Christa, Christus: Christ's Transgressive, Gendered Flesh in Late Medieval European Literature

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ABSTRACT

Christa, Christus: Christ's Transgressive, Gendered Flesh in Late Medieval European Literature

This thesis examines responses to Christ's gendered flesh that are located not in canonical literary texts or traditional saints' lives, but in the sermons, visions and confessions of devout and orthodox men and women, whose orthodoxy, upon closer examination, is nevertheless decidedly *unorthodox*. In it, using a series of test cases, I argue that closer scrutiny of these non-canonical texts thus offers a more nuanced understanding of late-medieval notions of interplay between gender, sexuality and the divine than has been considered within previous scholarship.

Beginning with the thirteenth-century *Liber Specialis* of Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1298), I demonstrate that, although remaining within the bounds of orthodox scripture and exegesis, the Saxon author nevertheless presents her readers with a Christ whose identity as saviour is predicated on his elevation of the female and the fleshly, and whose symbiotic, fluid relationship with Mechthild implicates her as co-redeemer through a divine, glorious, joyful, and uniquely feminine fecundity. I follow this with a detailed close analysis of the early fourteenth-century transcript of a young woman's heresy trial in southern France, in which she confesses to equating Christ's body with the 'filth' of the afterbirth, a concept so awful to her that she had been unable to believe in God or the transubstantiation. As I argue, however, Auda Fabri, experiences a species of revelation not unlike other orthodox female mystics, but, lacking their communities of discourse, must remain in a state of abjection from which capitulation to androcentric authority alone can save her. My third case-study is a sermon by the fourteenth-century English priest, John Mirk, in which Christ condemns an unconfessed merchant to Hell through the clotted blood from his feminised side-wound, which he casts at the dying man. I argue that, in attempting to uphold orthodox belief and practices, Mirk reveals a profound anxiety regarding late-medieval beliefs regarding the body and feminised flesh of Christ, whose appearance Mirk eventually demonises. Finally, to initiate my set of conclusions, I focus briefly on a largely unknown thirteenth-century Hebrew text, in which a Jewish woman in Sicily seems to give birth to a messianic figure from her body, which drips honey and oil. The woman's ecstasy, resonant of the experiences of Christian women mystics like Mechthild, suggests some sort of commonality between the Sicilian Jewish and Christian female communities in pre-plague Europe.

Ultimately, then, this thesis argues for – and contributes to – the need for far wider recognition of the importance of non-canonical and more generically varied source material and its closer scrutiny to gain better understanding of the deeply gendered complexities attached to the many labile beliefs concerning Christ's flesh and blood during the Middle Ages.

List of Abbreviations

CCSL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis
EETS	Early English Text Society
e.s	Extra Series
o.s	Original Series
PL	Patrologia cursus completes: Series Latina, ed J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, 1861-64).
TEAMS	Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages

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INTRODUCTION

Christa, Christus: Christ's Transgressive, Gendered Flesh in Late Medieval European Literature

An altarpiece, known as *La Vergine de la Leche,* by the Valencian painter, Antoni Peris (d.1423), is housed in Valencia's Museum of Fine Arts. It covers an area of 386 x 277 cm., and is executed in tempera and gold leaf on wooden board. Originally located in the cloister of the convent of Santo Domingo in Valencia, the altarpiece suffered extensive damage on account of its age, environment, and unsympathetic restoration, with two panels being lost entirely. However, between 2001 and 2002 the two central panels, and another showing the Epiphany were painstakingly restored to their present condition.

The existing panels illustrate familiar scenes from the life of the Virgin: Christ's nativity, the Presentation of Christ at the temple, the Epiphany, the Flight into Egypt, the Crucifixion, and the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, nursing the infant Christ. In all but the Crucifixion panel, the Virgin displays her right breast from which she feeds the Christ-child whom she holds in her arms. This motif is given special prominence in the lower central panel, the largest of all the panels, which dominates the altarpiece. Milk spurts from the Virgin's breast, showering and feeding the throng of the devoted, who kneel at her feet, and carry vessels with which to collect it. The Christ-child also participates in this feast, directing his gaze at the beholder, and squeezing his mother's breast to feed the devoted. The presence, appearance and behaviour of the Christ-child closely identifies the Virgin's role as nourisher, with the Eucharist, and the beholder is confronted by several conventional reminders of Christ's impending crucifixion. Christ's head is haloed with gold, inset with a blood-red cross; around his neck hangs a piece of coral, a material valued for its healing and apotropaic properties, but also symbolizing Christ's passion and blood; and around his waist is tied a

scarlet girdle fringed with what look like drops of blood. Furthermore, the vessels lifted by the kneeling worshipers clearly reference the eucharist and crucifixion iconography.[1]

The association of Mary's milk with Christ's blood is reinforced by the Crucifixion panel above it. Christ's blood flows from the wounds in his hands, feet, and side, as well as from his head from the crown of thorns, and the rest of his body. Mirroring the milk from the Virgin's breast, it runs down his hands and drops at the elbow, spurts out of his side wound, showering the centurion, Longinus, who pierced Christ's side with his spear, flows into Christ's groin and gushes from Christ's feet, down the cross, and onto the rock below. The colour red predominates the two panels, serving further to connect the Virgin and her son. In addition to the coral, girdle and halo on the infant Christ, the colour is used for the Virgin's robe, wrapping the Christ-child, and flowing down to her feet at which the devoted (also clothed in red) kneel. Moreover, the red of the robes of the onlookers at the crucifixion also provides a sort of continuation of Christ's flowing blood.

In associating the Virgin's body with nursing Christ's bleeding one, Peris articulates the medieval theology that, since milk, it was believed, was blood heated and purified within the female body, in showing his love for humanity through his incarnation and death, the bleeding Christ demonstrated the characteristics of birthing, nurture and love conventionally associated with the maternal and female, of which the Virgin was the supreme, though sinless, example. In this way, Christ could be mother.[2] Although such an association existed as early as in late antiquity – in Augustine of Hippo's (d. 430) commentary on Psalm 126, for example - the notion of Christ as mother gained especial purchase from the twelfth century

[1] Antoni Peris, *La Vergine de la Leche*: <https://arterestauracion.com/retablos-2/retablo-de-la-virgen-de-la-leche-de-antoni-peris > [accessed 10 September 2020].
[2] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 110-25.

onwards, finding graphic expression in devotional writing and iconography.[3] However, the theology which linked Christ with the maternal coupled him with what was considered inferior and faulty, both in terms of Aristotelian teaching, and those of Judeo-Christian tradition, which associated the female with the fleshly, sexual, and sinful – the result of the Fall, and embodied in Eve and womankind. The divine was bound, therefore, to the potentially abhorrent. This is evident in *La Vergine de la Leche*, which explicitly juxtaposes and conflates the bleeding, open, feminized Christ, whose blood pours from his gendered wounds, with the Virgin, from whose breast milk continuously gushes: both feed the believer with Eucharistic nourishment, but whereas the potential sinfulness of the Virgin's own sexuality was sanitized of all female filth, Christ's corporeality assumed it. There is no evidence that Peris's depiction of Christ and the Virgin was regarded as anything other than orthodox, but the potential to develop the concept was certainly exploited during the later Middle Ages, and the line between orthodox and heterodox at times seems very thin. It is this potential for transgression that I investigate in my thesis, via three separate case-studies from three very different literary genres, as outlined later in this Introduction.

Representations of Christ's flesh and blood

References to Christ's salvific association with the female body appear as early as the fourth century in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. In both *De civitate dei contra paganos*, and *Enarrationes in psalmos* for example, Augustine comments that, just as Adam produced Eve from his side, so Christ, the second Adam, gives birth to *Ecclesia* from his wounded,

[3] Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in psalmos*
S. Aurelii Augustini OPERA OMNIA - editio latina > PL 36 > Enarrationes in Psalmos:
<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/esposizioni_salmi/index2.htm > [accessed 20 July 2020], psalm 126.

crucified and salvific body.[4] Writing at the close of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) also exploits the sacrificial Christ's affinity with the maternal.[5] In his Prayer to Saint Paul, for example, echoing Christ's words as he approaches Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion, he addresses Christ as a mother who, 'like a hen, gathers her chickens under her wing', and urges his soul to 'run under the wings of Jesus your mother, and lament your griefs under his feathers'.[6] Caroline Walker Bynum observes the prominence of the Jesus as mother metaphor in the writings of Cistercian and Benedictine theologians, attributing this emphasis to the orders' ideas of authority and care within their communities as interpreted by Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153).[7] He himself frequently uses the notion of Christ's femaleness and physicality to express the loving, nurturing relationship between the soul and Christ, complicating the image of the maternal Christ who feeds his children from his breasts/wounds, with the fluid, slippery metaphors of bride, lover, sister and mother in his exposition of the Song of Songs.[8] William of St. Thierry (d. 1148) also identifies Christ's salvific potential with reproductive and fallen female flesh, developing the language of Christ's wounds as an internal, female, womb-like space wherein the Soul can be nurtured and find rest, as do Guerric of Igny (d. 1157) and Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167), who encourage an affective response to Christ's suffering body.[9]

Aligning Christ with the physical and weaker feminine meant that Christ was bound with sexualized, fallen flesh. Female writers in particular exploited this connection, exploring

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[4] Augustine, *De civitate dei contra paganos*, XXII, 17: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/civ22.shtml> [accessed 20 July 2020].
[5] Anselm of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G. (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 141-156.
[6] Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, II, 397-400, 465-467.
[7] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 112-13.
[8] Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermon 9', pars. 5-6. OB 1: 45-46, trans. Kilian Walsh, 'On the Song of Songs 1', *The works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), cited in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 115-19.
[9] William of Thierry, *Exposé sur le Cantique de Cantiques*, ed. J. M. Déchanet, SC 82, Sér. Mon., chs. 37-38, pp. 120-24; *Meditativae orations*, cited in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 119-20.

the Soul's relation with the Divine in terms that elevated the feminine, and often bordered on the transgressive, disrupting male-centred orthodox theology with a female-focused approach. While male authors could identify with the femaleness of Christ through a performativity of the female, for female writers, as Sarah McNamer argues, this level of performativity was unnecessary, and the focus upon Christ's physicality and suffering, the female element of the human, as opposed to the male, spiritual, element, was particularly appealing to women.[10] Numerous examples of female affective piety centred on Christ's feminized or queered flesh. According to the author of her *vita*, Rudolph of Farne, the eighth-century nun, St Leoba, received a vision in which she sees a never-ending purple thread coming out of her mouth, 'as if it were coming from her very bowels' which Leoba rolled into a ball.[11] The thread is interpreted by a fellow nun as representing Leoba's God-given wisdom. Nevertheless, the thread's umbilical, menstrual or birthing connotations cannot be overlooked, and unite in a distinctly female, fecund manner the fleshly, feminine part of the saint with the masculine spiritual divine in an allusion that foreshadows the visions of later mystics such as Gertrude of Helfta (d. 1301) and Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1398). Another example of female response to Christ's gendered flesh is Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), a contemporary of, and the correspondent with, Bernard, operating from all-female Benedictine enclosures. Hildegard equated Christ's sacrificial suffering and bleeding with the agony of childbirth and menstruation.[12] Hildegard's analogy is further supported in the image accompanying Hildegard's vision of the Crucifixion and the Eucharist in *Scivias* II, 6, from the Rupertsberg Manuscript: blood gushes from Christ's side wound to fill the chalice held up

[10] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 120-49.
[11] Rudolph, Monk of Fulda, 'The Life of St. Leoba', in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alvida Petroff (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 108, cited in Laurie Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 79-81.
[12] Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias* 2.6.1 trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) p. 238.

by Ecclesia, and Christ's wound is nipple-like, and located in Christ's engorged left breast.[13] For Marguerite d'Oignt (d. 1310), whose visions were recorded in the early fourteenth-century, the human, crucified Christ becomes a sort of 'hyper-mother', not only nursing her with the blood from his breast, but also giving birth to her through an agonizing labour which lasts more than thirty-three years, and culminates in the agony of the cross, Christ's equivalent of the bed in the birthing chamber.[14]And in Julian of Norwich's (d. c. 1416) vision of Christ as mother, the crucified Christ haemorrhages blood, in a manner that recalls the excessive blood loss through childbirth or menstruation:

> So plenteously the hote blode ran oute that there was neither sene skynne ne wound, but as it were al blode[…]Notwitstondyng the bleding continued a while til it migt be sene with advisement, and this was so plenteous to my sigt that methowte if it had be so in kind and in substance for that tyme, it should have made the bed al on blode and a passid over aboute.[15]

While ecstatic agony and pleasure frequently accompanied these visionary experiences, permitting, Luce Irigaray contends, a peculiarly feminine means of expression, it was not uniformly experienced or appreciated.[16] Mechthild of Hackeborn, for example, manipulates the convention of the feminized Christ, and the beloved's affective response. As I discuss in Chapter 2, in Mechthild's collection of her visions, the *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (the *Book of Special Grace*), Christ's identity is fluid, loving, nurturing and reciprocal, his

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[13] Hildegard, *Scivias* II.6: Crucifixion and Eucharist in Rupertsberg MS, fol. 86r. See Tova Leigh-Choate, William T. Flynn and Margot Fassler, 'Hildegard as Musical Hagiographer: Engelberg, Stiftsbibliothek Ms.103 and her Songs for Saints Disibod and Ursula' by in *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* ed. Beverly Maine Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt and George Ferzoco (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 112-13.

[14] Marguerite d'Oignt, *Pagina meditationum Oeuvres de Marguerite d'Oyngt, Prieure de Poleteins, publiées d'après le manuscrit unique de la Bibliothèque de Grenoble*, ed. E. Philipon avec une introduction de M.-C. Guigue (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1877), pp. 13-15: <https://archive.org/details/oeuvrespublies00oynguoft/mode/2up> [accessed 3 September 2020].

[15] *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ll. 473-480, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/the-shewings-of-julian-of-norwich-part-1> [accessed 3 October 2015]. Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Monstrous Masculinities in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love* and the Book of Margery Kempe' in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 57.

[16] Luce Irigaray, 'La Mystérique', in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 191-202.

wounds and suffering consistently transfigured into something pleasurable and lovely, and both Mechthild and Christ share the roles of mother, daughter, lover, human and divine. The risk of transgression in regarding Christ's humanity in this way is also articulated in contemporary responses to the theology of transubstantiation. In Chapter 3, I examine the trial transcript of a French woman, Auda Fabri, whose conflation of the *corpus Christi* with the 'filth' of birth, led to her standing trial for heresy: a crisis she suffered in the context of orthodox suspicion of female flesh as well as the Catharism's antipathy towards the notion of Christ's physicality associated with the reproductive body which it regarded as sinful, filthy and particularly associated with the feminine.[17] The emerging emphasis on Christ's flesh in English late fourteenth-century devotion, also troubled the English priest, John Mirk, as is evident through his association of sin with the bleeding, open, feminized body in the context of the Eucharist and Christ in the *Festial*, his collection of sermons (discussed in chapter four).

Despite the, sometimes profound, distrust of Christ's gender-implied physicality, the male 'Christus' – the judge, saviour, knight and bridegroom – could also identify as 'Christa' with impunity: if Augustine could justify a feminized, birthing Christ on the cross, orthodox religion could hardly challenge it. Furthermore, Aristotelian philosophy eschewed such clear-cut gender binaries. This is evident in the texts I examine. However, these texts demonstrate that the very orthodoxy of Christ's gender fluidity allowed not only the development of the concept that pushed the bounds of orthodoxy in mystical female expression, but also highlighted the challenges Christ's paradoxical identity could present.

Thomas Lacqueur's overview of the development of beliefs regarding gender difference and sex from the classical period to the early twentieth century, provides a useful

[17] According to her testimony, Auda was twenty-four at the time of her trial in 1318. Our knowledge of Auda, however, is confined to her trial transcript, and her life post-trial, and the date of her death is unknown.

background for medieval response to Christ's body.[18] Aristotelian and Galenic notions of the one sex model, where the female reproductive body was seen as the inverse, inferior, faulty version of the male were, he illustrates, commonly accepted throughout the Middle Ages. Their authority, he argues, is evident in the writings attributed to the apostle Paul, whose work, in turn, influenced late Classical theologians such as Augustine, Jerome and Tertullian, affecting not only their perceptions of, and responses to Christ's humanity, but also their attitudes towards male and female mystics and theologians.[19]Furthermore, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the teachings of these patristic exegetes had a profound effect upon medieval concepts of gender, divine authority and affective devotion, among female mystics as well as their male counterparts.

Caroline Walker Bynum picks up the thread of Laqueur's intervention in her own extensive contribution to the field medieval Christian devotion, arguing that, between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, the Catholic Church increasingly identified Christ's humanity with the maternal body.[20] This belief, she contends, is conspicuous in devotional writing such as sermons and letters of Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux (at the vanguard of this devotion), Guerric of Igny, William of St. Thierry, Anselm of Canterbury, and Hildegard of Bingen, and through the recorded experiences of visions and a received by men and, in particular, women, for example, Elizabeth of Schönau, the Helfta visionaries, Catherine of

[18] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, as before.
[19] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
[20] Bynum's intervention in this field is extensive. See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*. (New York: Zone Books, 2001); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

Siena and Julian of Norwich.[21] Christ as loving mother, she asserts, became a powerful paradigm for the relationship between the abbot and the monks of the Cistercian order, and, together with his identity as the bridegroom in the Song of Songs, this 'creative', feminized Christ, encouraged affective responses to his wounded, salvific, and essentially feminine flesh.[22] Bynum focuses on Christ as mother in her subsequent examinations of medieval Christian devotion. However, while acknowledging the existence of the erotic in medieval Christic devotion, she is reluctant to sexualize Christ's body in this way, contending that modern approaches are overwritten by an emphasis on sex, and fail to take into account medieval Aristotelian notions of gender and sex-difference.[23] In medieval devotion, Christ's body, she repeatedly contends, was distinctly maternal; and in that capacity his breasts, blood (even menstrual and birthing), wounds and openings were beneficent.[24] Bynum's emphasis on Christ as mother fails to take into account other aspects of Christ's physical and divine hybridity, however. This thesis argues that Christ's feminized body could be – in turn or simultaneously – productive, erotic, pleasurable, destructive, and abhorrent, while nevertheless remaining dependent upon his maternal identity.

The desire for a more nuanced, queer understanding of the response to Christ's body in medieval European Christian devotion has been of considerable concern to Mills, Kathleen Biddick, and Karma Lochrie. In her discussion of medieval mysticism, for example, Lochrie highlights the unstable gender slippage, the queer, that characterizes the relationship between male and female mystics and Christ, with Christ's body identifying him as both mother and lover, and through whose wounds the soul of the beloved is joined in an act of 'mystical

[21] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 110-69.
[22] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 137-38.
[23] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 109,114.
[24] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 114; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, for example, pp. 4-6, p. 186.

copulation'.[25] For Lochrie, the mystical act of union with Christ's feminized body 'disrupts' the accepted forms of love as presented in courtly love poetry and the '*locus deliciarum*' of the Song of Songs, .[26] The maternal is not necessarily separate from the erotic, or the male from the female. Christ's explicitly sexualized wounds, the vagina/vulva of his side, invite erotic responses from the worshipper, be they male or female. What is more, Lochrie notes, desire is often conceived in terms of intense pain and anguish. Mystical sex and eroticism, she observes, 'inhabit more perverse and polymorphous regions than is usually acknowledged'.[27] Mills also observes the significance of the queer. Supporting his assertion with René Girard's theory of the monstrous double, and Michael Camille's theories on the monstrosity of the sacred creature, he presents the reader with a potentially 'monstrous', hybrid Christ who crossed the boundaries of 'male and female, animal and human, human and divine', as is evident in Bernardian response to the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs, for example, or Geoffrey of Monmouth's devout werewolves. Such texts, allow for a queer reading and performance of devotional texts and iconography, which the Church could be accepted as orthodox, but which existed alongside 'the actual performance of resistance, opposition or transgression.[28] Kathleen Biddick also warns against conflating the maternal with the feminine, contesting that medieval response to Christ's body was not uniform, either geographically or temporally.[29] 'Anxieties about fluid boundaries', she argues, emerging with particular prominence in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe, affected perceptions of

[25] Karma Lochrie, 'Mystical acts, Queer Tendencies' in Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz, eds, Constructing Medieval Sexuality (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 180-22 (p. 189).
[26] Lochrie, 'Mystical Acts', p.182.
[27] Lochrie, 'Mystical Acts', p.182.
[28] Robert Mills, 'Jesus as Monster' in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bildhauer and Mills, pp. 28-54; Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p. 183; René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: the Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992).
[29] Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 135-162.

Christ's body, whose gendered identity became increasingly 'grotesque', 'hybrid', and 'fantastical', particularly in the imaginary of women mystics whose very gender othered them, and thereby categorized them with Jews, harlots and homosexuals.[30] Another commentator interested in a culturally ambiguous Christ is Miri Rubin, who also discusses the transgressive potential of Christ's gendered body in connection with the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi.[31] Rubin argues that 'increasingly gory images' of Christ exalted and emphasised maternal suffering. Rubin, however, contests that such images, especially those depicting Christ as a murdered and dismembered child, encouraged the participant to engage with acts of profound transgression and taboo, in a manner which would be explicitly and emphatically prohibited in other cultural settings.[32]Christ's feminized corporeality, therefore, becomes potentially, and even actually, transgressive, as is evidenced in my own close analyses of the responses of Auda Fabri and John Mirk, and even in the visions of Mechthild of Hackeborn, whose Christ assumes the feminine, often to the exclusion of the masculine and orthodox patriarchy.

