Defiance: The Personal Rebellion of Elizabeth de Burgh and Derbforgaill O Conchobair in Early Fourteenth Century Ireland

The Abduction of Dervorgilla

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Timeline and Figures

1170	Strongbow, Richard de Clare, invades Ireland
1176	Strongbow dies
1210	Formation of the Murtagh branch of the Conchobair family
1259	Richard de Burgh, the "Red" Earl of Ulster is born
1272	Edward I becomes king of England
1283	Joan of Acre, Edward I's daughter marries Gilbert de Clare
1288	Magnus Conchobair, of the Murtagh brance, becomes king of Connacht Richard de Burgh retreats from Magnus Conchobair's forces at Roscommon, Ireland
1293	Magnus Conchobair, King of Connacht dies
1295	Elizabeth de Burgh (née de Clare) is born
1297	Joan of Acre secretly marries Ralph de Monthermar
1307	Edward I dies, Edward II takes the throne becoming the king of England
1308	Elizabeth de Burgh marries John de Burgh, Richard de Burgh's son
1309	Elizabeth de Burgh moves to Ireland
1312	Elizabeth de Burgh's first child, William de Burgh is born
1313	John de Burgh dies Some time after John de Burgh's death, Elizabeth founds Ballinrobe Abbey
1314	Gilbert de Clare, Elizabeth de Burgh's brother and heir to the de Clare family, dies at the battle of Brannockburn
1315	Robert Bruce invades Ireland Ballintober Castle is burned by Rory Conchobair Derbforgaill Conchobair plundered the churches of Drumcliff Ruidri Conchobair murdered Magnus and Domnall Conchobair, Derbforgaill Conchobair's brothers
1316	Elizabeth de Burgh returns to England Elizabeth de Burgh is "abducted" by Theobald de Verdon Elizabeth de Burgh and Theobald de Verdon are married at Bristol Castle Theobald de Verdon dies Derbforgaill Conchobair hires men to kill Ruidri Conchobair Derbforgaill Conchobair dies
1317	Elizabeth de Burgh's daughter Isabella de Verdon is born Elizabeth de Burgh marries Roger Damory Edward Bruce invades Ireland with his brother Robert, king of Scotland married to Elizabeth de Burgh, Richard de Burgh's daughter Richard de Burgh is imprisoned under suspicion for supporting the Bruce invasion
1318	Elizabeth de Burgh's daughter Elizabeth Damory is born Robert Bruce dies
1322	Elizabeth de Burgh and her children are imprisoned at Barking Abbey Roger Damory dies at Tutbury Castle in the failed rebellion against Hugh Despenser the Younger
1326	Elizabeth de Burgh supports Isabella's invasion of England

	Richard de Burgh dies
1327	Edward II deposed, Isabella, Queen of England, takes the throne with Roger Mortimor for her son Edward III Edward II dies
1330	Edward III seizes power from Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimor, taking the government into his hands
1331	William de Burgh, Elizabeth de Burgh's son becomes Earl of Ulster
1333	William de Burgh is murdered in Ireland
1343	By 1343, Elizabeth de Burgh took a vow of chastity
1356	Elizabeth donates to Cambridge University creating Clare College
1358	Former queen of England, Isabella, dies
1360	Elizabeth de Burgh dies

Figure 1. Ballintober Castle, today the castle in County Roscommon, Ireland stands in ruins.

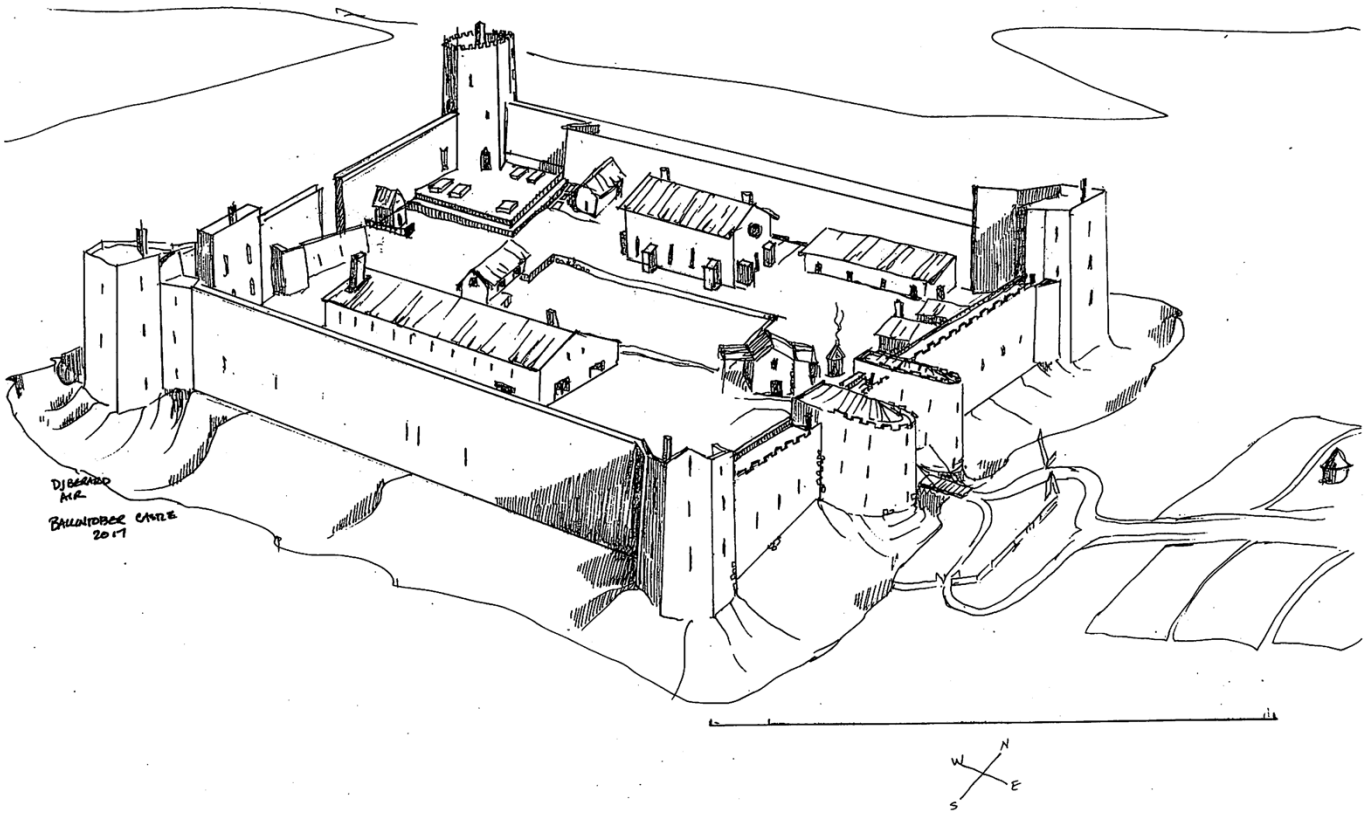

Figure 2. Illustration of how Ballintober Castle may have looked while in use.

Figure 3. Elizabeth de Burgh, this print is of her portrait at Clare College, Cambridge.

Figure 4. Elizabeth de Burgh’s seal at Clare College, Cambridge University.

Figure 5. The ruins of Drumcliff church, which Derbforgaill plundered, as it stands today.

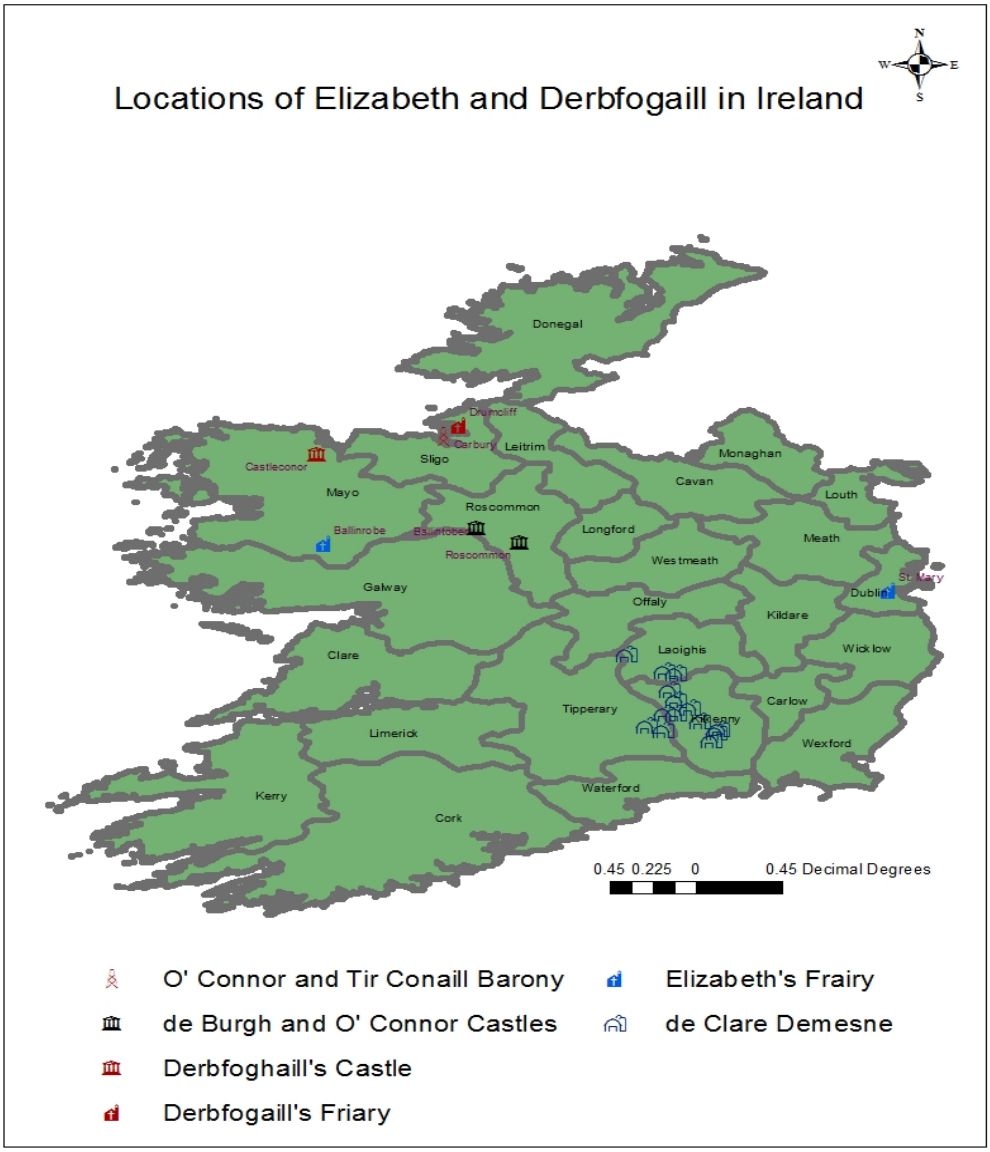

Figure 6. This map highlights important locations for Derbforgaill and Elizabeth in Ireland.

TABLE I THE O'CONOR FAMILY IN THE MIDDLE AGES (MEMBERS OF CLAN MURTAGH IN ITALICS, KINGS IN BOLDFACE)

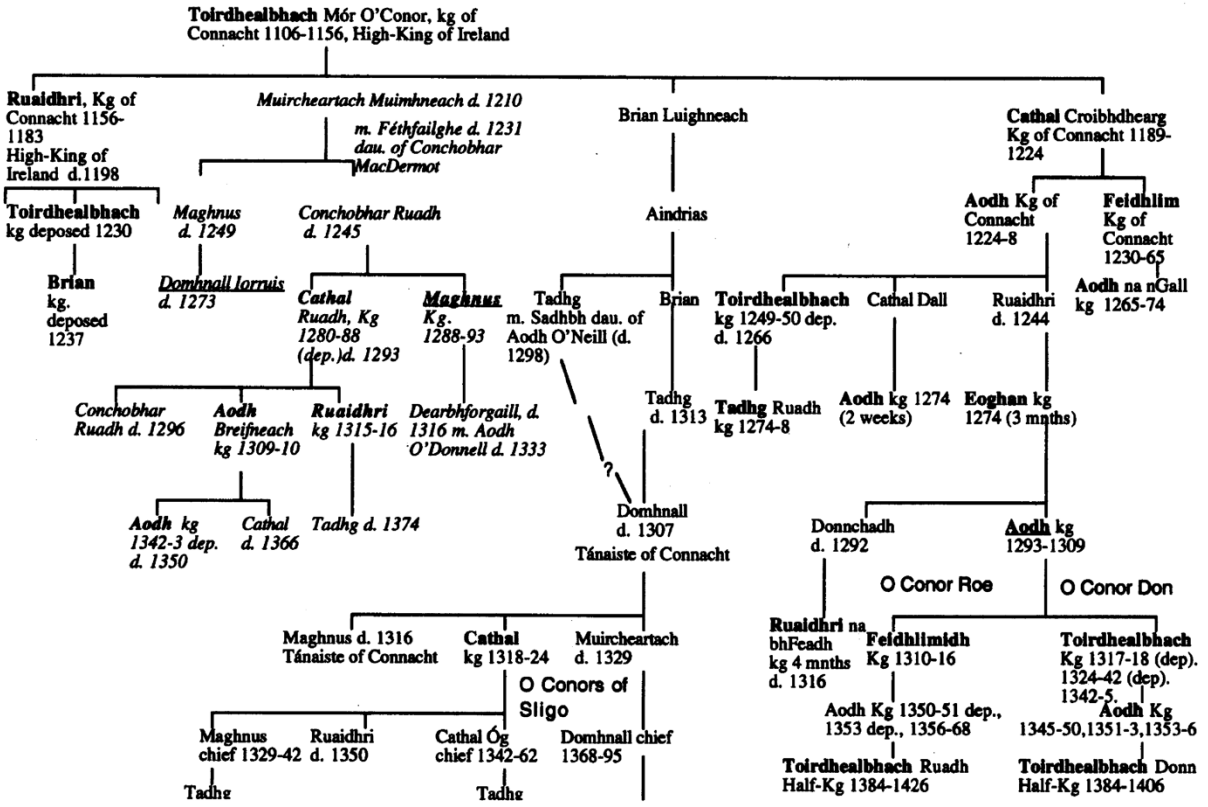

Figure 7. Family tree for the Conchobair family created by Katherine Simms.

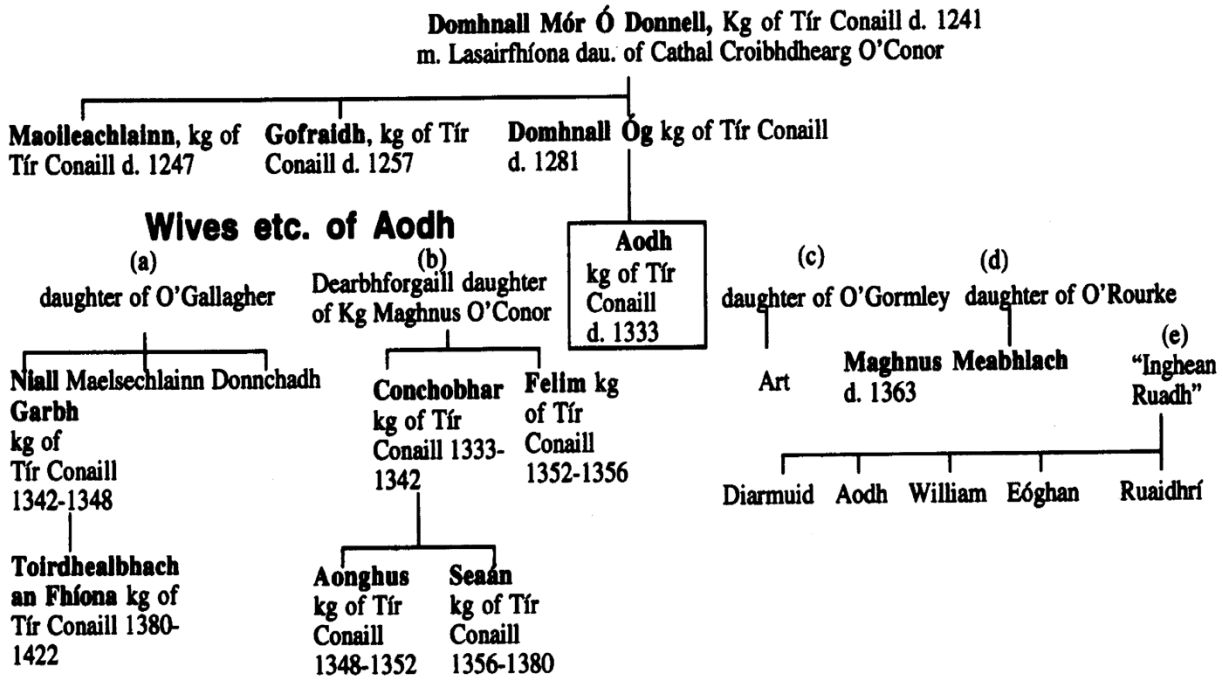

Figure 8. Family tree highlighting Derbforgaill and her husband created by Katherine Simms.

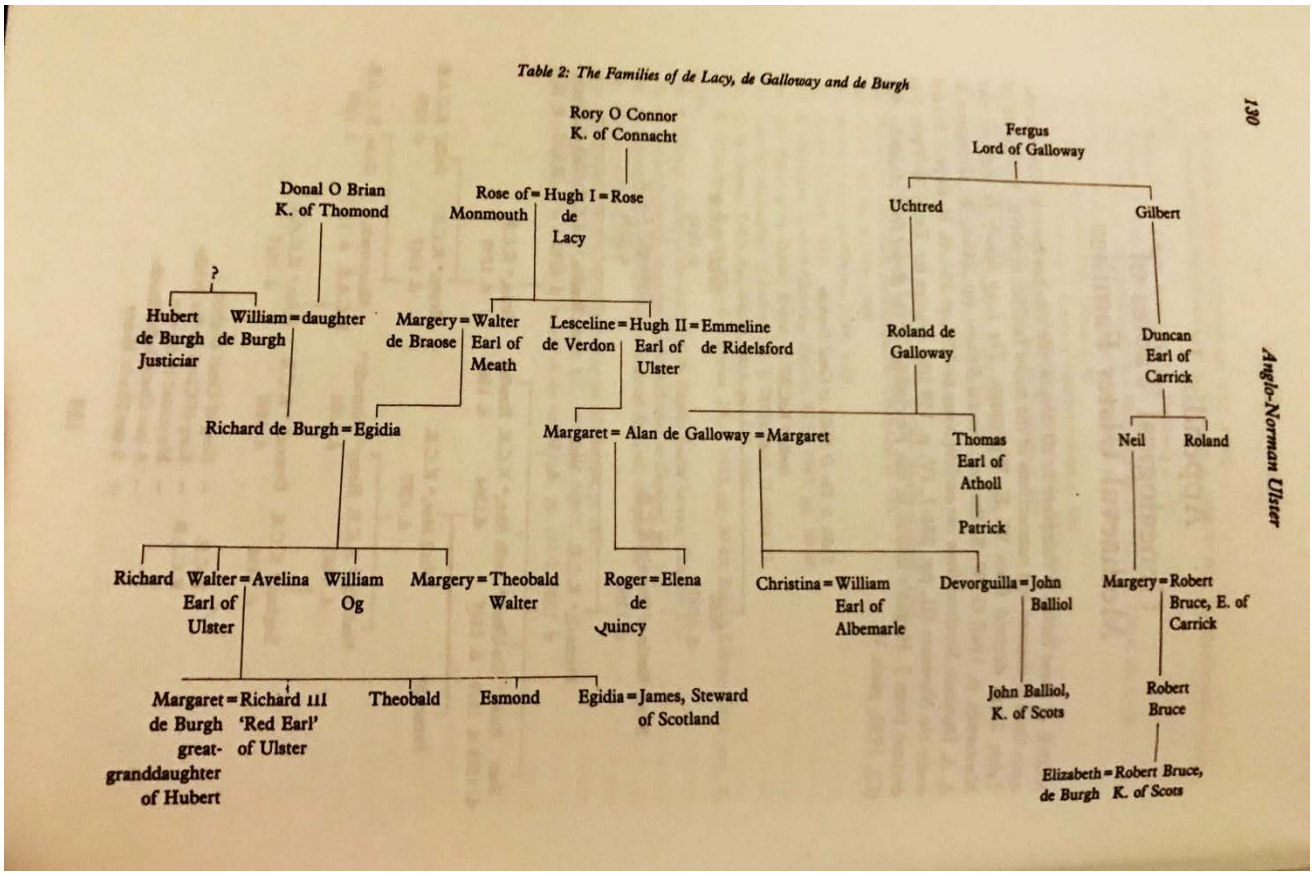

Figure 9. A family tree showing the connection between the de Burgh and O'Connor family. Richard III the "Red Earl" of Ulster is Elizabeth de Burgh's father-in-law.

