



## Gender as Spectacle and Construct: The Gyverney Effigies at St. Mary's Church, Limington

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The study of medieval tomb sculpture offers us a glimpse into the ways in which individuals and families constructed themselves as elite, salvation-worthy subjects in a culture obsessed simultaneously with earthly status and divine approbation. Medieval funeral monuments served many significant functions for their commissioners and viewers. For the commissioners they were first and foremost memorials to the deceased and vehicles for attracting prayers in the hope of a better afterlife. Secondly, they advertised the rank, status and lineage of both the commemorated and her or his family through the effigy's costume and attributes, heraldic decorations, inscriptions, and occasional inclusion of other family members represented as mourners on the monument.[1] For beholders, tomb effigies provided the occasion for the good work of prayers on another's behalf and for the contemplation of one's own death and the need for preparation. All who participated in devotional practices surrounding the medieval tomb forged a link between heaven and earth, and between the past, the lifetime of the deceased and her or his ancestors, and the future through the viewer's contemplation and prayer. Nevertheless, despite its centrality in medieval religious practice and its potential for helping to understand a remote period's deepest concerns, tomb sculpture may be

one of the least accessible categories of medieval art to the contemporary viewer. Unlike narrative episodes in architectural sculpture, manuscripts or stained glass, funerary effigies offer little in the way of gesture, setting, or obvious plot to aid the beholder's understanding or emotional engagement. Instead, tombs feature serene, recumbent figures with hands folded in devotion and eyes open in rapt contemplation of the divine, seeming at once mysterious and distant.

Yet, despite their reticence, tomb figures can reward persistent study, especially those figures assembled in family chapels. Unlike narrative representations in which figures interact using gesture and glance before the viewer's gaze, tomb effigies depend upon the beholder's gaze to activate them: the viewer becomes a participant in the memorializing performance. The viewer's gaze travels from tomb to tomb noting the size, attributes and positioning of each. These observations build upon one another, creating an imagined history for each figure and all the figures together. For the medieval viewer sequential contemplation of individual memorials constructed a biography connecting the deceased's past history to the viewing present in service of future salvation. In the case of family funeral chapels with multiple tombs, the viewer's sensitivity to the physical and visual relationship of effigies to one another, and to the sacred space they inhabit, allowed the recounting of a family history encompassing marriage, childbirth, wealth and position.[2]

But individuals and families are never isolated entities enjoying autonomy from their society. Individual and corporate subjectivity is conditioned by cultural norms. Medieval tombs construct social expectations and distinctions, especially those concerning class and gender, for the deceased, their families, and visitors. Furthermore, by virtue of their visibility and their very tangibility, tomb monuments assert truth-value, convincing the viewer of the legitimacy of the elite claims on display.[3] Recovering these expectations and attitudes requires first of all a thorough analysis of the available and relevant archeological and archival evidence. Yet, all too often, the information gleaned from these sources is limited. It is here that Madeline Caviness's model of triangulation can make a valuable contribution, for its historical leg necessitates accounting for available physical and documentary information, while its theoretical leg provides a means of interpretation when such evidence is scant or lacking. Together the two trajectories produce an analysis that is both historically sound and theoretically current. It breathes new life into such reticent objects as tomb figures, allowing the modern scholar/viewer new engagement with these potentially inert works.



**Fig. 1.** *View of Chapel, St. Mary's Church, Limington (photograph by author).*

The surviving chantry chapel in St. Mary's Church, Limington, provides a striking example of the medieval tomb's performative capacities and a showcase for Caviness's triangulatory approach (Figure 1). Located on the south side of this parish church, this small chapel contains three fairly well-preserved, fourteenth-century tomb monuments featuring four effigies: an independent female and male and a female and male couple. The relatively good condition of these monuments, and their high quality, have brought them to the attention of a number of antiquarians and art historians both in the distant past and more recently. Most of these studies have focused on dating the monuments and locating them within a stylistic taxonomy of medieval English tomb sculpture.[4] My recent book, *Of Armor and Men*, attempted to place the effigies within a broader interpretive context, but my suggestions were limited to Limington's armored effigy.[5] None of the other effigies have been studied in depth. In this essay, I expand the interpretation offered in my book by considering all of the monuments contained in the Limington chapel both as individual works and as a coherent ensemble. I also contextualize the figures, locating them within the cultural discourses of status and gender in later medieval

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England. Ultimately, my conclusions will account for the selection of individuals portrayed by the effigies and for the arrangement of the three tombs within the chapel's space. My analysis of the Gyvernay chapel's ensemble has implications for analyzing medieval funerary assemblages in general because it incorporates consideration of spatial relationships into its reading of such effigies' production of classed and gendered subjecthood. Taking into account the relationship of individual tombs to their architectural context, and of one tomb to another, can enrich the understanding of how these monuments served both the worldly and other-worldly goals of their commissioners. It is my hope that my study of this one example will underscore the crucial role medieval funeral chapels and their tombs played in the construction of family narratives and performance of social and gender identity.

### **The Tomb Effigies and Their Placement**

The most prominent tomb in the Limington chapel is that of an armored knight resting on a tabletop tomb which is contained within a traceried niche set into the north wall (Figure 2). Stylistically the tracery and the knight's armor can be dated to the second decade of the fourteenth century.[6] This figure is partially tilted toward the viewer, head resting on its helm and feet supported by a crouching, snarling lion. The left leg is crossed over the right at the knee and the left arm bears the shield by a strap with only the hand exposed. The right arm and hand crosses over the torso to grasp the hilt of the sword hanging from the sword belt along the figure's left side. The figure is clothed in a hauberk, a mail tunic, over a gambeson, a quilted undergarment, and chausses, mail leg protections, covered by a calf-length surcoat split up the center to reveal the crossed legs. His knees and legs display metal or *cuir bouilli* poleyns and greaves, while his arms bear vambraces and his hands are gauntleted. His head is covered by a bascinet over a coif with chinstrap. The figure's costume bears much more carved detail than that of any of the other figures. The links of the mail, seams and joints of the vambraces and greaves, and finger plates of the gauntlets are carefully delineated. The poleyns display carved foliate crosses and the greaves, scroll ornamentation. The shield bears a clearly visible heraldic charge of a bend between six scallop shells. With its polychrome intact, some of which is still visible, this figure must have been quite spectacular.