The highly charged, corporeal reaction to, and identification with, Christ's gendered and suffering body which Bynum, Lochrie, and the above discuss, were regarded as particularly feminine responses, and weeping was believed to be especially prevalent in women, due to their colder, wetter constitution.[33] Barbara Newman also examines the function of tears in these same medieval devotional contexts. [34] She argues that, while

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[30] Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism*, p. 147.
[31] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[32] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 139.
[33] For an examination of the significance of weeping in affective devotion, and its identification with a feminized Christ, see Elina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. xii. See also, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Holy Medicine and Diseases of the Soul: Henry of Lancaster and *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*,' *Medical History* 53. 3 (2009), pp. 397-414.
[34] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

women such as Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies, through their own tearful affectivity and suffering on behalf of the souls of the departed, conformed to societal expectations through such acts of *compassio*, the weeping itself disrupted societal and religious conventions.[35] Not only did weeping enable these women to challenge the authority, wisdom and goodness of God himself, but, by encouraging the weepers to identify with a weeping bleeding Christ, tears also accentuated his feminized humanity.[36]This is evident in the *Liber Specialis*: by conflating her own tears with the wound-tears of Christ, the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, Mechthild becomes intercessor and saviour of souls, and Christ is identified as Saviour precisely through his feminine weeping and bleeding.

Methodological approaches

Three theorists in particular inform this thesis: Julia Kristeva and her theory of the abject, Grace Jantzen with her proposition for a female-centred notion of the divine, and René Girard with his theory of sacred violence and monstrosity, as outlined below. As feminist philosophers, whose work markedly impacts upon recent and current gender and queer theorists such as Donna Haraway and the late Heather Höpfl, Jantzen and Kristeva engage with the female voice in religious expression and understanding, and highlight the suspicion of and antipathy towards such understanding which has traditionally come from androcentric Western orthodox religion.[37] With this regard, they are illuminating and insightful in regard

[35]For a critical edition of the Middle English translations of the *vitae* of these women, see Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie D'Oignies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).
[36] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, pp. 120-21.
[37] See, for example, Donna J. Harraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); and Heather Höpfl, 'Master and Convert: Women and other Strangers', *TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization and Science*, vol. 6 no. 4 (2007), pp. 116-31 <https://tamarajournal.com/index.php/tamara/issue/view/26> [accessed 24 January 2021].

to the examples examined in the chapters that follow. Girard approaches the question of suffering, sacrifice and taboo as a cultural anthropologist. His writing is decidedly more male-centred, but is nevertheless pertinent to analyses of the cultural meanings imposed upon bodies and how bodies can and do mean differently in different cultural contexts. I examine this further in chapter four, in a consideration of the joint feminised abjection of both Christ and a wicked chapman, to whom the former appears in an apparent attempt to save the chapman's soul. In engaging with these theories, I build upon the work of other medievalists, such as Lara Farina, Liz Herbert McAvoy, Karma Lochrie, Amy Hollywood, Kathleen Biddick, and Bruce Holsinger, who have successfully approached the topic of gender, and society and religion from a theoretical, feminist standpoint. Such an approach enables and encourages fresh scrutiny of the texts and opens up continued and productive dialogue between the medieval past and the present. At this point in the introduction, therefore, I will briefly outline the main theories used in the thesis, while the most pertinent elements of each will be discussed more fully in the main body of the thesis.

Kristeva expounds her theory of abjection in her monograph, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in which she defines abjection as a sense of horror when an individual experiences the collapse of the distinction between the Self and the Other.[38] The abject, she maintains, is expressed in the reaction of the individual – a manifestation of horror. Kristeva contends that this sense of abjection recalls 'the archaism of pre-objectal relationship,' 'when the body becomes separated from another body in order to be'.[39] This can be identified as the moment when the child is separated from its mother at birth. The blood of birth and the milk of the mother can therefore be associated with the abject, which includes things such as

[38] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[39] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 10.

blood, excrement, nail parings, the open wound, even the skim formed on warm milk – things that make us shudder with horror, or even vomit. The supreme example of the abject is the corpse, representing as it does, the ultimate breakdown of distinction, for it is 'death infecting life'. Associated with this collapse of boundaries is plague and disease, since these things are evidence of the lack of distinction between the living and the dead. In the same way, blood also becomes a definer of the abject. In its liquid, red state, which can be washed away, it is life-giving, but in its black, clotted state, it demonstrates the breakdown of distinction and becomes abject. It is this collapse of distinction that bind leprous and disabled flesh, and the maternal, birthing body.[40]Kristeva, however, argues that it is possible to sublimate the abject in a sort of mystical transfiguration, in which the agony of the abjection goes hand in hand with ecstatic joy, which she terms, *jouissance*, and is a prerequisite of mysticism.[41]

Kristeva's collapse of the sense of self and the other, of the distinctions between intense joy and equally intense anguish and pain becomes the focus of her essay, 'Stabat Mater' in which her recollection of the birth of her son, composed in poetic and fluid prose, is inserted into, and surrounded by, a linear, 'masculine' discussion of maternity and its treatment at the hands of artists (the dying composer, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi) psychoanalysts such as Freud, and contemporary women, who desire motherhood but without the loss of identity.[42] Kristeva's examination of the societal function of motherhood, the manner in which she articulates it, and her own portrayal of the birth of her child, with its collapse of boundaries of self, and the amalgamation of abjection and transcendence, indeed echo the experience of the medieval mystic, and the potential for mysticism examined in this thesis. The connection is particularly apparent in chapter three which deals with Auda Fabri's

[40] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 100.
[41] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 127.
[42]Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, pp. 160-186.

horror at the presentation of Christ's feminised flesh in the context of the Eucharist. Kristeva's argument, however, is also evident in Mechthild of Hackeborn's sublimation of the feminine abject, articulated through her visions, as well as in the intense anxiety concerning Christ's transgressive physicality in Mirk's Lenten sermon.

Like Kristeva, Jantzen also operates within a female-centred philosophy. Developing Irigaray's theory of *la mystèrique*, she argues for a female-centred notion of God and divinity centred around the concepts of flourishing, nurture, and interconnectedness, which she regards as a more productive and socially responsible alternative to the salvation/damnation, male-centred theology particularly evident in post-Reformation Christianity.[43] She argues that a masculine desire to dominate is manifested in the desire to control the other as is evident in other forms of control such as racism, colonialism, capitalism, homophobia and sexism. Jantzen's theology replaces the notion of mortality, with its emphasis on death and the afterlife, with that of natality, with its association with birth and flourishing, and which, she argues, 'open[s] the way to the divine horizon which alterities and furthers the aim of the divine incarnation of every woman and man'.[44]

Jantzen observes a precedent for the notion of flourishing in both the Old and New Testaments in which the motifs of the garden, honey, the vine-yard and the bridegroom/beloved are used to illustrate God's love for his people.[45] In contrast to salvation which requires a saviour and someone needing to be saved, flourishing, 'occurs from an inner dynamic of growth', needs 'no interference from the outside', and results in 'luxurious self-sufficiency' an and 'an inner impetus of natural energy' and 'overflowing vigour'.[46]

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[43] Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). In particular, pp. 156-170.
[44] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 157.
[45] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 157-8.
[46] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 161.

Flourishing fosters a 'continuing interdependence within the course of life' and allows for 'an imminent divine incarnated within us and between us'.[47] Jantzen's proposition suggests that 'God is the source and wellspring of this vigour, with Jesus as a paradigm of 'what it may mean to live fully and naturally in the creative justice of God'.[48]

This focus on flourishing opposes Augustinian and Tertullian theology which links the body and bodiliness to sexuality and the female, and since female fecundity would be equated with goodness, connecting the male with that goodness would also associate him with nature and the body rather than the spirit. Furthermore, flourishing and nurture are communal rather than individualistic, and elevate fleshly heath, connectedness and interdependence. Humans depend on each other in order to flourish and also depend on God who nourishes them. God, however, is also dependent on humanity for his kingdom to flourish.[49] This is something of which Mechthild, for example, showed prescient awareness in her writing, in the same way as Auda Fabri struggled to recognise the possible flourishing to be gained from the resolving of abjection.

Girard, in turn, argues that society survives through a community's practice of mimetic violence – what can be read as the imposition of abjection – against individuals or groups - 'sacrificeable victim(s)' - upon whom they cast the blame for violence. An individual is targeted and accused of heinous crimes which, the community claims, have caused the disaster. The purpose of sacrifice is, 'to achieve a radically new type of violence, truly decisive and self-contained'.[50] Violence is therefore used to stop violence. In this way, it is mimetic – and, in Jantzen's terms 'necrophilic'. However, it is also contagious, and

[47] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 161.
[48] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 162.
[49] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp.167.
[50] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 28

accumulative.[51] Girard argues that violence 'consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase, in proportion to man's efforts to master them […]Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred'.[52] Society seeks to distinguish good violence from bad violence, good blood from bad blood.[53] The ritual of sacrifice ritual is therefore the 'regular exercise of good violence'.[54]

For the sacrifice to be effective, the choice of the victim, usually some form of outsider, must be unanimously chosen by the group, and must be sufficiently like and unlike the rest of the group. The repetition resulting in the ritual means that, at some point, mistakes are made, leaving the ritual not only ineffective, but also dangerous. At this point, a surrogate victim is appointed to assume the guilt and punishment of the original sacrifice. The surrogate is later replaced with a substitute victim. Both victims are made monstrous, and forced to commit taboo acts which aid their monstrosity. They are also identified as kings, gods, heroes and executioners.

Blood and violence are significant elements to ritual violence. Like Kristeva, Girard distinguishes between good blood, which can be washed away, and bad blood which blackens and stains – and blood will feature everywhere in this present thesis. All blood signifies violence, but menstrual blood is particularly problematic because its association with birth and nurture complicates blood's association with violence. Girard notes that what he defines as 'primitive' societies (societies 'lacking legal sanctions') regard such blood as impure, and menstruating women are kept apart from the rest of the community for fear that they will contaminate it.[55] Girard's theory thus draws together those of Kristeva and Jantzen. In Christ,

[51] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 31.
[52] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 32.
[53] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 33-38.
[54] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.
[55] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 34.

Mirk is confronted with the monstrous - 'differences normally considered irreconcilable' – female-centred, flourishing natality, together with the androcentric necrophilic of Christian orthodoxy.[56]The result of this encounter is the abjection not only of the sinful chapman at the heart of one of his exempla, but also his monstrous double, Christ himself.

Selected texts

In this thesis, I concentrate on three texts which differ in authorship, date, genre and country of origin, but are nevertheless united in their authors' dramatic response to a Christ defined by an emphatically feminised, fecund physicality which challenges the traditional androcentric orthodox Christianity of which it has nevertheless been made a part. In the *Liber Specialis,* Mechthild of Hackeborn revels in the fluid, intangible, hard-to-define identity of Christ, who elevates the fleshly, polluting, feminine aspect of humanity, mingling his own salvific identity with Mechthild's corporeality, so that they are indistinguishable from each other. Auda Fabri's reaction to Christ's body, as revealed in Jacques Fournier's inquisition records, is very different. For Auda, the very idea of Christ being united in some way with female, reproductive flesh, is an anathema. Moreover, whereas Mechthild's voice and that of her sisters can be clearly heard in the *Liber Specialis*, Auda's comes to us via several layers of male-authored text, further complicated by the medium of Latin into which her words were noted and recorded. In my third text, John Mirk's *Festial*, written towards the end of the fourteenth century, Mirk seeks to promote an orthodoxy threatened by societal and religious upheaval, but proves deeply suspicious of the fleshly, feminized, sexualized Christ evident in mystical expression, and attempts, not wholly successfully, to rescue Christ from a more female-centred devotion.

[56] Mills, 'Jesus as Monster', p. 38 and p. 46.

The three texts I examine have either received relatively little scholarly attention or have been incorporated into other topics of study. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to redress the neglect afforded the texts, or to offer a fresh perspective on medieval understanding of Christ's body and blood, as depicted within them. In the following chapters, I aim to test Bynum's thesis of Christ's maternality against the texts I have chosen: how does the notion of Jesus as mother square, as it were, with Mirk's Christ, and the priest's close association of blood and flesh with sin and disease? I also aim to test Newman's argument for the gendered, disruptive power of affective tears and weeping, as presented in these texts. In this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that even the most seemingly orthodox, male-centred texts reveal far more nuanced, fluid notions of gender in the Middle Ages than has sometimes been recognised, notions that have implications for our reading of the texts themselves and even our understanding of religious belief. I have already published the following chapters and articles based on the texts I examine in chapters two, three and four of this thesis: 'The Curse of Christ's Wound: Christ's Blood as 'Anti-relic'', 'Gendered Space and Female Filth: Auda Fabri's Mystical Heresy', and 'The Abject and the Sublime: Auda Fabri and Mechthild of Hackeborn's Responses to Christ's Wounded Body'.[57]

The *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (the *Book of Special Grace*) comprises a collection of the Mechthild of Hackeborn's visions as recorded by Gertrude of Helfta, and an unnamed nun; a few letters written by Mechthild; some prayers of intercession on behalf of various clients who had approached her; and the posthumous vitae of Mechthild of Hackeborn, Mechthild's

[57] Kathryn Loveridge, 'The Curse of Christ's Wound: Christ's Blood as 'Anti-relic'', *Hortulus*, 9. 1, (2013), <https://hortulus-journal.com/journal/volume-9-number-1-2013/>; Kathryn Loveridge, 'Gendered Space and Female Filth: Auda Fabri's Mystical Heresy', *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, ed. Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, and Einat Klafter (London: University of London, 2019), pp. 157-70; Kathryn Loveridge, 'The Abject and the Sublime: Auda Fabri and Mechthild of Hackeborn's Responses to Christ's Wounded Body, *Speaking Internationally: Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Sue Niebrzydowski, with Vikki Kay and Kathryn Loveridge , forthcoming, 2022.

sister, Gertrude of Hackeborn, and Mechthild of Magdeburg.[58] Mechthild was a highly respected as visionary and intercessor before God, both within and without the community at Helfta, and the *Liber Specialis* was eagerly received shortly after its initial publication, remaining a popular and influential text for many years afterwards. However, the *Liber Specialis* was eventually eclipsed by the writings of the two other Helfta authors, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Gertrude of Helfta, with the result that scholarly work has, until relatively recently, focused on the latter women's writing. A vernacular translation of the *Liber Specialis*, known as *The Booke of Gostley Grace* was available in England from the late fourteenth-, early fifteenth-centuries, but the critical edition, published in 1979, is difficult to access. In addition, the nineteenth-century Latin edition is generally accepted as needing updating, and a modern English translation of the Latin has only been published in the last few years. Although several scholars have briefly examined Mechthild's writing in relation to the other Helfta authors, and the community itself, until recently, little attention was paid to Mechthild herself. This neglect, as I discuss more fully in Chapter Two, is now being rectified, and an exciting body of work is emerging, which both places Mechthild within the context of a burgeoning, female-centred theological nexus, which challenged and reinterpreted orthodox Christianity and the divine, and one which also forces a revaluation of the importance of these women in the development of later-medieval affective devotion.

Through my examination of the *Liber Specialis*, I hope to contribute to this body of research, focusing on Mechthild's manipulation of the conventional trope of devotional tears and weeping in order to convey the unconventional, and potentially transgressive and heterodox union between Christ and herself. I have focused my research to one particular

[58] The edition I use in this chapter is, Dom. Ludwig Paquelin, ed., *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae*, 2 vols. (Paris: Oudin Fratres,1875-77), vol. 2, pp. 1-421, which I refer to as *Liber Specialis*. I also make use of Barbara Newman's recent translation of *Liber Specialis*, an invaluable aid to my research. See, Barbara Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn and the Nuns of Helfta: The Book of Special Grace* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2017).

aspect of Mechthild's work. This is necessary not only due to the book's size, but the style in which Mechthild delivers her revelations. Mechthild's writing is packed with imagery and theological engagement, which demand much more attention than a whole thesis, let alone a chapter, can offer. In the chapter, therefore, I aim to contribute to the growing feminist research on this proto-feminist mystic, by examining how the tears of Christ and Mechthild impact upon our understanding of Christ's gendered flesh and blood.

The transcript of Auda Fabri's deposition is contained in the inquisitional Register of Jacques Fournier (d. 1342), commissioned by Pope John XII (d.1334) to stamp out the remains of Cathar heresy in his diocese.[59] On Fournier's election in 1334 as Pope Benedict XII, the Register accompanied him to Avignon, where it was placed in the pontifical library, and from there it was taken to the Vatican when the pontifical court returned to Rome in 1377.[60]As with the *Liber Specialis*, the Register is not necessarily easily accessible. Jean Duvernoy's edition of the Register is the only complete scholarly Latin edition, and no longer in print with relatively few copies in existence, and although a French edition, also by Duvernoy, exists, there is no English translation either of the entire Register, or of Auda's deposition.

In addition to the text's relative inaccessibility, Auda's testimony has been coloured by preconceptions of the female voice, with some, though not all, scholars describing her as hysterical, paranoid, and with a father-fixation. Such conclusions risk diminishing Auda's experience, and her attempt to engage with profound theological concepts, and articulate this engagement without the necessary language, community, or gender. Chapter Three is an

[59] Jean Duvernoy, ed., *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*, 3 vols (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1965), vol. 2, 133a-138d, pp. 82-105.
[60] Vat. Lat. MS 4030. J.-M. Vidal, *Le Tribune d'Inquisition de Pamiers. Notice sur le Registre de l'èvêque Jacques Fournier* (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1906), pp. 15-16.

attempt to redress this, building upon *and challenging* the few feminist readings of the text.[61] In so doing, I intend to recover Auda's voice from the layers of male overwriting, and position her in the context of the mysticism that was flourishing amid the fear and suspicion of heresy, and the growing emphasis on affective devotion and Christ's feminized identity.

The *Festial* is a late fourteenth-century collection of sermons, written in English, by John Mirk, canon and then the prior of Lilleshall Abbey, an Augustinian establishment near Shrewsbury in Shropshire. The work proved highly popular, both in manuscript and printed form, until 1532 when it ceased to be printed following the break with Rome. Although the original manuscript is lost, the Festial still exists in various manuscripts, printed editions, and extracts. In 1905, the Early English Text Society published the *Festial* edited by Theodor Erbe.[62] This remained the only English edition until Susan Powell's two-volume edition which EETS also published in 2011 and 2012.[63]

Sermon 34 of the *Festial* is a Lenten sermon the topic of which is the importance of priestly confession and penitence. In the final of the three stories with which Mirk illustrates his message, a certain chapman (a merchant or peddler) refuses to confess his sins and obtain absolution. On his deathbed, he is visited by Christ who also asks him to confess. When the merchant refuses Christ condemns the man to Hell by throwing the blood from his side-wound into the man's face. Despite Christ's extraordinary treatment of his own blood, that particular story in the Festial has received very little scholarly attention. What attention has been afforded the work as a whole tends to concentrate on the work in the context of the

[61] Wendy Love Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France', *Church History* 75. 4 (2006), pp. 748–767; and, Dyan Elliott, *Proving Women: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 223-29.
[62] John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies, Part I / by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk*), ed. Theodor Erbe, Early English Text Society, e.s. 96 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905).
[63] John Mirk, *John Mirk's Festial: Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A. ll,* Volumes 1 and 2, ed. Susan Powell, Early English Text Society e.s. 96 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Plague of 1342-53, the Uprising of 1382, or Mirk's response to Lollard heresy. Christ's encounter with the chapman cries out for a feminist reading, with Girard's theory of the monstrous double and sacred violence and Kristeva's theory of the abject, pitting Mirk's commitment to androcentric orthodoxy against Jantzen's feminine and flourishing divine. It is this I discuss in Chapter Four.

Chapter outlines

In Chapter One, I outline the notions of the body and gender as maintained by four significant classical and medieval contributors to Christian thought in late medieval western Europe. Influencing Jewish, Arabic and Christian scholarship, Aristotle's concept of the natural, divine-ordained order dependent on the superiority of the male one-sex body, and the innate inferiority and faultiness of the female, found purchase with influential scholars such as Thomas Aquinas and Anselm of Canterbury, affected their understanding of Christ's gendered humanity, and governed the response of and reaction to, women mystics to the concept of a feminized and fleshly Christ. Augustine's theology, on the other hand, reflected the Apostle Paul's distinction between the body and the flesh, and humanity's relation to the Divine. For Augustine, while the body could be pure and sinless, and could be manifested as such after death, the flesh was governed by the base, sexual desires of the Post-Lapsarian human. Augustine also argued that, although man and woman enjoyed a spiritual equivalence, they were ultimately by God to perform different functions, and man was inherently superior to woman. As discussed above, Augustine highlighted the maternality of Christ through his crucifixion and the birth of the Church. His philosophy profoundly affected theological notions of gender not only belonging to men, but also to women such as Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, who interpret Augustine's teachings to uphold and defend their own theological authority.

