of the narrative. Despite the importance of the child's body, we learn nothing about the child itself—not its name, sex, age, the cause of its death, or the social status of its family. The count uses the child's fate as a test case to protest an ecclesiastical decision. Undoubtedly many bodies were denied burial in holy ground during the interdict, yet Peter chose a child's corpse as the site of battle. All we know—and all that matters to the chronicler—is that the irascible Peter was driven to action by the mother's anxiety over her child's death and final resting place. Peter uses maternal grief as the catalyst for his protest against the injustice of the interdict. In this scene the child has become an occasion for female suffering and male anger, maternal imploring and comital defiance. For the count, the fate of the child's body leads to the final moment of rupture, a clear break with a bishop whose decision Peter opposed. After furthering the political aspirations of the count, the child reappears to restrain them. Through the final act of contrition, ecclesiastical and episcopal superiority are reasserted as the count undoes the sacrilege and cleanses both the bishop's chamber and his own soul. That the mother obtained her wish to bury the child in sacred ground is naturally less important to the chronicler than is the public humiliation of the count, who was forced to do penance in the form of serving as sole pallbearer for the corpse. Over the course of events, the body of the child came to signify both the count's resistance and his reconciliation.

The events of 1203—4 transformed the death and burial of a child from a familial tragedy to an event of dramatic consequence. They demonstrate the symbolic power inherent in the dead child in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although unusual in its dramatic details, the incident at Auxerre is far from unique in what it shows of concern for the fate of the child. In a wide variety of sources, anxiety over children is expressed far more explicitly than is indicated by this brief account in the Auxerre chronicle.

My research has identified a heightening of social anxiety over children during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an anxiety focused on images of children's vulnerability and susceptibility to external threats. Employing a wide range of sources, including historical chronicles, medical writings, Marian legends, hagiography, and popular theological texts, I have chosen four important

discussions of childhood that directly link the child's fragility with other sources of cultural anxiety.

> Medical writers of the high Middle Ages began to articulate an increasingly paradoxical view of women's bodily fluids—milk and menstrual blood—as simultaneously essential and potentially fatal to the survival of the fetus and newborn.

> In the course of doctrinal debates that increasingly elaborated the fate of children who died before baptism, twelfth- and thirteenth-century antiheresy polemicists condemned those heterodox movements that refused to baptize children.

> A new arena in which anxiety over children's fate was expressed, the earliest accusations against Jews who were charged with the ritual murder of Christian children arose in the twelfth century and quickly invoked images of domestic tragedy, especially maternal grief, and fed a rising wave of anti-Judaism in Western Europe.

> Finally, early accounts of the so-called Children's Crusade of 1212 placed blame for the movement's failure on a variety of social groups, especially Muslims and foreign merchants, but also internalized the failure by stressing that a corruption of innocence was an inevitable part of each child's growth.

These four discourses provide the greatest amount of material concerning childhood from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and, more clearly than do the scattered references in other sources (for example, literary, theological, or art-historical), identify and elaborate on the threats that were perceived to endanger children.

The literatures outlined above trace the progression of the earliest stages of the human life cycle. Each chapter deals with a specific phase in the process of maturing—from fetal development and neonatal care, through infant baptism and early child care, to the entry of the child into the world outside the domestic space (see Chapter 3) and into the dangerous and sexual realm of adolescence (see Chapter 4). Each discourse locates the source of vulnerability in the very nature of the child during the phases of maturation. As the study progresses, there is a slow transformation in focus from physical fragility to moral and intellectual weakness, as exemplified in the chapter—chapter 2, the discussion of infant baptism—that bridges both of these concerns.

All of these materials represent the child as endangered by external threats, including the mother, parents, heretics, Jews, and Muslims. However, the discussions are all founded on deficiencies and weaknesses specific to the child,

which are perceived to be exploited by the outside menace. Throughout these discourses the child is represented as distinct from the adult, as uniquely dependent or trusting. Writers suggested a wide range of characteristics, both positive and negative, that separated the child from the rest of humanity. Sometimes within the same texts, positive images of the child as morally worthy and innocent clash, or blur, with highly negative views of children as corporeally and spiritually pathological, weak, and sinful. Despite the seeming contradictions, writers invoked both characterizations, approving and disapproving, as evidence of the child's vulnerability. The positive imagery takes on negative implications, so that the innocent child is perceived as gullible, just as the child's moral worthiness is thought to make him the target of infidel—Jewish and Muslim—jealousy and violence.

The child in these texts appears simultaneously as distinct from adults and as a magnification of the problems faced by all humans, adult and child: physical weakness, sinfulness, and ignorance. The fragility of the child reflects, underscores, and symbolizes the inherent insecurity of human existence. Like the narrative of Peter of Courtenay, the texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries return incessantly to the fear and consequences of infant mortality.