Directly below the knight's effigy's niche lies a smaller female figure on a low plinth whose smaller size and simplicity of form and costume contrast sharply with the knight's figure installed above her (Figure 3). She has been dated to c.1300-1312.[7] She lies demurely with hands folded in prayer, while the remainder of her body is concealed under a heavy robe caught and held beneath the forearms so that it

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gathers into parabola-shaped folds on either side of the body. The garment's raised skirt reveals an equally weighty kirtle arranged in tubular folds which overlap the feet. Her head is covered by a close-fitting wimple and a loose veil.



**Fig. 2.** *Tomb of Richard Gyverney, ca. 1329, St. Mary's Church, Limington (photograph by author).*



**Fig. 3.** *Tomb of Gunnora*, ca. 1300, St. Mary's Church, Limington (photograph by author).

The third tomb in the chapel's space is installed under the arch connecting the chapel to the nave, opposite the knight's tomb (Figure 4). It is a sizeable double monument displaying a female and a male figure. The woman lies in the traditional pose for English medieval female tomb effigies with extended legs and hands folded in prayer. She wears the standard costume characterizing English women's effigies of the 1340s: her legs and feet are concealed by the gently curving tubular folds of a long kirtle with tightly laced sleeves, while her upper body's slender shape is revealed by the close-fitting surcoat. Her head is covered by a wimple and a long veil with a chinstrap. The man lies in much the same pose, but his legs are crossed like those of the nearby knight's figure, as revealed by the split skirt of a thigh-length tunic under

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a tight-fitting surcoat. His arms, clad in tightly-laced sleeves like those of the woman, display elbow-length tippets and end in folded hands. His head is bare, but draped around his neck and shoulders is a hood. At his side hangs a sword in its scabbard.

Archival sources suggest that the Limington monuments were commissioned by the Gyvernay family. The Somerset Record Office preserves the bishop's register of John of Drokenford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, dated 1309-1329, which records Richard Gyvernay's founding of a chantry in the parish church at Limington.[8] In the chantry foundation document, Richard gives a messuage, five acres, and one rod of land, an acre of meadow, and 72 pounds rent to the Church in Limington and to John Fychet, the Chaplain, for mass to be celebrated and prayers to be said for, among others, Richard and his current wife, Matilda; Gunnora and Margaret, his former wives; and Henry Power and his wife, also named Matilda. Henry Power is charged with maintaining the chantry after Richard's death. Based upon the list and description of the individuals in this foundation charter, we can identify the armored figure as Richard Gyvernay and the double effigies as Henry Power and Matilda. I will address the reason for identifying the smaller female figure as Gunnora rather than Richard's first or third wife later in this essay.[9]

If we study the tombs as an ensemble within the architectural setting, we are struck by certain correspondences between the male and female pairs. The male figures lie at the north and south perimeters of the chapel's space, Richard along the north wall and Henry under the arch marking the south boundary, while the Gunnora and Matilda's effigies are situated on each man's inner side. The males figures bracket the females and their shared cross-legged pose underscores their complementarity. The women also share a pose and a positioning relative to their male partners. These parallels, along with other features of the tombs, prompt several questions concerning the funerary ensemble at St. Mary's, Limington in their current configuration: why is the knight's monument allowed to dominate the chapel space through its size, location and detailed articulation of costume; why is the female effigy below the knight's figure so modest in size and treatment in comparison with the other tombs in the chapel; why do the two male figures display crossed legs; and finally, why are the effigies arranged with wives in the interior and husbands on the exterior edges of the chapel space?



**Fig. 4.** *Tomb of Henry and Matilda Power, ca. 1340s, St. Mary's Church. Limington (photograph by author).*

No evidence suggests that what we see today is not the original arrangement. Not surprisingly, Richard Gyvernay's effigy is located in the arched recess as he founded the chantry chapel and, therefore, could command the most prestigious burial format. Pamela Sheingorn has argued that the association of a donor's tomb with an arched recess housing the Easter Sepulchre was a feature of some English churches by the fourteenth century and in some instances the recess's function actually changed from Easter Sepulchre to tomb.[10] The association of donor's tomb with Easter Sepulchre would have enhanced the prestige of the burial monument and would speak to the importance of the person buried there.[11] Of the remaining three effigies, only Gunnora's figure shows the kind of extensive damage expected in works which have been relocated. Hers is the only effigy to lack an animal footrest, but she may have originally possessed this common feature of tomb figures. The rough condition of the stone at her feet might indicate the cutting away of such a feature at some point in the past perhaps to fit her into a more restricted location.[12] The protruding footrests of Henry Power and Matilda argue against an original location next to a wall and for their current placement.[13]