Newman places Hildegard of Bingen among twelfth-century 'prescholastics',whose work precedes the university trained scholars such as Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas.[64] While her originality and idiosyncratic philosophies support a highly conservative approach to certain doctrines, and one influenced by the Benedictine tradition of which she was part, Mechthild nevertheless manipulates the orthodox framework to present a radically female-centred theology.[65] This is evident in her treatment of female flesh, whose weakness and failings become its strengths and salvific potential through Christ's humanity, and the maternality and fecundity of woman. Although no definite evidence exists, Hildegard's influence is arguably present in Mechthild of Hackeborn's conception of Christ and her elevation of female flesh. Thomas Aquinas's extensive theological writing revealed his indebtedness to the teachings of Augustine and other Christian exegetes, as well as the works of Aristotle, Archimedes and other Classical scholars. Aquinas sought to reconcile spiritual equivalence with the assumption of the natural inferiority of the female. Aquinas reasoned, however, that women's physicality increased her powers of affectivity, thereby making her a superior conduit for the divine. The consequences of such an endorsement of female bodiliness were significant, and served not only to support female affectivity but also to develop notions of Christ's own corporal manifestation, as is evident, for example, in Aquinas's support for and contribution to the female-driven Feast of *Corpus Christi*.

Chapter Two focuses on Mechthild of Hackeborn's response to Christ's wounded body, as is evident in the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*. I argue that, through her unconventional treatment of conventional imagery, Mechthild portrays an idealized Christian all-female community governed by reciprocation, fluidity, and blurred boundaries, with a feminized

[64] Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley and Loss Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. xx.
[65] Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom,* p. xx.

Christ at its head, in a manner removed from the androcentric ecclesiastical hierarchy operating outside the convent walls at Helfta. A crucial way in which Mechthild conveys her radical response to Christ's gendered flesh, is through her depiction of tears which emanate from, and identify as, his wounds and blood, and which she shares with Christ through their union. In the *Liber Specialis*, tears function as food, gifts, and a means of intercession for the souls of the departed. Mechthild draws her images and conceits from her intimate knowledge of scripture, patristic exegesis, and the writings of theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas, and women such as Elizabeth of Schönau and Mechthild of Magdeburg. She manipulates them in such a way, however, that she presents the reader with a community in which the female, rather than the male, is the default, and by her elevation of the flourishing, fertile and symbiotic, she removes the fleshly and physical from its sinful, necrophilic state into union with a feminized divine. Mechthild's writing is overwhelmingly positive, joyful, and excessive. This is conveyed in her mystic union with Christ in which both she and Christ absorb the identity of the other, incorporating each other's humanity and divinity, so that the female becomes the saviour, as defined by Jantzen.

Chapter Three concerns the heresy trial of Auda Fabri, as recorded in Jacques Fournier's inquisition Register. Auda's horror at the notion of Christ's contact with female, birthing flesh – translated in the transcript as '*turpitudo*' – has attracted some scholarly attention, but much of this has focused on her mental state, and has consequently risked undermining the significance of Auda's response to Christ's gendered flesh. This chapter offers another explanation for Auda's response. Locating Auda within the context of female mysticism, the fear and tenacious presence of Cathar heresy, and the development of the theology surrounding Christ's humanity, I contend that Auda's experience was one of potential mysticism, but one which she was unable to recognise and articulate due to the

society in which she lived. Chapter Three places Auda alongside other women mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Mechthild of Hackeborn, demonstrating that while such women were able to transcend the abject of feminized flesh and decay in their association of the crucified Christ with the body, Auda's imagining remained stubbornly in the abject, and she could only be rescued through the intervention of the sinless and desexualized Virgin. Auda's narrative is therefore one of continual androcentric and patriarchal overwriting, in which she struggles to be heard where even her female companions and associates fail her.

In Chapter Four, I concentrate on an exemplum from sermon 34 in John Mirk's *Festial,* in which Christ condemns a merchant to Hell with the blood from his side. The sermon, written in the aftermath of the Plague, the 1382 Uprising, and amid Lollard heresy, is intended to uphold orthodox belief and practice, by encouraging its readers to confess and do appropriate penance, as instructed by their priest. While Mirk's orthodoxy is evident throughout the *Festial,* this exemplum reveals an underlying anxiety regarding Christ's body, with its association to the feminine which was gaining purchase in England at this time. Using Rene Girard's theory of the sacrifice and violence, and with reference to the theories of Kristeva, and Jantzen, I suggest that, by portraying Christ's blood and body as polluting, Mirk too recognises them as female at odds with an ecclesiastical androcentric patriarchy which considered the flesh as inherently sinful, feminine, and in need of salvation. In this exemplum the themes examined in the previous texts reappear. Christ's feminized, maternal, and sexualized body, which Mechthild rejoices in, and fills Auda with terror and disbelief becomes the locus for Mirk's profound discomfort. And while the reader is expected to believe that Christ's body and blood are salvific, John Mirk's Christ bears an uncanny resemblance to the Devil.

I conclude the thesis with an Afterword comprising an exploration of an anonymous Hebrew text, *Fresh Water for a Tired Soul*.[66] The document was discovered by Jacob Mann, in 1931 in Cairo's *Geniza* , a repository for documents deemed 'unusable'.[67] It dates possibly to the late thirteenth century, is composed in unsophisticated and badly spelt Hebrew, and details three Messianic episodes in the Jewish community of the Sicilian town of Catania. The protagonist is a prophetess who foretells the coming Messiah, seemingly delivers herself of a child, and who exudes honey, oil and saffron before a predominantly male audience. In her function as prophetess, the woman challenges the patriarchal norms in her masculine authority, speech, and assumption of the prayer shawl, while nevertheless maintaining her identity as a woman whose body suffers travail to produce a messianic sign. The woman's visionary ecstasy is resonant of the experiences of Christian women mystics, and the possible date of the manuscript, and the location of its origin suggest some sort of commonality between the Sicilian Jewish and Christian female communities in pre-plague Europe. In this way, perhaps, female mysticism could, to some extent, transcend distrust of and antipathy towards the Other.

In conclusion, therefore, just as the feminized and transgressive blood and body of Christ become the devotional focus in an orthodox setting, so Christ's feminization finds its way into the orthodox and established media of devotional writing, mystical experience, and depositions, as well as the forgotten scrap of Hebrew manuscript from Sicily. The few examples examined here, offer a brief glimpse at this presence, and demonstrate the force and appeal of this feminization in a society which considered the male as default, and the female

[66] Marcel Poothuis and Chana Safrai, 'Fresh Water for a Tired Soul: Pregnancy and Messianic Desire in a Medieval Document from Sicily', in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 123-44.
[67] Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1931), pp. 34-44, cited in Poothuis and Safrai, 'Fresh Water', p. 123.

as the faulty and inferior second best. The texts I have included in this thesis have not generally been scrutinized in this way. I hope, therefore, that this thesis helps to redress the balance, allowing voices like that of Auda Fabri or the nameless prophetess to be heard, and demonstrating how such feminization challenged the most orthodox of believers, and disrupted the boundaries of gender and faith.

CHAPTER ONE

Setting the Scene: Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Hildegard and their Understanding of the Body and Gender

In his study of early Christian society's notions of the body and sex, Peter Brown examines the different and competing attitudes to the body and sex in the early Christian Church.[1] Pivotal to these beliefs, Brown demonstrates, were St Paul's suspicion and fear of the body's frailty and vulnerability in the face of sin. These fears led Paul to make a clear distinction between the physical 'body' - which, though mortal and vulnerable, was capable of regeneration through Christ - and the more metaphoric 'flesh', which represented both humankind's rebellion against God and the means of its salvation through the humanity of Christ.[2] Paul, Brown contests, was unique in his theology of the flesh, for, while there is some evidence of the notion of human frailty in the face of fleshly desires throughout the New Testament (for example, I John 2. 16-17), other Christian writers had not developed Paul's radical or wide-reaching conclusions.[3] It was Paul's concepts of the flesh and the body that so influenced later Christian doctrine. As Brown observes:

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[1] Brown, *The Body and Society*, as before.
[2] Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 48.
[3] 'For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God, abideth forever'. *The Holy Bible*, Douay-Rheims Version (Charlotte, North Carolina: Saint Benedict Press, 2009), I John 2.16-17. All biblical quotations will be taken from this version.

> In all later Christian writing, the notion of 'the flesh' suffused the body with disturbing association: somehow, as 'flesh' the body's weaknesses and temptations echoes a state of helplessness, even of rebellion against God, that was larger than the body itself.[4]

In this chapter, I outline the notions of the body and gender as maintained by Aristotle (d. 322 BC), Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), scholars whose writing significantly influenced and reflected the development of such ideas, but, in managing the differences and incompatibilities that emerged among these theories, they allowed unorthodox and transgressive interpretations to infiltrate even the most orthodox contexts. Hildegard's idiosyncratic and emphatically female-centred approach to notions of the flesh (in particular female flesh) makes her writing something of an anomaly in the male-centred theology and natural philosophy of the other authors discussed in this chapter. Her inclusion, however, provides a transition between the androcentric philosophies of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, which governed traditional Christian doctrine and operation, and the disruptive female-centred exegesis which emerges in the texts scrutinized in the chapters which follow.

Aristotle

While the teachings of Roman Classical scholars, both Christian and Pagan, were read throughout the Middle Ages, and had a profound effect on medieval thought and writing, the Greek texts, familiar in classical antiquity, fell into obscurity in the western Roman Empire from the end of the third and beginning of the fourth centuries, victims of the empire's disintegration, and the lack of knowledge of and interest in Greek language and literature, and

[4] Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 48.

with it the philosophy and medical learning which had developed in and around the eastern Mediterranean and continued to thrive there. From the ninth century onwards, however, increased contact with the East, through trade, Arabic invasion and the First Crusade, increasingly exposed western Europe to Islamic, Jewish and Greek developments in medicine and philosophy. The medical school in the southern Italian city of Salerno, for example, was using Arabic translations of the medical treatises of Galen, Hippocrates (d. c. 370 BC) and Pedanius Dioscorides (d. c. 90 AD) from the ninth century onwards. The *Trotula*, an extremely influential collection of medical texts written specifically for women, also emerged, if not specifically from this city, then from somewhere in southern Italy.[5] Of particular significance in the translation and dissemination of Greek texts was the Spanish city of Toledo, which boasted a school of translators whose outpouring included most of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Avicenna (Ibn Sina (d. 1037)), Averroes (Ibn Rushd (d. 1198)), and the Iberian Jewish philosopher Avicebron (Ibn Gabriol (d. c. 1058/c. 1070)).[6] For example, Gerard of Cremona (d.1187), an Italian scholar based in Toledo, was responsible for the translation from Arabic into Latin of over seventy works by Greek and Arabic scholars, including Plato's *Almagest*, several works of Aristotle, and Avicenna's *Canon* .[7]

Aristotle's teaching methodology and philosophy formed the basis of scholasticism which developed in the newly formed universities and monastic schools among scholars such as Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), Peter Abelard (d.1142) and Peter Lombard (d.1160/1164).

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[5] For a valuable source of information in this area of study, see, Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). See also, Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[6] Paul Vincent Spade, 'Medieval Philosophy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/medieval-philosophy/ [accessed 2 March 2016].

[7] Biography of Gerard of Cremona, trans. Michael McVaugh in 'The Translation of Greek and Arabic Science into Latin', in *A Source Book in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 35-39.

Aristotle's philosophy was not considered necessarily incompatible with Christian doctrine - Augustinian and medieval theology, for example, concurred with Aristotelian, neo-Platonic notions of God as the transcendent creator of the world.[8] However, towards the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, an uneasiness began to emerge concerning Aristotelianism's impact on orthodox belief, its association with Judaism and Islam, and its popularity among heretical individuals and movements, such as Catharism, which culminated in a series of 'condemnations' banning the reading and studying of Aristotelian-influenced or heretical works.[9] Nevertheless, Aristotle's theories including those regarding gender and the body remained an influential force in thirteenth-century theology.

Although pagan in theology, Aristotle's belief in innate male superiority and the hierarchical, masculine order of creation fitted in well with those of Christian scholars, whose androcentric understanding of theology and natural philosophy was supported by the works of Roman scholars such as Seneca the Younger (d.65) and Pliny the Elder (d.79), with whom

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[8] Peter Abelard, *Yes and No: The Complete English Translation of Peter Abelard's Sic et Non*, ed. and trans. Priscilla Throop (Charlotte, VT: Medieval MS, 2007); Anselm of Canterbury, *Saint Anselm, Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo, Translated from the Latin by Sidney Norton Deane, B. A. with an Introduction, Bibliography, and Reprints of the Opinions of Leading Philosophers and Writers on the Ontological Argument* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1903, reprinted 1926), Medieval Sourcebook: Anselm (1033-1109): *Proslogium*, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-proslogium.asp> [accessed 2 May 2016]; Alexander S. Jensen, 'The Unintended Consequences of the Condemnation of 1277: Divine Power and the Established Order in Question', *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review*, 41.1 (2009), pp. 57-72 (p. 58).

[9] Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2003), pp. 148-50. For an English translation of the Condemnations and certain reactions to them and similar prohibitions, see 'The Reaction of the Universities and Theological authorities to Aristotelian Science and Natural Philosophy', trans. Edward Grant and Lynn Thorndike in *A Source Book in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 42-50; for the Latin version of the Condemnations, see *Chartularium Universitatis parisiensis. Sub auspiciis Consilii generalis facultatum parisiensium ex diversis bibliothecis tabulariisque collegit et cum authenticis chartis contulit Henricus Denifle auxiliante Aemilio Chatelain* ed. Heinrich Denifle and Emile Chatelain (Paris: Fratres Delalain, 1889), vol. 1, pp. 70-71, pp. 486-487 and pp. 543-555: <https://archive.org/details/chartulariumuniv01univuoft> [accessed 2 May 2016]; Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, pp. 163-65; 'Condemnations of 219 Propositions' trans. E. L. Fortin and P. D. O'Neill, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* , ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 335-54.

they were already familiar.[10] Just as with medieval orthodox Christian theology, Aristotle's female was naturally inferior to the male, a state divinely ordained to maintain an orderly society. Holding up the female against a male paradigm, Aristotle finds it wanting, describing it as a 'deformity', the accidental, or faulty, male, formed from an inadequacy of heat or some other deficiency. It is this notion of feminine failing which reinforced religious and societal androcentricism, impacted on the theology concerning Christ's humanity and divinity, in turn enabling the notion of Christ's transgressive flesh and its implications for the theology of the feminine divine to form and develop.[11]

In his attempt to define and describe the soul in relation to living things and their place and function in creation, Aristotle argues that the soul gives form and life to all living things.[12] All living things therefore have souls, but humans alone are capable of intellectual and rational thought. Men and women are 'preordained by the will of heaven' to perform different functions to enable an ordered and productive society.[13]However, not all humans have an equal level of rational thought. The souls of men (free man rather than slaves or barbarians), because they are intended to govern and use their reason, are superior to those of women (whose function is reproductive and nutritive), children, slaves, and barbarians who

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[10] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press,1990), p. 28.

[11] This later becomes translated in Aquinas's *Summa Theologia* as 'mas deficiens et occasionatus'. In his translation of the work, Peck suggests other possible translations of *peprōmenon:* 'imperfectly developed, underdeveloped, malformed, mutilated, congenitally disabled'. The difficulty in translating the word was not unknown to Aquinas who settled for Michael Scottus's *occasionatus* (accidental, unintended) rather than William of Moerbecke's *orbatus* (despised, stripped, spoiled, robbed, made destitute), while adding *deficiens* (lacking) to further convey Aristotle's notion of inherent female imperfection. See Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250-1500,* Part 1 (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 138. I discuss Allen's analysis of Aquinas's use and understanding of *occasionatus* later in this chapter.

[12] Aristotle, *On the Soul,* trans. J. A. Smith in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation,* ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 641-692.

[13] Aristotle, *Economics* 2. 3. 1343b25-1344a8.

need to be governed.[14] Essential to Aristotle's theory of gender hierarchy is his belief in the difference of heat and dryness found in men and women. He maintains that, whereas male animals are hot and dry by nature, female animals are colder and wetter, and this coldness and wetness account for female inferiority.[15] The female, he argues, is an 'impotent male', because of her inability to generate the heat necessary to turn blood into life-giving semen.[16] This heat and dryness makes male foetuses superior and therefore more active, although, in *History of Animals*, it makes the male less courageous and clever than the female.[17] The female is both more malleable and unstable: she is sooner tamed', responds more readily to 'caressing', and is more ready to learn than the male.[18] However, whereas men are 'more rounded off and complete' by nature, women tend to be more extreme. They are:

> more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive [...] more compassionate (emotional) than man, at the same time more easily moved to tears [...] more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike [...] more prone to despondency and less hopeful [...] more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, of more retentive memory [and] [...] also more wakeful; more shrinking [and] more difficult to rouse to action.[19]

Woman's natural state then, as Nancy Truman sums up, is one of lack, and it is this inherent lack that affects her powers of generation, as Aristotle emphatically and repeatedly

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[14] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1. 1252b 1: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,035:1:1252b.> [accessed 10 October, 2020].
[15] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. Platt, in, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 1111-1218; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* IV.6. 775a 13-21.
[16] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, I. 20.728a 17-21.
[17] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, IX. 1. 608a. 22-29.
[18] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, IX. 1. 608a. 23-29.
[19] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, IX. 1. 608b. 1-13.

points out. [20] Aristotle argues that the male animal alone is able to generate life in another, through the transmission of his sperm into the female.[21] Both male and female animals, he argues, produce semen, but only semen from the male generates life. Female residue, however – which Aristotle identifies as menstrual fluid, and which he terms *catamenia sperma* – is a stunted or mutilated (*peprōmenon*) substance, and, as such, lacks the soul which gives life to the offspring. The female animal is signified by her imperfect, mutilated menstrual residue:

> Semen is a residue/secretion […] When it has entered the uterus it puts into form the corresponding residue of the female and moves it with the same movement wherewith it is moved itself. For the female's contribution also is a residue, and has all the arts in it potentially though none of them actually; it has in it potentially even those parts which differentiate the female from the male, for just as the young of mutilated parents are sometimes born mutilated and sometimes not, so also the young born of a female are sometimes female and sometimes male instead. For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the menstrual fluids are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul.[22]

This contrast between complete and incomplete is what distinguishes male from female.[23]Aristotle frequently returns to this notion throughout *Generation of Animals*. A little further from the above passage, for example, explaining why not all men produce generative semen but all women produce menstrual residue, Aristotle once again argues for female lack rather than male incapacity:

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[20] Nancy Truman, 'Aristotle and the Politics of Reproduction' in, *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 189-206 (p. 202); Aristotle, *History of Animals* ,VIII. 1. 608b. 1-13.
[21] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* I, 2. 716a 5-7.
[22] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* II. 3. 737a 19-29.
[23] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* I. 2. 716a 13-14.

> Now the reason why it is not all males that have a generative secretion, while all females do, is that the animal is a body with Soul or life; the female always provides the material, the male that which fashions it, for this is the power that we say they each possess, and this is what is meant by calling them male and female. Thus while it is necessary for the female to provide a body and a material mass, it is not necessary for the male, because it is not within the work of art or the embryo that the tools or the maker must exist. While the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male, for the soul is the reality of a particular body.[24]

According to Aristotle, this male and female difference even becomes something of a conflict, again chiming with the misogyny evident in patristic exegesis, with woman as the gateway to evil, and Eve as the seductress of her mate. Male active 'essence' - as close to the divine as is possible for mortals - is so far above the material, passive essence of the female that it seeks to remain as far away as possible from it, only coming together for the purpose of generation.[25] It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such conclusions would find credence among well respected scholars such as Aquinas, and serve to promote highly misogynistic and influential works such as Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's *Secrets of Women*.[26]

Aristotle also attributes the shape and size of male and female reproductive organs to the body's level of heat and dryness. Again, it is the female that is found wanting. Aristotle advocates the one-sex version of an animal's reproductive organs. He argues that while both penis and womb are peculiar to male and female respectively, and are an indication of gender, nevertheless, 'the privy part of the female is in character opposite to that of the male. In other words, the part under the pubes is hollow, and not like the male organ, protruding'.[27]

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[24] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* II. 4, 738b 18-26.
[25] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* II. 1, 731b 1-11.
[26]For an English translation of *De Secretis Mulierum*, see *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* ed. and trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992).
[27] Aristotle, *History of Animals* I. 14. 493b 3-4.