The underlying theme of these discussions is the recognition that children during this period could, and did, die with staggering frequency. In fact, the fear of infant and child mortality pervades and links all of the texts used here. While reliable statistics on infant mortality for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are nearly impossible to obtain, previous historiography generally assumes that later figures provide a rough approximation of medieval demographics. Statistics for preindustrial Europe suggest that 20 to 30 percent of all infants died within the first year of life[6] and that only about half of all newborns lived to the age of five. While the death rate slowed considerably after the age of five, indications are that more than 50 percent of all children died before reaching adulthood.[7]

These statistics underlie the widespread idea that the high rate of infant mortality discouraged medieval parents from expressing love or affection toward their children.[8] Such arguments are based in part on the thesis of Philippe Ariès, who suggested in 1960 that the Middle Ages had no concept of the child as anything other than a miniature adult.[9] Ariès argued his point primarily from art-historical sources, mostly from early medieval images of the Virgin and Child, the child appearing to be simply a small version of the adult Christ. Since the late 1960s, medievalists have often countered the Ariès thesis, although it gained strength during the 1970s and was accepted by many early modernists and some

medievalists through the 1980s.[10] Those medievalists who attempted to refute Ariès argued that the Middle Ages did have a clear idea of childhood, one suspiciously similar to modern and sentimentalized notions of it. Such scholarship tended, and still tends, to posit a concept of childhood that is panhistorical and essentialist.[11] In fact, Ariès' argument was not nearly as overstated as the medievalist response often claims. Ariès was aware that by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a new understanding of children as creatures distinct from adults was becoming apparent in art-historical and other realms.[12] Professional critics as well as general-audience readers of Ariès' book often ignored the subtleties of his argument and concentrated on a reductionist version that claimed "there was no concept of childhood in the Middle Ages."[13]

Other medievalists have either circumvented or simply moved beyond the Ariès thesis. A steady stream of scholarship has demonstrated the importance of the child in feudal social relations,[14] French and German literature,[15] Jewish educational practices,[16] ecclesiastical attitudes toward oblation,[17] and tales of miraculous healing.[18] Initially the anti-Ariès writers sought to prove that there was a space in medieval culture for a concept of childhood. More-recent studies, like my own, have instead focused on specific contexts in which the child appeared.[19]

Like David Herlihy, I argue that there were a number of competing views of childhood in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[20] However, I seek to demonstrate that these views became prominent in the context of certain scenarios in which the child was envisioned as particularly vulnerable. In my work I study the different meanings of the loss of a child and focus on the consequences of the loss both for the children and for the survivors. Some chapters address parental guilt (Chapter 2) and anguish (Chapter 3). Others address the issue of the actual as well as metaphorical death of the child, the child's fate in the afterlife, and the transformation of children into young adults and the concomitant loss of the innocence and moral worthiness formerly attributed to them.

The themes analyzed here invoke children in order to discuss the actions and attitudes of adults, especially the proper treatment of children and the appropriate sentiments toward children.[21] The texts always discuss children in relation to adults and focus on adult affection and harshness, on love and cruelty toward children. In defining and valorizing close affective bonds between parents and children, the sources attempt to create a timeless and natural image of

childrearing, often by referring to the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child as cultural ideals. Throughout these writings, maternal imagery plays an important role, from the problematic biological models of maternity to the religious glorification of devoted motherhood in an era that exhibited an increasingly strong interest in the Virgin Mother.

Concern over the child's welfare thus reveals interplay between the familial, intellectual, religious, and social realms during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The four arenas I have chosen demonstrate that in certain contexts the idea of the child is implicated in a variety of social issues not otherwise connected to the realm of the family. The intensification of interest in the child's physical and spiritual well-being parallels and, in many medieval writings, serves in part to explain a concurrent heightened concern over various perceived social dangers, particularly women, parents, heretics, Jews, and Muslims. Writers deployed images of childhood vulnerability in these specific contexts in order to continue to problematize social groups already of great concern in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These discourses suggest that concepts of childhood could serve more purposes than that of simply demarcating the differences between child and adult.

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Note 1: Achilles Luchaire discusses the incident in precisely this context in *Social France at the Time of Philip Augustus*, trans. Edward B. Krehbiel (New York, 1912), 301—3. The royal domain was under a similar interdict as recently as 1200. back

Note 2: *RHF*, 18:728A: Ex historia episcoporum Autissiodorensium: "corpus pueri mortui, quod propter interdictum civitatis ecclesiasticam non poterat habere sepulturam, importuno matris pueri excitus clamore et lacrymis, in ipsa episcopi camera ante lectum domini sui episcopi fecit humari in contumeliam ejus et dei contemptum." back

Note 3: Innocent III, Epistolae Comiti Altissiodorensi, Regi Francorum, Archiepiscopo Senonensi, and Episcopo Altissiodorensi, *PL* 215.160—68, at 161: "domum ejus in coemeterium convertere voluisti, dum in ea corpus cujusdam triduanum forsan et foetidum in ejus fecisti opprobrium tumulari". back