Antiquarian evidence supports the assumption that the figures still occupy their original positions. In 1540, John Leland described them as we see them today in his Itinerary, the inventory of ecclesiastical libraries and other possessions he prepared for Henry VIII: "From Ivelcestre to Limington village about a mile. One Juuerney was owner of this toune and lordship, he lyith richely buried yn a fair chapelle on the north side of the paroche chirch of Limington. Ther lyith at the feete of Juuerney a woman vaylid in a low tumbre with an image of stone. Ther lyith also in the south arche of the same chapelle a gentilman and his wife, I think also of the Juuerneys."<sup>[14]</sup> Nigel Saul has argued in reference to the arrangement of the Cobham family brasses in Cobham church that, in general, the tendency to rearrange church interiors postdates the Elizabethan period, although it did happen earlier.<sup>[15]</sup> The fact that it was the Gyvernay family, rather than the parishioners, who controlled the Limington chapel reinforces the argument for the originality of the arrangement. However, photographs from the early twentieth century show Richard's and Gunnora's tombs in their present position but indicate that the double tomb was once placed against the west wall of the chapel. Yet, a plaque on the south wall of the chapel records a restoration by Edgar Glanfield, vicar, and his wife Katherine Dowling, in the 1930s. Thus, it seems plausible that the chapel was restored to correspond to Leland's description, with Richard Gyvernay's effigy occupying the arched recess in the north wall, Gunnora's figure on a low base below him, and Henry Power and Matilda on the double tomb situated below the arch between the chapel and the nave.<sup>[16]</sup> If Saul is correct in his opinion that medievals and Elizabethans did not engage in tomb re-arrangement as extensively as their descendants, it is probable that the tombs were not moved before Leland's visit; hence, it is likely they are in their original arrangement. Ultimately, Gyvernay family history and medieval social ideals together provide the framework for analyzing and interpreting the tomb sculptures' arrangement. I argue that the secure elite status suggested by the chapel's impressive tombs is rhetorical in that it constructs a family narrative at odds with the information available about the Gyvernays. In fact, in certain crucial areas, the men and women memorialized in the Limington church failed to conform to the ideals of status and gender current in medieval England. The pose and costume of the male figures employ a rhetoric of masculine subjecthood, dominance, and advancement that obscures the critical role played by the Gyvernay women in the family fortunes. Furthermore, in the case of Gunnora and Richard, his effigy's greater size and elaboration in comparison to her's amounts to a coopting of her figure's chronological primacy and a camouflaging of her critical role in her Richard's good fortune. One might even suggest a family text beginning with Gunnora's effigy in the early fourteenth century, to which Richard's more flamboyant figure is almost certainly a rejoinder; concluding with Power's statement of marital solidarity. In

addition, the siting of all the individual tombs within the chapel interior provides a visual analog to cultural attitudes governing elite society which decreed the women's subservient status, restraint, and seclusion.

## **Negotiating Social Identity**

It is clear that Richard Gyvernay's effigy was designed to dominate the chapel's space. His tomb stands out by virtue of its elevated position, decorated setting with its traceried arch, and life-size figure with its finely detailed costume and attributes. His effigy bears all the signs of knightly standing: armor, sword, shield, and heraldic charge. Furthermore, he displays the cross-legged pose and sword handling characteristic of English armored effigies of the years c. 1250 –c. 1340, but very rarely employed in continental knights' figures. I have argued elsewhere that crossed legs and sword-handling emphasize the muscular biceps and thighs indicative of successful warriors and impart a dynamism to the figure that evokes the successful knight's fighting prowess.[17] I have also argued that knights' effigies display the male body to a much greater degree than do the heavily robed figures of kings and clerics, which are closer to draped female effigies in their pose and concealing clothing. Finally, I have noted that the sword handling and the overlapping leg of so many English knights' effigies act as phallic signs and, together with the overt physicality of the figures, construct a hypermasculinity characterized by physical power, virility, and knightly rank.

Much has been written concerning chivalric ideals and expectations of men like Richard Gyvernay.[18] Epic and romance literature, and manuals of knightly behavior such as Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry*, identify certain required characteristics for the knight.[19] Foremost among these was military experience, which allowed the knight to display the desirable qualities of prowess and courage balanced by wisdom.[20] Peter Coss has discussed at length the increased military ethos of English knighthood during the reign of Edward I (1239-1307), when the king tried to appropriate in his campaigns of conquest in Wales and Scotland.[21] Participation in war was perhaps more a matter of image than reality: muster patterns for royal military expeditions from 1277 to 1327 show a decreasing proportion of knights to serjeants and feudal summons ceased after 1327.[22] Nevertheless, according to Coss, belief in military service remained an important part of the knight's sense of honor.[23] In addition to skill and experience at fighting, knights were expected to possess a good lineage, a well-made body, and an attractiveness to women.[24] While these traits characterized a pan-European knightly ideal, Coss has noted that Anglo-Norman literature suggests one issue of particular concern to English knights:

land ownership.[25] English knights did not acquire the right to permanent heritable estates until the legal reforms of *novel disseisin* and *mort d'ancestor*, both issued by Henry II in 1166 and 1176.[26] In English romances such as *Guy of Warwick*, the right to inherited estates is presented as just and therefore a positive good for the nation as well as the family or individual. Abrogating this right required recovery of the estates and the re-assertion of social order. Of course, maintaining the family holdings necessitated producing a legitimate male heir to inherit them as the English elite, as well as their continental counterparts, practiced primogeniture. In England, however, even knightly rank was only inherited only by the eldest son, not by the family; consequently, failure to produce a legitimate son put that rank at risk.[27]

How well did what we know of Richard Gyvernay's origins and life conform to the English chivalric ideal; how close did Richard Gyvernay come to fulfilling the knightly standards of his time? He was probably born sometime in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, the son of Gilbert Gyvernay and his wife Matilda. The family may have been Norman originally, although no substantial evidence supports this. Moreover, only fragmentary sources suggest that they may have owned land in Somerset.[28] Richard gained his lordship of Limington not through inheritance but through marriage: his second wife, Gunnora, inherited the land from her uncle, Gregory de Wylington.[29] Despite the elaborate armor which clothes Richard's effigy, and the sword which he holds, there are no real indications pointing to an active military career as might be expected of the Lord of Limington. And although he was married three times, Richard's estates passed to Henry and Matilda, suggesting that he had, indeed, no male heir.[30] Richard Gyvernay's effigy intensified the rhetoric of knighthood with its display of a military costume and active pose asserts his status as a battle-hardened warrior possessed of sufficient inherited estates to maintain his rank and to pass it on to his eldest son; Richard Gyvernay's biography suggests his failure to fulfill the crucial chivalric expectations.