While there appears to be careful distinction between the male and female genitalia, however, Aristotle allows for certain slippage between the sexes. The penis, for example, becomes an unreliable signifier of the male, for its presence or absence does not always indicate the ability or otherwise to impart life: a large penis, he argues, is less capable of generating life because it lets the sperm get too cold.[28] Furthermore, Aristotle seems to assimilate the female genitalia into the male. The womb, for example, becomes the male scrotum, and the vagina/cervix becomes an internal penis.[29] Female genitalia and, by association, the female herself, therefore, become an inferior and internal equivalent of the male. Such instability in the gender boundaries become significant in later medieval responses to Christ's body, where the shared identities of Christ and the beloved perfect their union.[30]

Blood, too, falls into this one-sex model. In the male, blood is refined by the heat of the male body and becomes life-generating semen. In the case of the female body, because it is naturally cold and wet, and cannot create sufficient heat to generate life from its blood, the unused blood is incapable of carrying life-generating seed, and so is expelled from the body as menses, which serves to moisten the vagina in preparation for intercourse.[31] The life-generating/ waste product dichotomy is illustrated by the terms Aristotle employs to describe these male and female emissions. His definition of this male reproductive fluid is '*sperma*', (seed) a word associated in classical literature with virile, active vitality. Female, menstrual blood, on the other hand, while identifying it as a sort of '*sperma*', Aristotle also terms,

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[28] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 1.7. 718a23, cited in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 33.
[29] Aristotle, *History of Animals* 16. 5. 637a23-25.
[30] Writing in the first century AD, Galen also concurs with Aristotle on female sexual inferiority, comparing female genitalia with the eyes of a mole, which are present on the animal but neither open nor allow it to see. Female genitalia, likewise, are inverted (blind) and stunted. Far from allowing the female some sort of equivalence with the male, therefore, this one-sex model reinforces the gender hierarchy of the male-dominated societies in which these scholars lived. Galen declares, 'Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so with mankind the man is more perfect than the woman.' Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 2. 629 -30, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May, 2 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), cited in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, pp. 26-29.
[31] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 4. 8. 776b 10.

catamenia (monthly discharge), a waste-product which needs to be expelled for the health of the woman.[32] Once again, however, the seeming dichotomies of male and female blood are more nuanced. The heat in the male body, that turns the blood to semen, also exists to a lesser degree in the female body, which turns the blood into the milk that feeds the child. However, Aristotle maintains, the male body is also capable of producing milk after the onset of puberty, and although this production is lower than that in the female, greater quantities can be generated.[33]This correlation between the male and the female body finds expression in the Peris's *La Vergine de la Leche*, and in Mechthild's Christ, as we shall see, as well as in the bloody horror of Mirk's exemplum discussed in chapter four and Auda's vision, discussed in chapter three, thus demonstrating how Aristotelian concepts of gender and the body permeated orthodox Christian doctrine, to allow a devotion that disrupted and transgressed male-centred theology.

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430)

The significance of Augustine of Hippo's teaching on medieval Christian thought was immense. His exegesis informed Augustine's notions of gender and flesh reveal the influence of classical medicine and philosophy, and the teachings of Christian exegetes such as Tertullian (d. 240), Irenaeus (d. 202), Justine (d. 165) and Ambrose (d. 397). Central to all Augustine's thinking, however, is the Bible, as the Word of God, with the Pauline letters holding particular significance. In his approach to flesh and gender Augustine therefore has to negotiate with theories and teaching not always compatible with one another.

[32] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 2. 3. 737a.28-30.
[33] Aristotle, *History of Animals* 3. 20. 522a 19-22.

Aristotle's and Galen's 'one-sex' theory of animal reproductive anatomy, with its theory of hierarchy among species and gender, in the superiority of certain living things over others, and of the adult male over the female and the infant and child, chimed well with the androcentric world of Augustine. However, it is Saint Paul's understanding of humanity that was particularly influential upon the development of Augustine's theory of humanity's place in the divine order. Paul's notion of a divinely decreed gender hierarchy relied largely on his distinction between 'flesh' and 'the body'. Writing nearly four centuries after the apostle's death, Augustine's theology inevitably reflects notions of gender and flesh that had developed among the Christian communities in the intervening centuries, but Paul's theology remains nevertheless a dominant influence. 'Flesh', for Augustine, comes to represent 'the body at odds with soul, city and God', and union between body and flesh is needed for harmony between God and human.[34]

Augustine's theology of the body

Augustine bases his teaching regarding man and woman on his understanding of the two accounts of Creation found in Genesis, and Paul's interpretation of these accounts. He argues that, in its original, 'natural' state - before Adam and Eve disobeyed God - the human body was not something shameful and lust-creating, and was intended to be immortal. Although temporarily lost, the post-lapsarian human body, however, could attain its 'natural' state after death through Christ's redemptive act of self-sacrifice. Augustine maintains that while women enjoyed a sort of spiritual parity with men, they were nevertheless inferior to them physically, emotionally and intellectually. Moreover, women were created to fulfil different purposes: while man was created to rule over and represent God on earth, woman

[34] Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 19.

was created to help man and bear children. Man's and woman's 'equivalence' was demonstrated in the first Creation account in Genesis 1: 25-31. Man and woman were created at the same time and in God's image, their purpose being to procreate and govern the rest of God's creation.[35] Augustine terms God's simultaneous intention to create both man and woman *informatio*.[36] Woman is afforded some sort of spiritual parity with man, which Augustine emphasises by defining Eve as *homo*, a human being, rather than *femina*, meaning, 'woman'. The creation of Adam and Eve, which is described in Genesis 2, Augustine terms *conformatio*, and this is what defines Eve (and therefore woman) as subordinate to Adam (and therefore man). Augustine argues that, although 'through her seminal creation, *informatio*, Eve is a human being just like Adam, *homo*; by the formation of her body in time, after that of Adam, she is a woman, *femina*'.[37] While *informatio* allows both man and woman each a rational soul, *conformatio* – the actual formation of the human body – resulted in the physical differences between man and woman, and woman's role as subordinate to man, a God-ordained, pre-lapsarian state, necessary for a well-ordered society.[38]

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[35] 'Et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam: ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos. Benedixitque illis Deus, et ait: Crescite et multiplicamini, et replete terram, et subjicite eam, et dominamini piscibus maris, et volatilibus cæli, et universis animantibus, quæ moventur super terram. Dixitque Deus: Ecce dedi vobis omnem herbam afferentem semen super terram, et universa ligna quæ habent in semetipsis sementem generis sui, ut sint vobis in escam: et cunctis animantibus terræ, omnique volucri cæli, et universis quæ moventur in terra, et in quibus est anima vivens, ut habeant ad vescendum. Et factum est ita.' (And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat: And to all beasts of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to all that move upon the earth, and wherein there is life, that they may have to feed upon. And it was so done.) Genesis 1. 27-30: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/vul/gen001.htm> [accessed 31 January 2016].

[36] Saint Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad litteram* VI, 2 and 5; 9 and 10, cited in Kari Elisabeth Børreson, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Grünewald: Kampen, 1995), p. 18.

[37] Augustine, *De Genesi* IX. 15, cited in Børreson *Subordination and Equivalence.* p. 18.

[38] 'Est etiam ordo naturalis in hominibus, ut serviant feminae viris, et filii parentibus, quia et illic haec iustitia est ut infirmior ratio serviat fortiori. (There is a natural order observed among humans, that women should serve men; and children their parents, because it is just that the weaker mind should serve the stronger). *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1. 153, cited in Børreson *Subordination and Equivalence*, p. 30.

Augustine argues that the human body reflects humanity's innate superiority over the rest of creation. All living creatures possess souls, but humans alone possess reason and intelligence and are created in God's image. This innate superiority (*homo interior*) is reflected in man and woman's upright posture (*homo exterior*), which points towards heaven.[39] While man's superior *homo interior* and *exterior*, however, reflect God's image, woman is hampered by her inferior powers of reason and her inferior *femina*, which is why, in *De Genesi*, Paul maintains that women must cover their heads.[40]

The integrity of the body is constantly threatened by the flesh and the soul, which seek to corrupt it and lead it to sin. Augustine exonerates the body of the 'rupture enacted by the soul and flesh', arguing that many of the vices enacted by an individual – such as heresy, envy and idolatry - have no benefit for the body.[41] The body, rather, is corrupted by 'the evils of the soul' (*mala animae*) and, as such is, burdensome. The body's burdensome state, however, can be rectified after death. While Augustine follows the teaching of Paul in denying that 'flesh and blood [can] inherit the Kingdom of God', he maintains that men and women can, after death, obtain the 'natural' body, which 'shall no longer be a burden, being no longer corruptible' ('et tunc enim erit, sed quia corrupibile non erit, non gravabit').[42] Men will be corporally reborn but will function as angels. Women's rebirth, however, is more dramatic as there is more flesh, as it were, to get rid of: their immortal bodies will be made

[39] Augustine, *De civitate dei contra paganos* XXII, 24, 4. S. *Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia*: *editio latina* > PL 41 > *De civitate dei contra paganos* libri XXII, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm.> [accessed 17 January 2016].
[40] Augustine, *De Gen. Litt* III, 22 ; 'Vir quidem non debet velare caput suum: quoniam imago et gloria Dei est, mulier autem gloria viri est. Non enim vir ex muliere est, sed mulier ex viro.' (A man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but a woman is the glory of the man. For man does not come from woman, but woman from man). I Corinthians 11: 7-8: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/vul/co1011.htm#007> [accessed 1 February2016].
[41] Augustine, *De civitate* XIV, 3.
[42] Augustine, *De civitate* XIV, 3; 1 Corinthians 15. 50.

more beautiful than their corruptible ones but will be incapable of causing lust in the beholder. While the female body remains female, therefore, its fleshly sexuality disappears.[43]

Augustine's theology of the flesh

Augustine, like Paul, distinguishes between' the flesh' and 'the body'. In *The City of God*, for example, he distances himself from the literal meaning of *carne* (flesh), in favour of its numerous and varied metaphoric uses found throughout the Old and New Testaments. For Augustine, the 'flesh' includes both the physical body, and the soul it houses; it is the 'synecdoche for the entire human being'.[44]Augustine's argument relies largely on his understanding of Paul's letters (an understanding informed by patriarchal societal norms) in particular, that addressed to the Galatians in which Paul compares the spiritual and the fleshly life.[45] In answer to Manichaean deep suspicion of the flesh and the body, Augustine emphatically maintains that, in itself, the flesh is a good thing. The downfall of humanity is, rather, caused by its desire to follow the will of the flesh rather than the will of the Spirit. [46] It is this desire to live according to the desires of the flesh – what Augustine terms concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) – that, he contends, has created, 'two kinds of human society, which we may justly call two cities [....] The one consists of those who wish to live after the

[43] Augustine, *De civitate* XXII. 18.
[44] 'Carnem quippe appellat non solum corpus terreni atque mortalis animantis ueluti cum dicit: Non omnis caro eadem caro. alia quidem hominis, alia autem caro pecoris, alia uolucrum, alia piscium, sed et aliis multis modis significatione huius nominis utitur, inter quos uarios locutionis modos saepe etiam ipsum hominem, id est naturam hominis, carnem nuncupat, modo locutionis a parte totum.' (For by flesh it means not only the body of a terrestrial and mortal animal, as when it says, All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, another of birds, but it uses this word in many other significations; and among these various usages, a frequent one is to use flesh for man himself, the nature of man taking the part for the whole). Augustine, *De civitate*, XI., trans. Marcus Dods, *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 2; ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120114.htm> [accessed 1 February 201]; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, p. 19.
[45] Galatians 5: 19-23: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/vul/gal005.htm> [accessed 2 February 2016].
[46] Augustine, *De civitate* XIV. 2. 3.

flesh, the other of those who wish to live after the spirit'.[47] But whereas the life lived according to the Spirit is God-directed and -intended, the life lived according to the flesh is the work of the Devil.[48]

Augustine equates the spirit-led life with the 'law of the mind' which 'brings the flesh into conformity with the will'. This belief is crucial to Augustine's concept of flesh and gender: it is the superiority of reason over desire that makes the woman inferior to the man, for woman's reason is inferior to man's.[49] This gender difference, however, is not restricted to flesh and body: it is also present in the asexual soul. Augustine argues the soul consists of masculine (rational and godly) and feminine (earthly and fleshly) elements. Being the embodiment, as it were, of the rational, God's image resides only in the masculine element of the soul 'which devotes itself to the contemplation of eternal truths' and guides the female element of the soul 'whose task is to provide for earthly needs'.[50] The feminine, fleshly element, however, is inherently rebellious and threatening to usurp the dominance of the masculine element. For the union between the flesh and the soul to be harmonious, therefore, this masculine element must keep the feminine in check. Augustine explains his argument with an analogy from ordinary, domestic life: reason must govern the flesh in the same way as a husband must lovingly discipline an unruly wife in order to reach a state of harmony in their marital union.[51] In so doing, Augustine equates the feminine element of the soul with woman herself. By using such an analogy, Lochrie argues, 'Augustine places the wife not at the site of the body but at the fissure of the flesh where concupiscence forever agitates against

[47] Augustine, *De civitate* XIV. 1.
[48] Augustine, *De civitate* XIV. 3.
[49] Augustine, *Confessiones* XIII. 32. 47.
[50] Augustine, *De Genesi* III.
[51] Augustine, *Ennarrationes in psalmos*, ed. D. Eligius Dekkers and Iohannes Fraipont, CCSL 40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956) 16, p. 2037, cited in Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, p. 19.

the will, the gap through which the self fell from God and from itself.'[52] Similar identifications of woman with the flesh rather than the will are evident throughout Augustine's work. Woman's body is constantly betrayed by her flesh, in such a way that it compromises her natural body, and so needs constant supervision by man. In her capacity as child -bearer, for example, she is liable to fall into the sin of pride without such guidance; the natural act of childbirth is forever tainted by pain; and woman's subordination to her husband becomes a *vitium* (disorder), akin rather to the relationship between a man and a slave than a husband to his wife.[53] Female flesh cannot reflect its divine creator and must be veiled.[54] Woman can only reflect God's image by shedding the weak *femina* and assuming her inner *homo* and even attaining *vir*-like qualities.[55]The idea that women are constantly betrayed by their own flesh echoes down the corridors of medieval biblical exegesis, as well as secular literature. Indeed, Augustine is reiterating Jantzen's theory of necrophilic anxiety, the patriarchal obsession with the threat of the flesh and the female divine, that she argues is a common feature of Western religion.[56] But it is the exploitation and reinterpretation of this perceived weakness that permits women mystics and theologians, like Hildegard and Mechthild to articulate a concept of the divine which is precisely that.

The opportunities to tap into this divine become evident in Augustine's argument that it is also possible for the very weakness of female flesh to be a source of and conduit for

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[52] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, p. 20.
[53] Augustine, *De Genesi* II, 19, PL 34, col. 210.
[54]'Quid ergo? mulieres non habent hanc innovationem mentis, ubi est imago Dei? Quis hoc dixerit? Sed corporis sui sexu non eam significant: propterea velari iubentur' (What then? Do women not enjoy this renewal of the spirit, where the image of God dwells? Who would deny this? But their bodily sex cannot show this, and so they are commanded to be veiled). Augustine, *De opere monachorum liber unus* XXXI., 40. PL 40, col. 580: <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/lavoro_monaci/index.htm> [accessed 17 February 2016].
[55] 'Quid nos impediret nominato viro intellegere et feminam, ut virum pro homine positum acciperemus? sicut in eo quod dictum est: Beatus vir qui timet Dominum utique ibi sunt et feminae, quae timent Dominum' (What should stop us understanding the word *vir* (man) to refer to *femina* (woman), since we accept that *vir* is used for *homo* (human) in the same way that the words "Blessed is the *vir* who fears the Lord" refer to *feminae* who fear the Lord). Augustine, *De civitate* XXII. 18. PL 41, col. 780: < http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>, [accessed 17 February 2016].
[56] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, esp. pp. 156-170.

redemption. In this capacity, female flesh is elevated to a state of near equivalence with male flesh. Augustine was not original in such propositions - earlier theologians such as Justine, Irenaeus and Tertullian also held similar opinions - but Augustine's lasting influence as an interpreter of scripture on later scholarship makes him particularly significant. Augustine holds that just as the first Adam and Eve brought death and corruption into the world through their act of disobedience, so the Christ, the second Adam, and the Virgin Mary, the second Eve, brought about humanity's salvation. He states, for example, 'Hominis autem liberatio in utroque sexu debuit apparere. Ergo quia virum oportebat suscipere, qui sexus honorabilior est, consequens erat ut feminei sexus liberatio hinc appareret, quod ille vir de femina natus est.' (However, it was necessary that the liberation of humanity to be shown in both sexes. And so, because it became [Christ] to take on the form of a man, which is the more honorable sex, it followed that for the liberation of the female sex, that man should be born of a woman.)[57]

Augustine also links Eve and, thus, female flesh with the Church: just as Eve was born from Adam's side, so the Church (*Ecclesia*) emerged from Christ's wounded side.

> Vt enim in exordio generis humani de latere uiri dormientis costa detracta femina fieret, Christum et ecclesiam tali facto iam tunc prophetari oportebat. Sopor quippe ille uiri mors erat Christi, cuius exanimis in cruce pendentis latus lancea perforatum est atque inde sanguis et aqua defluxit; quae sacramenta esse nouimus, quibus aedificatur ecclesia. Nam hoc etiam uerbo scriptura usa est, ubi non legitur "formauit" aut "finxit", sed: Aedificauit eam in mulierem; unde et apostolus aedificationem dicit corporis Christi, quod est ecclesia
>
> (For at the beginning of the human race the woman was made of a rib taken from the side of the man while he slept; for it seemed fit that even then Christ and His Church should be foreshadowed in this event. For that sleep of the man was the death of Christ, whose side, as He hung lifeless upon the cross, was pierced with a spear, and there flowed from it blood and water, and these we know to be the sacraments by which the Church is "built up." For Scripture used this very word, not saying "He formed" or "framed," but "built her up into a woman;" whence also the apostle speaks of the *edification* of the body of Christ, which is the Church.)[58]

[57] Augustine, *De diversis quaestionbus* XI. PL 14.
[58] Augustine, *De civitate dei contra paganos*, XXII, 17. col 778.

Augustine further exploits the role of female flesh when he likens the Church's relationship to Christ to that of the spouse to the bridegroom. In his sermon based on Psalm 127, Augustine explores the metaphor of Christ as the head and body of the Church: Christ is the head and body of *Ecclesia*, the Church, with its limbs being Christ's followers. Augustine, however, elaborates further: *Ecclesia* is Christ's *uxor* (wife) identified as the *vinea fertilis* (fertile vine) and located in Christ's wounded side. [59] While extoling the 'natural' function of the female Church, however, Augustine distances her from fleshly desire so often associated with the feminine and female: *Ecclesia* is also virginal.[60] Moreover, the union between Christ and the Church existed in unbroken body of the Virgin. Such a relationship, Augustine believes, encapsulates the perfect marital state in which true love is lust-free. His lust-free union, by inference, draws attention to the post-lapsarian flesh which humanity has inherited: offspring are not born to virgin mothers, and men and women succumb to irrational lust. Augustine, however, while revealing this profound discomfort at the inherent natality of a female divine, nonetheless reveals, and gives credence to, the possibility of such an hypothesis within Christianity, and the image of this mystic union became remarkably prominent in the later Middle Ages, when both men and women eagerly adopted the role of betrothed to Christ the bridegroom in order to express their intensely personal relationship with their saviour.

Woman's inherent irrationality also becomes a strength, according to Augustine, as she is naturally more receptive to God's words and seeks him more ardently and affectively, as is demonstrated in the Gospels when the women seek and find the risen Christ before the

[59] Augustine, *Enarrationes* 127. 11-12.
[60] Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione, et de baptismo parvulorum, ad marcellinum libri tres* I. 25. 38. col. 131, cited in Børreson, *Subordination and Equivalence*, p. 80.

apostles.[61] The vulnerability of female flesh can thus elevate woman to a near-equivalence to man, it is through his strength-in weakness theology, that many female medieval mystics find a voice, with or without the approval of their male advocates, and focus their desire upon that most female of men, the Son.[62]

Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179)

Although her influence upon medieval Christianity's notions of the flesh was perhaps not as extensive as that of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, nevertheless, Hildegard of Bingen's contribution to the development of these ideas and theologies is exceptional. While her theology and beliefs regarding the role of the Church and its clergy are fundamentally conservative and Augustinian, there are elements to her theology, and her means of expression which do not sit comfortably with the androcentric orthodoxy they espoused.

As a visionary, prophet, preacher, theologian and leader within her community of nuns at Rupertsberg and Eibingen in what is now south-east Germany, Hildegard achieved a remarkable reputation. Her literary output includes records of her visions, works on natural medicine, musical compositions and liturgy, and a large body of letters whose correspondents include popes, emperors, abbots and even Bernard of Clairvaux. Hildegard undertook four preaching tours throughout Germany - a highly unusual undertaking for any woman at that time – promoting Crusade and denouncing the moral laxity of the clergy. She was termed the Sibyl of the Rhine by her contemporaries and her influence as a mystic survived her into the

[61] Augustine, *Sermo Guelferb* XIV, Misc Agost I, p. 486 .15, cited in Børreson *Subordination and Equivalence*, p. 78; Jerome, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, Prologue (CCSL 73: 465-6), cited in *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents*, ed. Vera Petch Morton and Jocelyn Wogan-Brown (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 80.