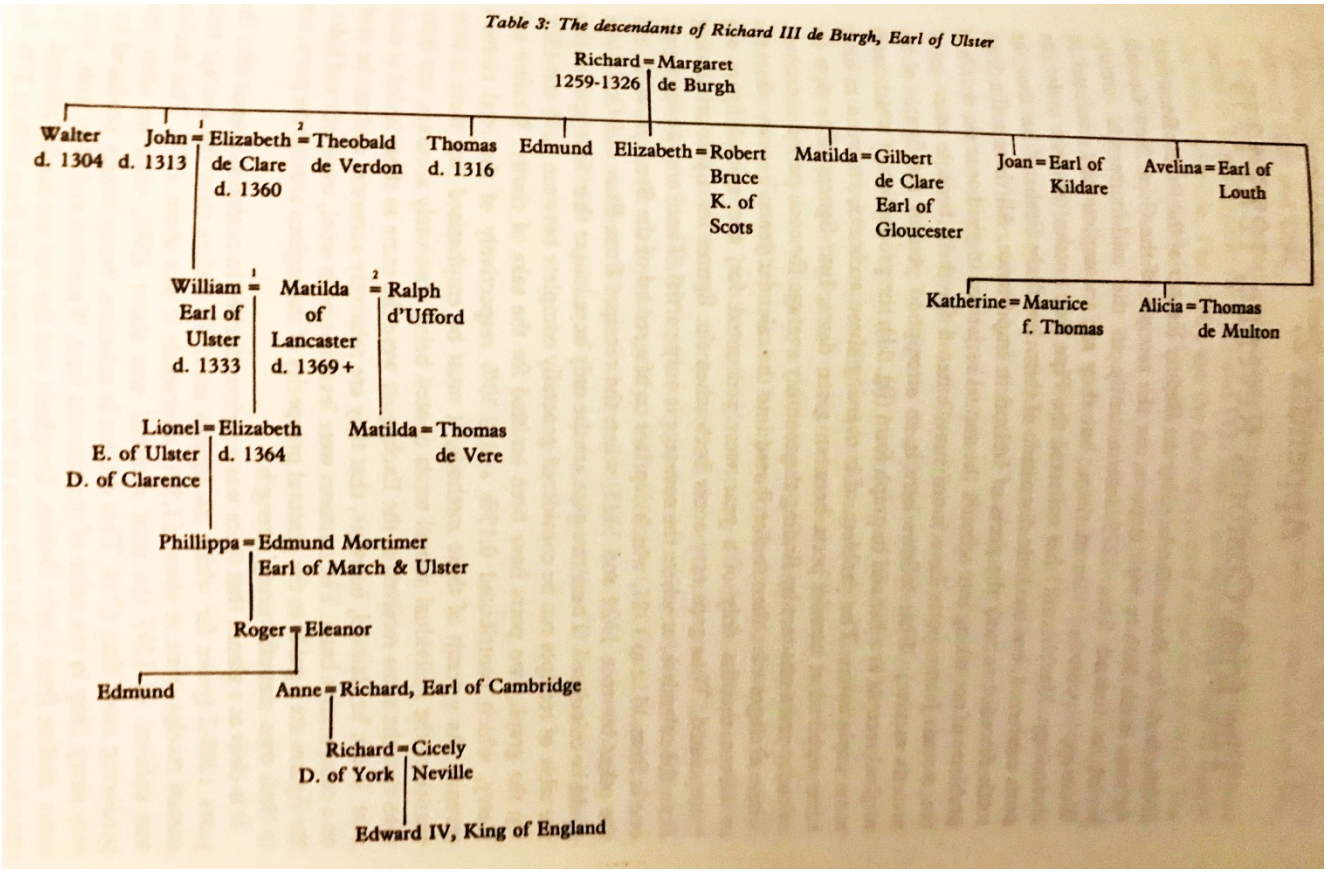

Figure 10. This family tree shows the descendants of the de Burgh family, Elizabeth's grandfather was Edward I, her uncle was Edward II, her cousin was Edward III, and in the future one of her descendants would be Edward IV.

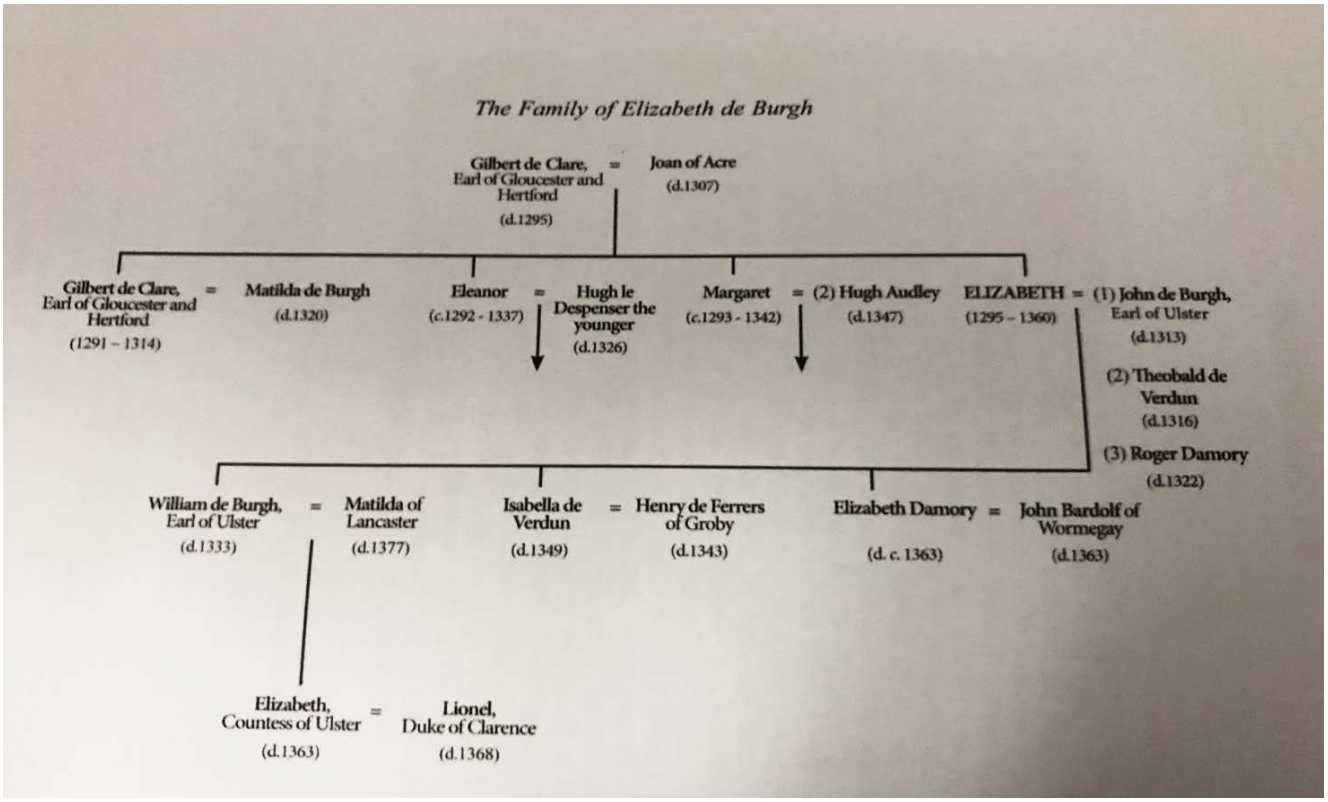

Figure 11. The family tree of Elizabeth de Burgh shows her children and her three husbands.

Introduction

I. Connecting the Story: Ballintober Castle

Deep in the Irish countryside, in ancient Connacht territory, sits a castle. Although now abandoned, Ballintober Castle was once considered a "great castle."[1] The castle lies on the ancestral home of the Conchobair (modern day O'Connor) family. The castle, however, was built by the de Burgh family, a powerful Anglo-Norman family that controlled most of western Ireland after the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1170. Throughout the Anglo-Norman occupation the Conchobair and de Burgh family would confront each other, vying for power. Although enemies, they would also join together in strategic marriages.[2] The castle serves as a symbol for the complicated relationship between the Irish and the Anglo-Normans. Throughout the Anglo-Norman occupation, Irish and Anglo-Norman societies were connected, and Irish culture still remained present. In the end, the de Burgh family even became the Burke family, semi-assimilating to the Irish culture.[3] The Conchobair family would later reclaim the land around Ballintober, making it their seat of power. Within the two ruling families, there are two powerful women, Derbforgaill O Conchobair (d. 1316) and Elizabeth de Burgh (1295-1360). Derbforgaill is remembered for her family loyalty. Derbforgaill demonstrates an Irishwoman active in the political world. Elizabeth married into the de Burgh family. She defied the king of England, fighting to keep control of her land and power. Although there is no evidence that these women were at Ballintober Castle itself, both of them and their families contended for power in the area.

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[1] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944), 233.
[2] King of Arms of All of Ireland, *Pedigree of the O'Conor Family* (1825). "Agnes Duir of Hugh O'Connor, king of Connaught married Richard de Burgo, Lord Justicar of Ireland in the year 1227".
[3] James Muldoon, *Identity on the Medieval Irish Frontier* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 106.

II. Overview of the Thesis

Scholarship once ignored the medieval period in Ireland, assuming that Irish culture was abandoned as the Anglo-Normans invaded. This is not what happened. Irish culture continued to thrive despite Anglo-Norman efforts to control the people of Ireland. Instead, there were instances of the Anglo-Normans converting to Irish culture. Although the Anglo-Normans did control vast amounts of Ireland, the Irish people were not passive, fighting against the occupation. While they would sometimes take up arms and challenge the Anglo-Norman rulers in the political realm, much of the struggle to maintain Irish culture was carried out in the home. Indeed, one way that Irish culture survived was through women's actions. Medieval Irishwomen, in the domestic sphere, helped Gaelic culture remain prominent. But Irishwomen were not only active in the home, when noblewomen held power outside of the home, they were powerful forces of defiance, using their agency in war and marriage, parallel to the heroines of Irish literature. Derbforgaill Conchobair and Elizabeth de Burgh were both extraordinary women. They refused to acquiesce to authority.

This chapter will demonstrate the gaelicisation of the Anglo-Normans. Elizabeth's family turned from being a leading Anglo-Norman family to Irish rebels. As Derbforgaill and Elizabeth rebelled, their families also rebelled against the king of England. Derbforgaill and Elizabeth's stories are intertwined with the general history of Ireland as Elizabeth and Derbforgaill's defiance occur in a larger Irish rebellion.

In the early fourteenth century, Ireland was invaded by Robert and Edward Bruce in an attempt to end the Anglo-Norman occupation of Ireland. The de Burgh and Conchobair family were also in contention. In this setting of rebellion, Derbforgaill and Elizabeth had their own personal rebellions. Derbforgaill defied the king of Tir Conaill, her husband, to seek vengeance

against her brothers' killer. Elizabeth planned an abduction marriage, defying the king, her uncle, to choose her marriage.

> Historian Sean Duffy writes on the limited role women had in Ireland. He states that
>
> with few exceptions, women could not buy or sell or make any form of contract or transaction without the consent of those who had authority over her: her father when she was a girl, her husband when she married, her son when she was a widow. This is an illustration of the way in which the claims sometimes made as to the degree of freedom and power enjoyed by women in early Irish society has been exaggerated. In the sagas, it is true, women are frequently very powerful…Queen Medb in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, who was the real leader of Connacht rather than her weak husband Ailill. But in real life it was otherwise and the power of women was much more circumscribed. The annals are our primary source for politico-military history, and it is hard to find in them a single example of a political or military leader.[4]

In general, women in Ireland were very limited, forced to accept the authority of a male figure. Derbforgaill and Elizabeth, on the other hand, do not fit the model written by Duffy. Derbforgaill leads a raid, she is a military leader. Her actions are written in the annals, and she appears more like Queen Medb than a woman without authority. Elizabeth blatantly defied the king, planning her abduction marriage in Ireland. Her abduction marriage has precedent with the Irish heroine Dervorgilla. These women refused to accept the authority of male figures and were active in the political world. Both women serve as examples that counter Duffy's narrative. Many women may have been trapped in the domestic sphere, but Dervorgilla and Elizabeth prove that women in Ireland could be active in the political world.

III. Remembering the Past

In the Middle Ages, Ireland was first invaded by the Vikings in the early medieval period, then the Anglo-Normans in the high medieval period, and finally the Scottish in the late medieval period. Even with these invasions, a unique Irish culture still prevailed. Historian

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[4] Sean Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 22-23.

Robin Frame claims that Irish culture would have looked "odd" to Anglo-Norman invaders. The Normans brought their own laws and customs to Ireland.[5] Before the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, there was a distinct political structure, mythology, and legal system. After the Anglo-Norman invasion, the king of England ruled over Ireland, but the king could not erase Irish culture.[6] Anglo-Norman customs and laws could not fully replace the Irish customs, the cultures co-existed.[7] Historian Kenneth Nicholls states that it has been customary to depict medieval Ireland as sharply divided into two worlds, the test of division being whether the ruling family in a particular area was of pure Gaelic or of Anglo-Norman origin. In fact it was not so."[8] Both cultures co-existed, but it was not peaceful. There was eternal strife between the Anglo-Normans and Irish over land. Yet, the two cultures came together, joining in marriage. The intermarriage of the Irish and Anglo-Normans spread Gaelic customs to the Anglo-Normans.[9]

For many years, historians struggled to define the distinctions between the Irish and Anglo-Normans. Historically, medieval Ireland was ignored in scholarship because it has been seen as a time when Irish culture was destroyed.[10] Historians Duffy, Edwards, and Fitzpatrick highlight the lack of academic research for the period after the Anglo-Norman invasion, stating that "it is difficult to think of another area of Ireland's past that has been so poorly preserved by scholarship. Even the most basic facts have been left unexplored."[11] Finally, academic interest in

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[5] Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain: 1170-1450* (London: Hambeldon Press, 1998), 134.
[6] The Norman Invasion of Ireland will be further detailed in the chapter on Elizabeth de Burgh in Section VII.
[7] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Smurfit Print, 1972), 3-4.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, 16.
[10] Elizabeth Crooke, *Politics, Archeology and the Creation of a National Museum of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).
[11] Patrick Duffy, David Edwards, and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, ed. *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250-1650 Land, Lordship, and Settlement* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 22.

medieval Ireland started in the 1970s.[12] Although historians assumed that Irish culture was lost, the interconnection between the Medieval Irish and Anglo-Irish society did not mean a lapse of Irish tradition. Instead Irish culture remained prevalent in medieval Ireland. Derbforgaill shows that traditional raiding and intra-family feuds still took precedence even with Anglo-Norman control of Conchobair land. Elizabeth's defiance of the king and her abduction marriage similar to the marriage of the historical Irish figure, Dervorgilla, demonstrate that even an Anglo-Norman noblewoman was connected to Irish rebellion. Irish culture was present even after the Anglo-Normans invaded, and both Derbforgaill and Elizabeth show that Irish culture was still alive. They also demonstrate that although they both came from different societies; they were connected in their defiance of authority. The Conchobair and de Burgh family were even connected in marriage.[13] Irish and Anglo-Norman culture had to merge, but it does not mean that Irish culture would disappear.

IV. Literature Review

Symbols of early Irish stories are memorialized in the real historical actions of fourteenth century Ireland. The actions of both the Irish and Anglo-Normans reflect the warfare seen in early Irish literature.[14] Medieval Ireland contains Irish influence. Derbforgaill can be represented by Queen Medb in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Like Medb, Derbofgaill took control for herself as she planned the murder of her brothers' killer. Medb demanded that she be respected as a ruler, wanting equality with her husband.[15] For Elizabeth, Dervorgilla's story has many retellings and

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[12] Ibid, 22-71.
[13] King of Arms of All of Ireland, *Pedigree of the O'Conor Family* (1825). For more instances of de Burgh and Conchobair intermarriage see Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 85.
[14] Myles, Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), introduction.
[15] Ibid, 4.

would have been known to Elizabeth. Dervorgilla is blamed for the start of the Anglo-Norman invasion as her "abduction marriage" sparked the fighting. The armed conflict lead the Anglo-Normans to help King Diarmait Mac Murchada "win" the war.[16] The victory would be short lived as the Anglo-Normans took ancestral Irish lands. Elizabeth may have been inspired by Dervorgilla's actions to take control of her own marriage as Elizabeth planned an abduction marriage while in Ireland.

Medieval texts are important in explaining the expectation for Irishwomen. The early eighth century religious text, *Cain Adamnain* frees "Irishwomen" while also creating the expectation that women will remain in the home, far away from battle.[17] This text was used throughout medieval Ireland in discussion's on women's roles. Although it was written before the Anglo-Norman invasion, it continued to have an impact on Irish culture after the invasion. The *Annals of Connacht* explains the events of Connacht from 1224-1544 while *Vita Edwardi Secundi* tells of the events under Edward II's rule, the king for most of Elizabeth's adolescence and young adulthood. Both texts are important in explaining the actions surrounding the lives of Derbforgaill and Elizabeth. They also show that both women were important historical figures, included in these texts which record the most important events of the time.[18]

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[16] Finbar Dwyer, *Witches, Spies and Stockholm Syndrome: Life in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: New Island, 2013), 10-11.
[17] Kuno Meyer, trans. *Cain Adamnain: An Old Irish Treatise on the Laws of Adamnan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 13.
[18] See Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol,-Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957) and A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944).

New, modern scholarship focuses on women's roles in medieval Ireland. Historians such as Jennifer Ward and Frances Underhill write about Elizabeth's life.[19] Katherine Simms and Gillian Kenny explains the setting for Derbforgaill's actions, referencing her as a powerful woman.[20] Many secondary sources are consulted for both Elizabeth and Derbforgaill due to the limited sources for Derbforgaill and Elizabeth's early life. Although primary sources may be limited, Derbforgaill's actions are included in the annals, and there are not many instances where women have multiple entries dedicated to them. A few records even show that Derbforgaill was an important figure. Elizabeth's life is recorded in her widowhood from 1326 to her death in 1360 in her estate records, but it was her early years that shaped her powerful, independent widowhood. Together, these two women show that these extraordinary women in Irish and Anglo-Norman society were more connected than first thought.