**Fig. 5.** *Tomb of a Civilian (Possibly a Member of the Everynham or Hathelseye Family), St. Mary's Church, Birkin, Yorkshire, Early-Fourteenth Century (photograph by author).*

If Richard did not live up to established chivalric standards, the person represented by the other cross-legged figure in the Gyverney chapel, Henry Power, conformed neatly to the expectations of his elite, gentry rank; yet, while he wears no armor, his cross-legged pose does suggest a desire to claim association with the prestigious knightly rank of his brother-in-law. Henry's is one of four male English effigies combining civilian dress and crossed legs; the other three are to be found at Birkin, Yorkshire; Thurlaston, Leicestershire; and Much Marcle, Herefordshire.[31] While the attribution of the Limington figure is the strongest of the group, archival and antiquarian evidence about all four figures suggest that they represent members of the emerging gentry class in later fourteenth-century England. Coss has identified the gentry as a group of lesser nobility whose rank was defined not only by their land holdings but also by their ownership of urban property. This layer of society was also able to accommodate increasingly wealthy professionals.[32] According to this historian, these individuals had a collective sense of elite identity, served the crown as the local bureaucracy, and sought to exert control over the local population. The Birkin figure (Figure 5) may represent either a member of the de Everynghams or

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Hathelseyes, both leading families in the area whose members engaged in land transactions and served on various commissions appointed by the Crown.[33] The most likely identification of the effigy in Thurlaston (Figure 6) is a member of the Turville family, and local tradition maintains this attribution today. The Turvilles were a leading family in the area as far back as the thirteenth century and included at least one knight, Ralph de Turville, among its members.[34] At the same time, the Patent Rolls make several references to Turvilles without indicating any knightly rank.[35] In any case, the Patent Roll entries feature the same sort of land transactions and service to the Crown as those concerning the de Everynghams and Hathelseyes. The same could be said of the Much Marcle cross-legged civilian (Figure 7), generally attributed to Walter de Helyon, a member of a leading local family who acquired property in Much Marcle and eventually came to possess the nearby manor of Helyons.[36] Henry's life, what we know of it from archival materials, fits Coss's profile. Between 1331 and 1351, the Crown appointed him twenty-eight times to commissions of oyer and terminer, an office charged with hearing and determining criminal and civil disputes.[37] He also acted at least seven times as one of the keepers of the peace for Somerset and Dorset, as well as receiving appointments to numerous other commissions.[38] In all of these positions, he was associated with the elite of Somerset.

Henry's biography is not limited to work he undertook for the Crown but also involves numerous property transactions. Starting in 1330 his name begins to appear in the Feet of Fines for Somerset in association with a number of land conveyances which he transacted with individuals in the area around Limington.[39] None of Henry's property lay much beyond the village of Limington, making his influence strictly local. At least one of these conveyances occurred between Henry and his wife, Matilda, and William de Shareshull, identified in the text of the agreement as *chivaler*, knight.[40] This indicates that in business, Henry was moving in knightly circles; however, Henry is never identified as knight in any of these recorded transactions. This fact, coupled with the civilian dress of the effigy, confirms his status as elite but non-military.

The use of the cross-legged pose in these male, civilian effigies, a posture so closely associated with knightly effigies, proclaimed the increasing power and prestige on the part of those with gentry rank to any viewers of these figures. In the case of the Power effigy, the cross-legged pose is directly tied to Henry's family relationship with Richard Gyvernay. The presence of his effigy in Richard Gyvernay's chantry chapel is a direct result of his acquisition of the manor of Limington as right heir of Gunnora.[41] The Feet of Fines for Somerset, 1343-44, records an agreement involving Henry and

Matilda, on the one hand, and William de Shareshull, knight, William Power and William de Broughton, on the other, which indicates Henry's possession of the manor and his acknowledgement that it will be held by his daughter, Joan, and her husband, William de Shareshull after Henry and Matilda's death.[42] In 1326, Henry and Matilda had been granted the right to the same manor then held by Richard Gyverney, after Richard's death.[43] Henry's method of acquiring the manor of Limington resembles that of Richard Gyverney, a pattern to be continued by Henry and Matilda's son-in-law, William de Shareshull.



**Fig. 6.** *Tomb of a Civilian (Possibly a Member of the Turville Family), All Saint's Church, Thurlaston, Leicestershire, Early- Fourteenth Century (photograph by author).*



**Fig. 7.** *Tomb of a Civilian (Possibly Walter de Helyon), St. Bartholomew's Church, Much Marcle, Herefordshire, ca. 1360- 70 (photograph by author).*

The chantry foundation entry in the bishop's register points to Richard's affirmation of his familial connection with Henry Power; he may even have intended that Henry's tomb be located in the chapel along with his own. Certainly, by its location in his brother-in-law's chantry chapel, Henry Power's funeral monument underscores his relationship with Richard Gyverney. But the association is emphasized by one further attribute: Henry Power's effigy displays the cross-legged pose so closely associated with the knightly rank in England during the first third of the fourteenth century. After the mid-1340s, anyone visiting the chantry chapel for the purpose of praying for Richard Gyverney, Gunnora, or Henry and Matilda, would see Richard's fully armored cross-legged effigy in its niche and observe that Henry's figure exhibits a similar attitude. In this way, the prestige of knighthood legitimately held by Lord Richard would also be implied for Henry. The cross-legged pose served different functions in the two figures: for Richard it masked his knightly shortcomings, for Henry it asserted his growing prestige. Nevertheless, the two men were united by a common factor: both had acquired the manor through a woman, possibly the same woman. Consequently, each man's socially elite position was at least in part dependent on

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the social standing of a significant woman in his life. Thus, the cross-legged pose represents something of a subterfuge in both figures, concealing the crucial role played by a woman in each man's success.