[62] Morton and Wogan-Brown highlight the endorsement of the female prophetic voice and the justification for weak female flesh in the High Middle Ages in their selection of correspondence from Peter Abelard to the abbess Heloise (letter 7). Morton and Wogan-Brown, *Guidance*, pp. 53-95; Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp.191-203 (p. 199).

sixteenth century. Hildegard's remarkable reputation and influence throughout medieval and early modern Germany, however, did not really extend beyond the geographical boundaries of Germany after her death. The breadth of her scholarship and ability became overshadowed by her reputation as a mystic, and even that became eclipsed by that of other female mystics, such as those in Helfta, Liege and the likes of Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden, whose writings reveal her influence upon female religious houses and communities.[63] However, Hildegard's influence, Nevertheless, her limited influence makes Hildegard no less significant as a theologian nor remarkable as a woman, adapting, as she did, orthodox, androcentric theology to support her female-focused conception of the divine, and successfully defending it in the face of significant patriarchal opposition.

Barbara Newman places Hildegard among twelfth century prescolastics, such as Hugh of St Victor (d.1141), Rupert of Deutz (d.c.1129) and Honorius of Regensberg (d.1154), whose prolific and varied output ranged from Biblical commentary to spiritual instruction and encyclopedic information.[64] Like theirs, Hildegard's work predates the early humanist scholarship which emerged from the cathedral and monastic schools and universities established in the late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and which was heavily influenced by the newly discovered Greek and Arabic natural philosophy of scholars such as Aristotle, Plato and Avicenna. Hildegard's originality and idiosyncratic philosophies nevertheless serve to support a highly conservative approach to certain doctrines, and one influenced by the Benedictine tradition of which she was part.[65]This approach is evident in Hildegard's treatment of the flesh and body, in particular with reference to female flesh.

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[63] Caroline Walker Bynum discusses the interest in and influence of Hildegard in the preface to Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), pp. 1-6.
[64] Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. xx.
[65] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. xx

Hildegard's teaching regarding this subject reveals the influence of Augustine (and, via him, Aristotle and Galen) and traditional androcentric, patriarchal Church teaching. However, Hildegard manipulates this misogynistic Church teaching, so that the very weaknesses and failings of female flesh become its strength, and female flesh becomes a source of redemption and enlightenment.

Significant to Hildegard's development of her ideas of the flesh is her treatment of Adam and Eve, who represent both ideal and fallen humanity. Hildegard follows Augustinian tradition in identifying man with the soul and woman with the body; and so, Hildegard argues, man and woman represent different Christic elements, with 'man signifying the divinity and woman indeed the humanity of the Son of God'('vir divinitatem, femina vero humanitatem filii Dei significat').[66] In this Hildegard concurs with Augustinian teaching. However, in her development of this argument, she differs radically from Augustine in several ways. Firstly, although Adam, and therefore man, represents divine nature, he is unable to share that nature: Eve, on the other hand, is fully representative of Christ's humanity. Secondly, in representing and sharing Christ's humanity, woman not only 'bears the stamp of his image', but in her function as mother, reveals God's image in her offspring. Thirdly, it is woman who clothes with flesh the naked soul, and gives it form:

> Ipsa enim opera scientiae suae virum operit, quia et de carne et de sanguine plasmata est, quod vir non est, quoniam primum limus fuit, quapropter etiam in nuditate sua ad mulierem respicit, ut ab ipsa operiatur. [67]

[66] Hildegard of Bingen, *Sanctae Hildegardis liber divinorum operum simpliis hominis*, I.4.100, PL 197: 945d; II.5.43, 885c, cited in Newman, *Sister of* Wisdom, p. 93.
[67] DOD I.4.65, PL 197:851c., cited in Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 95.

> (For by the work of her knowledge she covers man, because she was formed from both flesh and blood, and man was not, since he was originally clay. And indeed because of this, in his state of nakedness, man looks to woman so that he might be clothed by her.)

By such a declaration Hildegard, shifts away from the Aristotelian and Galenic tradition, which taught that the form of the offspring was dependent on the male; and also from Augustinian teaching which privileges male flesh over female flesh as the mirror of the divine.[68] Hildegard maintains that woman was created to be dependent upon and serve man.[69] However, by arguing that it is woman rather than man who provides form, thus raising her from simply the passive recipient of the male seed, Hildegard complicates the notion of gender superiority at a fundamental level and allows woman the creative abilities more often associated with God and the male.

Hildegard is also unusual in that, in proportioning blame for the fall of humanity, she seems to excuse both Adam and Eve, attributing their disobedience to their physiognomy rather than their moral failings. Adam was, by nature, strong (*vir* [man] was believed to derive from *vis* [power]), but it was this very strength embodied in his affection for Eve that caused his downfall. [70] On the other hand, formed from Adam's flesh, rather than the hard earth from which he had been created, Eve's natural softness (*mulier* [woman] was believed to be derived from *mollis*, meaning soft) made her easy prey for Satan.[71] In *Scivias* 1.2.10, for example, Hildegard takes pains to portray an innocent and naïve Eve who is totally

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[68] *De opere monachorum liber unus* XXXII, 40. PL 40, col. 708: <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/lavoro_monaci/index.htm.> [accessed 17 February 2016].

[69]For example, she writes that in the context of marriage, 'mulier sub potestate viri quoniam ut duritia lapidis ad teneritudinem terrae est, ita etiam et fortitudo viri ad mollitiem mulieris' ('a woman remains under the authority of her husband, since, just as the hardness of stone is to the tenderness of the earth, so the potency/strength of man is to the softness of woman'). Hildegard, *Scivias* 1. 2.11, PL 197: col. 392b, c.

[70] Hildegard, *Scivias* 1. 2.10, PL 197: col. 391d, cited in Newman, *Sister of* Wisdom, pp. 115-16.

[71] Isidore of Seville, *Etmologiae* XI. 2. 17-18, PL 82, col.417a.

unprepared for Satan's wiles.[72] In language similar to that used in *Causae et Curae,* when referring to menstruation (which is discussed below), the devil 'invasit' the guileless Eve, causing her to sin. Using the language of military attack, Hildegard writes that 'the devil rushed upon Eve, who possessed an innocent soul, through the seduction of the serpent, in order to through her down.' ('Evam innocentem animum habentem […] per seductionem serpentis ad dejectionem eius diabolus invasit') Paradoxically, however, it is Eve's very frailty that permits humanity's salvation: if Adam had sinned first, then, Hildegard argues, the sin would have been too great to forgive[73]. Furthermore, rather than being the seductress of Tertullian, Paul and other Christian exegetes, Hildegard's Eve becomes infected by Satan's poison and then passes it on to Adam. In *Scivias* 1. 2. 10, it is the Devil, not Eve, who is the seducer, a point Hildegard makes twice in the passage, referring to Satan as 'the ancient seducer' (*antiquus seductor*). [74] By portraying Eve in this way, Hildegard seeks to redeem not only Eve's fallen flesh but also that of her daughters, from traditional Christian exegesis.

Hildegard also argues that it is woman, not man, who is the naturally continent sex. She outlines her theory in *Scivias* 2. 3. 22-4. For her, the causes of procreation – desire (*concupiscentia*), potency (*fortitudo*) and zeal (*studium*) are found in man rather than woman, and mirror God's will in the creation of Adam. Woman, being colder and wetter in temperament, is more suited to 'bring forth children in the fluid of birth' (*in humore partus*).Woman only perceives the 'fluid of fertility' (*virtus humoris*) at certain times, because she is weaker and constitutionally colder than man; and, were it not for that fluid, she

[72] Hildegard, *Scivias* 1. 2. 10, PL 197, col. 391d.
[73] 'Sed et si Adam transgressus fuisset prius quam Eva, tunc transgressio illa tam fortis et tam incorrigibilis fuisset, quod homo etiam in tam magna obduratione incorrigibilitatis cecidisset, quod nec salvari vellet nec posset. Unde quod Eva prior transgrediebatur, facilius potuit, quia etiam fragilior masculo fuit.'(But if Adam had sinned before Eve, then that sin would have been so strong and so uncorrectable (because, indeed, man would have fallen is such a great uncorrectable stubbornness), that God would not have wished, nor been able to save him. And so, because Eve sinned first, that sin could be erased more easily, because she was more fragile than the male). Hildegard, *Causae et Curae* II p. 47, ll. 4-8.
[74] Hidegard, *Scivias* 1. 2. 10, PL 197, col. 391d.; PL 197, col. 392a, cited in Newman, *Sister of* Wisdom, p. 116.

would not receive her husband's sexual advances. It is man's strong nature that is his downfall, and the man who wishes to remain a virgin for Christ has to work especially hard at attaining a state which is against his natural disposition. It is as though he must achieve a state of female fleshliness in order to become Christ's consort:

> Cum etiam fortitudo viri recusat ducere consortium matrimonii, ita quod vir propter amorem Filii mei se coercet in vivida natura sua, cum floret in germine filiorum; ipse tamen constringens membra sua ne exerceant. [75]

> (When indeed the strength of a man refuses to take a wife, so that, on account his love for my son, he forces himself in the vigour of his nature (since he flourishes in the begetting of children), but he restrains his own limbs so that they do not carry out the desires of his flesh, then this man is especially pleasing to me because he conquers himself in this way.)

Woman, on the other hand, naturally does not seem to face so harsh a struggle.

Hildegard further redefines Augustinian perception of the flesh-oriented nature of the female, by identifying woman with air and clouds. In *Scivias* 1. 2, bright clouds replete with shining stars represent an innocent Eve pregnant with humanity ('a shining white cloud, which had come out of the fair form of a human and contained within it very many stars' ('candidam nubem (quae de pulchra forma hominis plurimas stellas in se continens exierat')), while the envious Satan is represented by 'the foulest vapours' ('nebulam teterrimam') threatening to overshadow her. [76] Eve's etherealness also links her to Christ -who is often represented in medieval iconography as seated on or amidst clouds -, angels, and the Virgin

[75] Hildegard, Scivias, 2. 3. 24 PL.197, 461d.
[76] Scivias 1. 2. 10, PL 197: 391d.

Mary, similarly depicted and herself overshowed by the Holy Spirit .[77] Eve's airy nature therefore demonstrates her purity, godliness and specifically female fecundity. It also represents the female fragility of her innocence, threatened by the Devil's foul vapor. Hildegard even uses this imagery to define herself in her capacity as one open to the Holy Spirit.[78] In this way Hildegard appropriates a physiognomy, traditionally associated with the male, for fragile female flesh.

This manipulation of the abject nature of female flesh is evident in Hildegard's discussion of the certain aspects of female flesh particularly associated with woman's fallen state: menstruation and childbirth. Hildegard concurs with Augustine and other patristic exegetes, that menstruation and the pain and dangers of childbirth are a result of Eve's disobedience in the Garden. In a discussion of menstruation in her medicinal handbook, *Causae et Curae*, for example, she attributes menstruation to the 'flood of lust' which 'entered Eve' and opened her veins and those of all women after her, to allow the flow of menstrual blood.[79] However, Hildegard's description of menstruation is vivid but also nuanced: menstruation is a 'river of blood'(*fluviu[s] sanguinis)* whose individual drops 'flow out like a stream' (*effluunt ut rivulus*), or even 'a raging torrent' (*procella*).The vocabulary she uses echoes her description of the 'flood of concupiscence' (*fluxus cupiditatis*) that 'invaded' the hapless Eve, thus linking menstruation with Eve's own moral frailty. The consistency of blood is also dependent on the virginity or otherwise of the woman: while the blood of a 'virgin'/'young girl'(*virgo*/*puella*) is somewhat bloody, and even concentrated (*sanguineus*), that of a 'woman' (*mulier*) whose intactness has been 'ruined' or 'destroyed' (*corrupta est*) through sex, is bluish in colour (*livor*), and lacking the purity of virginal

[77] For a much more detailed analysis of this image, see Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp.100-107.
[78] DOD III. 10. 38, PL 197: 1038a, cited in Newman, *Sister of* Wisdom, p. 106.
[79] Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegardis Causae et Curae,* ed. Paul Kaiser (Leipzig: B. G. Trubner, 1903) p. 102.

menstrual blood can become mixed with the male seed to produce offspring.[80] Hildegard further manipulates this abjection so as to female flesh becomes exonerated and beneficent. Firstly, rather than being the source of all post-lapsarian evil that has befallen humanity, Hildegard's Eve is a helpless victim of a flood of *cupiditas,* bewitched by Satan and fooled into her act of disobedience.[81] Moreover, menstruation is a natural, purgative process necessary for women who are colder than men.[82] Furthermore, Hildegard calls for sympathy for the sufferings of female flesh and takes pains to remove it from the realm of taboo. This evident is *Scivias* 1.2.20 in which, echoing Gregory's advice to Augustine of Canterbury concerning whether menstruating women should be permitted to receive communion, God commands that such women should not only be 'cherished' but also be allowed into 'my Temple', since their issue of blood is God-given and therefore sacred.[83]

Hildegard, however, goes further still in her exoneration of female flesh. While Augustine is happy to acknowledge female flesh as the conduit of salvation through the virgin body of the Mary, Hildegard uses the suffering of childbirth and menstruation and uncontained menstrual blood in her explanation of Christ's role as savior of humankind. This is present, I would argue, in the *Causae et Curae* passage. Although Hildegard makes no specific reference to the crucified and bleeding Christ in this passage, her description of the flowing menstrual blood is none the less reminiscent of representations of Christ's blood which is typically depicted and described in literature and iconography of the time as flowing, red and salvific. Hildegard herself makes use of such imagery in *Scivias* 2.6.1, when she describes her vision of the crucified Christ whose crimson blood flows from his side as a bridal gift for

[80] Kaiser, *Causae et Curae*, pp. 102-3.
[81] Kaiser, *Causae et Curae*, p. 103.
[82] Kaiser, *Causae et Curae*, p. 102.
[83] Hart and Bishop, *Scivias*, 1.2.20, p. 83; Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 118-19.

Ecclesia. [84]Elsewhere in her writing, her dramatic and forceful descriptions of the agony of labour serve to reflect the birth of Christ and his second coming. In *Causae et Curae*, for example, Hildegard likens the pain of labour to that undergone by the world at the end of time – 'In pain you will give birth: and in such pain as when the world will be changed at the end of time' ('in dolore paries: et in tali scilicet dolore, ut in fine temporum terra mutabitur'). While she echoes the Genesis account of Eve's punishment, and Paul's pronouncements in I Thessalonians, for Hildegard, the birth pangs are 'proleptic', foretelling not only Christ's incarnation his second coming at the end of time and who is born, as it were, a second time by the Church and the cosmos. 'Woman,' therefore, 'who personifies both, bears in her body the pain with which Satan has tainted all fruitfulness.' [85]

'Paupercula feminea forma'

While Hildegard does not openly challenge notions of the frailty of female flesh, she nevertheless exploits such notions in order to give authority to her voice. This is particularly evident in her presentation of herself as a weak and unlearned female to male authority figures, often in the context of strident criticism of ecclesiastical and monastic failings.[86] Tatiana Tsakiropoulou-Summers notes Hildegard's concern on this score in a letter to Pope Eugene III (d.1153) in which she writes that her words are rejected on account that they emanate from 'a poor woman who was created from a rib and has not been instructed in

[84] Hart and Bishop, *Scivias*, 2.6.1, p. 238. The Rupertsberg manuscript (now lost) contains an illumination illustrating this vision in which Ecclesia can be seen collecting blood from Christ's side-wound in a chalice. See Leigh-Choate, Flynn and Fassler, 'Hildegard as Musical Hagiographer', pp. 112-13.
[85] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 118.
[86] Adelgundis Führkötter, trans., *Briefwechsel* (*Epistolae*) (Salzburg: O. Müller, 1965), pp. 30ff, cited in Tatiana Tsakiropoulou-Summers, 'Hildegard of Bingen: The Teutonic Prophetess' in *Women Writing Latin: Medieval Modern Women Writing Latin*, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 139.

philosophy'.[87] In order to overcome the seemingly insurmountable barrier of her gender, Hildegard exploits the prejudices of her male fellow monastics by identifying herself with female frailty. Through her description of herself as a frail woman, a *paupercula feminea forma* (a poor little female form), speaking only because higher male clergy have become so morally lax and 'womanly', Hildegard becomes God's mouthpiece through her gift as a prophet.[88] The trope of humility is a feature common among monastic writers who often compound their state of abjection by identifying themselves with the female: Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, famously exploits such an image of humility to great effect in both his correspondence to fellow monastics, and in his commentary on the Canticles. The trope has particular resonance, however, when used by a woman, who simply by being female, is already ahead of her male counterparts in the humility/abject stakes. Hildegard's description of herself is particularly strong, and emphasises specifically female frailty: *paupercula* is the diminutive, feminine form of *pauper* (beggar, poor man); while the inclusion of *feminea* compounds Hildegard's identification with the abject. Hildegard's divine appointment as prophet is further enhanced by the description's association with the Virgin Mary, whose exhalation as the mother of Christ was also dependent on both her humility and her sex (a similarity not lost on Guibert of Gembloux who addresses Hildegard in a manner similar to the *Ave Maria*). Hildegard's role as mouthpiece of the Almighty demonstrated that God chose the lowliest and basest female flesh to shame the wise, strong male flesh which has failed to live up to the position of authority God had intended for its members. As Newman points out, female authority is paradoxical, depending as it does, on both its own fleshly

[87] Führkötter, 'The Teutonic Prophetess', p.139.
[88] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 4.

inadequacies and on those of a 'womanly' male elite.[89] Female flesh can only achieve greatness through its state of abjection.

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274)

Thomas Aquinas's extensive theological writing reveals his indebtedness to the teachings of Augustine and other Christian exegetes, while reflecting the marked development in medical learning which emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, following the recovery of the works of Aristotle, Archimedes and other ancient scholars. This development is also evident in the attention given to Christ's humanity in devotional literature and iconography, with particular emphasis placed upon Christ's nurturing, bleeding and suffering body; his readiness to assume and identify with the frailty of human flesh; and the believer's affective response to Christ's multivalent humanity and divinity. It is no coincidence that the feast of *Corpus Christi*, which specifically commemorates Christ's eucharistic and transubstantiated flesh, was instituted at this time nor that Aquinas himself was commissioned by Pope Urban IV (d. 1264) to write two out of the three offices for the Feast .[90]

At the same time, however, there emerged a growing anxiety to preserve the binary distinctions in gender, which seemed under threat from the more complicated notions of gender. As Joan Cadden contends:

> The persistence with which medical writers and natural philosophers applied terminology of sex difference particularly in situations and cases […] which did not fit the binary structure of

[89] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 3-4.
[90]In 1264, Urban IV (d. 1264) issued the papal bull, *Transiturus in hoc mundo,* in which he instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi. The third office was written by the prioress and visionary, Juliana of Liège (d. 1258) who, along with the anchoress, Eva of Liège (d. after 1264), championed the institution of the Feast. See Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 90-92.

> sex distinctions, suggests that knowledge about nature was one element in the enforcement of narrower forms.[91]

Aquinas and the body

Like Augustine, Aquinas seeks to reconcile the notion of gender equivalence put forward in Genesis 1 with that of gender hierarchy deemed essential for a properly functioning society. Aquinas's arguments also demonstrate the influence of Aristotle, to whose teaching he makes direct reference throughout his writing. Aquinas is keen to stress that both man and woman reflect the image of God, their creator, 'in the mind [the rational part of the soul] in which there is no distinction of gender'.[92] However, Aquinas holds that the soul is also gendered - a more Aristotelean stance - maintaining that the human being consists of 'a unitary substance in which the rational soul is the form of the body'. And because woman is less rational than man, her soul, the seat of rationality, must be inferior.[93] This inferiority is demonstrated in her physicality. Aquinas writes ' there should be proportion between the soul and the body, like form to matter, and the mover to the thing moved; and thus, woman was less perfect than man even as regards her soul.'[94]Aquinas argues that woman is inferior to man because she was created from man and for him: because man was made directly in God's image, he is more able to reflect that image outwardly. The female in higher animals and humans is 'aliquid secundarium', (something secondary): something that follows as a consequence of its male counterpart.[95] Furthermore, while 'man is more finished in reason and in manly virtue'

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[91] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 4.
[92] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1, 93, 6 ad 2: <http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_I/Q93> [accessed 12 October 2020].
[93]Thomas Aquinas, *Super primam epistolem Pauli ad Corinthos* XI. 2. 607: <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~1Cor.C11.L2.n607.3> [accessed 10 October 2020].
[94]Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* 2d, 21,2,1 ad 2: https://aquinas.cc/la/la/~Sent.II.D21.Q1.A2.C.6 [accessed 10 October 2020].
[95]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1. 93. 4. ad 1.