V. Women as agents of Irish Culture

Women were part of the reason Anglo-Norman and Irish cultures were not separate societies. Historian Elizabeth Fitzpatrick explains the marriage benefit for both the Anglo-Normans and the Irish. She states that "the earliest interplay between the leading families of the two culture groups was by means of intermarriage – a practical solution for people who needed to find a foothold in both worlds on the same island."[21] The Irish and Anglo-Norman rulers were

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[19] See Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014) and Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de* Burgh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[20] See Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) and Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, (2001). (accessed March 29, 2018), jstor.org.

[21] Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, "Assembly and Inauguration Places of the Burkes in Late Medieval Connacht" *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250-1650 Land, Lordship, and Settlement* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 357.

connected. Author James Lydon states that a "Anglo-Irish magnate had to involve himself intimately network of alliances to maintain some degree of equilibrium. Usually he was related by marriage."[22] Marriage gave Anglo-Norman families authority in Irish controlled areas providing legitimacy to their rule.[23] These marriages also provided protection for the Irish, linking them to the new landholders.

Not only did marriage create alliances, but it helped start the gaelicisation of the Anglo-Normans. Fitzpatrick states that "by the fourteenth century the leaders of a number of ruling families of Anglo Norman stock, among them the Burkes of Connacht, carried Gaelic titles and may have already assumed the Gaelic election practices recorded for them at a later date."[24] Not only would the Anglo-Norman and Irish culture be connected, but the Anglo-Normans would convert to Irish culture. This change was influenced by Irishwomen marrying into Anglo-Norman families. Although women were powerful outside the domestic sphere, the women in the domestic sphere helped keep Irish culture alive. They brought their customs to their new marriages.

Marriage had a practical and political role because women were able to move between the Irish and Anglo-Norman cultures. They moved with an ease not often seen by men who encountered each other in attack. In marriage, women maintained the knowledge of their own traditions. They passed their traditions to their children creating a hybrid culture. Women's societal role helped form the "Gaelic re-conquest of the fourteenth century."[25] Kenneth Nicholls

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[22] James Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 135.
[23] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 85.
[24] Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, "Assembly and Inauguration Places of the Burkes in Late Medieval Connacht" *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250-1650 Land, Lordship, and Settlement,* 357.
[25] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages,* 17.

explains that descendants of Gaelic women, even if they were part of Anglo-Norman families would have been "brought up by their mother in Gaelic milieu."[26] The "Gaelicisation of the Normans" was an internal process facilitated by mothers teaching their children the Gaelic culture they, themselves, were raised in. [27] Women's traditional societal role of working in the domestic sphere was important in creating societal change. Although the expected societal role for women was to remain enclosed in the home, women travelled between one culture to another, linking them from their past to their present situation. Women were a driving force in keeping Irish traditions and culture alive in medieval Ireland.

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth de Burgh were in Ireland during the Bruce Invasion. The invasion, took place surrounding Derbforgaill and Elizabeth's defiance. The Bruce Invasion gave action to the Gaelicisation process. Robin Frame writes that "On 26 May 1315 a Scottish army commanded by Edward Bruce, earl of Carrick, landed near Larne in County Atrim. From this date until his death…on 14 October 1318 there was a Scottish presence in Ireland. Edward was made king of Ireland, probably within Ulster."[28] Edward Bruce wanted to remove Ireland from English rule, giving himself control. Although his invasion would eventually fail, both the Conchobair and de Burgh family were involved. Edward Bruce attempted to gain Felim O' Connor, King of Connacht's support, but instead when Rory O'Connor offered help to Edward Bruce, he attacked Felim's land.[29] Bruce's intrusion into Connacht politics caused "complete confusion in Connacht…[ending] when the Connacht Irish were defeated by Richard de Bermingham and William de Burgh."[30] The Bruce invasion helped fuel family division in the

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain: 1170-1450* (London: Hambledon Press, 1998), 71.
[29] Ibid, 83.
[30] Ibid.

Conchobair family, demonstrating divisive family politics seen in Derbforgaill 's actions. In the invasion, Richard de Burgh, Elizabeth's father-in-law was captured under suspicion of his loyalty to the king of England.[31] Richard promised to defeat Edward Bruce, but he was unable to do so. Because he broke this promise and his daughter was married to Robert Bruce, the king of Scotland, who invaded Ireland in 1317 with his brother Edward, Richard was imprisoned in Dublin Castle until the attack was over.[32] The suspicion over Richard de Burgh's loyalty gives evidence that Richard de Burgh may have been willing to help Elizabeth in her own defiance of Edward II. Richard de Burgh was a powerful ruler, and his imprisonment shows that other Anglo-Normans viewed the de Burgh family as sympathetic to the Irish in the Scottish invasion. Elizabeth and Derbforgaill 's actions in Ireland occur during the invasion just as their families' loyalties were complicated.

VI. Bruce invasion

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth lived in Ireland during the Bruce invasion and gaelicisation of Ireland. Irish culture did not end with the Anglo-Norman invasion, and women helped facilitate its survival. In the Bruce Invasion, Elizabeth would plan her defiance of Edward II with her abduction marriage. Derbforgaill's family would further divide in the invasion. Her actions show she valued immediate family loyalty over the larger loyalty to the Conchobair family just as the Conchobair family was experiencing further division. Even Ballintober castle would be burned in the invasion when Rory attacked.[33] Neither family was safe from the effects of the Bruce

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[31] Sean Duffy, "Burgh, Richard de, second earl of Ulster [called the Red Earl] (b. in or after 1259, d. 1326), magnate, lord of Connacht." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (accessed April 13, 2018), (www.oxforddnb.com).

[32] Ibid.

[33] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 233.

invasion, and it shows the complicated loyalty of medieval Ireland. Both Elizabeth and Derbforgaill defied authority, and they were active in the political world. Their stories show that women did hold power, and they deserve to be remembered.

Elizabeth de Burgh

I. Elizabeth's Story

In medieval society, Elizabeth de Burgh (1295-1360) appears to embody the typical roles of a noblewoman. Elizabeth married, had children, and helped her husbands increase their standing. Elizabeth de Burgh was born Elizabeth de Clare, the daughter of an earl and a princess. Her mother was Edward I's daughter and Elizabeth was "born a granddaughter of the reigning king of England…Elizabeth's parentage was illustrious on both sides."[34] Elizabeth was a valuable noble belonging to one of the richest and grandest families in England. Her family owned land throughout England, Ireland, and Wales. According to historian Frances Underhill "Elizabeth's parents…enjoyed the largest income of any of the English lords, save the King."[35] Although Elizabeth would be an important landowner herself, she was first viewed as being able to transfer wealth to her husband. In marriage, Elizabeth would transfer land and status to her husband, making Elizabeth a desirable bride. Historian Gillian Kenny describes the idea that "from the earliest period of colonization in Ireland onwards, the heiress acts as a conduit that could bring to a new husband title, lands and sometimes even her family name."[36] She further adds "the freedom to acquire a good marriage was ironically something that was most often denied to single women of an elevated status."[37] Elizabeth herself married three times with each

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[34] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de* Burgh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 5.
[35] Frances Underhill, "By Their Works Ye Shall Know Them: Elizabeth de Burgh and Clare College, Walsingham Friary, Ballinrobe…" In Constance Berman, Charles Connell, and Judith Rothschild, ed. *The Worlds of Medieval Women: Creativity, Influence, and Imagination* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1985), 86. Also see Jennifer Ward's thesis on the Clare Estates, it takes many pages to list all of the landholdings of the de Clare family and she maps their estates in England, Ireland, and Wales. Jennifer Ward, *The Estates of the Clare Family 1066-1317*, Thesis, Queen Mary: University of London, 1962.
[36] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540*, 23.
[37] Ibid.

marriage ending in widowhood. The multiple marriages seem to suggest that Elizabeth dutifully fulfilled her societal expectation as a wealthy heiress. Yet, in her second marriage, Elizabeth defied the king's wishes and chartered her own course. Although Elizabeth still followed the societal norm of marrying, her second marriage reveals a moment of defiance. Elizabeth may have dutifully upheld the societal expectation for marriage, but she did not lack all agency in decisions regarding marriage.

Given that Elizabeth was married three times, it would appear that Elizabeth was married most of her life. This was not the case. She actually spent almost forty years of her life as a widow. Her three marriages occurred in quick succession. Her first marriage was to John de Burgh (1308-1313) following her brother Gilbert's marriage to Matilda de Burgh. After marrying, they moved to Ireland, and she had her first son William in 1312. Then after her husband's death in 1313, Elizabeth would continue to live in Ireland until 1316. In 1314, after her brother Gilbert's death in battle, Elizabeth became one of the de Clare heiresses. Now that Elizabeth was even wealthier than before, Edward II, her uncle, would demand her return to England in order for him to choose her next marriage. Soon after arriving in England, she married Theobald de Verdon (1316) the former Chief Justicar of Ireland. Yet, this marriage was controversial because Theobald claimed that he and Elizabeth were betrothed in Ireland, implying that Elizabeth decided her marriage independently of the king's wishes. Her marriage to Theobald was an "abduction" marriage meaning that Elizabeth did not have the king's permission to marry, which was customary for the upper nobility. After the marriage's turbulent start, Theobald would fall ill and die five months into the marriage. Soon after Theobald's death, Elizabeth had her daughter Isabella. Finally, a few weeks after the birth of Isabella, she married Roger Damory (1317-1322). Roger Damory was ranked far below Elizabeth, and according to

the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, he "was a poor and needy knight who by his industry and valor had received the king's special favor, wherefore the king gave him his niece [Elizabeth] in marriage."[38] Unlike before, the king was finally able to dictate Elizabeth's marriage. While Elizabeth was married to Roger Damory, she was in king Edward II's court and was a close confident of Queen Isabella.[39] In what would become her last marriage, she gave birth to Elizabeth Damory. Roger Damory died in rebellion against the king in 1322.[40] Damory and Elizabeth rebelled because they did not support Hugh Despenser, the new favorite of the king. Damory died of injury after fighting against the king. Damory's actions would lead to Elizabeth's own imprisonment and her protests to the king against her treatment. Finally Elizabeth refused another marriage and before 1340, she took the vows of chastity, devoting her life to religion, her family, and her land.[41] In widowhood, Elizabeth lived in Wales and England travelling to her ancestral homes.[42] Elizabeth's early life was centered around marriage and seemed to be determined by male authority, but Elizabeth would rebel against the dictates of male authority and try to safeguard her autonomy.

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[38] Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol,-Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957), 123.

[39] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*. For all of the information in this paragraph not referenced separately, see Chapter 1 for more information.

[40] Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol,-Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 123.

[41] Ibid, 44.

[42] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), see 89-99 for an example of Elizabeth travelling from Norfolk in 1347 and a description of her travelling from London to Clare in 1358. Also see Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 182-183. There is a list of guests, Elizabeth's itinerary and residences for 1349-1350. She is at Usk, Troy, Ross-on-Wye-Newent, Tewkesbury, Stanway, Chipping Norton, Bletchingdon, Bicester, Buckingham, Woburn, Chicksand, Litligton, Radwinter, Clare, and Stoke. Receiving many guests including her granddaughter.

Elizabeth de Burgh is an important historical figure because she defied the authority of the king and asserted her own authority by choosing her "abduction" marriage. There are many instances of Elizabeth in contention with the kings of England, and her "abduction" marriage is the start of a lifelong defiance. Although this thesis emphasizes Elizabeth's rebellion in marriage, this moment is not her only action against the kings of England. Elizabeth demanded control of her inheritance. She worked against Edward II and Edward III's demands to control her land for the crown. She would also protest Edward II's treatment of her, writing a protest against him. Elizabeth defied the king's wishes, continuously attempting to block the king from controlling her land. Finally, she would even help end Edward II's reign. Elizabeth supported Queen Isabella's deposition of Edward II. Isabella invaded England and captured the crown in regency for her son.[43] This chapter will delve into the character of Elizabeth de Burgh in order to understand her refusal to acquiesce to authority.

This chapter will explain how Elizabeth's time in Ireland as a young mother and widow helped influence her independent nature. In fact, her "abduction marriage" has historical precedence in the life of the twelfth century Irishwoman, Dervorgilla. Dervorgilla was an Irish heroine blamed for the Anglo-Norman invasion in the late twelfth century. Elizabeth's family gained their illustrious position as the leader of this invasion. Dervorgilla's story also shows the political blame medieval women faced while trying to decide their own fate. Elizabeth's parallel story to this Irish heroine explains how women acted as forces of defiance. Gaelic culture did not disappear after the Anglo-Norman invasion, and Elizabeth's story shows the adoption of Gaelic

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[43] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), xvii. Ward states that she "welcomed the invasion of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer on 24 September 1326, although she regarded it as essential to remain on good terms with Edward II until she was sure the invasion would be successful" showing that although Elizabeth supported the rebellion, she was also practical and considerate of the effect another lost rebellion would have.

culture by the Anglo-Normans. Next, the focus will return to Elizabeth's second marriage. In her second marriage, she defied the king's expectations, following the historical figure Dervorgilla and her own mother. Finally, the discussion will turn to her imprisonment, which serves as the start of her widowhood. Elizabeth's widowhood shows her as independent and powerful in the medieval world, but it was her early life that prepared her for this time. This section reflects the importance in remembering Elizabeth de Burgh for her refusal to acquiesce to authority.

Overall, "abduction" marriages were a complicated form of medieval marriages. Marriage was a contractual business that relied on negotiation and political favors, not love, but abduction allowed a couple to avoid the traditional marriage arrangements. Historian Hanawalt states that "the only readily documentable cases of using abduction and rape for marriage… is really heir and heiress snatching."[44] Hanawalt further explains that some women consented to their abduction stating that "[she]…agreed to be abducted and married…[her husband] however was accused of rape because she married him without the king's consent."[45] Marriage was viewed as a political institution. If a woman wanted to marry a man that would not seek traditional approval, she could resort to abduction to reclaim her right to marriage. Abduction could be planned by a man and woman who wanted to marry, but for single heiresses and even powerful abbesses, abduction was a real fear. Not every abduction case saw the woman consenting to the marriage before the abduction took place, but in some instances these "hostages" actually chose their marriage. For Elizabeth de Burgh, and even her own mother, their second marriages were without traditional approval, just like Dervorgilla. These women illustrate the point that there is more than just one side of the story in explaining the ways women

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[44] Barbara Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities 1300-1348* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 106-107.
[45] Ibid.

gained power in a feudal society. By exerting control of their own marriages, these women determined their own lives, going against traditional societal expectations.

II. The First Marriage

Elizabeth's first marriage highlights the de Clare family tradition to amass power. The de Clare family understood that protecting their own interests was very important in remaining powerful. This idea is echoed in Elizabeth's own life. In Elizabeth's first marriage, the family worked to consolidate power as Elizabeth and her brother Gilbert married into the de Burgh family. In 1308, Elizabeth de Clare married John de Burgh while her brother married Matilda de Burgh. Elizabeth was married "at Waltham abbey and in the king's presence John…was married…to Elizabeth…eventually, heiress of much of both of the de Burgh and de Clare inheritance."[46] The dual marriage of the de Clare siblings was a politically savvy move and convenient as having two siblings marry into the same family would strengthen the relationship between the Anglo-Norman families. This arrangement would also allow their land to stay within the family. Historian R. R. Davies explains that with the expense of marriage, "one way of limiting the costs and solidifying the alliances formed by marriage was to arrange a bilateral agreement…a striking example was the Clare-de Burgh marriage axis in the early fourteenth century, with its possibly wide-ranging implications for aristocratic territorial fortunes in England, Wales and Ireland".[47] The de Burgh family owned land throughout Ireland and much of Connaught, such as Ballintober Castle, which was part of the ancestral home of Derbforgaill's family. Davies illustrates the de Burgh family's wealth and power by explaining that John de Burgh's father, Richard de Burgh, accomplishments. Davies claims that

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[46] R. R. Davies, *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 153.
[47] Ibid.

> Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster (d. 1326)…descendant of an East Anglian family which had, through its own prowess and royal support, found fortune and fame in Ireland…by the second half of his career about half of Ireland, formally, at least, lay under his rule…He parlayed with Irish chieftains; deposed Irish high kings; collected huge tributes in cattle from Irish lineages; went regularly on punitive raids, pillaging and taking hostages…He was also the leading magnate in the world of England and Ireland.[48]

When the de Clare siblings intermarried with the de Burghs, it joined two powerful families in Ireland. Elizabeth would end up the uniting factor of the powerful families after both her husband and brother died. These events left her as the link between the two families. She was one of the most powerful people in Ireland and England.

Elizabeth's marriage was a grand transfer of power, but the marriage decision was not Elizabeth's own. Gilbert, Elizabeth's brother, had the right to marry whomever he wanted, a benefit he gained from their sister Margaret's marriage.[49] With his own right to marriage, Gilbert also had the rights to arrange Elizabeth's marriage. King Edward II granted Gilbert "the right 'to marry whomsoever he will,' and the double Ulster marriage suggests he also had the right to Elizabeth's marriage."[50] Elizabeth's first marriage was a political match of others' choosing whereas Gilbert was allowed to make his own decision. Granted, Gilbert still gained his right from the king, an authority figure for both men and women, but the king needed Gilbert's support. Free choice in marriage may not have been easily accessible for most of the nobility, but

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[48] Ibid, 43-44.

[49] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 9. Gilbert also benefited from not only Elizabeth's marriage but his other sister, Margaret. Her marriage provides the background for his right to start his own marriage. This case is an example of where Gilbert unequally benefited from the marriages of his sisters as Elizabeth was not given this same right after her sister's marriage. Underhill claims "Margaret [de Clare]'s marriage to the king's favorite was possibly part of a deal with her brother Gilbert, who received seisen of the Clare estates shortly after her marriage…five months after the marriage Gilbert held the lands and titles of the earldoms of Gloucester and Hertford. Of course, Gilberts' early majority…rather reflected the king's need for Gilbert's support".

[50] Ibid.

for men, they could make the political decisions in marriage while women were expected to have their marriage decided for them. Gilbert continued working to keep his family powerful, but he was able to do so with his right to make his own marriage choice. Powerful noblewomen, like Elizabeth, were only supposed to be powerful because of the position they would give their husband, not because of their independent actions. They were expected to increase the fortunes of others, and their marriages were bargaining pieces for political support. Although Elizabeth's hand in marriage to Roger Damory, her third husband, was a political favor and her first marriage to John de Burgh was for the consolidation of power, Elizabeth would try to gain the same right in choosing her marriage as her brother. Only, she had to defy the traditional betrothal method with her abduction marriage. Gilbert's marriage decision for Elizabeth would also take her to Ireland, opening the door for a new chapter in her life. Elizabeth's time in Ireland would be influential in preparing her for being powerful in her own right, instead in how she could make someone else wealthy.

III. The Importance of Ireland

Elizabeth may have had many familial connections to Ireland, but her arrival there placed her in a new world. In her childhood, she was educated at an abbey, but now she would have to learn to run a household as a young bride.[51] Elizabeth was only thirteen when she and John de Burgh married, and while Ireland may have been foreign to Elizabeth, it was not necessarily unknown. Janetta Sorley states that "if Elizabeth now went to Ireland with her husband she was probably returning to the land of her birth and would find that a large part of it bore her family

[51] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 7. Underhill claims that Elizabeth was likely "educated at the convent at Amesbury in Wiltshire...such a wealthy, aristocratic covenant possessed appropriate credentials to house the king's granddaughters, and its sisters could impart the education the nobility increasingly desired".

name brought by Strongbow and fastened by her uncle."[52] Although Sorley claims that Ireland is the "land of birth" for Elizabeth, this location may be symbolic. Underhill writes that "historians differ over the date and place of her birth. The date was almost certainly September 16, 1295, the place likely at or near Tewkesbury, a Clare stronghold on the English-Welsh border."[53] Regardless of whether Elizabeth's real or imagined birth place was Ireland, her family's power stretched over the island with their rule lasting for almost one hundred and fifty years. Elizabeth would create her own bond to Ireland in arranging her second marriage and creating a friary, leaving her mark in the family's history.