The family narrative on display in the Limington chapel constructs the two male figures as protagonists in a drama of autonomous masculine achievement, but also employs the female effigies in supporting roles. This is most apparent in the visual contrast between the effigy of Gunnora, Richard Gyvernay's second wife, and that of her knightly husband, which seems to confirm his dominating subject position. Gunnora's place in Richard's chantry chapel is assured through her role as provider of the manor of Limington, but the discourse of chivalry underlying Richard's figure necessitated the minimizing of Gunnora's decisive part in his elite status. Thus, while her memorial's presence acknowledges her importance to Richard's knightly standing, it does not grant her an agency equivalent to his. The figure's size, simplicity of form and costume, and demure devotional posture are consistent with a date of c. 1300, and with other female effigies of a similar date, but at the same time, these features render her representation a pale comparison with the flamboyant display of her husband stationed above. She is present, but easily overlooked or even dismissed as unimportant. She thus has little visual prominence in Richard's story.

Richard Gyvernay's ostentatious effigy works to conceal his inadequacies as a knightly subject—his apparent lack of warring experience, male heir, and inherited estates—while Gunnora's modest form camouflages her crucial role in consolidating his elite status. Was the size, detail, and general vigor of his figure also intended to contrast with the simplicity of his second wife's memorial? It was through Gunnora's inheritance, not his own, that he acquired the manor which entitled him to be called Lord of Limington, and thus acquiring her lands in marriage in part allowed his construction as a knightly subject. For Richard, Gunnora's body, possession of which gained him access to her uncle's estate, functioned as the necessary vehicle to produce himself; yet, the same role underscored his failure to fulfill knightly ideals, especially those of English knighthood which focused on the possession of lands inherited through one's birth family. The overwhelming of her modest figure by his elaborate and bellicose effigy and setting functions as abjection--the attempted exclusion of something, particularly the mother's body, which is crucial to our subjectivity yet simultaneously threatening to it.<sup>[44]</sup> Nevertheless, the abjected object never entirely disappears but remains ever present on the margins of the subject's selfhood. In Gunnora's case, the figure is not rendered vile or disgusting as abjected objects normally are, although its greater degree of erosion makes it much less visually appealing. Instead, the effigy's "abjection" results from its visual



inconsequence by comparison with the effigy of her husband, for the detail female figure lacks the elevated position, elaborate framing arch, and sculpted so striking in the knight's figure. At the same time, it is present in the chapel, even if in a diminished form. Thus, Richard had to try and exclude Gunnora's body by overshadowing her representation with his own in order to attain full subjectivity as a knight—he had to be seen to hold knightly rank solely by virtue of his own agency, with no help from his second wife. Paradoxically, however, the position of Gunnora's effigy subverts the normal operation of abjection, which attempts to marginalize the disturbing object, for Gunnora's stone surrogate rests at the center of the chapel's space, a factor to which I will return.

In contrast to the effigies of Richard and Gunnora, those of Henry Power and Matilda do not operate according to the same rules of abjection. Matilda's effigy is not subordinated to her husband's as is Gunnora's to Richard's. Matilda's figure is as large and detailed as Henry's; indeed, it is its equal. Furthermore, Matilda's figure almost matches Richard Gyvernay's in size. Likewise, Henry's effigy is quite impressive in its size, fashionable dress, and prominent sword. In addition, its crossed legs are visually striking and, as has been discussed above, serve to link the male civilian's figure to the nearby knight's. Yet, although their tomb displays parallels with those of Gunnora and Richard, one significant fact might explain why Matilda's effigy lacks the modesty of Gunnora's. While Richard's family's status is unclear, it is certain that after marrying Gunnora, he is accepted as a knight. He is termed Lord Richard Gyvernay in a number of documents including the chantry foundation for Limington. The same cannot be said of Henry, who is not labeled as either dom or miles in the few documents which refer to him. Yet, as heir to Limington, he achieved higher status, a status not threatened by his marriage to Matilda.

Since she did not represent a threat to his social status, it was not necessary for Matilda's figure to be so visually subordinated to Henry's figure as is Gunnora's to Richard's. One can also read the prominence of Henry and Matilda's monument and the use of crossed legs in his figure as a deliberate challenge to the effigy of Richard Gyvernay. Since he inherited the manor of Limington from Gunnora, rather than acquiring it through marriage, as did Richard, Henry may have considered himself a more legitimate "lord of Limington" than his knightly predecessor in that role and thus entitled to the use of the knightly attitude in his funeral monument.