(‘mas est ratione perfectior et virtute fortiori’), woman is childlike and dependent on the support of her mate and is more suited to the inferior, domestic sphere of the home.[96] Aquinas illustrates female inferiority by referencing Aristotle's notion of the female as the imperfect version of the male: nature always seeks to create perfection, but when that is not possible, it creates something of lesser perfection, 'for example', Aquinas argues, 'when [nature] cannot produce a male, it brings a female to birth, i.e. Aristotle’s 'mas occasionatus'.[97]

Aquinas argues that, before the Fall, man’s body was ‘preserved from decay’ through the immense power of the rational soul.[98] As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience, however, the body decays and dies. However, bodily resurrection is possible through the force of the incorruptible and immortal soul, which desires union with the body and thus forms a whole human being.[99] The body will be resurrected 'in aetate iuvenali’ (in youthful age), without the encumbrances of childhood or old age, its identity and gender will remain, but the concupiscence associated with lack of reason, materiality, and sin will not be present.[100] Merit, rather than the gender will signify a difference of value.[101]

Aquinas and the flesh

Aquinas’s notion of ‘the flesh’ combines also Augustinian and Aristotelian teachings. Like them, Aquinas argues that the highest aspect of humankind is its power of reason (*mens*) because it reflects the true image of God.[102]However, from Adam and Eve’s act of

[96] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3. 123. ad 3: < https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~SCG3.C123> [accessed 10 October 2020].
[97] Aristotle *Generation of Animals* ii, 3; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Supplementary Questions 52,1, ad. 2.
[98] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1, 97, 1, c.
[99] Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles* IV, 79.
[100] Aquinas, *Supplementary Questions* 81. 1.
[101] Aquinas, *Supplementary Questions* 81. 3. ad 2.
[102] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1. 93. 6 ad 2.

disobedience, men and women have inherited Original sin, the desire to follow the lower aspects of the soul (*concupiscentia*), rather than the God-reflecting reason.[103]Through the supremacy of concupiscence over reason, the human body falls prey to the fleshly failings such as pride and lust.[104]Because of her inferior powers of reason, woman is more fleshly, and therefore more prone to concupiscence. This is demonstrated, Aquinas argues, by Eve's act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden: although she was intellectually weaker than Adam, it was her sin of *elatio* (self-complacency) - a form of pride - that caused her to obey the serpent rather than God.[105] While Aquinas here falls short of Tertullian and Pauline condemnation of Eve, and, by association, womankind, his analysis of her role in the downfall of humanity is in marked contrast to her exoneration by Hildegard, as I discuss below. Adam, on the other hand, while committing the sin of pride in his desire to become like God, was less to blame, since he had been seduced by the woman and acted out of love for her.[106] Womankind is further limited by her fleshliness in that she cannot receive the Sacrament of Order, i.e. she cannot become a priest and thus enjoy the unique relationship between the priest and Christ nor be part of the hierarchy which the priesthood signifies.[107]

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[103] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1. 93. 6 ad 2.
[104] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1, 95, 2, ad 1.
[105] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 94, 4, ad 1; II, 163, 1, ad 4.
[106] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II 163, 4; Børreson, *Subordination and Equivalence*, pp. 208-9.
[107]'Christus in sacramentis habuit duplicem potestatem. Unam auctoritatis, quae competit ei secundum quod Deus. Et talis potestas nulli creaturae potuit communicari, sicut nec divina essentia. Aliam potestatem habuit excellentiae, quae competit ei secundum quod homo. Et talem potestatem potuit ministris communicare, dando scilicet eis tantam gratiae plenitudinem ut eorum meritum operaretur ad sacramentorum effectus; ut ad invocationem nominum ipsorum sanctificarentur sacramenta; et ut ipsi possent sacramenta instituere; et sine ritu sacramentorum effectum conferre solo imperio. Potest enim instrumentum coniunctum, quanto fuerit fortius, tanto magis virtutem suam instrumento separato tribuere, sicut manus baculo.'
(Christ had a twofold power in the sacraments. one was the power of "authority," which belongs to Him as God: and this power He could not communicate to any creature; just as neither could He communicate the Divine Essence. The other was the power of "excellence," which belongs to Him as man. This power He could communicate to ministers; namely, by giving them such a fulness of grace--that their merits would conduce to the sacramental effect--that by the invocation of their names, the sacraments would be sanctified--and that they themselves might institute sacraments, and by their mere will confer the sacramental effect without observing the sacramental rite. For a united instrument, the more powerful it is, is all the more able to lend its power to the separated instrument; as the hand can to a stick). Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III. 64. 4. c.2, cited in Børreson, *Subordination and Equivalence*, pp. 235-36.

Aquinas claims that woman is barred from this office due to her inferior powers of reason and her bodily inadequacy, both ordained by God.[108] Aquinas also explains away the presence of deaconesses and priestesses in the Canon Law by redefining 'deaconess' as woman 'who carries out the function of a deacon' rather than one who holds ecclesiastical authority; and 'priestess' as a widow.[109]Women's lower intelligence and her state of subjection to men prevent her from preaching and speaking God's word in public: even the gift of prophesy must be delivered through a male intermediary. Aquinas here is following the teaching of Paul (1Corinthians 14; 34 and 1Timothy, 2;12). However, he further justifies his argument by adding that by speaking in public, women can arouse concupiscence among the men they are addressing.[110] A vocal and visible woman, therefore, becomes an object of fear and suspicion, whose fleshly propensities threaten the spiritual integrity of the superior male; and she can only escape from her fleshliness, it seems, by being silent and invisible or by overcoming her natural inadequacies through divine grace, treading the thin line between propriety and impropriety, heresy and orthodoxy, a line that medieval women mystics consistently had to negotiate.

Aquinas maintains that escape is possible, however. Indeed, the very weaknesses that so typically defines woman as fleshly and therefore intellectually and morally inferior can sometimes make her more superior in virtue to man. [111] Woman's greater powers of affectivity make her more merciful, constant and more devout, and a suitable recipient for the gift of prophesy. For example, Christ's mother and the women remained with Christ at the foot of the cross, while the male disciples, with the exception of John, had fled; Mary Magdalen alone stayed in the garden to look for Christ's body; a Samaritan woman

[108] Aquinas, *Supplementary Questions* 39; Børreson, *Subordination and Equivalence*, pp. 236-37.
[109] Aquinas, *Supplementary Questions* 39, 1, c.
[110] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 177, 2.
[111] Aquinas, *Expositio in evanglium Ioannis* XX, 2, 2491.

conversed with Christ at the well.[112] It is also possible for women to display manly virtue as soldiers of Christ.[113]Nevertheless, the very same weakness which channels God's words is also a source of lust and concupiscence, and so, Aquinas emphatically argues, women's revelations should be privately, rather than publicly articulated.[114] Aquinas's sentiments are evident in the numerous, approved *vitae* of enclosed women visionaries and mystics such as Julia of Cornillon and Marie'Oignies, as well as in the antipathy towards, and suspicion of, women such as Margarite Porete and Mechthild of Magdeburg, who delivered their revelations in the open and independently.

Flesh is also instrumental in mankind's salvation. In *Scripta super libros Sententiarum* Aquinas argues the appropriateness of Christ's male incarnation through the intermediary of female flesh.[115] Christ's male incarnation 'presupposes the sin of Adam and therefore the divine goodness manifests itself as a redemption'. Through what Aquinas terms 'hypostatic union' human nature is united to the divine nature in Christ who is both human and divine.[116] Aquinas maintains that Christ needed to be a sexual being in order to be completely human to demonstrate that gender belongs not just to a person and individual, but to the 'mystical body', the Church of which he is the head. Christ is male because his function as redeemer is male. His flesh, however, retains its pre-fall integrity which man can

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[112] Aquinas, *Expositio in evanglium Ioannis* XI, 4, 8, 1510 and 1519-20; IV, 2, 9, cited in Kristin M. Popik, 'The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas', *Faith & Reason* (Winter 1978), pp. 1-22: < https://media.christendom.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kristin-M.-Popik-The-Philosophy-of-Women-of-St.-Thomas-Aquinas.pdf> [accessed 10 October 2020].

[113] 'Et in homilia de militia spirituali dicit, apud Deum femineus etiam militat sexus, multae namque feminae animo virili spiritualem militiam gesserunt. Quaedam enim interioris hominis virtute viros aequaverunt in agonibus martyrum, quaedam etiam fortiores viris exstiterunt. Et ideo mulieribus hoc sacramentum conferendum est.' (Again, [Saint Chrysostum] says "In God's eyes even women fight, for many a woman has waged the spiritual warfare with the courage of a man. For some have rivaled men in the courage with which they have suffered martyrdom; and some indeed have shown themselves stronger than men"). Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III. 72. 8. ad. 3.

[114] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II. 171-178. For an excellent study of the female visionary's voice in late-medieval Europe, see Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Medieval Visionaries* (York: York University Press, 1999).

[115] Aquinas, *Scripta super libros Sententiarum* 3d. 12. 3.

[116] Aquinas, *Scripta super libros Sententiarum* 3d. 12. 3. 1 sol. 1.

attain after death. Female flesh also has redemptive qualities. Aquinas argues that because Eve (and therefore woman) was instrumental in humanity's fall, restoration should also come from woman in the form of the second Eve, the Virgin Mary who, in her role as Christ's mother she represents the female sex. [117] The incarnation, which incorporates both Mary and Christ, therefore, represents and exonerates both man and woman.[118] The notion of human flesh is further invoked, although on only two occasions, in Aquinas's discussion of the mystical body of the Church. Aquinas draws attention to the similarity of Eve's birth from Adam's side and the Church's birth from body.[119]Aquinas, however, omits the image of Christ and the Church as bridegroom and the beloved, and the comparison of Mary with the Church, concentrating instead on an image of the Church which is incorporated into a human and angelic hierarchy ruled by Christ, the Head.[120]The eroticism and images of the maternal which elevate female flesh in the discourses of writers such as Hildegard and Bernard of Clairvaux are ignored in favour of a mystical union between Christ and the Church, maintained through male-centered order and hierarchy.

Conclusion

As this overview demonstrates, in their attitudes to flesh and gender, all the above commentators reveal the complexity and ambiguity that challenged medieval understandings of the body, flesh and their relation to the divine. The exploitation, manipulation and, on

[117] Aquinas, *Scripta super libros Sententiarum* 3d.12. 3. q. 2. ad 1.
[118] *Scripta super libros Sententiarum* 3d, 12, 3, 2, sol. 2.
[119] *Summa Theologica* I, 92, 2, c.
[120] *Summa Theologica* III, 8, 1.

occasion, subversion of these complexities and ambiguities by later writers become evident in the three 'transgressive' texts examined in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

One of the Girls: Christ's Gendered Flesh and Mechthild of Hackeborn's Un/Orthodoxy

In my previous chapter, I outlined medieval attitudes towards gender and the body, and the impact such attitudes had upon religious belief appertaining in particular to Christ's wounded flesh, taking as my examples the teachings of Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Hildegard of Bingen. Chapter Two examines the response to Christ's gendered humanity of the nun and mystic, Mechthild of Hackeborn, as it is conveyed in her collection of visions, the *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (The Book of Special Grace). I demonstrate how Mechthild presents her readers with a Christ whose divinity is defined by his feminised and thus faulty flesh, thus allowing Christ and the sisters of the convent in which she dwelt to both participate in and anticipate a union in which the feminine and flourishing, rather than the authoritarian and masculine, is the default; and the ideal community is overwhelmingly female, fluid, and reciprocal, akin to Grace Jantzen's theory of the female divine.[1]

Mechthild's understanding of Christ's divine/human nature is iterated in the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*, a collection of Mechthild's visions, letters and prayers, written and edited during her lifetime and shortly after her death.[2] Central to Mechthild's vision is the

[1] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, as before.
[2] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, as before. See also Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, as before.

feminized body of Christ, whose open wounds pour forth miraculous, salvific and sweet liquor, with which he feeds, cures, nurtures and embraces Mechthild's soul. Mechthild's feminization of Christ's body formed part of a wider discourse on Christ's humanity, as I demonstrate in chapter one. However, Mechthild's extension and development of this gendering is very much her own interpretation of theology and affective devotion. In the *Liber Specialis*, humanity and female flesh are elevated to, and incorporated into, the divine. Mechthild's writing is rich with varied imagery which frequently shape-shifts, flows and blends from one motif to another. But while her visions and narrative are exuberant, excessive and non-linear, they are consistently followed by an explanation, usually delivered by Christ or the Virgin, which betray Mechthild's (and her scribes') learning, intelligence, and ability and willingness to think independently of strict orthodox theology, and convey her theology with intelligence and clarity, traits traditionally considered male rather than female, and attest to the importance afforded to learning at Helfta. The quantity and variety of the imagery necessitates disciplined selectivity regarding the focus of my discussion. With this in mind, therefore, in this chapter, my examination of Mechthild's notions of Christ's gendered flesh is confined to her depiction of his wounds as tears and food, motifs which well exemplify Mechthild's radical response to orthodox theology, and her distinctive stylistic approach. Useful to my examination are the notions of the distinctly feminine voice in religious expression articulated in the theories of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Grace Jantzen. Irigaray's and Kristeva's exploration of the significance of the female abject to a transcendental union with the divine, and the implications this concept has on the mystic's notion of a feminized and physical Christ, are indeed found in Mechthild's own concept of a feminized, fleshly divine and its connection with humanity. Jantzen's development of these theories, with her focus on a the feminine divine with a symbiotic, communal, universalist, fluid and flourishing imaginary is particularly pertinent to Mechthild's own extreme, female-

centred and potentially heterodox theology and her interpretation of Christ's transgressive, gendered flesh.

Mechthild of Hackeborn and her community

Details of Mechthild's life are recorded in the preface to the *Liber Specialis* and in several chapters throughout books 1 to 5, which Mechthild co-authored with at least two other sisters in the convent at Helfta, and in the hagiographical books 6 and 7 which were written after her death. Mechthild was born in 1241, the younger daughter of the Hackeborn family, prominent members of Saxon nobility. She was one of four surviving siblings: her elder sister, Gertrude of Hackeborn (d.1292), who became abbess of the convent at Helfta, and two brothers, Albert and Ludovic, who supported the convent both financially and by providing the land on which it was built. At the age of seven, on visiting the nearby convent at Rodardsorf near the town of Halberstadt, where her sister, Gertrude, was already an oblate, Mechtild asked to join the company of the nuns. Her parents reluctantly agreed, and Mechtild joined the convent where she remained until her death in 1298/9.[3] Mechtild held the office of chantress in the convent, a position whose duties included directing the choir, maintaining the liturgical books, presiding over the scriptorium, where manuscripts were copied and stored, and overseeing the worship in the convent. She was also tasked with instructing the sisters on Scripture. Although Mechthild did not possess the administrative authority of her sister, the *Liber*

[3] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis* 1. Praemium, p. 5. Gertrude also joined the convent at a young age. She was elected abbess at the age of nineteen and governed the convent until her death forty years later. She is not known to have written anything, but under her direction, the convent, now at Helfta, became a vibrant hub of learning and religious expression, and instrumental in promoting the cult of the Divine Heart.

Specialis reveals that she held a prominent position as spiritual advisor, counsellor and prophet to men and women both inside and outside the convent.[4]

Mechthild claimed to have received her visions and mystical experiences from childhood, but was reticent about confessing her gift.[5] However, in 1291, at the age of fifty, and confined to her sick-bed, Mechthild recounted her visions to her friend and protégée, Gertrude of Helfta (d. 1301/2) and another nun, unnamed in the text, who secretly recorded them on the instruction of Gertrude of Hackeborn, by then abbess of the convent. Mechthild claims to have been initially unhappy to discover that her words had been recorded. However, Christ and the Virgin Mary convinced her of the usefulness of the book, and she gave her approval to the corrected volume shortly before she died.[6]

The convent of St Mary was founded in 1229 at Mansfeld by Count Burchard of Mansfeld and his wife, Elisabeth, to house a number of Benedictine nuns from Halberstadt who wished to follow the Cistercian order. In 1228, however, the Cistercian General Chapter had ruled against incorporating any further women's houses, and so, although the house loosely followed the Cistercian Order, the convent was never officially affiliated with it, was officially a Benedictine establishment and received instruction and confession from Dominican friars. In 1234 the community moved to Rodarsdorf, and then to Helfta in 1258, where it remained until 1342, when it was ransacked and burned to the ground by Albert of Brunswick who resented the community's association with his rival, Albert of Mansfeld.[7] This was one of several threatened or committed attacks upon the convent: its wealth and

[4] See, for example, 4. 11 and 12, which record Mechthild's role as prophetess. Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 4.11-12, p. 368. Mechthild's function as spiritual advisor and intercessor features prominently in *Liber Specialis*, 4, which contains, for example, the four letters she writes to 'a certain secular matron' who was a friend of hers, as well as prayers intercessions and advice she gives to male and female clients outside the convent. Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 4.59, pp. 310-315; 4.39-53, pp. 298-300.
[5] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1. Praemium, p. 6.
[6] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.42 and 43, pp. 190-93.
[7] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 6.

dependence on local nobility meant that it frequently found itself caught up in the, often violent, disputes between rival noble families, and reference to these hostilities is found throughout the *Liber Specialis*. In 1284, for example, Helfta was invaded by Gerhardt of Mansfeld, who behaved with such violence that he was excommunicated by Pope Martin IV.[8] Furthermore, in 1296, because of a disputed debt owed to the General Chapter of Halberstadt, the convent was placed under an interdict which meant that the nuns were unable to receive communion, a particularly severe penalty for a community which placed so much emphasis on the Eucharist.[9] Helfta's precarious community of female-centred cooperation, flourishing and learning was in marked contrast to the climate of threatening, male-dominated violence which existed outside the convent. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the latter provided the convent with the impetus to create the paradisial, feminine ideal which is central to Mechthild's visions. There were several unsuccessful attempts to re-establish the house following its destruction in 1342, but the community was eventually re-established as a Cistercian institution in Lutherstadt Eisleben in 1999, with the chapel of Gertrude of Helfta dedicated in 2008.[10]

The community flourished significantly under Gertrude of Hackeborn, becoming a vibrant centre of learning and mystic expression. Gertrude used the convent's wealth to purchase books and increase the library, and manuscripts were also copied and illuminated both for the use within and without the convent.[11] She clearly had ambitions for the

[8] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 6.
[9] The interdict becomes the focus of Mechtild's vision in *Liber Specialis* 1.27. Christ, however, witnesses Mechtild's distress at being unable to receive the sacrament, and intervenes, performing the role of the celebrant to the entire congregation and assisted by John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, Luke and the Virgin Mary. Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.27, pp. 95-97. 'Congregatio autem tota ad mensam illam accedens, unaquaeque sub brachio beatae Virginis quasi geniculando accepit Dominicum corpus de manu Domini.'(However, the whole congregation approached the table, and each one, kneeling, it seems, beneath the arm of the blessed Virgin, received the Lord's body from the hand of the Lord'). Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.27, p. 96.
[10] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 7.
[11] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 175.

intellectual potential of her nuns: at a time when Latin was largely the province of male scholars, the sisters were expected to be competent in the language and conversant in religious and secular Latin literature, and those less advanced in the language received instruction from nuns specifically appointed to teach them. The nuns were steeped in the liturgy, but were also conversant with the works of Church fathers and theologians such Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas, and with those of at least two female visionaries: Elisabeth of Schönau's (d.1164) *Visionum Primus* (*The Book of Visions, Part One*), and Mechtild of Magdeburg's (d. 1282) *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit* (*The Flowing Light of the Godhead*), the final part of which was written in Helfta.[12] Mechtild of Magdeburg's influence was particularly significant, since her presence at Helfta seems to have been the catalyst for Gertrude of Helfta and Mechtild of Hackeborn who both produced work following Mechtild of Magdeburg's death.[13]

The *Liber Specialis Gratiae*

The *Liber Specialis* is comprised largely of Mechtild's visions, but also includes the four letters mentioned above, and hagiographies of her and Gertrude of Helfta. It consists of seven books: the first five being written during between 1291and 1298/1299, the year of Mechthild's death, and the last two posthumously. The contents of books 1 -5 were recorded

[12] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, pp. 9-10. Mechtild of Magdeburg lived in the beguine community at Magdeburg for about forty years, supported in her role as visionary by the Dominicans at Halle who authorized and promoted *Das Fließende Licht.* However, in around 1270/1272, as a result of clerical hostility towards her status as a beguine, and at the invitation of Gertrude of Hackeborn, she joined the Helfta community where she remained until her death in 1282.