In Ireland, Elizabeth achieved an important milestone for a medieval woman, motherhood. Although there is confusion over where William was born, Elizabeth lived in Ireland at the time of her son's birth. Jennifer Ward states that "Elizabeth remained in Ireland where her son William had been born in 1312."[54] Janetta Sorley, however, claims William was born in England, writing that " Elizabeth came to England for the birth of her son…[he] had his own small place in the succession of the throne."[55] Sorley's motivation for England as William's birthplace is to emphasize Elizabeth's connection to England, and the king. Ward's claims of Ireland for his birth demonstrates the fact that Elizabeth's child would become a very powerful ruler in both Ireland and England. After Gilbert and Matilda's marriage ended childless,

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[52] Janetta Sorley, *Kings' Daughters*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 40.
[53] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 5.
[54] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)*, xv. Jennifer Ward and Frances Underhill reference Ireland as William's birthplace because of information from the *Chartularies of St. Mary's Abbey*, which recorded events from the Dublin abbey, mention Elizabeth in 1309 and the de Burgh family in other instances John T. Gilbert ed., *Chartularies of St. Mary's Abbey, Dublin, Volume II* (London: Longman & co., 1884), 294. The Latin states "Item, uxor fillii Comitis Ultonie applicuit xv. die Octobris in Hibernia" with a note stating that it is Elizabeth, daughter of Gilbert, Earl of Gloucester.

[55] Janetta Sorley, *Kings' Daughters*, 40.

Elizabeth's son ensured that there would be an heir for the de Burgh family, while Elizabeth herself then became an heiress to the de Clare family fortune. [56] In her son's birth, Elizabeth fulfilled an important societal role for a medieval woman. Although Elizabeth was strong-willed, she was a supporting mother who tried to help her children when she was able to.[57] She also had to be pragmatic in the fact that death was ever present. Her son, William died at the age of twenty-one when he was murdered in Ireland.[58]

There were many roles a medieval woman was expected to fulfill from daughter, to wife, to mother. For Elizabeth she learned how to react to these transitions in Ireland, remote and independent from the king's court. Although Elizabeth defied the king, her uncle, in her second marriage, she was still expected to fulfill her societal duty once married. Her time in Ireland started along a traditional path, but she would quickly change the expectation with her staged abduction.

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[56] Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol,-Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 62. It is written that "we must grieve, I think, for the Earl of Gloucester, that so powerful and youthful a man should die so prematurely that he left no heir of his body, and yet the countess his wife has been expected to give birth for a year or more; and if she should now give birth, I do not see by what right the boy could claim the inheritance…thus if the inheritance of the earl descends to the sisters, it will fall into three parts".

[57] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360),* 2. In Elizabeth's expenses for 1326, when William would have been fourteen, we see her pay for "a German saddle bought from him in June last past…the same for 1 saddle for William de Burgh's courser…on the same day to to William's servant by the Lady's gift for his expenses from London and returning with the carriage…money delivered to William de Burgh for leather from 3 carcasses purchased to line his basinet and *skynebald*…on 4 October to William de Burgh for repairing cord for hanging up his armour, 6d. by her own hand". Here we see Elizabeth's expenses for William and the focus on materials for fighting. Throughout Elizabeth's expenses we see her paying for her children and grandchildren.

[58] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944), 273. It is reported that "William Burke [de Burgh], Earl of Ulster, was killed by the Ulster was killed by the Ulster Galls, who all died for it, some being hung, others slain and others drawn by the King's men". This act signified the ending of Anglo-Norman control over Connacht.

IV. Where did Elizabeth live in Ireland?

The records of Elizabeth's location and actions in Ireland are mostly lost. Elizabeth went to Ireland for her marriage but remained even in widowhood. Elizabeth would not leave Ireland for good until February 3rd 1316, when she was summoned back to England by Edward II.[59] The paucity of information about Elizabeth's time in Ireland is tied to the minimal information for her husband, John de Burgh. John de Burgh was expected to outlive his father and become the Earl of Ulster, but instead it was John's granddaughter, Elizabeth, who would be remembered as the Countess of Ulster. While Richard de Burgh, John's father, ruled the land, John's actions were seen as unimportant, remaining "elusive."[60] Historian Underhill explains how women were tied to a male figure. Because Elizabeth is tied to John, where there is little information on John de Burgh, there will not be information for Elizabeth. Underhill states that "medieval women rarely functioned independently unless unfettered by ties to a male, for noblewomen served as pawns in the shifting alliances of the fourteenth century."[61] In this period of her life, Elizabeth was tied to her husband, brother, and even her son. Although Elizabeth was obviously maturing and learning at this time, recorded information misses her actions. The information that is known about Elizabeth during her marriages is normally tied to milestones in the lives of male figures instead of her actions independently.

When Elizabeth achieves independence through widowhood, the recorded information about her estates, her travels, and the favors she bestowed increase.[62] The estate records from her widowhood may even explain her location and actions as a young bride. For example, T. E.

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[59] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)*, xv.
[60] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 10.
[61] Ibid, 1.
[62] See *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)* by Jennifer Ward for more information.

McNeill, refutes the popular legend of John de Burgh building a castle in Dunluce because of the information recorded on Elizabeth's estates. McNeill states that "his [John de Burgh's] estates in Ulster were almost certainly centered on the castle and town of Coleriane."[63] The evidence that these were John and Elizabeth's main estates are that long after Elizabeth left Ireland, she was still profiting from these lands. Historian Robin Frame writes that "Coleraine in northern Ulster, contained a prosperous, though isolated group of manors; as late as the 1350s, Elizabeth de Burgh, lady of Clare, drew significant income from her property there."[64] The estate records demonstrate the importance of Ireland for Elizabeth. She lived there as a teenager in her first marriage and widowhood, and she would keep the land for the rest of her life. Just as her family worked to gain control, Elizabeth was successful in her independence in keeping her northern Ulster land profitable.

Overall, the little information on Elizabeth's time in Ireland does not mean that it was not extremely important in her development as a strong woman. Instead, it highlights the passiveness for women's treatment in medieval records. Women were either omitted, mentioned only in regards to a male figure, or just their death is recorded. Medieval women themselves were not passive figure, but the historical records for medieval society attempts to instill this idea by not referencing their actions. Medieval historians must infer more about women's lives based on the information provided for the male figures in their lives, searching for instances where women held control.

V. Writing her Name in the History Books: Religious and Educational Donations

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[63] T. E. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: Feudal Power in a Gaelic World* (London: Routledge, 1997), 195.
[64] Robin Frame, "Ireland" in Michael Jones, ed., *The Cambridge Medieval History Volume VI c.1300-1415* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 195.

Elizabeth lived in Ireland during the Bruce invasion.[65] She demonstrated this same spirit of rebellion in her own defiance against the king. Yet, she used this rebellious spirit to create her own legacy in Ireland. Using the lands given to her in marriage, Elizabeth endowed the Augustinian friary, Ballinrobe. The friary is situated in Connacht, in the current county Mayo.[66] Underhill writes that although the land for the friary was given to Elizabeth and John, "Elizabeth is credited with the foundation; probably because John was already dead when the building program there began."[67] Creation and control of this friary connected her to her Irish tenants. This connection explains why she received payments from them even when other Anglo-Norman estates found it difficult to collect money.[68] The friary also shows that for Elizabeth, Ireland's impact was more than just economic benefit. Elizabeth wanted to pay homage to Ireland. During her life, Elizabeth prioritized religious donations. With her founding of Ballinrobe, this priority extended to Ireland.[69] Elizabeth's religious donations continued after her initial efforts at Ballinrobe. Historian Jennifer Ward describes Elizabeth as "deeply attached to her family and friends, proved to be an energetic manager, loved splendor and display, and had strong religious commitments."[70] The creation of Ballinrobe friary represents a splendid display of her religious devotion following the birth of her son. Elizabeth had many lifelong associations with religious

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[65] See the introduction for an explanation of the Bruce Invasion

[66] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 10.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid, 66.

[69] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)*, xv. In The Will of Elizabeth de Burgh, she states that "Item if through necessity a cutback must be made, I wish it to be made as much from the goods that I have bequeathed [to her daughters and granddaughters]" ensuring that the religious donations in her Will would be preserved.

[70] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500*, 13.

foundations. Written in her estate records are documents describing the many offerings given and items donated to religious foundations from Elizabeth.[71] Religion was an important part of Elizabeth's life, and with religious donations, she was able to confirm her beliefs. She ensured her legacy as a patron to religious houses. In Ireland, Elizabeth wanted to be remembered for the creation of the Ballinrobe friary. Ireland was Elizabeth's home for seven years, a time period that lasted longer than any of her marriages, and it helped her develop into a strong woman. In Ireland, she was able to make the independent decision to endow a friary, and she would then make the decision to choose her own marriage.

Ballinrobe friary had a lasting impact in Ireland. Reverend Francis Martin suggests that "this was the first Anglo-Norman religious foundation in the county [Mayo]."[72] Elizabeth brought her family's religious beliefs to Ireland, giving her power not only as a landowner, but by instilling her religious influence on the land. Reverend Martin further comments that "the foundation at Ballinrobe had far reaching effects on Irish Augustinian history…introducing the Augustinians to Connaught the way was prepared for the native Irish foundations at Banada and Murrisk."[73] Although the friary was created as an Anglo-Norman religious institution, it would quickly become an Irish institution. Elizabeth influenced the development of medieval Irish culture. Although the reformation officially dissolved Catholic institutions in England and Ireland, these institutions were able to survive in western Ireland, Connacht. Editor Therese Martine states that "the influence that [Elizabeth] and other generations of English noblewomen

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[71] Ibid, 220-221. These recordings are from 1351-1352
[72] Francis X. Martin, "The Augustinian Friaries in Pre-Reformation Ireland." *Augustiniana vi* (1956): 361-362.
[73] Ibid.

exerted in Ireland…extended across much of the country".[74] Elizabeth would not only be influenced by Ireland, but she would have a long influence on Irish religion.

Just as her efforts created Ballinrobe friary, her efforts rebuilt Clare friary and Cambridge University's Clare Hall.[75] Elizabeth's patronage to Clare Hall helped create a persisting model for universities. Editor J P Roach states that

> the skill and tact with which the foundress carried through for the University the work which it had itself begun was truly extraordinary. The early history of the College is of particular interest because it was Lady Clare who first conceived the idea of a College as a community consisting of undergraduates as well as a Master, fellows, and graduates.[76]

Elizabeth helped define the way universities are structured. Elizabeth's role in the creation of Clare College showing the importance she placed on her religious and educational donations. Religious donations allowed Elizabeth to express and exert her personal Augustinian beliefs. Elizabeth was able to preserve not only her family's name, but her personal legacy. Elizabeth is still remembered for founding Clare College, leaving a legacy that is almost seven hundred years old.

Elizabeth's founding of religious and educational institutions follows the de Clare family model of establishing control and power through institutions. Through her donation of Ballinrobe, she would lead a new religious order to Ireland. With Clare College, she regulated how the university would be created. She had the power to shape the religious and educational

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[74] Therese Martin ed., *Reassessing the Role of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 306-307.
[75] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360),* 144-145. In Elizabeth's Will she "bequeath[ed] to my hall called Clare Hall" many gifts along with items to the Clare friary.
[76] "The colleges and halls: Clare College," in *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 3, the City and University of Cambridge,* ed. J P C Roach (London: Victoria County History, 1959), 340-346. *British History Online,* (accessed March 22, 2018), british-history.ac.uk.

culture for Ireland and England. In her religious offerings, Elizabeth demonstrates remarkable independence for a medieval woman. Underhill states that "Ballinrobe… marked her first independent foundation."[77] After her first husband John de Burgh's death, Elizabeth had the freedom to establish Ballinrobe. Both Elizabeth, and Derbforgaill, would find independence and power in religious institutions, but in very different styles. Derbforgaill raided a church while Elizabeth built a church. Religion was ever present in medieval society, and for these two women, they expressed their control through creating and destroying religious sites.

VI. Learning to Lead

As a young woman, Elizabeth had much to learn. While in Ireland, Elizabeth had to learn to be a young wife, a mother, a young widow, and a powerful landowner. When Elizabeth sailed to Ireland, she was a young child handed over in marriage, but when she left, she would leave making her own choice in marriage. Underhill states that

> little in Elizabeth's background in England's settled conditions could have prepared her for the Irish experience, but her residence there afforded her ample experience in practical politics and social understanding…she learned of the violent strain of Irish politics. Probably she maintained an independent household in marriage…her first independent foray into religious foundation and patronage had taught her something of the planning and prosecution of building projects. Possibly by this time, Elizabeth had organized a group of men into a council to direct her affairs, a very early example of this sort of household administration.[78]

Living in Ireland clearly had a large impact on Elizabeth's future life, giving her the skills to survive in a world where her status suddenly changed. Whether it was from a wife to a widow or in the king's favor to a traitor's widow, Elizabeth had to be prepared for the changes she would face in her life. Ireland also provided Elizabeth her first sense of independence. Throughout her life, Elizabeth would dominate in the independence granted by widowhood. Living in Ireland

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[77] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 10.
[78] Ibid, 11.

taught Elizabeth how to control her land and take control in her own life. Ireland provided the setting for her first contention with authority in her "secret betrothal" for her second marriage.[79] Elizabeth refused to give away her power and control, fighting the king to take back control of her lands. Elizabeth's leadership is a reflection of the strong women she was descended from and the strong women in Ireland.

Elizabeth de Burgh, Derbforgaill Conchobair, and Dervogilla all rebelled against the traditional expectation for their lives. Derbforgaill was a woman active in warfare while Dervogilla is another woman who planned her "abduction" marriage. These women were expected to be contained in a domestic role, yet they manipulated and overcame societal limitations to hold their own power. Elizabeth de Burgh is a powerful medieval figure, showing not only the stages of life for a wealthy noblewoman, but the story of a woman fighting for control. She started a religious movement in Ireland, and remarried in rebellion, demonstrating that these moments were anything but simple milestones in her life.

VII. Dervorgilla and her Abduction Marriage

To understand the power of the de Clare family and the nature of medieval abductions, one must look back to the life of Dervorgilla. Dervorgilla lived over one hundred and fifty years before Elizabeth arrived in Ireland. Dervorgilla's life, although native Irish, in many ways mirrors Elizabeth's Anglo-Norman life. Both women had abduction marriages and used abduction as a means to choose their marriage partner. The similar abduction stories for Elizabeth and Dervorgilla show that in both cultures women were subjected to the authority of male figures, but they both successfully challenged these traditions.

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[79] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500*, 42. Theobald's statement to parliament will be discussed later in the chapter, but Theobald claims that he and Elizabeth were betrothed in Ireland.

The story of Dervorgilla is remembered because of her role the invasion of Strongbow. Strongbow (his Irish nom de guerre), Richard de Clare was the first Anglo-Norman to conquer Ireland. Richard de Clare is Elizabeth's great-great-grandfather. Dervorgilla is famous for being abducted in 1152. She was the wife of the Irish king, Tigernan Ua Ruaric. In this marriage, she was abducted by King Diarmait Mac Murchada. This resulted in a civil war. The abduction created insular fighting which turned to an external power struggle. Diarmait Mac Murchada sought help from Richard de Clare, and his soldiers, who would subsequently take control of Ireland for himself. These actions ended the rule of Ireland by an Irish high king and started the Anglo-Norman invasion. In order to control Ireland, Diarmait sought the help of Richard de Clare, or Strongbow, who would change the fate of Ireland when he took control for himself. Yet, the Anglo-Norman invasion is blamed on the life of one woman. Richard de Clare arrived in Ireland looking to increase his own power, not to help Diarmait without reward. Historian Finbar Dwyer, summarizes why Richard de Clare would decide to involve himself in Irish infighting as

> By the 1160s, when Diarmait McMurrough [Mac Murchada] arrived looking for adventurers and mercenaries, the descendants of many of those who had settled in south Wales had fallen from political favor…they relished a chance to come fight in Ireland…the Earl of Pembroke, Richard de Clare, was promised lands and the hand of McMurrough's daughter Aoife…finally in 1170 Strongbow himself arrived at the head of a force…[they] started a process that irrevocably changes Irish history…Strongbow had married his daughter Aoife. Diarmait did not live long…leaving Strongbow, the most dominant figure in Leinster…possessing Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford, he was an increasingly powerful figure across Gaelic Ireland.[80]

In the Anglo-Norman invasion, Richard de Clare dominated Ireland. Richard de Clare brought Anglo-Norman culture to the conquered Ireland, but the original Irish culture did not disappear. Richard de Clare's actions would help grow his family's power and wealth as the lands he

[80] Finbar Dwyer, *Witches, Spies and Stockholm Syndrome: Life in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: New Island, 2013), 10-11.

controlled grew dramatically after the invasion. The de Clare's connection with Ireland would also lead his own future ancestor, Elizabeth to Ireland. She gained her own fortune and marriage in Connacht and Ulster, the same locations where Dervorgilla's actions would occur.

In Irish history, little is written of Dervorgilla, but in the end, her actions had a large impact. Historian Sean Duffy states that historians do not normally want to overinflate the actions of one person, but that in the case of Dervorgilla individual actions play a large part in history.[81] Duffy further states that "the story has little to recommend it…but, if it tells us anything, it is that one should not underestimate the force of tradition. The so-called 'rape of Dervorgilla' may be just a line in a set of annals...[but] when Diarmait Mac Murchada made off with the wife of Tigernan Ua Ruaric, he made an enemy for life."[82] The comment "line in an set of annals" warns us to not underestimate the actions of women even when they are barely mentioned in the records; their voices are often hidden even when they have a remarkable life and effect on history.

Dervorgilla changed history with her abduction, but she is punished in memoriam, blamed for the destruction and oppression Ireland suffered from the Anglo-Norman invasion. Irish annals may not include much direct information about Dervorgilla, but the Anglo-Normans adopted her story in their rationale for their invasion. The Anglo-Normans wrote poems, spun tapestries, and retold stories of Dervorgilla. Dervorgilla's story in historical narratives is classic political propaganda. Sympathy or hatred towards Dervorgilla changes based on political sympathy. Professor Preston-Matto analyzes the records of Irish queens, looking at the

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[81] Sean Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 57. Duffy states that "Historians, anxious not to allow undue weight of personal animus, tend to play down the importance of events such as these with motivating forces, but in this case they may be wrong".
[82] Ibid.

representation of Dervorgilla. In the late twelfth century Anglo-Norman poem "The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland," Dervorgilla is portrayed as an active participant in the story.[83] Professor Preston-Matto states that "[Dervogilla] is depicted as the plaything of Diarmait mac Murchada: he is aware that she loves him, and so he sends her letters and messengers telling her that he also loves her."[84] Further, Preston-Matto comments on the recordings from Giraldus Cambrensis, giving authority to Dervorgilla in her own abduction stating that "'she, who had long entertained a passion for Dermitius, took advantage of the absence of her husband, and allowed herself to be ravished, not against her will. As the nature of women is fickle and given to change, she thus became the prey of the spoiler at her own contrivance.'"[85] Both these stories portray the Irish as "participating in their own political downfall" giving Dervorgilla agency in her abduction, but also blaming her for the Irish downfall.[86] The Anglo-Normans use Dervorgilla's actions as an excuse for why the Anglo-Normans had to react to the fighting in Ireland.[87] In showing that Dervorgilla knew of the abduction and helped to plan it, the authors show a woman making her

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[83] Lahney Preston-Matto. "Queens as Political Hostages in Pre-Norman Ireland: Derbforgaill and the Three Gormlaiths." *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology 109*, no. 2 (2010): 158. (accessed February 16, 2018), muse.jhu.edu.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Dr. Marie Flanagan argues that the writer of the *Song of Dermot* [here seen as Giraldus Cambrensis] is Irish and not Anglo-Norman, showing that the author's reaction proves that "some individuals in Ireland were expecting Henry [Henry II is the King of England who starts to take control over Ireland after the Invasion] and interpreted his intervention as being to their advantage, as a mission which would regulate relations between them and the Anglo-Normans". This view goes against the idea set forth by professor Preston-Matto, but it still shows that in both societies women were viewed as "prey of the spoiler" which devalued women's opinions. It also shows the complicated relationship between Anglo-Normans and the Irish even at the time of the invasion, the Irish had to react to the new power structure and attempted to gain an advantage even when it would bring the eventual downfall of their autonomy. Marie Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 171.

own decisions, but these actions serve as a warning. The story demonstrates societal fear over women having power as when just one woman makes her own decisions all of society collapses. Elizabeth de Burgh's abduction is represented in this literary precedence which describes Irish actions. Anglo-Norman and Irish cultures were connected, and Irish culture was not lost in the invasion. Elizabeth would have known her family's history, in a time when legacy was so important. She would know the story of Dervorgilla's abduction marriage as the impetus for her great-great-grandfather's invasion of Ireland. She may have looked at this moment of Irish, female rebellion when she planned her own abduction marriage.