Henry's sense of entitlement may have also governed the prominence of the Power's funerary monument in Limington parish church. The tomb's size and its notable location just at the juncture of the chantry chapel with the nave of the church seems

designed to attract attention. Furthermore, visitors have to navigate around this work in order to enter the chapel space, guaranteeing their notice of it. Christopher Daniell has noted two factors governing medieval burial location: relative degree of sanctity of a particular area of the church and proximity to other family members.[45] In particular, the east end of the church was the most privileged position owing to its greater sanctity over the west end. Thresholds also commanded respect, including the division between the nave and the aisles. The Gyvernay and Power tombs correspond closely to Daniell's findings. Finally, there was a marked preference for burial close to other family members.[46] In his study of the Cobham family brasses, Saul argues for a deliberate medieval arrangement of brasses starting in the 1360s in order to create a family burial chapel in the chancel of the parish church.[47] The catalyst for this was Sir John, 3rd Lord Cobham's foundation of a college at Cobham in 1362, possibly as a memorial to his cousin Reginald, 1st Lord Cobham, who died in 1361.[48] Saul also suggests that in founding the college and in establishing a family mausoleum in the chancel of Cobham parish church, John de Cobham may have been bolstering his family's honor and prestige and compensating for the rather lackluster career of his own father John, 2nd Lord Cobham. Henry and Matilda's monument fits Daniell's pattern for burial; it might also be analogous to the Cobham example's celebration and rehabilitation of family history. It is conceivable that the setting up of a double monument to Henry and Matilda may represent a similar strategy to enhance family prestige and foreground Henry's role as heir to the manor. I have suggested that whatever its intervening history, the Limington chantry chapel now displays its tombs in their original arrangement. The sheer bravura of Richard's monument overshadows the much more modest tomb of his second wife and accordingly her role in Richard's lordship of Limington. Similarly, the location, size and quality of Henry and Matilda's monument argues persuasively for the couple's elite and parallel social status to Richard. Henry's crossed legs furthers the identification with the knight, thus offsetting the social inequality between husband and wife. We have no way of knowing how Richard Gyvernay would have responded to the prominence of his sister and brother-in-law's tomb in his chapel, since their monument was almost certainly installed after Richard's death.[49] I would suggest, however, that Henry and Matilda's tomb amounts to an endorsement of Richard's assertion of knightly identity and the minimizing of wife's role, for the Powers' monument similarly obscures Henry's less desirable origins and foregrounds their possession of the manor of Limington through its large, commanding presence and a liminal siting that demands our attention.

## Negotiating Gender

Earlier I noted that the position of Gunnora's effigy subverts the marginalizing consequences of abjection. At the same time, its location toward the center of the chapel responds to another spatial code, that of gender. The visual rhetoric of the individual monuments within the Gyvernay chapel asserts autonomous masculine success: the arrangement of the tombs reinforces a discourse of masculine subjectivity by invoking the cultural mandates calling for the social and physical sequestering of elite women.

The cultural discourse specifying the enclosure of the female body itself derived from medieval gender and reproductive theories which were grounded in the inheritance from the ancient world. Most significant were Aristotle and Galen, whose writings were disseminated in the medieval West through Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* in the early seventh century, and Avicenna's *The Canon of Medicine*, at the beginning of the eleventh, among many other sources.[50] A central debate in the period was the nature of the procreative process and the relative contributions of male and female to conception: Aristotle maintained the "one-seed" model in which the male supplied the active agent, semen, to form the fetus, while the female produced the material, blood, to nourish it; Galen favored a "two-seed" model which allowed for female production of semen.[51] Aristotle and Galen agreed that women were colder and moister than men, which dictated that their reproductive organs be internal while those of men were external. To this classical heritage, Constantine the African, a Muslim who converted and became a Benedictine monk at Monte Cassino, contributed Arabic medical thinking and attempted to reconcile the contradictions between Aristotelian and Galenic theories in the later eleventh century.[52] His writings were an important means of disseminating medieval knowledge from a monastic context into the more secular arenas of towns and universities in the thirteenth century.

Medieval theorizing on female and male natures and their relation to reproductive physiology had its counterpart in cultural attitudes and gendered practices which decreed externally or self-imposed enclosure and interiority for women. Preachers and moralists counseled women to circumscribe their movements outside of the home, for fear of inciting the kind of violence exemplified by the brutal rape of the overly active Dinah as recounted in Genesis.[53] The thirteenth-century *Ancrene Riwe*, or Rule for Anchoresses, cites both Dinah and Bathsheba, object of David's lust, as examples of the fateful results of wanton behavior.[54] Women who engaged in social activities outside the home such as dances, parties and other festivities at

best dishonored their families by their loose behavior and at worst rendered themselves vulnerable to violent sexual attack. As women were thought to be less stable than men, they had to take particular care to curb the restlessness and curiosity which fueled excessive talking and glancing about. In the *Ménagier de Paris* the elderly husband instructs his young wife to conduct herself with modesty when outside the house and to walk in silence with her gaze lowered to the ground to avoid eye contact with strangers.[55] Women's' alleged inconstancy and consequent vulnerability to curiosity and vice necessitated that they be placed in the custodial care of men. Fulfilling their spiritual needs required the intervention of male clerics; safeguarding their person depended upon the protection of male guardians. In return, women were urged to display a proper submissiveness to male authority. The end result of the insistence that women practice "custody of the senses" and submit to the authority and protection of men was as Carla Casagrande notes, "...to diminish the exterior aspect of their lives and strengthen the interior. A woman was encouraged to detach herself from public life in the community and remain within the private realm of home or convent. Corollary to this was the recommendation that she detach herself from the external aspects of her body and concentrate on the internal aspects of her spirit." [56]