[13] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 11; See also, Sara S. Poor, 'Transmission and Impact: Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*', in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany (1200-1500)*, ed. Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 73-101, and Barbara Newman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg at Helfta: A Study in Literary Influence', in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, and John Van Engen (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2020), pp. 383-96.

by Gertrude of Helfta and another nun who is unnamed. Although the exact method of production is not specified, it seems likely that the two mentioned nuns initially noted Mechthild's words, probably in the vernacular, and other sisters in the convent were tasked with translating, editing and copying them.[14] The text itself informs us that Mechthild read, and gave her approval to the *Liber Specialis*, and that Christ himself gave the work its title.[15] These books record Mechthild's account of her visions in which she encounters Christ, the Virgin Mary, apostles, and saints, and is arranged broadly thematically (allowing for occasional discrepancies), as explained in the Prologue. Book 1 deals with liturgical feasts especially those concerned with the Virgin Mary; book 2 centres on Mechthild's intimacy with Christ, with particular prominence given to the Divine Heart; books 3 and 4 are concerned with instructions on monastic life and Mechthild's role as advisor and spiritual intercessor, and include Mechthild's letters to a devout noble woman who seems to have recently taken holy orders; book 5 also concerns itself with Mechthild's role as advocate for the souls of the departed, and, along with the last two books, also contains hagiographic material. Books 6 and 7 also contain the hagiography of Gertrude of Hackeborn. The visions provide instruction on worship, penance and living in accordance with the rules of the Cistercian order. They portray the ideal relationship shared between the community and Christ; as, for example, the courtly marriage of Christ the bridegroom and Mechthild and her sisters as the bride, or the bond between a mother and her daughter, a kitchen where a banquet is being prepared, a dance, or a garden with a fountain or a spring. Running through Mechthild's visions is the motif of the Divine Heart, revealed to Mechthild through the wound in Christ's side. It is food, drink, a refuge, a home, a kitchen, a garden, a meadow, and

[14] Newman briefly discusses this in the introduction to her edited translation of the *Liber Specialis*. Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, pp. 1-2; p. 248, n. 3 and n. 8. See also Anna Harrison, '"Oh What Treasure Is in This Book?": Writing, Reading, and Community at the Monastery of Helfta', *Viator* 39. 1 (2008), pp. 75-106.
[15] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.43, p. 193; 5.31, pp. 369-70.

a banqueting house both for Mechthild and the Helfta community. Intoxicated with the Heart's food and drink, Mechthild finds herself totally incorporated into Christ, and experiencing a profound and inexpressible joy. Such female-focused imagery – the physical, domestic, maternal, fertile and exuberant – allows Mechthild to present the ineffable in terms that elevate the feminine and the Divine to be similarly recognised. Christ's corporality is central to Mechthild's theology. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mechthild's employment of metaphors squeeze out the masculine, align the spiritual with the feminine physical, and present Christ and even God the Father in recognisably female terms that border on the transgressive.

The *Liber Specialis* draws its influences from several sources. The liturgy – the acts of worship carried out by the community as a body, which included chants, psalms, prayers and scripture readings and culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist – was a particularly significant influence, and features prominently throughout the work, especially in the first book whose first thirty-four chapters were organised chronologically around the Church calendar, starting with the Annunciation (March 25) and concluding with the Feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria (November 25).[16] Mechthild's decision to start with the Annunciation, rather than the more usual Feast of the Nativity, reflects the significance of the Virgin Mary in the worship of the community. The annunciation leads the reader from the Virgin's miraculous conception, to her equally miraculous delivery.[17] Each chapter is set in the context of a particular feast day or act of worship, and the words of the liturgy are frequently quoted. That Mechthild often experienced her visions during mass, moved by the words of particular chants or Scripture, or at specific points of the Eucharist, also explains

[16] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 7-11; 1.32, p. 110.
[17] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.2-5, pp. 11-21.

their prominence in the *Liber Specialis*.[18] An example of this occurs in Chapter 1, which starts, 'Annunciationis dominicae die, Christi Virgo posita in oratione, cum peccata sua in amaritudine animae recogitaret, vidit se vestitam cinericio indumneto. Incidit etiam menti eius verbum illud: Et erit iustitia cingulum lumborum eius.' (On the Feast of the Annunciation, as she was meditating upon her sins in the bitterness of her soul, the virgin of Christ, kneeling in prayer, saw herself clothed in an ashen raiment. And there came to her mind the words, 'And justice shall be the girdle of his loins'). (Isaiah 11. 5) During her vision, Mechthild makes frequent reference to verses of Scripture in order to explain her encounter. The vision then changes when the Eucharist is celebrated, with Mechthild sharing in a celestial banquet attended by angels and martyrs and presided over by Christ.[19] The liturgy assumes particular significance in 1.27. The convent had been placed under an interdict which forbad them from receiving communion. Mechthild and the sisters, however, bypass mere mortal authority. The mass becomes an elaborate wedding/betrothal celebrated by Christ and the nuns. [20] Christ himself, assuming the role of the priest, administers his body, the Eucharist, to the souls of the sisters who are thus united to him.

Although Helfta was a vibrant hub of female devotion and intellectual vigour, the foundation of its theology was orthodox and predominantly masculine. As observed above, the abbess, Gertrude expected the Helfta women to be conversant with the writings of

[18] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, p. 7.
[19] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 7-11; 'Cum autem instaret tempus nobilissimi convivii quo ipsa dilectum animae suae percepisset in sacramenti Corporis et Sanguinis communione, audivit eum sibi dicentem, "Tu in me et ego in te, et in aeternum non derelinquam te". Illa autem nihil aliud quam Dei laudem totis praecordiis affectabat. […] Post haec rediit ad Dominum, cum ambitum coelestis palati circuisset. Qui scypham illum accipiens in cor animae posuit et sic deo feliciter est unita. (However, when the time came for that most noble feast in which she was to receive her soul's beloved in the sacramental communion of the Body and the Blood, she heard him say to her, 'You are in me and I am in you, and I will never forsake you". But she, with her whole heart, desired nothing more than to praise the Lord […] After this returned to the Lord, having gone right around the whole palace. And he received that cup, and placed it in her soul's heart, and so she was blissfully united with God). Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 10-11.
[20] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.27, pp. 96-98.

theologians such as Augustine, Bernard, and Thomas Aquinas in Latin. Thanks to Gertrude, the library at Helfta was extensive; and that, together with the regular flow of books and teaching by way of the Dominicans who served the convent as confessors and priests, the convent's reputation as a centre for copying religious works produced a micro-climate of learning and interpretation.[21]

Mechthild's radical theological understanding, and, indeed, the Helfta 'brand' of devotion and identity were informed and nurtured by their studying and interpretation of these texts. Their influence upon Mechthild's writing is undeniable. She rarely quotes from or even acknowledges their sources, but the teachings of these exegetes permeate the *Liber Specialis*.[22] For example, Mechthild's understanding of angelology, as evident in 1. 12, seems to have been informed by the teachings of the first-century Dionysus the Areopagite, possibly via Hugh of St. Victor.[23]And in 1.5, she reveals a familiarity with Aquinas's teaching concerning Christ's unique divine and human nature, termed *hypostasis*, which she translates as *personalis unio*. Mechthild, however, reconfigures the theology to describe the close union enjoyed by the Virgin and the saints with the Trinity - which is, she claims, second

[21] The extent of the contents of the library at Helfta is unknown, since it was razed to the ground in 1342. What is known or surmised of its contents comes the works and biographies of the two Mechthilds and Gertrude of Helfta, and knowledge of the libraries and the communities of discourse that existed among the religious houses and groups at that time. We know for certain that the writings of Elizabeth of Schönau and the above-mentioned male theologians were contained in the library and read by the nuns. The sisters were also familiar with the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg, since it was through her reputation as mystic and writer that she came to the attention of the abbess Gertrude. Also, the contents of other monastic and conventual libraries, and the to-ing and fro-ing of the Dominican friars between the houses, as well as the sisters' extensive cliental, provide possible evidence through the development of her ideas that Mechthild and the women were aware of Hildegard of Bingen, who famously corresponded with Bernard of Clairvaux and Elizabeth of Schönau. See Rosalynn Voaden, 'Community, Gender, and Vision at Helfta', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p. 72.

[22] An exception to this rule, as Newman points out, is in the prologue, where the nuns quote directly from Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*: 'quia, ut beatus dicit Augustus: "Bonorum ingeniorum insignis est indolis in verbis verum amare, non verba"' ('for, as the blessed Augustine says, "It is a *well noted quality* of good minds to love the truth in words, not the words themselves"'). *De doctrina christiana*, IV. ch.11: <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina_cristiana/index2.htm.> [accessed 29 January 2018]. Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 254, n. 2.

[23] Hugh of St. Victor, c.1220–30, *Commentariorum in Hierarchiam coelestem Sancti Dionysii Areopagitae* (Commentary on CH), PL 175: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/#TexTra.> [accessed 28 January 2018].

only to the inseparable union between the human and divine nature of Christ - thereby privileging the physical, feminine aspect of humanity.

Influences on the *Liber Specialis*

Mechthild's familiarity with orthodox theology emerges in her confident use of the technical vocabulary of mystic devotion. She experiences *inebriatio* (being drunk with divine pleasure) in Christ's presence, *annihilatio* (self-annihilation in the soul of God), and *excessus mentis* (mystic ecstasy). Such language features prominently in the writings of male authorities such as Hugh of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux, and had also gained purchase with female mystics by the close of the twelfth century.[24] Bernard himself was a particularly prominent authority in Helfta: and his teachings were crucial to the development of affective devotion in the community. It is also clear from Mechthild's writing that she identifies with Bernard: like her, he experiences an intense and reciprocated love for Christ; and Mechthild is at pains to present Bernard, like herself, as assimilated with Christ and the Virgin. In 1.28, for example, Bernard appears before her, dressed in a robe of white, green gold and red. These colours, she explains, are symbols of Christ's innocence, virtue, blood and love, and they are seen adorning Christ, the Virgin and Mechtild herself throughout the *Liber Specialis*. Like Mechthild, Bernard is accompanied by 'Amor […] in specie virginis pulcherrimae' (Love […] in the appearance of a most beautiful maiden), whose presence indicates 'specialis meriti quod habuit, ex eo quod tam amorosus erat, et tam multos suis eloquiis et scriptis in Dei accendit.' ('the special merit he had, because he was so loving and set so many

[24] Newman, *Mechthild of Hackeborn*, p. 9. See also Newman's discussion of the concept of *annihilatio* in the mysticism of Marguerite Porete in *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 592-630.

on fire with love for God with his eloquence and his writing'). [25] The value Mechthild places on Bernard's teaching is further emphasized when, at the conclusion of the vision, she declares, 'Totum quoque coelum ex verbis eius velut margaritis fulcidis erat ornatum' ('The whole heaven was adorned with his words which were like shining pearls').[26] As Herbert McAvoy maintains in her discussion of this interpretation by Mechthild and other female mystics, the verdant, flourishing, and female-defined context in which Mechthild places Bernard, is indicative of the way she bends orthodox metaphor and exegesis, in order to defend a female-centred, Jantzen-like theology .[27]

Despite the strong presence of male orthodoxy, the influence of female mystic writers is also very much in evidence in the *Liber Specialis*. Like Elisabeth of Schönau's *Liber Visionum Primus,* part one of the *Liber Specialis* is structured around the liturgical calendar.[28] Mechthild's revelations also bear the hallmark of Elisabeth's visions. She experiences misery, self-doubt and extreme physical pain. She, too, beholds angels, converses with Mary and Christ. However, there are marked differences between the texts, both stylistically (*Liber Visionum*, for example, is written in the first person, whereas Mechthild's visions are related in the third), and in Mechthild's understanding of her physicality and its impact upon her relationship with Christ. In Elisabeth's visions, the focus is on her own sense of unworthiness, the pains of Hell, the sufferings of Christ, and the torments of the Devil – the profound self-loathing and violent abjection that Irigarary's mystic must experience in order to unite with the Divine.For example, during the Mass celebrating the Annunciation in 1152,

[25] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.28, pp. 97-98.
[26] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.28, p. 98.
[27] Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Flourish like a Garden": Pain, Purgatory and Salvation in the Writing of Medieval Religious Women', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 50. 1 (2014), pp. 33-60.
[28] *Liber Visionum Primus* chronologically records Elisabeth's visions from Pentecost (effectively the birth of the Church) in 1152, to Assumption (15 August) in 1154. Elisabeth of Schönau, *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Anne L. Clark (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), pp. 41-96.

Elisabeth experiences 'excessive and miserable sufferings', she sees Christ surrounded by saints 'looking as if recently crucified and showing his wounds to the world and making great complaint'. Christ's wounds are 'flowing with fresh blood', and he brandishes his cross and demands the suffering of Elisabeth and his followers: 'with a great and terrible voice, […] "Such things have I endured for you, but what have you endured for me?"'[29] Mechthild's Christ is altogether more comforting. On the rare occasion when he foretells her sufferings for his sake, for example, he is quick to reassure her of his comfort and help. In 2.25, for example, Christ compares the pain of affective suffering as a soft silk garment, 'sicut serica vestis lenis est et mollis, sic omnis poena et tribulatio animae Deum vere amanti est suavis' (Just as a silk garment is smooth and soft, so all suffering and tribulation is sweet to the soul that truly loves God). [30]And Mechthild knows that even the profound suffering, foretold in 2.11, is temporary: the chalice Christ withholds from her is the sweetness which she '*necdum* videt neque gustat' (does *not yet* see or taste).[31] Mechtihild's response to her physical humanity is markedly different. She seems consciously to distance herself from Elisabeth's abjection and horror. She does not see her flesh as something abject, but as something shared with Christ, and essential to their union. Mechthild's suffering becomes a starting point from which she explores Christ's graciousness towards his beloved handmaid: the symbols of Christ's agony are transformed into kisses, jewels and gold; the devils that beset Elisabeth are swiftly dispersed by Christ's goodness and love; even humanity's sins become precious gold.[32]

[29] Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau*, 1. 41, pp. 69-70.
[30] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.25, p. 168.
[31] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.22, p. 145 (the italics are mine).
[32] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, pp. 52-53; 1.17, pp. 51; 1.10, p. 32.

The beguine, Mechthild of Magdeburg, also proved to be a powerful influence upon Mechthild of Hackeborn, as Newman demonstrates in her recent study.[33] Through the support of the Dominicans at Halle, another town in Saxony, her visions, poems and exhortations had already been partially recorded, and formed *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit* (*The Flowing Light of the Godhead*), a copy of which accompanied her to Helfta.[34] However, due to increasing hostility from the Church towards the beguine movement, Mechtild was unable to continue within the beguine community, and so, in 1270, Gertrude received her into the Helfta convent where she remained until her death in 1282, completing the seventh and final part of *The Flowing Light,* quite possibly helped in this by Mechthild of Hackeborn who was chantress of the convent, and in charge of the Scriptorium. *The Flowing Light* is an intense exploration of the Soul's intimate and passionate relationship with Christ, the Bridegroom. It comprises of seven books, each of which is divided into many short sections. It is written, in Middle Low German, in alternating poetry and prose, and makes use of the first person as narrator. Mechthild's language is impassioned and lively, conveying her confidence as a mouthpiece for the Divine and her ecstatic intimacy with Christ, as in 2.25, when she declares, 'Alas, my dear lover, I am hoarse in the throat of my chastity. But the sugar of your sweet Kindness Has let my voice resound, so that I can now sing this: Lord, your blood and mine are one, untainted, Your love and mine are one, inseparable'. [35] Her use of tropes and features of contemporary literature and theology seems to have struck a chord with Mechthild of Hackeborn, as elements of *The Flowing Light* appear in *Liber Specialis*. As with the *Liber Specialis*, *The Flowing Light* is replete with images of the mystical marriage between Mechthild the beguine and Christ. The wedding dance of the Bride in 1.44, for example,

[33] Newman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg at Helfta', pp. 383-96.
[34] I have used Frank Tobin's translated edition of *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit*: Frank Tobin, *Mechthild of Magdeburg: The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997).
[35] Tobin, *Flowing Light,* 2.25, p. 96.

reappears several times in *The Flowing Light*; the language describing the courtship and marriage is intense and erotic, the ecstasy and languor experienced by the bride is also a significant feature of both texts.[36] Both women receive insights regarding purgatory and the fate of the souls of departed sisters, and act as mediators in their release of souls from purgatory.[37] And in both works, the Soul communes with saints and apostles in Christ's presence. (e.g. *Flowing Light* 2.24). [38]

A more striking example of the beguine's influence on Mechthild of Hackeborn, however, is Mechthild's inclusion of the allegorical character *Amor* (Love), who resembles Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Frouwe Minne* (Lady Love), an allegorical figure who appears in *minnesang*, German songs of courtly love composed and performed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. In *The Flowing Light*, *Fouwe Minne* converses with another allegorical figure, Lady Queen, The Soul about the love between her and Christ the Bridegroom and Satan's attempts to destroy their union. Mechthild of Hackeborn develops the beguine's *Minne,* exploiting the gender difference between the two nouns. Whereas the German *Minne* is a feminine noun, the Latin word, *amor*, is masculine. Mechthild of Hackeborn gets around the gender difference by frequently describing *Amor* as a beautiful young girl, who appears to her *in specie pulcherrimae virginis* (in the likeness of a most beautiful maiden), and thus presents the reader with the fluidity characteristic of Mechthild's treatment of gender in the text.

[36] Tobin, *Flowing Light*, 1.44, pp. 58-62; Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.13, p.104. Mechthild of Hackeborn includes dancing several times in vision of Heaven, with 1.31 being particularly close to Mechtild of Magdeburg's vision.
[37] Tobin, *Flowing Light*, 2.8, pp. 77-78; Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.11, pp. 336-39; 5.20, p. 351.
[38] Tobin, *Flowing Light*, 2.24, pp. 89-92; Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 4.8, pp. 264-66.

Mechthild's feminine hermeneutics of liquidity

Mechthild's writing is striking for its emphasis on the feminine as defined by Galen and Aristotle – her language and imagery are morphic, formless, unstable, physical and slippery. Mechthild's visions change and flow from one image to another; and a similar blurring of boundaries exists between male and female, human and divine, Heaven and Mechthild's earthly surroundings and define the relationship between Mechthild and Christ. This liquidity is prominent in the metaphors with which Mechthild defines Christ, the Souls of the elect, and the union between them. These feminine qualities are idealised in their identification with Christ's wounded body. Flesh dissolves into liquid; the gold of Mechthild's soul melts and dissolves into Christ, and his into hers; Christ's flowing blood solidifies into precious stones or is transformed into a divine ichor which circulates between his heart and the congregation who feed on it through golden straws or are bound to it with golden ropes.

The language of liquidity is that of excess. Christ's blood, like his love for Mechthild and hers for him, continually overflows and cannot be contained. It is also the language of reciprocity and inclusivity, growth and flourishing: qualities conventionally associated with the female and the physical. In this respect, while identified as male - as boy, man, gardener, bishop, bridegroom and, occasionally, warrior – Christ's body is decidedly feminine, and the spiritual and earthly utopian envisaged by Mechthild is far removed from androcentric ecclesiastical hierarchy, resonant of Grace Jantzen's feminist reimagining of western theology: 'An idiom of flourishing: opening the way to a divine horizon which celebrates alterities and furthers the aim of the divine incarnation of every woman and man'.[39]

[39]Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 157.

Jantzen's proposition for a female-centred notion of God and divinity, centred on the concepts of flourishing, nurture, and interconnectedness, is very helpful in interpreting Mechthild's understanding of Christ, as discussed in the main Introduction to this thesis. Jantzen regards a female-centred theology a more productive and socially responsible alternative to the salvation/damnation, male-centred theology particularly evident in post-Reformation Christianity.[40] Her theory resonates remarkably with Mechthild's own unorthodox, female-coded interpretation of orthodoxy, providing a theoretical framework with which to approach Mechthild's writing.

Jantzen attributes salvation/damnation dualism to Western civilisation's fascination with death: an obsession she defines as 'necrophilia' and 'necrophobia', concepts which, she argues, are connected with a male-centred, misogynistic and hierarchic imaginary.[41] Jantzen argues that a masculine desire to dominate is manifested in the desire to control the other as is evident in other forms of control such as racism, colonialism, capitalism, homophobia and sexism. Necrophilia, she claims, reflects Western culture's desire to dominate death, viewing the here-and-now as preparation for something better.[42] Jantzen's theology replaces the notion of 'mortality', with its emphasis on death and the afterlife, with that of 'natality', with its association with birth and flourishing, and which, she argues, 'open[s] the way to the divine horizon which alterities and furthers the aim of the divine incarnation of every woman and man'.[43]

Jantzen observes a precedent in the notion of flourishing in both the Old and New Testaments in which the motifs of the garden, honey, the vine-yard and the

[40] Jantzen, *Becoming* Divine, esp. pp. 156-170.
[41] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 156-7.
[42] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 132.
[43] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 157.

bridegroom/beloved are used to illustrate God's love for his people.[44] Such motifs are present in the prophets and the wisdom literature (for example, Zechariah 9; 10-1, Hosea 14; 3-7, Psalm 92; 12 and Proverbs 14; 4); in the New Testament books of Ephesians 3; 19-20, 2 Corinthians 9; 8, where God fills the believer with abundance; and in John 15, in which Christ compares himself, the Father, and his followers to the true vine, and the husbandman and the branches of the vine. In contrast to salvation, which requires a judge, a saviour and someone needing to be saved, flourishing 'occurs from an inner dynamic of growth', needs 'no interference from the outside', and results in 'luxurious self-sufficiency' and 'an inner impetus of natural energy' and 'overflowing vigour'.[45] Flourishing fosters a 'continuing interdependence within the course of life', and allows for 'an imminent divine incarnated within us and between us'.[46] Jantzen's proposition suggests that 'God is the source and wellspring' of this vigour, with Jesus as a paradigm of 'what it may mean to live fully and naturally in the creative justice of God'.[47] Her theory chimes well with Mechthild's understanding of Christ's wounded body and the feminine, and the female-centric interdependence fostered at Helfta.