Modern readers may never know Dervorgilla's true feelings, but her actions can be seen as a powerful and bold move to take charge of her life. Her abduction also makes her a valuable political player in medieval society. Professor Preston-Matto suggests that "if women were in fact used as political hostages, we need to shift our ideas about medieval Irish noble women: they were not simply influential because of their wealth or the agnatic, marital, or maternal relationships, but were also involved in the highest level of political negotiation".[88] Although professor Preston-Matto argues that the agency of Dervorgilla is a "phantom agency," and that she would only gain power in the political process, I do not agree that she was lacking all agency. Dervorgilla seems to have agency in the abduction as her own brother was a part of the party that abducted her[89]. Also, Historian McCraith states that Dervorgilla "did not forget to

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[88] Lahney Preston-Matto. "Queens as Political Hostages in Pre-Norman Ireland: Derbforgaill and the Three Gormlaiths." *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology 109*, no. 2 (2010): 161. (accessed February 16, 2018), https://muse.jhu.edu/.

[89] Conell Mageoghagan and Reverend Denis Murphy, eds., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise; Being Annals of Ireland, from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408.* (Dublin: University Press for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland), 1896, 199-200. "Dermott m'Murrigh king of Leinster tooke the lady Dervorgill, daughter of the said Morrogho'Melaglin, and wife of Tyernan o'Royrck, with her cattle with him, and kept her for a long space to satisfie his insatiable, carnall and

bring away with her the cattle which she had brought to O'Rourke as a dowry".[90] If Dervorgilla did not want to leave with Diarmait, it seems unlikely that she would take her dowry. Author Gillian Kenny states that "Gaelic married women appear to have had the right to hold and administer these dowries independently of their husband, which was completely opposite to the English common law".[91] If she had control over her dowry, it would seem that if she expected to quickly reunite with her husband, she would not take her dowry with her. Instead, she was ready to start a new life with her chosen husband.

Analyzing stories of Dervorgilla shows the parallel to Gaelic literature in the life of Elizabeth de Burgh. Although Dervorgilla was a real person, her life has become a traditional story in Irish memory. Author McCraith writes of Dervorgilla saying that

"no Irishwoman in history is more often mentioned than Dervorgilla…her name is spoken with loathing, but she died in the odour of sanctity. She is compared with Helen of Troy…rightly or wrongly, however Dervorgilla, is popularly regarded as the cause of the coming of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland…[she] was one of those women of destiny with whose acts the fate of the Womanland of Eire has been closely bound up".[92]

For both Dervorgilla and Elizabeth many of their thoughts and feelings towards their abductions are missing. It is unclear whether Dervorgilla's abduction was her plan or if it was the rape written in the annals. Even different annals have divergent stories as each one reflects the political drama of a different family.[93] It is unlikely that Dervorgilla or Elizabeth would have

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adulterous lust, shee was procured and enduced thereunto by her unadviced brother Melaghlin for some abuses of her husband Tyernan don before".

[90] L. M. McCraith, *The Romance of Irish Heroines* 53-54.

[91] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540*, 69.

[92] L. M. McCraith, *The Romance of Irish Heroines* (New York: Longmnans, Green and Co., 1913), 51.

[93] Flanagan's biography of Diarmait reflects the confusion surrounding the events as she states "In 1152 Mac Murchada abducted Tigernán Ua Ruairc's wife, Derbforgaill, from Mide. She was the daughter of Murchad Ua Máelsechlainn, king of Mide, and according to the seventeenth-century translation of the annals of Clonmacnoise, her brother Máelsechlainn had induced her to

even admitted their true feelings. Their abductions were acts of rebellion, and they would not have wanted to openly implicated that they planned the rebellion themselves. Yet in these cases, their actions must speak for their feelings. Elizabeth de Burgh faced a complicated abduction story in the same vein as Dervorgilla. While it would be wrong to place agency and claims of power to these women who may have been forced into marriages to men who abducted them, the little information recorded about their actions support the conclusion that they made their choice. Both women had arranged first marriages. Both would control their second marriage, leaving history to judge their actions.

Dervorgilla and Elizabeth changed the history of Ireland through war and marriage. They are key players in the story of Ireland. Dervorgilla's abduction marriage starts the story of the Anglo Norman invasion while Elizabeth's marriage into the de Burgh family is the end of the Anglo-Normans' control and the start of the de Burghs' own submission to Irish power and culture. Although they lived in Ireland over one hundred and fifty years apart, both were rich, noblewomen who held power in medieval Ireland. In the end, Dervorgilla's life foreshadows the increased importance of religion in Elizabeth's life. Author McCraith states "it is clear she

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solicit Mac Murchada's intervention. The Connacht-oriented annals of Tigernach place the abduction in the context of a joint raid with Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair of Connacht, against Tigernán Ua Ruairc, during which Ua Ruairc suffered a defeat and was temporarily deposed. The annals of the four masters record the participation of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, king of Cenél nEógain and claimant to the high-kingship, and state that on the same occasion Mide was divided between Murchad Ua Máelsechlainn and his son, Máelsechlainn, who was granted the eastern portion. It is not impossible that Máelsechlainn had offered the kingship of east Mide to Mac Murchada, along with his sister Derbforgaill, as a means of preventing Ua Ruairc's further encroachment upon that area". Flanagan, M. T. "Mac Murchada, Diarmait [Dermot MacMurrough; called Diarmait na nGall] (c. 1110–1171), king of Leinster." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 16 Feb. 2018. www.oxforddnb.com

[Dervorgilla] must have been a rich woman…in her own right."[94] He writes that she died at the age of eighty-five "in the fair Abbey of Mellifont the final act of Dervorgilla's passionate and troubled career was played out."[95] Both Dervorgilla and Elizabeth lived long, eventful lives ending their tumultuous actions in the comforts of religion. In religious spaces, noblewomen could find comfort after their long political careers. Dervorgilla and Elizabeth's stories help tell the history of the Middle Ages. The records on noble women may be slim, but they cannot be forgotten.

VIII. A History of Rebellion: A Mother and Her Daughters

Elizabeth de Burgh was not the first in her family to have a rebellious marriage. From 1313 to 1316, Elizabeth was widowed with her son, William, in Ireland. Her independent days in Ireland ended when her brother, Gilbert, was killed during the Bruce invasion. The de Clare family's early fortune in invading Ireland would be reversed in the Bruce invasion of Ireland as it led to Gilbert's death. When Elizabeth's brother, Gilbert died, he "left no surviving issues, his death at Bannockburn dramatically entwined his three sisters into the grim politics of Edward II…Gilbert's estates must be divided between his three sisters. In these circumstances, Edward II recalled Elizabeth from Ireland…his aim was to exploit her matrimonial potential for his own ends."[96] Elizabeth was now a wealthy heiress after the tragic death of her husband and her brother.[97] Her sudden increase in wealth captured the attention of the king. Edward II,

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[94] L. M. McCraith, *The Romance of Irish Heroines* 59-60.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 12.
[97] Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol,-Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 52. Gilbert died in battle, fighting for Edward II. After Gilbert cautioned ahainst battle, Edward II thought him traitourus and Gilbert fought saying "'Today,' said the earl, 'it will be clear that I am neither a traitor nor a liar,' and at once prepared himself for battle". Yet in the end he died because his troops left him and he "would have been victorious if he had faithful companions". Supporting

Elizabeth's uncle, wanted to capitalize on her wealth by marrying her to one of his supporters and using her holdings to his advantage. Elizabeth was not willing to let the king complete his plan, and she married without his permission. She was not the first de Clare woman to defy the king in marriage. J. C. Sorely explains that "like her mother Elizabeth may have thought this time to take her own way and marry for love."[98] Elizabeth, her mom, her sister, and even Dervorgilla, took their own right to marriage seriously. They were willing to risk the anger of authority in order to choose their own marriages.

Elizabeth's mother was Joan of Acre. She was the daughter of King Edward I and Eleanor of Castile. After her first marriage ended with her husband, Gilbert de Clare's death, she decided whom she would next marry. Her second marriage which was one of love, or at least spite. The *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde Chronica et Annales* states that

> Lady Joan of Acre who in the process of time was handed over to Gilbert earl of Gloucester in lawful matrimony…on his death she took or herself a certain knight of elegant in appearance but poor in substance. I do not say that all the lords of the land received this news with pleasure…one of the magnates of the land came and thundered in the king's ear that a marriage of this kind was contrary to his honour…to him she replied 'it is not ignominious or shameful for a great and powerful earl to marry a poor and weak woman; in the opposite case it is neither reprehensible nor difficult for a countess to promote a vigorous young man'. Her reply pleased the lord king, and thus his anger and that of the magnates was appeased.[99]

Elizabeth's mother was a strong woman, who defied her father, the king. Joan had a sense of defiance like Elizabeth. In her first marriage, "both Joan and Gilbert possessed a strong sense of independence."[100] Joan of Acre was willing to blatantly defy the king, to secure her own marriage. In Joan's speech in defense of her marriage, she recognized that if a man is not faulted

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the king did not always benefit the de Clare family, and we see that they do not always follow this path.

[98] Janetta Sorley, *Kings' Daughters*, 43

[99] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500*, 43.

[100] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 44.

for marrying a poor woman, she should not be judged for marrying a poor man.[101] In a time when Joan was expected to silently submit to a politically motivated marriage, she demanded her right to love just as a man could. Elizabeth would remember her mother's defiance of the king and demands for equality in marriage choice, carrying these ideas throughout her own life.

Abduction marriages seem to be common for the nobility to circumvent traditional marriage patterns. Abduction and elopement undermined the king's authority, giving rights to the couple. Davies claims that Joan of Acre's second marriage would have caused Edward I, her father, to "explode," because he did not arrange her secret marriage, but there was little he could do about the daughter that became the "talk of the town, indeed of the kingdom."[102] Edward I could not stop his daughter's marriage because the Church determined that a marriage only needed the consent of both parties, not the consent of the parents or the king.[103] Although this ruling was supposed to make the Church more powerful, both Elizabeth and her mother would use this law to give their own consent to marriage, ignoring the kings' desires to control their fortunes and their lives. Joan's daughters must have learned from the stories surrounding their "headstrong" mother and carried the desire to create their own marriage.

IX. The Abduction Marriages of the de Clare Sisters

Not every abduction meant that the marriage was secretly arranged. Yet, it seems that for some of the de Clare daughters, they wanted their "abduction" to end in marriage. Elizabeth's older sister Eleanor who "exhibited audacity and recklessness and, above all, a firm resolve to

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[101] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500*, 43.
[102] R. R. Davies, *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages*, 155-156.
[103] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 6. Even the King of England had to respect the Church in medieval England, and interactions with marriage and the Church would not only frustrate Henry VIII but earlier kings as well.

maintain her Clare legacy" was abducted for marriage.[104] She was abducted by William la Zouche, and for this abduction she "was imprisoned again…the couple got their pardons and land, but never repaid the fine. They were also successful in beating back John de Grey of Rotherfield, who claimed he married Eleanor before Zouche. This took years."[105] Eleanor could have used the abduction confusion to attempt to end her marriage with Zouche, but instead she chose to fight Grey's claims. She had already been imprisoned by the Crown, and once again, she crossed the Crown for this marriage. Eleanor seems defiant in protecting the marriage she wanted.

Margaret Audley, Elizabeth's other older sister, had her daughter abducted. The family accepted the marriage after it became politically beneficial, but they first "protested the marriage in vain, because Edward III supported Stafford [her abductor]."[106] The king was not able to prevent every rebellious marriage from happening, but he could reward the marriages he approved. Once a woman was married, pregnancy and medieval ideas on virtue made it hard for Anglo-Norman women to end a marriage. This view demonstrates another instance of difference between Anglo-Norman and Irish culture. Although this thesis demonstrates how both the Anglo-Normans and the Irish participated in abduction marriages, they had different rules for ending a marriage, as discussed in the section on Derbforgaill.[107] The Anglo-Normans expected permanence in marriage, and so for Joan, Elizabeth, and Eleanor, they had to think carefully over the long term effects of their desired abductions. These women made bold decisions, but they

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[104] Ibid, 87.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid, 87-88.
[107] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540*. See page 67 and Chapter 11 "Ending Marriage for Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Women".

were not careless, they tried to make the marriage matches they wanted even when the king was against them.

Overall, marriage in medieval Ireland and England carried political weight and motivation. Even when the marriage defied societal expectation, it still carried the consequences regulated by societal norms. The abduction and elopement of the de Clare sisters, their mother, and daughter, show how these women worked to control their own lives even at the cost of imprisonment and loss of lands. These women expressed their opinions. Although often forced into marriage by the king, every so often, they determined who they would partner with.

X. All is Fair in Love and War: Defiance in Ireland

While it can be difficult to absolutely prove that Elizabeth was a willing participant in her own abduction, her time in Ireland and her continual defiance of the king give evidence that she planned this marriage. First, it is important to note that Elizabeth was now a part of the de Burgh family and had given birth to their heir. She was protected by Richard de Burgh, her father-in-law. Richard was the earl of Ulster, extremely powerful in Ireland. Richard de Burgh's power demanded "exceptional skill. Earl Richard used marriage as one of these skills...the successful exercise of lordship, especially the lordship of the premier magnates, was proportionately more critical to the political and social health of Ireland."[108] Elizabeth may have been vulnerable as a widow, but she was not without powerful allies who knew how to use marriage to their advantage. If Elizabeth wanted to arrange a marriage on her terms even when under pressure from the king, Richard de Burgh would have known how to manipulate a marriage, helping Elizabeth design her own marriage. Underhill writes that "the earl's friendship with Elizabeth continued until his death add[ing] weight to the idea that her new marriage received his

[108] R. R. Davies, *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages*, 44.

blessing".[109] If her marriage received the blessing of the Earl of Ulster, it does does not seem like a forced abduction, but instead, a tactical marriage subverting the authority of the king.

Elizabeth's own role as a powerful woman along with her families' power shows the marriage to be of desire not force. Elizabeth's and Theobald de Verdon, her second husband, were living in Ireland when they "arranged" their marriage. J. C. Sorely explains their marriage stating that

> as people will, they went on marrying and giving in marriage, particularly the widow de Burgh who early in the next year was taken to wife by her second cousin Theobald de Verdun. He was descended from the lords of Verdun…the family had a large estate in Ireland, of which country Theobald was lieutenant justiciar at this time…he and Elizabeth de Burgh married 'secretly', that is without the knowledge of the King whose ward she was, but he took it pleasantly as an uncle should.[110]

It does not seem that Edward II took the news "pleasantly," as after Theobald's death, he would not allow her to choose her next marriage, and quickly forced Elizabeth into her third marriage. Sorley does explain De Verdon's connection to the king as lieutenant justiciar. De Verdon's role as the justiciar of Ireland was symbolically powerful as "the head of government. He was the chief executive…the governance of medieval Ireland was a replica of England …but in practice, in the later middle ages, the system did not work very well."[111] Although Theobald de Verdon was the justiciar of Ireland, both the de Clare and de Burgh families were more powerful. Elizabeth may have chosen this marriage for romance, since it seems unlikely that de Verdon could overpower either the de Burgh or Clare families. As Theobald was King Edward II's Irish head of state right before he staged this abduction, both Elizabeth and Theobald were in defiance of the king's authority. The marriage occurred during the Bruce invasion. The difficulties in the

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[109] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 16.
[110] Janetta Sorley, *Kings' Daughters*, 43.
[111] James Lydon, *Ireland in the Later Middle Ages*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillion Ltd, 1973), 28 and 46.

invasion may have made it easier for de Verdon to circumvent the king he swore loyalty to.[112] Loyalty and power were flexible between medieval Ireland and England. Theobald and Elizabeth's marriage show an instance of shifting loyalty away from the king, continuing the theme seen in Ireland during this time.

Theobald de Verdon's account of his marriage to Elizabeth survives as a court document. Although Theobald would not want to admit that the marriage took place with any wrongdoing, his statement helps show the events of the marriage. The court proceedings were written in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* stating that

> Theobald de Verdun was summoned before the king's council because by force and arms he abducted Elizabeth from Bristol castle…on the king's orders she came to Ireland to England…and was living in Bristol castle by the king's arrangement…Theobald married her outside the castle without the king's license and in contempt of the king of £1,000.Theobald stated that he was betrothed to Elizabeth in Ireland before he married her, and that on Wednesday she came one league from the said castle on his orders, and there he married her; he added that he did not enter the castle and he did not believe he had done anything in contempt of the lord king. However if it seemed to the lord king's council that he had done anything wrong he was prepared to make amends according to the will and grace of the lord king.[113]

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[112] Underhill writes that he was justiciar from 1133-1315, but then later states he was "recalled before Bruce's invasion". Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 16. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* states that he was "replaced 27 February 1315" only months before the invasion, so he would have still been aware and had to deal with the effects of the Bruce invasion as he was a landowner in Ireland and had just recently held the governmental seat for Ireland. Waugh, Scott L. "Verdon [Verdun], Theobald de, first Lord Verdon (1248?)–1309), baron." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* (accessed February 17, 2018), www.oxforddnb.com. Richard de Burgh's loyalty to the king was questioned during the invasion and he was imprisoned in 1317. R. R. Davies, *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages,* 44. The Bruce invasion creates an environment where both parties could have struggled with loyalty to the king and been accepting of de Verdun starting a courtship going against Edward II's desires for Elizabeth while de Burghs already had their loyalty questioned.

[113] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500,* 42.

The start of this marriage took place in Ireland according to de Verdon, making Ireland Elizabeth's first place of defiance. Underhill senses that the romance could have started in Ireland, even if there is not recorded proof, besides Theobald's words. Underhill states that "Theobald's term as justiciar…presumably meant that he and Elizabeth were acquainted before they were married. He went to Ireland as a recent widower; she lately widowed. Her Irish lands were situated near Burgh manors…Verdon and Clare lands lay in close proximity in the eastern Welsh March. Prior acquaintance seems natural, indeed likely, but unprovable."[114] Underhill writes the romantic narrative of prior meetings of Theobald and Elizabeth, even giving the idea of a courtship. Although there is not evidence for courtly romance between Theobald and Elizabeth, their marriage was against Edward II's direct wishes, taking place literally under the nose of the king. While she is staying in the king's castle, Elizabeth forgoes the king's plans and marries Theobald. This marriage gives her a chance to enjoy the marriage she wants, even if it is only briefly.