The elite female body was the greatest source of cultural anxiety for it was the vehicle by which legitimate heirs were produced and lineage maintained, or conversely illegitimate progeny were propagated to threaten the family patrimony. Thus, special care was taken to protect a woman's virtue and ensure sexual fidelity by restricting her movements and enclosing her person. Architecture was central to this project for it functioned as both a metaphor for the aristocratic female body and the structure designed to circumscribe it. Numerous surviving ivory caskets, combs and mirror backs testify by their decoration to a link between female corporeality, sexuality, and architecture. Often associated with female ownership, these luxury objects were popular courtship or marriage gifts, providing their imagery with a conjugal and sexual subtext.[57] Courtship scenes featuring such metaphors for sexual pursuit as chess games and hunting appear frequently and often allude to male possession of the female body through gazing, gesturing, or actual touching. On two fourteenth-century ivory combs of Parisian production, for example, a young man reaches out to stroke a young woman under the chin in a gesture long acknowledged as a symbol for intercourse.[58] On one of these combs, another vignette shows the man explicitly placing his hand on the woman's crotch. A mirror back in the British Museum's collection displays a less explicit version of this motif in which the young man points to the woman's crotch but does not touch it.[59]

The examples cited above employ the female body itself as the object of the male lover's gaze or touch; however, one common theme on ivory luxury objects prefers a more metaphorical approach by casting courtship as actual or ritual warfare in which knights enact the lover's role and the besieged castle represents the female love object. The theme of the Assault on the Castle of Love or its variation, The Joust Before the Castle of Love, which appears on several surviving mirror backs and caskets, features armored warriors attacking a fortification while female defenders pelt them with roses or knights tilting in front of a castle gate witnessed by a female audience (Figure 8). As Susan Smith points out, the presence of the God of Love presiding over the action indicates the erotic nature of the conflict.[60] In these examples, the castle acts as a metaphor for the female body defended against invasion, although not always successfully. Defensive measures are two-fold in these images: women defend themselves with floral weaponry, but more effective are the castle walls and turrets which shelter the women behind their battlements.



**Fig. 8.** *Mirror Case with Attack on the Castle of Love*, Baltimore, Maryland, Walters Art Gallery (71.169).

Rachel Dressler, "Gender as Spectacle and Construct: The Gyverney Effigies at St. Mary's Church, Limington," *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.61302/GRBT2094>.

Architecture did more than merely symbolize the chaste (or not) female body. Roberta Gilchrist has demonstrated that the residential buildings serving elite society frequently configured domestic space in order to locate women in the innermost and least accessible parts of the structure.[61] She links the impulse to segregate women to medieval corporeal theories which assigned the material, physical, and lustful aspects of human nature to women and the spiritual, intellectual, and rational side to men. As women were more prone to feel and express their sexual desires, they required greater supervision and physical restriction than did men.[62] This was accomplished by spatial segregation by sex on formal occasions, described in literary accounts, and everyday separation through the location of living quarters.[63] Archaeological investigations of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century structures indicate that the women's quarters frequently occupied the innermost area of the precinct or those farthest from the major entrances and public buildings or both.[64] At Porchester Castle, for example, what is thought to have been the queen's chamber formed the north range of an interior courtyard overlooking a garden. It was shielded from the north curtain wall by the chapel and the keep; the king's chamber was located along the west curtain wall which formed part of the enclosure. The queen's area at Clarendon Palace, an undefended royal residence, could be found at the easternmost end of the north range. A fourteenth-century complex containing chambers, chapel, well and kitchen was probably built for Queen Isabella at Castle Rising. It formed a separate, protected set of accommodations south of a Norman keep, which was also equipped with a kitchen as well as the great hall to be used for public occasions. A complex containing the chamber of the countess, was included as part of an upper bailey added in the thirteenth century to the late-eleventh-century Chepstow Castle. Through its position on the upper story of a chamber block located in the southwest corner of the bailey it was both spatially and visually segregated from the pre-existing, and more public, keep. Finally, at both Pickering and Carisbrook Castles new residential blocks containing halls, chambers, and chapels were added for countesses in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, which in both examples granted privacy to the female occupant by screening her chambers from view from the more public areas of the respective castles.

Gilchrist notes that in the six cases she cites, women's quarters were designed to allow the occupants substantial views of castle interiors while protecting them from visual or other access.[65] As others have done, Gilchrist links this spatial positioning with the medieval gender construction which associated interiors and containment with the female body.[66] As noted previously, among the land-holding classes of medieval Europe, female chastity and sexual fidelity was essential to maintain family

honor and patrimony. Consequently, a discourse of the female body as impregnable fortress, protected by its battlemented, enclosing walls, was developed in courtly and religious literature. The identification of the Virgin Mary's body with the *hortus conclusus*, the garden enclosed, is one outstanding example of this thinking.[67] That enclosed gardens also signified as meeting places for lovers, such as figures in the *Romance of the Rose*, would intensify the pressures surrounding the protected body of the queen or the lady.

In the Gyvernavy chapel, the siting of the female figures in relation to the males, and to the architectural context, reinforces the chapel's privileging of male agency and implication of female passivity. As noted previously, Richard's figure is sheltered by a niche in the north wall of the chapel space. This positioning may reflect the possibility that his manor house, which no longer survives, was located on the north side of the church.[68] Thus, he could have seen his chantry chapel's exterior from his home. On the other hand, Henry would not have had the same motivation and the location of his figure on the chapel's south periphery may have been responding to a different agenda. Matilda is on her husband's left, the standard format when husband and wife are represented together on a tomb, but unusually Gunnora is on Richard's right. Her location is dictated by the need to juxtapose her figure to his within its niche, but the result transcends logistical requirements. If they are in their original positions, as I have argued, the current arrangement of figures locates both women closer to the center of the chapel than either man. In effect, the women are interiorized, a positioning consistent with medieval constructions of gender in medical, clerical, and instructional literature, and the siting of women's spaces in aristocratic households.