Note 4: Philip Augustus was related to both the count and the bishop, had supported the election of Hugh, and had married the heiress of the county of Nevers to his cousin Peter in 1184; see John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus* (Berkeley, 1986), 27 (on Peter) and 68 (on Hugh). On Hugh's attacks on heresy, see Emile Chenon, "L'Hérésie à la Charité-sur-Loire et les débuts de l'inquisition monastique dans la France du Nord au XIIIe siècle," *Nouvelle revue historique du droit français et étranger* 41 (1917): 299—345. back

Note 5: *RHF*, 18:728B: "effosso sepulcro propriis manibus, corpus extraxit defuncti foetens admodum et putridum, magnum naribus offendiculum, utpote quod jam per menses aliquot ibi jacuerat tumulatione, et ab ipsa camera usque ad coemeterium Montis-Autrici, nudis pedibus, solis indutus lineis ut plebeius quilibet, ad tumulandum ibidem propriis humeris deportavit, sese humlians salubriter coram Deo". back

Note 6: Such statistics do not take into account miscarriages and abortions but only stillbirths and later deaths. back

Note 7: See E. A. Wright and R. Schofield, "Infant and Child Mortality in England in the Late Tudor and Early Stuart Period," in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. C. Webster (Cambridge, 1979), 65; E. Badinter, *L'Amour en plus* (Paris,

1980), 129; and Francine van de Walle, "Infant Mortality and the European Demographic Transition," in Ansley J. Coale and S. C. Watkins, *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* (Princeton, 1986), 201—4. See also Shahar, who notes that, in times of plague, children made up an inordinately high percentage of the epidemics' victims: Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990, 149-50). back

Note 8: This research was generally done by non-medievalists who used the "Middle Ages" as a backdrop to contrast with more recent periods. See Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd deMause (New York, 1974), 1—73, for the most extreme argument of this kind. back

Note 9: Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962), esp. pt. 1, chap. 2, "The Discovery of Childhood." back

Note 10: The best-known medievalist supporters of Ariès claims are Jacques Le Goff, *La Civilisation de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1964), 357; and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound* (Paris, 1979; Cambridge, 1983), 83—86. back

Note 11: Most obvious among these essentialist arguments are Barbara Hanawalt's work, esp. "Childrearing among the Lower Classes of Late Medieval England," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (summer 1977): 1—22, and her *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford, 1993). Shahar, *Childhood*, also shows similar tendencies and devotes a considerable amount of attention to refuting Ariès, as did the earlier critique of Ariès by Mary McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries," in *History of Childhood*, ed. deMause, 101—31. back

Note 12: Medievalists tend to create a strawman out of a very simplified version of Ariès' thesis, generally culled from pp. 33—38. In the revised introduction to the French edition of 1973 (*L'Enfant sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris), Ariès admits that his arguments were occasionally overstated and partially incorrect, especially concerning medieval precedents for his primary interest, the early modern period. back

Note 13: Few scholars noted Ariès' claim that only the early Middle Ages lacked an iconography that differentiated children from adults. See Ilene Forsyth, "Children in Early Medieval Art: Ninth through Twelfth Centuries," *Journal of Psychohistory* 4 (1976—77): 31—70. back

Note 14: Roland Carron, *Enfant et parenté dans la France médiévale, Xe—XIIIe siècles* (Geneva, 1989). back

Note 15: Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1981); and James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100—1350* (Philadelphia, 1995), which tries to avoid any essentialist ideas on children. back

Note 16: Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 1996), presents an excellent anthropological study of the meaning of pedagogy. back

Note 17: John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988); like all the scholar's work, this fluctuates between historicized and essentialist views of childhood and sentiment toward children. back

Note 18: Ronald C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York, 1997). back

Note 19: The references above are only to the most influential and lengthy scholarship on the history of medieval childhood. There is an ever growing number of articles and brief essays of very high quality related to the child in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See Lorraine Attreed, "From Pearl Maiden to Tower Princes: Towards a New History of Medieval Childhood," *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): 43—58; Sylvia Nagel and Silvana Vecchio, "Il bambino, la parola, il silenzio nella cultura medievale," *Quaderni Storici* 57 (1984): 719—63; and Eric Berthon, "Le sourire des anges," *Médiévales* 20 (1993): 123—47. back

Note 20: See the conclusions in David Herlihy, "Medieval Children," in *Essays on*

Medieval Civilization (Austin, 1978), 109—43. back

   Note 21: In this sense, the scholarship on motherhood is of crucial importance to my work. See the overview by Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), and the collection of essays in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 1996). On the problems of historicizing maternity, see Stephen Wilson, "The Myth of Motherhood a Myth: The Historical View of European childrearing," *Social History* 9 (1984): 181—98. back

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