There is no way of knowing the romantic interests of Elizabeth and Theobald, but the historical evidence presented support the idea that this marriage was an act of defiance for Elizabeth. Further, this marriage starts her pattern of resistance. Both Elizabeth and Theobald were connected to the king, yet they took a calculated risk to plan this marriage. Elizabeth could have attempted to end the marriage if she claimed she did not consent to the marriage, but neither she nor the king "raised the matter of her consent, it must be presumed that she agreed to the union and so met the Church's requirement of validity."[115] The testament of Theobald de Verdun states that he did not "enter the castle" when he went to marry Elizabeth.[116] While she was

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[114] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 16.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500,* 42.

guarded by the king, it would seem that if she did not want the marriage, she could have ended the process under the king's protection, without risk to herself. Yet, she chose to continue with her marriage to Theobald, disregarding the king even when she under his orders.

Elizabeth continued her relationship with the Verdun family long after Theobald died. Elizabeth and Theobald had a daughter, Isabella (b. 1317), born after he died, connecting her to the family. Her comfort with the family shows that she remembered her marriage without resentment, wanting to stay close to the family of her daughter, even after she was remarried. Underhill states that "although Elizabeth spent only five months of married life with Theobald de Verdon, association with the two Verdon stepsisters persisted much longer…[while] ties to the Damory family go almost unnoticed."[117] Elizabeth remained connected to the family, giving influence where she wanted. In contrast, the marriage to Roger Damory was forced, ending with her imprisonment. She had to fight to gain her land back after that marriage, and so, she did not favor the Damory family. Elizabeth was a powerful and wealthy woman choosing to help and nurture those she considered family. After Theobald died, Elizabeth continued to have mass said for him, including him as one of her three husbands. [118] Her religious devotion to Theobald may have been part of her pious duty, but it also shows she felt the need for his religious remembrance, showing her care for him. Elizabeth's short marriage to Theobald de Verdon was a dramatic moment in her life. Her defiance started with her independent act in Ireland where she planned this untraditional marriage. Elizabeth went against the wishes of the king to determine her own husband, refusing to be subjected to authority.

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[117] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 99-100.
[118] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)*, 143. Elizabeth's Last Will states that she will "bequeath for masses to be sung for the souls of Sir John de Burgh, Sir Theobald de Verdun, Sir Roger Damory, my lords, for my souls, and for the souls of all my good and loyal servants who have died or will die in my service".

XI. Third Time's [not] the Charm

Although Elizabeth left Ireland in 1316, her life in England would still be influenced by her secret betrothal in Ireland. Elizabeth rebelled against the king. She would have to live with the consequences. Jennifer Ward explains how in some cases, women could choose their remarriage, but "there were cases where she was forced to remarry as the result of parental, or royal pressure. This was clearly the case with Elizabeth de Burgh, one of the Clare heiresses, was married to the royal favorite Roger Damory in 1317…political circumstances explain the king's anger when the year before she had made a runaway match with Theobald de Verdun."[119] After Elizabeth crossed Edward II in her marriage to Theobald, Edward II still persisted in gaining access to Elizabeth's land. After Theobald died, Elizabeth was once again vulnerable, and she had already angered the man in charge of her next marriage. Underhill writes that "in medieval tradition, one looked to the mother's brother for support, but in Elizabeth's case this was the king himself, who was making demands on her."[120] While Elizabeth could have chosen to remain independent through a vow of chastity, at this point in her life, she was in her early twenties and the mother of two small children. Taking the vow of chastity would have avoid marriage, but then she would have to forgo her maternal rights.[121] Faced with this alternative, she agreed to the marriage the king forced upon her.

Elizabeth's privilege of wealth and power did not always mean that she was free to enjoy these privileges for herself. While she was still pregnant with Isabella, Theobald's daughter,

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[119] Jennifer Ward, "The English Noblewoman and Her Family," in Christine Meeks and Katherine Simms, ed. *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context*, 125.
[120] Ibid, 17.
[121] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 18.

Elizabeth took solace at Amesbury Priory.[122] Edward II would not care that she was a pregnant widow resting in a religious house as he "pursued heavy-handed tactics…he also sought to weaken her resistance" in agreeing to marry Roger Damory.[123] Edward II sent Queen Isabella to pressure Elizabeth into marriage.[124] Although this plan may have given Edward II immediate success in convincing Elizabeth to marry, he would unite two powerful women against him. Elizabeth and Isabella resented the king's political ploys, and their meeting at Amesbury Priory only further gave Elizabeth reason to support Isabella when she would invade England herself.

Although Elizabeth supported rebellion against the king and defied his wishes, she was also practical. Elizabeth always protected her land and personal power first, and her marriage to Damory was a reflection of her supporting the Clare family's desire to amass power. Underhill explains how Elizabeth was forced into the marriage to protect her land as

> Edward had the right to approve her marriage and was bent on coupling her with Damory. Magna Carta protected a widow's right to refuse an unacceptable marriage, but if Elizabeth insisted on that protection, she might jeopardize her share of the still-undivided Clare inheritance…possibly within six weeks after she bore her Verdon daughter, Isabella, on March 21, 1317, Elizabeth bowed to Edward's wishes and married Roger Damory.[125]

Although protection for widows was written into one of the most powerful English documents, Elizabeth worried about protecting her land over her personal feelings. Elizabeth was still living in a world where men dominated, and women were expected to remain silent on the marriages chosen for them. Elizabeth went against this expectation, but in her third marriage, she valued the power her land gave her over the risks of remaining a widow. Elizabeth calculated that marriage was a better option than refusal. Even in this reluctant marriage, Elizabeth was still

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

powerful. Underhill writes that "Roger was ten or 15 years older than she, but she had experience beyond his…one imagines that he looked to Elizabeth for continuing information and guidance."[126] Elizabeth's early life in Ireland is important because it taught her political lessons on warfare and landholding giving her more practical knowledge than even one of the king's favorites. Elizabeth was thoughtful, documenting her estates and specifying what she wanted done in life and death. Even in this marriage she would have held her own, worried over planning for her children, and focused on her goal of keeping her land under her control instead of in the king's hand.

Elizabeth did not have luck in her marriages as her third husband died a traitor. Roger Damory rebelled with the barons against Edward II in 1322.[127] The motivation for the rebellion was against the power of Hugh Despenser the Younger. Despenser was married to Eleanor de Clare, Elizabeth's sister, and he attempted to consolidate all of the de Clare lands for himself.[128] Damory, also had gained his high position as a favorite of the king who was chosen to marry a de Clare sister. Yet, he participated in this unsuccessful rebellion against Hugh Despenser where he was mortally wounded in battle.[129] Underhill writes that "each year [Elizabeth] generously distributed food to the poor on St Gregory's day (March 12), the anniversary of Roger's death. She may have felt that Damory needed all the prayers he could garner, but it is tempting to see this as an acknowledgment that she encouraged his resistance to the king and the Despensers

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[126] Ibid, 19-20.
[127] Monk of Malmesbury, N. Denhol, -Young, trans., *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, 123.
[127] Ibid, 44.
[128] J. S. Hamilton, "Despenser, Hugh, the Younger, First Lord Despenser (d. 1326), Administrator and Royal Favourite". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 24 March 2018. oxforddnb.com
[129] Ibid.

[who attempted to take her land]."[130] Elizabeth may have "encouraged" the actions which caused her husband's death along with her and her daughters' imprisonment. Although this rebellion was against the Despenser's attempts to take Elizabeth's land, she ended up losing much of her land after the rebellion failed. Yet, Elizabeth remained strong in this time and worked hard to regain what was lost to her. Underhill comments that "these difficult years mark Elizabeth's emergence as an individual rather than a nearly invisible daughter, sister, or wife."[131] She gains prominence in her widowhood, relying on the experiences of Ireland to once again become an independent woman. Her early independence may be shadowed by the actions of men, but it cannot be ignored. Her early defiance would help her fight to regain her land, as she was willing to denounce the king's actions to protest for her rights.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth would not willingly submit to the demands of Edward II. When Elizabeth's third husband was captured, just prior to his death. She and her children were imprisoned as traitors in retribution. Elizabeth fought against the loss of land and her imprisonment by writing a protest. Elizabeth attempted to sue parliament in her protest.[132] Elizabeth states

> I Elizabeth clearly see my disinheritance, the oppressions done by the king and royal power at the hands if Sir Hugh the younger…I was captured in the castle of Usk, part of my inheritance, by the power and command of the king, and taken to the abbey of Barking where after my lord's death [her third husband Roger Damory] I remained imprisoned more than half a year, and all my lands were taken in to the king's hands.[133]

Elizabeth was unwilling to accept the conditions she was forced into by Hugh and Edward II. Although Elizabeth could not find a sheriff who would defy royal authority to publish her

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[130] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 30.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500*, 117.
[133] Ibid, 117-118. This protest written in 1326 and "Lady Elizabeth recited each and every of the items in the French language, and thus made her declaration as stated above".

protest, writing the protest proves that Elizabeth did not passively accept her fate.[134] Elizabeth wanted to make sure the harm to her and her lands was recorded. She worked to express her anger, doing everything in her power to have her lands returned. She refused to accept an exchange of land that was worth less than her estate stating that "I do not and will not accept them of my free will."[135] Elizabeth recognized her authority as a powerful landholder, and she refused to be given less than she originally held. Elizabeth was strong in demanding her land and rights, accusing Edward II of his wrongdoing. Elizabeth defied the king in her marriage to Theobald, and she then expressed her outrage at the king's actions against her. She refused to be denied her land and position.

Elizabeth's protest even states that the king forced her "to seal another writing, namely a letter binding me by my body and lands, contrary to the law of the land."[136] Ward explains that this letter bound Elizabeth to only being able to marrying or making grants of her land with the king's agreement, but Elizabeth later saw this agreement cancelled by Edward III.[137] Edward II may have forced Elizabeth to sign this letter denying her the right to choose her own marriage, and decisions for her land, because she went against the king's consent in her second marriage. Edward II wanted to make sure that she would not repeat her actions, punishing her for her defiance against him. He would not be able to hold his anger at her for long as he was soon overthrown by his own wife.

XII. Elizabeth's Endowment

[134] Ibid, 118.
[135] Ibid, 119.
[136] Ibid, 118.
[137] Ibid.

After these three marriages, Elizabeth took action into her own hands and decided her marital fate for good. No one would be able to control Elizabeth's marital life after she took a vow of chastity. Underhill explains it as "rather a safety measure for her person and enjoyment…though she was pious, Elizabeth's primary purpose in taking her vow was to insure her own independence."[138] Elizabeth's life was often decided by others, but wherever possible she fought to regain control. She sought security to live her life, as after three marriages in her early adulthood, she took protection in the Church. Canonical doctrine is often seen as limiting women, but medieval women created spaces in religious institutions where they would be protected. For Elizabeth, she was raised in an abbey and would return to religious sites in pregnancy and imprisonment at vulnerable moments in her life. She found protection and personal legacy in religion.

Elizabeth would remain independent for over thirty years. Elizabeth continued to use her first husband's last name even after her remarriages because "though Theobald de Verdun and Roger d'Amory were peers their families did not rank as high as that of her first husband."[139] Even in independence, Elizabeth recognized power, and she wanted to keep the position that being a part of the de Burgh family gave her. Elizabeth ruled over her lands, working hard to regain the lands lost to her while protecting her legacy. Ward claims that her estate records show a "high level" of activity, meaning Elizabeth was active in her role as a landholder.[140] In her independent years, Elizabeth lived as an affluent noble as

> wherever Elizabeth de Burgh was residing, she maintained a wealthy lifestyle. Her brother, Earl Gilbert, had been one of the richest members of the nobility…Elizabeth's share in the 1317 partition [from Gilbert's death] mounted to about £2,000, and in

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[138] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 44.
[139] Janetta Sorley, *Kings' Daughters*, 45.
[140] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500,* 124.

addition she held dower from her two first marriages. She thus enjoyed an income similar to several earls.[141]

Elizabeth's records tell the personal story of a woman who fought against the king and his supporters to keep possession of her estates. She was wealthy and independent, and she worked hard to keep her lifestyle. In her widowhood, Elizabeth supported the rule of her friend Queen Isabella against Edward II. Again she would defy the king, and this time it was in support of another powerful woman in open rebellion against the king.[142] Elizabeth's time as a widower would lead to her most famous action of being "the founder of Clare College, Cambridge".[143] In widowhood, she was involved in her children and grandchildren's lives, cherished female friendship and rebellion, gave her patronage to religious institutions, and finally founded a college.

Elizabeth's seal at Clare College symbolically represents the power and independence that Elizabeth cherished. Elizabeth's seal "was attached to statues she gave at Clare Hall, Cambridge, in 1359.[144] Jennifer Ward states that "The Lady stands in a niche holding a book of statutes in her left hand and giving the foundation charter to the Master and members of the hall with her right…to the left and right are the arms of Edward and Eleanor of Castile, the lady's maternal grandparents, and at the base her own seal which she used from 1353 with the Clare shield impaling the de Burgh."[145] The seal shows Elizabeth granting education. She holds knowledge in her hand and bestows it to others, she does not find knowledge from others but they find it from her. In her seal, she honors her strong and independent mother while

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[141] Ibid, xviii.
[142] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh*, 38-45.
[143] Ibid, 99-100. See Chapters 3 and 5.
[144] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360),* xiii.
[145] Ibid.

acknowledging her powerful lineage. Her own seal pays homage to the de Burgh family, and the time in Ireland that she spent with the family, but her own personal family crest “impales” the de Burgh crest, showing that all that she may have gained from the de Burghs, she puts herself first.

Elizabeth held significant power in the Middle Ages. The information available on Elizabeth’s life shows the limits medieval society placed on women, and how women did not let these limits stop them from fighting for their rights and having a lasting legacy. Elizabeth did not cave to the pressure of her tumultuous early years which started in Ireland. Instead, she would learn from her Irish experiences, many marriages, and personal rebellion which led to war and imprisonment. Elizabeth valued her independence and personal accomplishment, she was a powerful woman, with strong ancestors, leaving a legacy of dominant women for the future.

Derbforgaill O Conchobair

I. Writing Herself into History: Derbforgaill O Conchobair

Derbforgaill O Conchobair (d. 1316) is a noble Irish woman who lived in the early fourteenth century. She was a part of the Conchobair (O'Connor) family which lived in Western Ireland. The Conchobair family had many different family branches, and Derbforgaill was part of clan Murtagh of the Conchobair family.[146] The Murtagh branch formed in the mid-twelfth and early thirteenth century, descending from Muircheartach Muimhneach (d. 1210), a younger son of the high king of Ireland Toirdhalblhach Mor O'Conor (d. 1156).[147] The Murtagh branch was strong, holding onto land along the coast of Mayo. The clan was important in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, subsequently they faded from power. Derbforgaill was part of the elite in this expansive and important family as her father was king of Connacht. The Conchobair family remained dominant during the Anglo-Norman invasion protecting the land they had and fighting to regain control of the land they lost. In this powerful family, Derbforgaill was active in familial conflicts and raiding.

Derbforgaill, was the daughter of King Magnus. Derbforgaill's father was in direct contention with the de Burgh family. In 1288, Magnus O Conchobair seized the kingship from his brother Cathal to become the King of Connacht.[148] Magnus was a powerful ruler, opposing the de Burgh family. Following Magnus's apprehension of the kingship, Richard de Burgh challenged Magnus for control of Connacht. The *Annals of Connacht* state that Richard de Burgh "marched into Connacht as far as Roscommon against Magnus son of Concohabar Ruad, who

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[146] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, (2001):1. (accessed March 29, 2018), jstor.org.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid, 8.

was king of Connacht at that time, Fitz Gerald, and the King's men. These all assembled to oppose him and challenged him to advance beyond that point. So the Earl determined to retire from the country and disband his army."[149] Although the de Burgh family was powerful, this area was Derbforgaill's family's ancestral land. They were able to intimidate Richard de Burgh to retreat from Roscommon. As the king, Magnus would survive a rebellion raised against him and once again stopped Richard de Burgh from attacking.[150] In the end, he negotiated with Richard de Burgh, a powerful landowner, only making submission after "all his petitions were granted by the Earl."[151] Although, he submitted to Richard de Burgh, it was on his own terms, he kept his own control and respect as a king. Magnus realized that he would need to submit to Richard de Burgh in order to keep his power instead of continually warding off attacks by de Burgh. When Magnus died in 1293 the *Annals of Connacht* record that "king of Connacht for five and a half years…Magnus of the horseman king, died this year after a sickness of three months – one who was terrible and deadly in battles and forays, the most generous and valiant of all the kings of Ireland- on Loch Caircin."[152] Derbforgaill's father was "terrible and deadly" a bold king who died of sickness, not in deposition, which was not an easy accomplishment for a king in Ireland.

Derbforgaill had a powerful position in society as the king's daughter. According to historian Katherine Simms, her marriage "follow[ed] the age-old compromise by which the successive Connacht kings had dealt with the claims of the kings of Tir Conaill, Magnus married

[149] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944), 181.
[150] Ibid, 185-189.
[151] Ibid, 189.
[152] Ibid.

his daughter Dearbhfogaill [Derbforgaill] to king Aodh O'Donnell."[153] Derbforgaill went from being the daughter of one king to the wife of another with her marriage to Aed O Domnaill, the king of Tir Conaill.[154] Aed and Derbforgaill had two sons, and both would continue the family dynasty by becoming the kings of Tir Conaill.[155] Yet, Derbforgaill is remembered for more than her connection to two royal Irish families. Derbforgaill is memorialized in the *Annals of Connacht* for killing the man who murdered her brothers. Throughout three hundred years of history recorded in the *Annals of Connacht*, Derbforgaill stands out as a woman who refused to stay silent. She defied her husband's authority, and societal norms, to defend her family's honor.

The *Annals of Connacht* tells the story of the O'Connor, or Conchobair, family and the events that occurred in their land. The history outlines the rise and fall of the Conchobair family in relation to the actions surrounding them. The text is detailed giving information on specific events, but in some years, it just briefly summarizes the important deaths. The *Annals of Connacht* was recorded by three different people according to the nineteenth century editor A. Martin Freeman.[156] The original document was recorded in the early sixteenth century using early transcripts and materials as its sources.[157] Irish history is often recorded in long annals, giving hundreds of years of history in one long text. Derbforgaill's story is just a few lines of text in hundreds of pages, yet her story clearly shows where a woman had power and control, which is often hidden in history records. Derbforgaill had power in the political world, and Derbforgaill defiance of the norm stood out, allowing her actions to be saved.

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[153] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, 9.
[154] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944), 237.
[155] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, 14.
[156] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, Introduction.
[157] Ibid.

This chapter will focus on Derbforgaill's actions and defining women's roles in medieval Ireland. Derbforgaill life only has a few records, and so, other sources are used to show how she defied the norm. This section will also demonstrate how Irish culture differed in its treatment of women compared to Anglo-Norman society. As shown in this thesis, Elizabeth de Burgh's personal defiance appears to be inspired by Irish culture, and this chapter will further demonstrate Irish society's views on women. Early Irish texts, written before the Anglo-Norman invasion, explain the unique nature of Irish culture. The *Cain Adamnain*, an early medieval religious treaty, will be used to explain Irish religious and societal views on women. Although early Irish texts were written before the Anglo-Norman invasion, the thoughts and rulings in the manuscripts did not disappear during the invasion. Instead, Irish culture continued in Connacht and was intermixed with Anglo-Norman culture. In early Irish texts, there is also literary precedent for Derbforgaill. Medb, an early Irish heroine demanded equality and was a powerful leader. Medb was an active warrior similar to Derbforgaill. Brigit, is an Irish saint who would lead a battle. Comparing Derbforgaill to Medb and Brigit will show how Irish society allowed women more power in theory, but in reality, it was expected that women remain in the domestic sphere. Yet, there were women that were active members of Irish society, unafraid to defy the norm.