It is hard to know how much the discourse of the protected, secluded, aristocratic female body governed the arrangement of tomb figures in the Gyvernavy chapel. The decisions concerning where to place the tombs and their relationship to one another may have responded to any number of conditions and desires. Yet, the chapel's configuration can be seen as participating in a larger cultural discourse which encouraged the enclosure of the women's figures by the men's. Both Richard Gyvernavy and Henry Power had reason to worry over the status of their wives' bodies as both men achieved their social position through possession of those bodies, yet neither woman appears to have produced a male heir to maintain the patrimony. By replicating gender structures, which decreed the metaphorical and literal seclusion of women, these figures normalized the reality concerning the relations and contributions of men and women to the Gyvernavy and Power family status, and alleviated a certain amount of anxiety on Richard and Henry's part.

## Conclusion

My essay has invoked abjection as a concept for analyzing the disparity in size and elaboration between Richard's effigy and that of his second wife Gunnora. I have further suggested that Henry and Matilda's monument replicates this structure to a certain degree by calling attention to itself through size and location—thus potentially detracting from the impact of Richard's tomb. Yet, as I also noted, the siting of all four monuments also subverts strategies of abjection. That which is abjected is expelled and marginalized, but Gunnora's tomb is centered, incorporated into the interior of the family constellation on display in the Gyvernay chapel. Indeed, it is Richard and Henry's figures which occupy the spatial margins at Limington. And it is Richard and Henry who also occupied insecure positions at the margins of knightly standing.

Medieval funeral sculpture such as that displayed in Limington Church may appear less accessible to contemporary analysis than other forms of visual culture since it presents no explicit narrative to recount or deconstruct. Yet, closer investigation of and sensitivity to the permutations of funerary conventions suggests that these monuments engage the central concerns of medieval society. The Gyvernay chapel affords just such an opportunity to investigate the intersection of multiple discourses—social status, gender, and family—through the vehicle of funerary sculpture. At Limington, the three Gyvernay tombs articulate the tensions surrounding the emergence of the gentry as an increasingly significant social force in later medieval England through the visual parallels between Richard Gyvernay and Henry Power's effigies, both of which adopt the cross-legged pose so closely associated with knightly rank. Additionally, the same monuments' visual rhetoric is consistent with medieval understandings of gender since they aggrandize masculine attainments while minimizing the women's contribution, and interiorize the female effigies similar to women's physical positioning within the elite household. I hope that my analysis of the discourses activating these tombs will reinforce other similar investigations of this major category of medieval visual, social, and religious culture.

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- 8** Somerset Record Office, Bishop's Register of John of Drokenford, SRO D/D/B. Register 1, f.30a [modern pagination 296]. I am grateful to Helene Scheck for her help in translating this document.
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- 29** Ass. Rolls. Div. Cos. 6 Edward II, no. 2/15, 5a.
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- 30** *Somerset Record Society*, vol. 12, 80, 127, 209. Linda Mitchell has suggested that the John Gyverney mentioned in several Feet of Fines was, in fact, Gunnora and Richard's son, but he did not survive his parents.
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- 31** Matthew Bloxam, "On Certain Cross-legged Effigies of Civilians," *Archaeological Journal* 33 (1876): 235-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1876.10851729>
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- 32** Peter Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chs. 1 and 2, summarized on p. 11.
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- 33** *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1327-1330, 418; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1334-38, 67; 1358-61, 149; 1364-67, 399; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1350-54, 523; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1330-34, 4.
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- 34** See the Turville pedigree in John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, intro. Jack Summers, vol. 4 (orig. pub. by John Nichols, London, 1795; repub. S. R. Publishers, Ltd., 1971), 1004.
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- 36** For his holdings see Herefordshire Record Office, document G 37/11/15, G 37/11/27, G 37/11/150, G 37/11/151 and G 37/11/168. I am grateful to Mrs. M. Tonkin for her help in finding these references. See also Charles J. Marshall, M. A., *Mansions and Maonors of Herefordshire* (1872), 199 and George Marshall, F. S. A., "Wooden Monumental Effigies in Herefordshire," *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club* (1920): 199.
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- 37** *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1331, 201; 1332, 237; 1332, 288, 350, 351; 1332, 450, 497; 1334, 68, 574; 1336, 353; 1337, 375, 450, 512, 514; 1338, 146; 1339, 360, 369; 1340, 483, 485, 103; 1342, 586; 1344, 399, 400, 403, 418; 1345, 36; 1348, 152.
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- 38** *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1345, 572, 30; 1346, 106, 107, 232; 1347, 301; 1348, 75.
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- 39** Fines evolved in the twelfth century as a means of conveying freehold property under the guise of a fictitious lawsuit involving a defendant, the person receiving the land, and a plaintiff, the person conveying the land. The agreement was recorded three times on a single sheet of parchment which itself was cut up with one copy going to each party and one, the foot, being kept in the court. Hence the term Feet of Fines.
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- 40**      *Feet of Fines for Somerset, 1343-44.*
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- 41**      *Feet of Fines for Somerset, 1326.*
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- 42**      See note 25.
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- 46**      *Ibid.*, 97, 100-102.
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- 47**      Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory*, 80.
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- 60** *Ibid.*, 78.
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- 62** *Ibid.*, 116.
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- 63** Gilchrist cites literary references to the former practice from the *Romance of Guy of Warwick* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historiae Regnum Britanniae*. See 123.
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- 64** Ibid., 130-137.
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- 65** Ibid., 137. She also notes a consistent association between women's chambers, chapels, and gardens.
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- 66** Ibid., 139.
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- 67** Ibid., 140. Gilchrist notes that the enclosed garden could also signify a place of trysting to a medieval audience, the garden of Pleasure in the *Romance of the Rose*, is a primary example. The ambiguity of the symbol would intensify the pressure surrounding the protected body of the queen or lady.
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- 68** John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*, 3 vols. (London, 1791), 218.