II. Derbforgaill in the *Annals of Connacht*

In the *Annals of Connacht*, there are three direct references to Derbforgaill. Although she is only mentioned in three instances, her immediate family is mentioned more. Here are the records of Derbforgaill which will be referred to throughout this chapter and further analyzed. She is first mentioned in 1315:

> Aed O Domnaill, King of Tir Conaill, came into Carbury and ravaged the whole district, being advised thereto by his wife, the daughter of Magnus O Conchobair. She herself,

> with all the gallowlgasses and men of the Clan Murtagh that he could obtain, marched against the churches of Drumcliff and plundered many of its clergy.[158]

Then, in 1316, Derborgaill [Derbforgaill] commits a surprising action going against her husband

> Aed O Domnaill and all the Cenel Conaill assembled a great army and came into Carbury again, reaching Castelconor this time. And Ruardri son of Domnaill O Conchobair parted with his kinsmen and made peace by himself with O Domnail, yielding to him the lordship of Carbury. But Derbforgaill daughter of Magnus of Conchobair hired a band of gallowglasses and gave them a reward for killing Ruardri son of Domnaill O Conchobair; so by them he was killed, in violations of oaths sworn to him previously on the relics of Tirconnell. After this the chief families of Carbury were extensively plundered by the Cenel Conaill.[159]

Finally, the last instance records her death later that year as,

"Derbforgaill, daughter of Magnus O Conchobair and wife of Aed O Domnaill, died."[160]

Because her death takes place only a year later, it is difficult to know the personal consequences of her actions. The simple recording of her death does not reflect one of the many gruesome deaths recorded in the *Annals of Connacht* giving evidence that she did not received any personal injury because of her actions.

Even without the further in-depth analysis of the recordings, two points are clear. First, Derbforgaill was described as an active participant in the world around her, making her own decisions and giving advice. Second, recording family connections and genealogy are very important. People are defined not only by their actions but by who they are related to and in partnership with. Historian Kenneth Nicholls describes the importance of genealogy stating that "in a lineage-based society the keeping of genealogies is of primary importance. Not only is membership of the clan conferred by descent, but the precise details of descent may determine a person's legal rights…in Ireland the keeping of genealogies was entrusted to the professional

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[158] Ibid, 241.
[159] Ibid, 243.
[160] Ibid, 249.

families of scribes and chroniclers."[161] The importance of family connections is seen as there was even a profession of recording genealogy. Family relations in medieval Ireland are especially important when considering the man Derbforgaill had killed is also a part of the Conchobair family. Kinship in medieval Ireland were extremely complicated. The person in power was often disposed, many times by their own immediate family. Focusing on Derbforgaill's active role in society and the complicated importance of family relationships are crucial to understanding medieval Irish society and the discussion of Derbforgaill's extraordinary position.

III. Power Structures: Being a King's Wife

Derbforgaill's actions are important because they show a place where a woman entered the political sphere. Derbforgaill's husband, Aed O Domnaill, was an Irish king, giving Derbforgaill a higher position in society. Historian Kenny states that "the wife of a Gaelic chieftain was independently wealthy and was also, by virtue of her marriage entitled to some share of the chief's authority over his territory… sometimes [they] became very involved in the political concerns of their husband's families through their active involvement in Ireland."[162] Derbforgaill was actively involved in raiding and advising, clearly involved in the political world around her. Kenny even mentions Derbforgaill as an example of a powerful woman.[163] Derbforgaill's position in society gave her authority, but she also took advantage of her position. Derbforgaill refused to be "protected" in the domestic sphere where women were expected to

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[161] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Smurfit Print, 1972), 9.
[162] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 72.
[163] Ibid.

remain.[164] Derbforgaill was part of the Irish ruling class, just as Elizabeth de Burgh was a part of Anglo-Norman nobility. The two cultures had different ruling structures. Anglo-Norman structure centered around one king while the Irish system had many different clan leaders and a symbolic high king, but both had many power struggles for control.[165] Both women held high positions in societies entangled in an endless fight for power.

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth were able to be involved in the political world because they held power themselves as landowners. Derbforgaill had the right to authority with her status as a chieftain's wife, but this power caused societal anxiety. Kenny states that "thanks to such activities [Derbforgaill's actions], some Gaelic wives were acknowledged by the authorities as being both troublesome and dangerous to the Church and state."[166] Debrfogaill plundered a church, unconcerned with the religious morality of this act, and she broke an oath sworn on relics. She defied religious sanctity and political trust in her actions. In her defiance, she broke sacred confidence in the system, rebelling against the expectations, showing that religion and oaths were not as revered as one would think. Gaelic wives viewed as "troublesome and dangerous" reflects broader social fears on both the status of woman overall, and the fact that in medieval Irish society was rebellious and power quickly switched hands. In fact, Derbforgaill's

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[164] David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 130-131. Wyatt states that in pre-industrial societies, power was seen as an accumulation of wealth. Women were viewed as possesions to be accumulated by powerful men.
[165] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*. See chapter II for more information on Irish clans and pages 143-146 to see power conflicts between the de Burgh and O'Connor families along with O'Connor factionalism. For more information on the limitations on Irish high kings making them unable to hold control authority over Ireland like in England, see Chapter I in James Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).
[166] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540*, 72-73.

actions occur in the middle of an invasion of Ireland as her personal vendetta is centered in a rebellion of Ireland.

IV. Whose Authority?

Derbforgaill's highs status marriage suggests that she came into the marriage with her own strength and land. She was powerful in her own right. Kenny states that Derbforgaill gained her power "by virtue of her marriage".[167] This statement suggests that there were powerful women in Ireland, but their power came from their husband. Yet, while Derbforgaill was involved in her husband's affairs, she was also active in her own family's affairs, independent of her husband. She even went against the peace made by her husband to avenge her brothers. In 1315, "great raids were made by the sons of Domnall [O Conchobair] on the Clan Murtagh…they killed Magnus son of Magnus and Domnall son of Magnus…[killed by] the sons of Domnall son of Tadc O Conchobair, namely Ruardri."[168] Derbforgaill had power in her own right, her husband took her advice, and when necessary, she defied his authority to extract revenge.

The Irish landscape was the scene of constant fighting as many different family factions were in contention for power. Combined with familial fights was the fact that the Anglo-Normans also tried to control the area. The Irish fought against the Anglo-Normans as they invaded. Robin Frame writes that Ireland "was a country where warfare was a routine part of life"[169]. Derbforgaill was active in the warfare of Ireland. In hiring men to kill Ruardri, Derbforgaill takes matters into her own hands. Not only does she participate in the politics, she

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[167] Ibid, 72.
[168] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 237. More of Tadc O Conchobair's sons also participated in the raid.
[169] Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain 1170 – 1450* (London: Hambledon Press, 1998), 222.

facilitates the outcome that she wants. When peace is offered and given, Derbforgaill does not accept this and hires men to kill Ruardri. Robin Frame suggests that in an area where warfare is acceptable, truces were broken when they did not give the opportunity for revenge or where land was seen to be unfairly taken.[170] Derbforgaill did not accept peace when she had not achieved her revenge. Lisa Bitel claims that women "did not seem to kill their kinsmen for land, power, or vengeance. No references directly implicated and women in fingal [kin slaying]".[171] Bitel's statement does not appear to be fully accurate in the case of Derbforgaill. While Derbforgaill did not kill Ruardri with her own hands, there is no doubt that the text directly implicates Derbforgaill. She hired the men. She violated the previously sworn oaths. Derbforgaill used her own authority in the decision to kill Ruardri placing family honor over the truce from her husband. Derbforgaill may have had access to power as a chieftain's wife, but she wielded her own power for her own purposes. Derbforgaill's actions, separate from her husband's allowed her to seek vengeance, placing her directly in the action. She was not on the periphery making decisions, but in control of men to raid, with money to kill. Derbforgaill is a strong woman that defied societal expectation to seek the outcome she favored.

Not only did killing Ruardri complete her revenge, but Derbforgaill had political motivation too. Ruardri was descended from Brian Luignech, another one of Toirdhalblhach Mor O'Conor's sons.[172] After Ruardri's death, Carbury was then plundered. Carbury was the ancestral home of the Brian Luigneach descendants.[173] Not only was vengeance sought, but both Derbforgaill and her husband benefitted from raiding the area. In fact, as mentioned earlier,

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[170] Ibid, 236.
[171] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland*, 143-144.
[172] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 243 and779.
[173] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53,* 9.

Derbforgaill's marriage to Aed continued the tradition of both the Tir Conaill and Conchobair family holding land in Carbury. The punitive raiding after Ruardri's death reasserted Derbforgaill and Aed's authority to the territory. Derbforgaill, and her husband, benefitted politically, and monetarily with the death of Ruardri. They plundered his ancestral home showing that Derbforgaill and Aed held the power. Not only did Derbforgaill's actions show her own power, but it helped her further her control over the land.

V. Women in Power

Derbforgaill O Conchobair tells the story of a woman engaged in the political activities that surrounded her family. Although the amount of women mentioned in the *Annals of Connacht* is slim, Derbforgaill has an active role in manipulating the events around her. Just in being mentioned in the annals, Derbforgaill must have been a regarded figure in her time. Helen Oxenham in *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* writes that for the women recorded in annals "those who stand out are extraordinary; their power makes them individually visible in the sources".[174] Oxenham gives proof of the extraordinary nature of women represented in the annals by categorizing the amount and types of women recorded in Irish Annals from the fifth century to the start of the tenth century.[175] In these five hundred years, only fifty-four women are mentioned.[176] Almost all the women mentioned were "royal and ecclesiastical women."[177] The annals do not give examples to the daily lives of women in Ireland, but instead show instances where women defied the expected norm and gained power. Although the women recorded in the annals show atypical cases, it does not mean that powerful women were absent from Ireland's

[174] Helen Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* (Woodbridge; Boydell Press, 2016), 90.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid, 90-94.
[177] Ibid, 97.

history. Their stories are intertwined with the larger history of Ireland. Although women's lives are normally defined by a "domestic sphere" that is separated from the lives of men, the recorded women are connected to the events and people around them, not separated.

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth de Burgh both lived in an unequal, patriarchal world as demonstrated in marraige. Author Bart Jaski explores marriage laws in the early Middle Ages for Ireland finding that "women were ultimately subject to men as regards to their social status and legal rights."[178] Women went from being property of their fathers to their husbands. Even in religious vocations, women were still the brides of Christ, married to their faith.[179] Once married, men and women were expected to lead separate lives. Women and men were viewed as different in Irish society, both fulfilling separate societal roles. Bitel writes of their separate roles in marriage stating that

> When properly nurtured, the partnership of man and woman flourished within the dark, enclosing walls of an isolated farmhouse, but once the couple emerged into daylight outside their domestic fortress, they parted. Each of them tended to cling to others of the same sex. The social networks of the two sexes touched, grew parallel, and occasionally even intertwined, but their roots remained distinct. Everything outside worked to separate them; the culture's suspicion of women, the gendered division of labor, political structures that granted power to men but not women, and legal arenas that reinforced those politics…the legal domestic couple, did they graft together, and then not always successfully or permanently[180]

Bitel's metaphor demonstrates a society centered around the idea of marriage for its societal benefit. In such a society, women could hold control but only in their separate social world.

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[178] Bart Jaski, "Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages," in Christine Meeks and Katherine Simms, ed. *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 17.
[179] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 176.
[180] Ibid, 138.

Societal attitudes, and as Bitel claims, fears of women, kept men and women separated. Even the idea of honor was tied to separating men and women. Writer Mair Ni Dhonnchdha states that "women might keep within the household enclosure for their own safety, male honor was also upheld by their remaining there. Women of the church submitted themselves even more emphatically to enclosure…female honor and freedom to roam tended to be opposed to each other in medieval Irish sources."[181] In an unequal society where death could come suddenly and there was dangers, not just of disease and accidents, but of family feuds and invasions, staying at the domestic front seems practical for safety. [182] Yet, it also shows how medieval society attempted to disconnect women from the political and economic spheres outside of their immediate enclosure. Women did and could interact with men, but it was kept in the bedroom, in the safety of the home. Yet, Derbforgaill did not remain enclosed in the home. She raided throughout the countryside. While women were expected to remain separate and in safety, in reality, a few women used their political power in the same sphere as men. Derbforgaill defied the norm, she was active even outside of the home, holding power in the same sphere as men, not separately.

To better understand Derbforgaill and the societal views for medieval Irishwomen, the expected role of women in medieval Ireland will be explained. The role of women was defined by medieval texts. The scholarship shows the expected roles of women, but it also demonstrates

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[181] Mair Ni Dhonnchadha, "Travellers and Settled Folk: Women, Honor, and Shame in Medieval Ireland," in Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, ed., *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 19.

[182] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944). In reading the entries for any year, one sees that death is frequent and constant. Not even animals were spared from dramatic death, in 1335 it is recorded "heavy snow in the spring, which killed most of the small birds of all Ireland" and in 1315, right before mentioning Derbfoghaill it is also written that there were "very many deaths, famine and many strange diseases, murders, and intolerable storms" as well.

how women gained power and were viewed as powerful. For example, Derbforgaill's actions stem from a literary tradition of active women in early Irish mythology and religious texts. Although there is precedent for powerful women, medieval expectations for women show that Derbforgaill was an extraordinary woman. Warrior women may have been idolized, but this is not how women were actually expected to act. Exploring the different aspects of women's lives in medieval Ireland and Derbforgaill's own life show a strong woman performing the unexpected by taking matters into her own hand, similar to her counterpart, Elizabeth de Burgh. Although Elizabeth de Burgh came from an Anglo-Norman society, the lives of these two women overlap in Ireland in their defiance of their expected role.

VI. Women's Role defined in the *Cain Adamnain*

An important description of the societal role for women is in the early Irish text *Cain Adamnain*. This Irish early manuscript gives women protection while defining their societal role. The unique manuscript is part of early Irish Catholicism. In the early days of Christianity for Ireland, Irish monks and priests created a mythological and interpretive view of Christianity. Kenneth Nicholls summarizes this view in saying "the Irish Church had developed its own peculiar pattern in virtual isolation, that a pattern of organization had emerged quite distinct from that prevalent in western Christendom as a whole."[183] One of the unique aspects in the development of the Irish Church was *Cain Adamnai*n which gives the "emancipation of women."[184] Historian Bitel explains that the manuscript is authentic, and it is an important

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[183] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 91. Although most historians write on the isolation of the Irish Church in the early Middle Ages, Benedict Fitzpatrick claims that the Irish have an early Medieval tradition of missionary work into Britain and beyond. Benedict Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Making of Britain*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1922).

[184] Kuno Meyer, trans. *Cain Adamnain: An Old Irish Treatise on the Laws of Adamnan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 13.

document with a history that can be traced. Bitel states that "*Cain Adamnain* is datable and linked to an authentic historical figure…the text can reliably be assigned to a decade of the saint's life, 690-700."[185] Overall, the treaty is about the protection of the innocent. Women are considered innocent and are given protection in the text. The treaty not only protects women from harm but also defines the limits on women. The text states that women did not have a place on the battlefield. Women are given freedom, but it comes at a cost. Women were given their freedom after Adamnan's mother tells of a gruesome site where

> they behold the battlefield, they saw nothing more touching and more pitiful than the head of a woman in one place and the body in another, and her little babe upon the breasts of the corpse…and the woman who was there resuscitated at the word of Adamnan was Smirgat daughter of Aed Finn King of the Brefni of Connaught…'well now, Adamnan,' said she, 'to thee henceforward it is given to free the women of the western world.[186]

This scene tells of the horror of battle with the idea that the "freedom" of women protects them from the fate of battle. The treaty outlines specific punishments for men that inflicted pain on a woman, but part of their protection meant that women were required to stay enclosed and safe.[187] Although women are "free," they are limited in their role and expected to remain far from the action. The text is important because it is an example of where medieval Irishwomen were given more rights, but these rights still excluded them from Irish society. Women were protected and those that ignored their protected status were punished, but women were not trusted to participate in society. Derbforgaill breaks away from the idea that women should not participate in bloodshed as she planned Ruardri's murder, but she serves as a unique example. Although

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[185] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland*, 104.
[186] Kuno Meyer, trans. *Cain Adamnain: An Old Irish Treatise on the Laws of Adamnan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 4-7.
[187] Ibid, 21-33.

Derbforgaill went against societal expectation, it appears that for the most part, ideas outlined in the *Cain Adamnain*, of women remaining outside the political, war-torn society was upheld.

Cain Adamnain is more than just a religious doctrine, it was a social contract. Adamnain gives a list of the men that saw the treaty as law including Congalach son of Fergus, king of Tirconnell and Cellach son of Ragallach, King of Connaught.[188] The inclusion of real people in the treaty shows that although it is a religious text, it also had authority from the important rulers in Ireland. It was not just a text for the Church, but one that was supposed to be followed by all. Both the ancestors of Derbforgaill and of her husband thought that women's place was away from battle. Derbforgaill broke the societal contract signed by her ancestors. Her actions make her responsible for killing a man. She is not afraid of the warfare around her, showing that although her family had signed the contract to protect women, Derbforgaill herself would not stay away from the action. She was willing to break the treaty made for the protection of women to defend her family's honor and remain a powerful ruler.

The role of women in medieval Ireland became increasingly limited. The *Cain Adamnain* is an example of an expansion in limiting women by defining them in motherhood. Bitel explains that "by 900…the *Cain*, had become part of an ongoing discussion of the literati over the function and importance of mothers and Christian women generally."[189] The story tells of the important creation of protection for women with their role in society as mothers. Unlike the idea that women should remain far from battlefield, author David Wyatt writes that "in the pre-Christian era it had been possible for a woman to assume the role of a warrior."[190] As the medieval era went on, women could no longer be warriors, but instead, they were expected to

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[188] Ibid, 19.
[189] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland*, 104.
[190] David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland 800-1200*, 199.

stay in the home having children. The *Cain Adamnain* was written before the Anglo-Norman invasion, showing that Irish society was becoming stricter for women's position even before the more restrictive Anglo-Norman culture arrived in Ireland. Overall medieval society continued to become more limiting for women, yet some women, like Derbforgaill and Elizabeth worked to remain in control and defy the societal norms.

Cain Adamnain was a part of an ongoing discussion about motherhood as women's roles grew more limited, centering women as mothers instead of having their own identity too. The treaty demonstrated the new, expected role of women as peaceful mothers under the protection of God, and men. Yet, although women were no longer supposed to be a warrior, Derbforgaill breaks this societal norm. Derbforgaill acts with with warrior-like skills leading men in raids and seeking vengeance. Derbforgaill defied the expectation of being a peaceful women enveloped in the protection of God as she plundered churches and went against the sanctity of a promise made on saint's relics.[191] Although there is historical, religious precedent for the expected behaviors of a woman, Derbforgaill was not afraid of upsetting the societal or religious norm as she went out into the world.

VII. Marriage in medieval Ireland

Not only were women controlled by religious ideas, but marriage kept women enclosed in unequal partnerships. Early Ireland had extensive laws on marriage differing from the typical medieval customs. Irish marriage laws gave women more freedom allowing them to enter into a

[191] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 241-243. "Derbforgaill daughter of Magnus of Conchobair hired a band of gallowglasses and gave them a reward for killing Ruardri son of Domnaill O Conchobair; so by them he was killed, in violations of oaths sworn to him previously on the relics of Tirconnell. After this the chief families of Carbury were extensively plundered by the Cenel Conaill."

legal realm.[192] Yet, even with more legal rights, Irish women still faced a life typical of any other medieval woman. Historians Frances and Joseph Gies explain the life of noblewomen stating that women were married as young teenagers, with a betrothal that occurred even earlier.[193] They further explain that in marriage, women had many children and then "by thirty, if she survived the hazards of childbirth, she could expect to be widowed, married, or a grandmother."[194] The ritualistic pattern of a woman's life represents the political nature of marriage in the medieval world. Marriage was part of a woman's duty. A woman's life was centered around the expectation of marriage. As explained earlier, Derbforgaill's marriage was arranged to keep the peace between two powerful families. Her marriage was politically motivated showing that powerful women were used to keep societal peace, even if the women themselves were not peaceful.

The chapter on Elizabeth de Burgh demonstrates how in her marriage decision it was important for her to remember the expectation that she would stay in her marriage until her husband's death. This idea was not always accurate for an Irish marriage. Joseph and Frances Gies claims "there was no legal divorce," in the medieval world, but this was not true for Ireland.[195] Kenny compares marriage for Irish and Anglo-Irish women throughout the Middle Ages and in for Irishwomen she finds that

> Gaelic culture allowed for the couple to dissolve the relationship and enter a new one. The grounds for divorce were wide…if he had concealed his impotency, if he was too fat to have intercourse, if he neglected or beat her, if he gossiped about her sexual

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[192] Helen Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, 68. Oxenham states that "women are evidently better off in early Ireland than other Medieval regions, and this is ensured by the terms of their marital rights than in other medieval regions…women are thus actors in the legal sphere, but in a specifically feminine legal sphere".
[193] Joseph Gies and Frances Gies, *Life in a Medieval Castle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974), 78.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid, 79.

> performance to others and if he was a homosexual. Similarly, a man could divorce his wife on many grounds…after the couple divorced, the wife was usually allowed to receive her marriage-portion back.[196]

Irishwomen did have legal protection. In the *Cain Adamnain*, there was great worry over the safety of women, and both religious and legal entities were created to keep women safe. In the case of Irish legal texts for marriage, women held more power because it was easier for them to divorce their husbands, but in a society where women were seen as needing the protection of a male figure, just because a woman could divorce her husband does not mean she could be independent. Derbforgaill has independent actions, but she is also married. She still has the protection of a male figure in marriage. She may not appear to care of the consequences of her actions or her husband's wishes, and while she defies the norm in her actions, her marriage still follows societal expectations.

Although in general, medieval marriage was not actually equal for men and women, there was supposed to be equality within an Irish marriage. Jaski claims that a marriage was expected to be of equals.[197] He finds that men could become dependent on a woman if she contributed the most to the marriage fund.[198] Even if her husband was dependent on his wife, women found it hard to actually gain independence because of their "inability to inherit land permanently."[199] Women did not gain property through inheritance, and so, they would need to marry in order to ensure protection. There could never be true equality, because women needed marriage for

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[196] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540,* 102.
[197] Bart Jaski, "Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages," in Christine Meeks and Katherine Simms, ed. *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context*, 22-23. Jaski further says that in this equal marriage, "the wife enjoys almost the same contractual capacity as her husband, and can undertake legal transactions and responsibilities up to her honourprice (half of that of her husband, and related to his status); neither can undertake important legal transactions without the consent of the other".
[198] Ibid, 26.
[199] Ibid, 27.

protection. The concept of equality in an Irish marriage does show that women had powerful landholdings and were supposed to marry someone of similar status. Derbforgaill was an elite woman, and so for her marriage to be one of equals, she would need to marry a powerful ruler. Aed O Domnaill was an important king, and if the accepted and most desired marriage was one of equals, both must have had contributed significantly to the marriage. Not only did Derbforgaill contribute to the marriage through her lineage, she was a powerful actor in her marriage. The date of marriage for Derbforgaill and her husband is not recorded in the *Annals of Connacht*. It is unknown whether she was a young bride or mature women, but at whatever age, she played an active role in her marriage. She advised her husband, and he followed her request.[200] They must have had a partnership as he acts on her advice. Her father may have chosen her marriage for political purposes, but she would remain involved in politics in her marriage.

Like Elizabeth de Burgh, Derbforgaill's high position in society gave her more accessibility to participate in political society. Their high positions made them political ambassadors through marriage. When both women married, they combined the power of two families. Derbforgaill was offered as a part of a compromise with Aed Domnaill as she brought together two families' claims of power.[201] Elizabeth's marriage to John de Burgh combined the strength of the de Clare and de Burgh family together.[202] Both women were expected to help their families in their marriages. Author Elizabeth Mckenna writes that "marriage alliances between the leading families was regarded as as a basic element in the political process and one,

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[200] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht,* 241.
[201] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53,* 9.
[202] R. R. Davies, *Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 153.

moreover, which could be used to allow women of spirit and intelligence the opportunity of becoming involved in political affairs".[203] As both women fulfilled their societal duty of marriage, they opened the door to defiance. Both Elizabeth and Derbforgaill placed family loyalty as a priority, entering marriage to help their family and then in defiance. Derbforgaill had a man murdered to complete familial revenge. Elizabeth went against the king to keep her family land intact. They participated in the political world as actors on their own, but they entered the political world in their political marriages. Although Derbforgaill has independent power and does not seem to gain all her power through her husband as Kenny suggests, marriage is the first entrance to the political world for these noblewomen.[204] After their marriage, both Elizabeth and Derbforgaill participated in politics, independent of the initial act of getting married. In her second marriage to Theobald de Verdon, Elizabeth even used marriage to defy the expectation that she would marry whomever the king demanded. Derbforgaill went against her husband's truce, defying his authority. Both women held power in their marriages, but they were still constrained by the societal duty of marriage. Both women were political actors even if their first political action was through a marriage not of their choosing.

VIII. Family Matters

One reason that women did not normally defy the social norm was over fear that their actions would harm their children. In a society that relied on alliances, although they may have been tenuous, to exchange power, women were at a disadvantage. Many women could not provide the same alliance as men because of limitations in controlling property. Also, in

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[203] Elizabeth McKenna, "A Politicial Role for Women in Medieval Ireland," in Christine Meeks and Katherine Simms, ed. *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context*, 164.
[204] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540*, 72.

marriage, a woman entered into a new family. In this new family, she would have to deal with a set of family alliances different than the ones she grew up with. In Ireland there was a system of fostering. Fostering was when "persons of importance would commit the upbringing of their children to others…the practice was of considerable political importance".[205] In fostering, women wanted to have some control over who would raise their children. Bitel states that "for mothers seeking to fortify ties to their own kin and maintain partial control over the raising of their children, fosterage supplied the means".[206] The fostering system was another way to take power from women because it regulated them as just "birth givers," but the *Cain Adamnain* helped show the honor of motherhood.[207] Although, motherhood limited women' participation in society, it gave women more power in the fosterage system. Women wanted to gain the most advantageous alliances for their children, and they used their position as mothers to protect their children. Women worked to form their own alliances to help their children and have some control over their children's lives. For Derbforgaill, disrupting the norm is a risk to more than just her. She is still reliant on an unequal society for protection for her and her children, and in her defiance she ignored the risk.

It is not known how old Derfogaill was when she had Ruardri killed or how old her children were. In the *Annals of Connacht*, Derbforgaill is the only wife of Aed O Domnaill, but the text mentions three different sons for Aed. Katherine Simms claims that Aed O Domnaill was married twice with Derbfoghaill as his second wife.[208] Simms states that his first wife was a

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[205] Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 79.
[206] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland*, 98.
[207]Idid, 98-103.
[208] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53,* 14.

daughter of O'Gallagher and together they had one child, Niall.[209] After his marriage to Derbforgaill, it appears unlikely that Aed remarried. Before his death, he "entered rest in the cloak of a Gray Monk…after confession and repentance."[210] Although he had previously plundered churches, he seems alone and willing to repent before death. Although it is not known what effect Derbforgaill's actions had on her children, it appears that her children, and stepson, followed in their parents' footprints. One of her sons is named Conchobhar, seeming to pay homage to Derbforgaill O Conchobair and her natal family.[211] The children also have the same murdering spirit as their parents, as the three sons sought to gain their father's kingship with two of the sons murdering their brothers to take the kingship[212]. Derbforgaill has family loyalty, but the brothers' murders, show that power often came before loyalty. Derbforgaill's sons and stepson demonstrates the fact that people were willing to break kinship ties in order to gain power. Derbforgaill was loyal to her kinship ties, but in doing so, she gained power, raiding the land after Ruardri's death. She also defied the alliance her husband made with Ruardri as Derbforgaill's loyalty did not extend to her husband's alliances. Derbforgaill and her family illustrate that medieval Ireland had a different set of rules and customs for each person when trying to find power and opportunity. On top of this, women had another layer of societal expectations worrying over the fate of their children, even when their own children may murder each other.

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[209] Ibid.
[210] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 273.
[211] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, 14.
[212] Ibid 273, 293, 295. A brutal example of a one brother killing another is when "Conchobar O Domnall, king of Tir Conaill…his nobility and splendor and excellent bounty and valor, was killed by Niall O Domnaill, his own father's son. The house at Findros was burned over his head and as he came out he was slain in the doorway".

Derbforgaill is extraordinary in how she has defied the societal norm, but she is not the only extraordinary woman. Derbforgaill is an example of a woman that had a high position in society and used this advantage to gain power. Women who held power gained their power through brutal actions. For example, in 1305, the O'Connor family was at the mercy of another powerful woman Ela de Oddingeles. Ela helped her husband commit murder. Ela "watched and warned [her husband] when any of the O Connors tried to hide"[213] In the end, with Ela's help, Piers de Bermingham, her husband, killed twenty-nine members of the O Connor Faly family[214]. Women were active participants, even when their participation helped facilitate destruction. They were not always peaceful mothers in the home, but women willing to kill for power.

IX. Powerful Precedent: Brigit and Medb

Derbforgaill also has literary precedence to strong women in Irish history. Queen Medb is a fearsome warrior goddess that wanted equality in her marriage and was willing to start a war which spread across Ireland to meet her demands. St. Brigit, is one of the most important figures in Catholicism for Ireland. Brigit performed miracles and became a bishop, defying her expected role. Queen Medb is a figure of mythology, but her story is represented in archeological sites throughout Ireland and is seen as representing Ireland itself.[215] Looking at these two women's actions help understand Derbforgaill. Derbforgaill is unique as she was a real, historical figure, but strong women were not unknown to the mythology and religious spirit of early and medieval Ireland. Comparing Derbforgaill to these two women also helps show that although these figures have been glorified, overcoming the societal restriction for women.

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[213] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540,* 62.
[214] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 207. The Annals of Connacht make no mention of his wife, hiding the fact that women were active participants in the political process.
[215] Lewis Perry Curtis, "The Four Erins: Feminine Images of Ireland 1780-1900." *Eire Ireland 33*, no.1 (Spring 1988): 70-102 (accessed April 13, 2018), ebscohost.com.

St. Brigit is a legendary figure. The Church often seems to only value women as mothers or for their purity, but it also gave images of powerful women and an alternative life for women as an abbess or nun.[216] Even with these images, the Church still actively maintained control over the lives of women.[217] Brigit is an Irish saint, but she also had a warrior image. Judith Bishop explains Brigit rewarding the king of Laigan who prays to her. Because of his prayers, Brigit helps him win his battle. Bishop states that

> each of the four major saints is active…in political affairs and even warfare. As usual, the example of Brigit is the most striking…when outnumbered in battle, he had his soldiers call upon the saint. 'Whereupon the king immediately saw saint Brigit going before him into battle with her staff in her right hand and a column of fire was blazing skywards from her head. Then the enemy were routed and the king and his household gave thanks to God and Brigit'…the unforgettable vision of Brigit leading a military charge.[218]

Although the *Cain* states that women are free from the battlefield, Brigit has power, by leading the battle. The Church may expect women to stay enclosed in the abbey, but the saints that inspire, were out on the battlefield. Just as Derbforgaill raids the countryside, Brigit was represented as leading the warfare of early and medieval Ireland. Yet, ironically, Derbforgaill, plundered churches while Brigit lead battles with the power of God. Derbforgaill's husband was able to repent even after plundering churches. Derbforgaill's own plundering of churches does not mean that she was not part of Catholic society, even if her actions seem against religion. In medieval Ireland, the Church was powerful, but it still needed the support of local kings, even if those kings lead raids against the Church. The Church relied on patronage and gained wealth and

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[216] Brigit is also connected to Ballintober, as she has her own well in the town.
[217] Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Fender from Early Ireland*, 167-203. See Chapter Eight: "Priests' Wives and Brides of Christ".
[218] Judith L Bishop, "They kept Their Skirts On: Gender-Bending Motifs in Early Irish Hagiography," in Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, ed., *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 118.

power when wealthy families entered the Church as nuns and monks. Jaski writes that the Church even wanted to complement the secular law too.[219] The images of St. Brigit and the treatment of Derbforgaill's husband shows that there is a practical nature to bending gender norms or "forgetting" the plundering of a church. The Church needed support and that support came from the Irish kings who participated in warfare. This need means that religious saints were represented in warfare. Although a woman, Brigit can lead battles in the name of God. She has power and wields it in battle. Derbforgaill gained her own power participating in warfare. Even if it was expected that women remain at home, in reality, women were active in warfare. They had power and used it to win wars.

Medb is the heroine of the *Tàin*. The text has a long oral history but it was recorded in Old Irish prose in the eighth or ninth century, with two surviving text from the twelfth century.[220] Overall, the *Tàin* is a collection of stories, part of the Ulster Cycle.[221] Medb is a powerful ruler, she is the queen of Connacht. Medb was in the nobility just like Derbforgaill. Medb is famously known for starting a war in her attempts to gain a bull to create perfectly equal wealth, and power, with her husband.[222] The idea of equality in marriage is shown in the *Tàin*. Similar to Medb, Derbforgaill appears to have had a marriage of equality. Medb describes herself as "the goodliest of them in bounty and gift-giving, in riches and treasures. 'Twas I was best of them in battle and strife and combat. 'Twas I that had fifteen hundred royal

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[219] Bart Jaski, "Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages," in Christine Meeks and Katherine Simms, ed. *'The Fragility of her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context*, 41.
[220] Helen Fulton, *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*), (Online: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), abstract.
[221] Ibid.
[222] David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200*, 199.

mercenaries".[223] Medb was powerful, knowing her strength. She was not afraid to demand her rights. Like Medb, Derbforgaill was a warrior who fought for what she wanted. There were warrior women represented in religious and mythological Irish stories, and these women had real counterparts, who raided and planned killings.

X. In the End

Overall, Derbforgaill is an important reminder that there were powerful women that defied societal norms. Women were active in the political world. Societal expectation may have been for women to be mothers, stay enclosed in a domestic sphere, and foster children, but women like Derbforgaill moved throughout Ireland. Derbforgaill and Elizabeth have personal rebellions, defying authority figures and holding onto natal family loyalty. With Derbforgaill's death in 1316, her story ends, shortly after its beginning in the historical record.[224] It is not known what other rebellious actions she accomplished in her life, but the actions recorded show a woman unafraid. Derbforgaill and Elizabeth's families were in personal contention, but these two women had their own rebellions. They may have never met and lived different lives, but they were connected by landownership. They were both landowners, of the same area, holding power as noblewomen. They used their role as noblewomen to defy kings and hold their position even if it went against societal norms. Derbforgaill had her own family loyalty, acting independently. Simms states that "the difference of opinion between Aodh O'Donnell and his wife shows that the need to secure Tir Conaill's southern borders by controlling Carbury was more important to the King of Tir Conaill than simply maintaining a feud between his in-

[223] Steve Tyler, "Tàin bó Cualgne (Joseph Dunn translation)," (accessed 13 April 2018), vasser.edu.
[224] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, 243.

laws".[225] For Derbforgaill the "feud," was a part of her family's honor. It was important to her, and so, she had Ruardri killed. Simm's statement demonstrates that Derbforgaill planned the murder, acting on her own. She had her own priorities, and she went against her husband to accomplish them. Derbforgaill was a strong Irishwoman who brought to reality her literarily representation from early Irish stories.

[225] Katherine Simms, "A Lost Tribe: The Clan Murtagh O'Connors" *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society 53*, 12.

Conclusion

I. Do Not Forget the Women

Derbforgaill Conchobair and Elizabeth de Burgh were both extraordinary women. Derbforgaill took action, leading raids and planning the murder of her brothers' killer. Elizabeth chose her marriage against the king's wishes, was imprisoned as a traitor, and supported overthrowing Edward II. They were noblewomen from powerful Irish and Anglo-Norman families, and they used their elevated position in society to have an active role in politics. Both took great risks in defying the social norm, but they always remained strategic. Derbforgaill planned Ruaidri Conchobair's murder, defying her husband's truce with Ruaidri. [226] Not only did Derbforgaill's actions defy her husband, but her husband was the king of Tir Conaill, she defied the authority of her king. Yet, after Ruaidri's death, Derbforgaill and her husband raided Ruaidri's ancestral lands, reasserting their authority. Elizabeth defied the king in her second marriage. Using the guise of an abduction marriage, she married Theobald de Verdon while under the king's control.[227] Yet, when Edward II pressured her into her third marriage to Roger Damory, Elizabeth accepted. She put her land and children's protection before her personal feelings.[228] In the end, this marriage lead to her and her husband being considered traitors, rebelling against the king. Even when Elizabeth initially followed the king's wishes, her marriage ended in defiance.

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth were active in the political world. They refused to be silenced. Historian David Wyatt says that "generally the conservative and intensely patriarchal *literati*

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[226] A. Martin Freeman, ed., *Annals of Connacht*, (Dublin: Alex Thom & Co., 1944), 243.
[227] Jennifer Ward ed., *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 42.
[228] Frances A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de* Burgh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 19.

probably chose to overlook the deeds of such exceptional women."[229] Derbforgaill and Elizabeth's actions are recorded. Although the sources are limited, they do exist. Derbforgaill is mentioned in the *Annals of Connacht*. She held power for herself, showing a woman as a dominant leader, and the literati could not ignore her. Elizabeth, herself, ensured that her name would survive, leaving detailed records of her estate and final wishes.[230] Her records reveal her role as an active, independent landowner. Elizabeth wanted to leave a legacy, endowing Clare College at Cambridge and many religious houses. These women should be remembered for their active role in medieval society.

This thesis has shown that in medieval Ireland, there were women in control. Women's actions were often ill-recorded in primary sources, leaving historians to piece together their stories. It is worthwhile and necessary to uncover more about the women that disrupt the social order. Societal fear about powerful women in medieval Ireland helped to restrict women's interaction with the political world.[231] These fears, however, demonstrate that there were indeed powerful women who controlled their land, circumventing the traditional, patriarchal society. Historians must relook at primary sources, searching to find where women held power. Although Irishwomen in the home helped keep Irish culture alive, Derbforgaill and Elizabeth held power outside the home, demanding that their authority be heard.

Derbforgaill and Elizabeth appear inspired by the rebellion that occurred while they both lived in Ireland. In the Bruce Invasion, they staged their own moments of defiance. Although

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[229] David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 204.
[230] Jennifer Ward, *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare (1295-1360)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014).
[231] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 72-73.

Elizabeth was Anglo-Norman and Derbforgaill Irish, both women desired autonomy. This desire is reflected in women across time and place. Derbforgaill and Elizabeth demonstrate instances where women held power, and even when they fulfilled the societal expectation of marriage, they would demonstrate their agency. They defied their expected role of being silent women remaining in the home, and instead Derbforgaill led raids across Ireland and Elizabeth helped depose a king. We cannot ignore the actions of these women, and we must search through history to see the women that demanded power. Medieval recorders wanted to forget the powerful women that defied expectations, but we cannot allow these women to be forgotten. They were active in society, in control of their lives and the world around them.

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