As Jantzen demonstrates, flourishing, growth and fecundity challenge the type of Augustinian theology discussed in chapter one, which links the body and bodiliness to sexuality and the female. And since female fecundity would be equated with goodness, connecting the male with that goodness would also associate him with nature and the body rather than the spirit. Furthermore, flourishing and nurture are communal rather than individualistic. The notion of self-identification and competitive individualism, where masculinity and femininity are seen as binary opposites, and are integral to the concept of

[44] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 157-8.
[45] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 161.
[46] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 161.
[47] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 162.

personal salvation, is thus undermined.[48]The focus on the body and communality further challenges orthodox theology, since it privileges the salvation of the soul, which continues to live after death – and at the expense of the flesh. Flourishing and natality, on the other hand, elevates fleshly health, and champions connectedness and interdependence. Just as good soil is needed for plants to grow, and these in turn nurture the ground from which they have sprung, humans depend on each other in order to flourish and also depend on God who nourishes them. God, however, also needs humanity for his kingdom to flourish.[49] This co-dependence, Jantzen argues, is evident in Scripture, in the prophesies of Hosea and Zechariah, for example, and in John's Gospel, in which the. Kingdom of God is female-coded: flourishing, fertile, abundant, interdependent and present.[50] These concepts emerge emphatically in the *Liber Specialis*. The fluidity which exists between the physical and material worlds makes it often difficult to separate the one from the other, and, certainly, they seem to coexist simultaneously for Mechthild, who can be lying as though dead in her cell while spiritually transported to a celestial realm, or simultaneously be celebrating an earthly and a heavenly mass, as in 1.27.[51] While ultimate bliss is anticipated after death, union with Christ is nevertheless achievable in this life through worship, devotion to, and communion with, the Divine within the female space of the convent where earthly worship frequently mirrors its heavenly counterpart. Liquidity is central to this Jantzean interconnectedness: spiritual union is achievable only through Mechthild and Christ's common humanity, which Christ demonstrates through his wounded, bleeding, leaking - feminised - flesh.

Jantzen herself makes use of Luce Irigaray's theory of mystic women's privileged access to a female Divine, and Irigaray's approach to mystic expression and the female voice

[48] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 164-66.
[49] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 167.
[50] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 167-68, p. 170.
[51] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.27, pp. 95-96.

is also helpful when examining liquidity in the *Liber Specialis*.[52] Irigaray regards the Soul as essentially feminine, and needs to escape from the male-defined physical universal in her search for the Divine light. She contends that, due to Western culture's suppression of the female voice, women have historically sought to articulate themselves in a language which rejects the linear logic, syntax, and 'the dry desolation of reason' , employing, instead a language that has reflected their attempt to express the inexpressible, and the overwhelming nature of union with Divine.[53] Irigaray terms this language, '*la mystèrique*'. More than a language, *la mystèrique* is a place or state which privileges women, and into which they can allow or forbid men entry.[54] Moreover, in order to act as confessor to these women, this female discourse and state of being, men must imitate these women, and abandon their notion of self-sufficiency and their identity as subject.[55]

Irigaray argues that, because the Soul abandons the usual markers of identity and expression in her quest for the Divine, her points of reference and the way she communicates replace the normative. Like Mechthild of Hackeborn, and, indeed other female visionaries, including Mechthild of Magdeburg, Irigaray's Soul experiences a lack of the usual boundaries that define inside and outside, subject and object, heat and cold, pleasure and torment.[56] Such definitions melt, as it were, and flow from one to the other, very much like the nun Mechthild's own sense of union and lack of identity in the face of Christ. Indeed, Irigaray's description of the Soul's identity, such as it is, mingling with God, like a liquid, fluid and ethereal mirror, is resonant of Mechthild's description of her own Soul's union with Christ. 'Each becomes the other,' Irigaray writes, which 'In this cauldron of identification

[52] Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 191-203, as before.
[53] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191.
[54] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191.
[55] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 192.
[56] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 196.

will melt, mingle, and melt again these reversing matrices of our last embraces.'[57]As in the *Liber Specialis*, distinction between what is carnal and holy, male and female, divine and human also melt or dissolve. For Irigaray, Christ is 'that most female of men, the Son', sharing the sweetness and agony of the ecstatic Soul through his death and 'awful suffering', in much the same way as wounds blood, flesh and tears , the torment of the crucifixion, become nurturing and nourishing substances that reflect the flourishing feminine.[58]

In this chapter, my focus is on two aspects of Christ's wounded, feminised body, which particularly well illustrate Mechthild's response to that body, and her understanding of union with him, and which exemplify the liquidity necessary to this union: Christ's wounds as tears, and his wounds as food. As already discussed in chapter one, the miraculous coupling of the divine and the earthly that was God the Son, made manifest in his incarnation, death and resurrection, and constantly repeated in the Eucharist, was a powerful magnet for female devotion from the twelfth century onwards. Christ's salvific power and love was dependent upon his humanity - the inferior, feminine part of a human. Two examples of this were emotional incontinence and the ability to conceive, nurture and feed the infant offspring. Such capabilities involved pain, suffering and sacrifice, but also demonstrated love and devotion. As Sarah McNamer argues, these characteristics, also identified with Christ, and constantly visible in his wounded, bleeding, and weeping body allowed women an immediate affinity with him which was denied their male counterparts.[59] While female religious houses articulated such devotion, in Helfta the level of education and learning afforded and demanded of the women fostered an intellectual independence which privileged female physicality. This is everywhere manifested in Mechthild's writing.

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[57] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 196.
[58] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 199.
[59] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 2-3.

Tears and weeping

Despite the overarching positivity of the *Liber Specialis*, tears feature prominently in the work. This is not really surprising, considering the devotional nature of the *Liber Specialis*, and the other literature which helped shape it. Mechthild herself both describes, and refers to, her own tears and distress throughout the text: the tears of intercession she weeps on behalf of the soul of Count Burchard of Mansfeld (5.1), for example, Christ's gift of tears (1.1), and the tears she sheds and the bitterness she suffers during her long and severe sickness (2.15 and 2.26)[60] She is not alone in this act: in 1.25, Mary Magdalen weeps in a vision of the crucified Christ, and in 1.21, Christ himself weeps at the tomb of Lazarus.[61] However, Mechthild's treatment of this conventional motif is characteristically unconventional, as she pushes the boundaries defining gender and humanity. Tears are consistently associated directly with Christ's suffering, wounded and gendered body. They flow from the openings in his body, like the blood that also flows from his wounds. In this way, therefore, we can think of Christ's tears like his blood, part of the liquid, feminine make-up of his humanity. When others identify with Christ's pain through tears, therefore, they too are partaking in his wounded bleeding and liquid-producing femininity. The liquidity of this wound-tears metaphor is particularly appropriate for Mechthild, whose images are characterised by slippage, flowing and fluidity.

The significance of weeping as an intrinsic part of female and feminine devotion has attracted much recent scholarship. Bynum observes that, because women were regarded as, by nature, more fleshly and physical than men, their devotion was correspondingly more 'somatic'.[62] In acts of affective devotion, they were more likely to bleed, for example, to eat

[60] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.11, pp. 336-39; 1.1, p. 9; 2.15, p. 149; 2.26, p. 169.
[61] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.25, pp. 86-88; 1.21, pp. 76-77.
[62] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, as before.

or be eaten by Christ, to spiritually conceive through partaking of the Eucharist, and to weep in sympathy with Christ's agony, the sorrows of the Virgin, or at their own sinfulness.[63] Such displays, she observes, were closely connected with the duties associated with womanhood - the roles of mother, midwife, nurse, attending to and mourning the dead - transferred to religious devotion.[64]

The shared properties of blood, milk and tears, and their association with feminised piety, are also examined by Liz Herbert McAvoy in reference to mystic performativity in early medieval male anchoritism.[65] The very liquidity of these fluids, and the sources from which they came, McAvoy contends, made them both beneficent and potentially harmful, but when allied with the humility becoming the female, permitted the male recluse access to the Divine.[66] Elina Gertsman, referencing medieval and late Classical writers, also highlights the multivalent aspect of tears and weeping: they were sustenance, a sign of virtue, but also of deceit; of ignorance but also of divine insight; they could blur the vision, but also allow the one weeping to see clearly, as in the case of Mary Magdalene beholding Christ.[67] However, what unites these different properties was the perception that weeping was a predominantly female trait, borne of the female body's inherent weakness, inferiority and fleshliness. In this context, McNamer identifies affective devotion as 'insistently gendered' and observes the importance of *compassio* in such displays of piety, the act of feeling as or suffering alongside Christ or the Virgin Mary.[68] *Compassio*, she argues, originated among women religious (it was considered a particularly feminine trait), and inspired men such as Anselm (d. 1109) and

[63] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 121-22; pp. 189-194.
[64] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 197-98.
[65] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 11-42.
[66] McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, pp. 34-35.
[67] Gertsman, *Crying in the Middle* Ages, pp. xi-xiii, as before.
[68] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 3.

Bernard of Clairvaux, who strove to imitate these inherently female modes of devotion, in an display of humility and piety, playing the female to Christ's male, as it were, and muddying notions of gender, the body and sexuality, something Mills also scrutinizes in his discussion of Christ the bridegroom in the Rothschild Canticles.[69]

Barbara Newman has examined the importance and potential transgressive nature of women's tears as a means of intercession for souls.[70] Women's weeping as spiritual intercession had a long and illustrious history. Traditionally, intercession on behalf of the souls of the dead could be obtained through the purchase of prayers, requiem masses and the building of chantry chapels, but even from late antiquity, tears accompanying intercessory prayers were considered valuable currency. Newman points to the use of tears for the salvation of souls in purgatory as a predominantly female form of intervention from late antiquity by which time the notion of purgatory had become an accepted part of main-stream Christian theology.[71] As intercessors, Newman observes, women conformed to their societal function as compassionate nurturers. Through their weeping, the women identified with Christ's suffering body, his salvific humanity, the humanity/body being that which Christ had in common with them.[72] This identification, in turn, lent the women an authority as co-redeemers: by suffering with Christ, these daughters of Eve could also contribute to his act of salvation. Such authority was potentially transgressive, disrupting, as it did, the boundaries of gender and the human and divine. Moreover, as Newman demonstrates, by their very act of tearful intercession these women challenged God's authority as judge and punisher.[73]

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[69] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 3; Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, p. 183.
[70] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 108-136.
[71] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, p. 109. For a cross-cultural, comparative study of weeping and tears, see *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* ed. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[72] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, pp. 120-122.
[73] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, p. 120.

Tears perform several functions within the *Liber Specialis*. They are intercessory, as, for example, in 5.11 in which the soul of Count Burchard emulates Mechthild's intercessory weeping, and is thus assured entry into Heaven.[74] They are also a gift from Christ as a mark of devotion – in 1.25 Christ tells how he rewarded Mary Magdalene's devotion with the gift of tears; they demonstrate Mechthild's despair and sense of lack (e.g. 2.26); and they identify Mechthild and the other saints who weep (the Virgin, for example, and Mary Magdalene) with the weeping and bleeding Christ. However, the agony and grief frequently accompanying tears in female devotional writing are not present to the same extent in Mechthild's visions. Tears, rather, serve as a starting point from which Mechthild explores the ecstatic joy she experiences in her union with Christ, the joy that Christ himself feels at his own humanity, or the pleasure that another can feel when contemplating Christ's love.[75] Throughout the *Liber Specialis*, therefore, tears are intrinsically bound with the fleshly, feminine aspects of Christ, Mechthild and, by association, with the Helfta community and those associated with it. The tears, therefore, shed by Mechthild and Christ serve to underline the fluidity of Christ's gender, and the roles that, through their shared humanity, both he and Mechthild perform in the salvation of humanity and in the spiritual welfare of the Helfta sisters.

The importance of tears as evidence of Christ's humanity is made explicitly clear in 1.21, in which Christ weeps at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus.[76] The chapter is important to our understanding of Mechthild's feminising of Christ's wounded body and the identification of his tears as wounds, because it encapsulates Mechthild's treatment of tears and weeping, as expressions of, or springboards to, overflowing joy within a female-centred and physical

[74] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.11, pp. 336-39.
[75] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 4.38, pp. 296-97.
[76] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.21, pp. 76-77.

context. In 1.21, Mechthild places Christ in a predominantly female context, privileges the feminine and physical, and excises the masculine in Christ's function as saviour. Christ's tears present him as Irigaray's 'most female of men, the Son', whose feminised response to the Soul and, indeed, all humanity, not only unites him with humanity, but effectively cuts out the male in the union.[77] Furthermore, in Mechthild's vision, Christ's tears, although interpreted as those of mourning, express Christ's joy at the humanity he shares with his creation.

Mechthild's vision centres on an episode in John's Gospel in which Christ raises Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead:[78]

> Item cum audiret legi in Evangelio Dominum flevisse, et ipse ex hoc memoriam occupasset suam, dixit ad eam Dominus: "Quoties in terris cogitabam illam ineffabilem unionem quae Deo Patri unitus, unum cum ipso eram, humanitas mea a lacrymis se continere nequibat. Quoties etiam recordabar inaestimabilis dilectionis quae me de sinu Patris alliciens, humanae coniunxit naturae, toties humanitas mea de fletibus non poterat se cohibere."[79]
>
> (On another occasion, when she heard it read in the Gospel that the Lord had wept, and this had occupied her memory, the Lord said to her, "On earth, whenever I thought of the ineffable union which united me to God the Father, my humanity could not contain its tears, and I was one with him. And whenever I remembered the inestimable pleasure which drew me to itself from the Father's breast, and joined me to human nature, my humanity could not refrain from weeping.)"

John 11 contains one of the three references in Scripture to Christ's weeping (the other two being in Luke, 19: 41, when Christ weeps at the sight of Jerusalem, foreseeing its destruction; and in Hebrews, 5: 7, in which Christ is reported to have wept in the Garden of Gethsemane), and Mechthild clearly considers it to be of some not little significance: it foreshadows Christ's imminent crucifixion and resurrection as is made clear in the chapter (for example,

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[77] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 199.
[78] John, 11: 1-46 and 35. Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.21, pp. 76-77.
[79] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.21, p. 76.

19. 23-27, 38-44, and 49-53), it has a strong female presence and reflects the ideal community portrayed in the *Liber Specialis* – Mary and Martha enjoy a familiarity with Christ which allows them to challenge his initial lack of intervention; in addition the women's tears are powerful, effecting a response not only from neighbours but also from Christ, and resulting in the return of their brother. [80]The language Christ uses to describe his love for humanity is also intensely feminine – overflowing and liquid. It is easy to see, therefore, how this passage would have appealed to Mechthild and the other Helfta women.

Chapter 1.21 presents the reader with a profoundly female-coded interpretation of the divine/human relationship. Christ's ecstatic and uncontrollable response to union with *humanitas* closely resembles Irigaray's *jouissance,* a response she associates as the feminine, erotically charged religious expression of the Soul's union with the Divine.[81] The language used to convey the union is that of excess, abundance, and of lack of control and containment – characteristics regarded as feminine and fleshly. Mechthild is possessed by the image of the weeping Christ ('ipse ex hac memoriam occupasset suam'), and her lack of autonomy flows, as it were, into Christ whose weeping is excessive and beyond his control ('a lacrymis se continere nequibat' and 'de fletibus non poterat se cohibere'). The union Christ shares with humanity is described as *ineffabilis* and is a source of *inaestimabilis dilectionis* – conventional terms in the context of the soul's response to Christ the bridegroom, but here describing Christ's feminine response to the Soul. Like Irigaray's mystic, the earthly Christ resorts to '*la mystèrique*', the language of the mystic. He becomes inarticulate, abandoning the 'dry desolation of reason' and orderly language that characterise masculine expression and authority, and experiences instead, what Irigaray describes as, 'sweet confusion' and 'the

[80] Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection are paralleled (up to a point) in Lazarus's death and resurrection, which serves to demonstrate to those present Christ's role as saviour and God's power. In the Gospel, Mary is identified as the woman who washes Christ's feet, although no mention of her tears is made in the Gospel.
[81] Irigaray, *Speculum,* pp. 191-202.

fear, cries, tears and blood that go beyond any other feeling' and elicit both 'delight and longing' – *jouissance*, which he can express only through weeping.[82]

The tears of Christ

Crucially, it is Christ's *humanitas* – the physical, feminine, inferior part of the human, wet, cold, liquid, given to humoral excess – which governs his Irigarayan response, and forces the flow of his tears, just as it governs the flow of salvific, life-giving, and nourishing blood from the feminised openings in Christ's body. Christ's tears prefigure his imminent Passion and crucifixion, just as his pre-Passion body is often seen, in devotional texts and iconography, bearing the marks of its wounds through his bleeding circumcised flesh, and the milk he drinks from the breast of his mother. An excellent example of this is found in the illustration accompanying Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II. 6, in which the crucified Christ pours forth blood from his engorged and wounded breast upon *Ecclesia* - blood which, Hildegard declares, will lead to the flourishing of God's people.[83] Conflated thus with his wounds, Christ's tears are life-giving, recalling the flourishing, fertile and fleshly power of Jantzen's feminine Divine.[84] Indeed, John's Gospel features prominently in Jantzen's argument for the feminine Divine, in particular John 15; 1-17, in which Christ develops the image of himself as true vine from which grow the apostles as the branches, in a manner which Jantzen

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[82] Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 191-93.
[83] Hildegard, *Scivias* II.6: The Crucifixion. Rupertsberg MS, fol. 86r: < http://nathaniel-campbell.blogspot.com/2014/04/o-virgo-ecclesia-hildegard-of-bingen-symphonia-66.html> [accessed 10 October 2020]. In a recent examination of Christ and the queer maternal in medieval text and horror films, Rachel Sharpe observes the visual link between Christ's tears, his wounds and milk in Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen's 'Man of Sorrows', 1510. See, Rachel Frances Sharpe and Sophie Sexton, 'Mother's Milk and Menstrual Blood in Puncture: The Monstrous Feminine in Contemporary Horror Films and Late Medieval Imagery', *Studies in the Maternal* (Open Library of Humanities): <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2Fnourishing body%2Fdoi.org%2F10.16995%2Fsim.256> [accessed 10 October 2020].
[84] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 165-168.

describes as a 'connectedness, adequate physical and psychological roots to support the blossoming and fruitfulness which grows out of that nourishing ground'.[85] The regenerative nature of Christ's tears is apparent in his response to Lazarus's death: they transform Lazarus's decaying corpse into a living body - a physical manifestation of Christ's own forthcoming bodily resurrection, and the promise of life made possible through the wound-tears of Christ's *humanitas*. In this way, Lazarus's corpse, Kristeva's ultimate example of abjection, becomes the site of regeneration and life, of which Christ, as a human, is an integral part.

Christ's tears, interpreted by the witnesses in the Gospel as those of mourning (a traditionally female role, thus further identifying Christ with the feminine) are tears of uncontainable joy, an exuberance coming from his union with the flesh – *humanitas* – the leaky and inferior feminine. This inferiority is essential for the fulfilment of Christ and therefore for those with whom he is united. It is signified by Christ's ever-bleeding wounds and weeping eyes, typically marks of the weaker female; and, therefore, those who by their very gender share these 'faults' can naturally relate to 'that most female of men, the Son'.[86]

Mechthild's tears

The excessive, feminine nature of tears is reinforced in 5.30, in which we are told how Mechtild was bestowed with the gift of *lacrymarum ubertatem* (an abundance of tears), and *sedulae contemplationis fruitionem* (the pleasure of tireless praying):[87]

> Caetera omnia ad Religionem pertinentia habuit; scilicet propriae volunatis abdicationem, suimet deiectionem, obedientiae promptitudiem, orationis et devotionis studium, lacrymarum

[85] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 167.
[86] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 199.
[87] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.30, pp. 363-69.

> ubertatem, sedulae contemplationis fruitionem. Semetipsam in tantum abnegaverat, oblitaque sui Christo sic absorpta erat, ut quemadmodum de sancto Bernardo legitur, sensibus exterioribus parum uteretur.[88]
>
> (She possessed all the following attributes which are necessary for a nun: an abdication and casting down of her own desires; a readiness to obey; an eagerness for prayer and devotion; a copiousness of tears; and a pleasure of tireless praying. Indeed, she denied herself to such an extent and was so forgetful of herself and thus absorbed in Christ, as in the manner of which Saint Bernard writes, she was too little aware of external sensations.)

Mechthild's devotion depends on the feminine properties of carnality and flourishing (*fruitio* and *ubertas*) to express divine love. Mechthild's choice of *fruitio* is significant. F. Tyler Sergent notes that the term holds particular importance for William of Saint Thierry who uses it to describe the union between the Bridegroom and the Bride in his exposition of Canticles 2.7, but who is rather hesitant to exploit fully *fruitio*'s carnality.[89] Mechthild, however, displays none of his reluctance, recognising her devotion as flourishing and exuberant. Mechthild's tears are part of the verdant cycle of growth – Jantzen's 'natality' – which feeds, and is fed by, a feminised, physical, and wounded Christ. This one-ness and co-dependence culminates in Mechthild's assimilation with Christ, which she experiences at the expense of all external sensations. She loses all idea of her own identity, enjoying instead, Iriragay's 'abdication and crashing down of her own desires': a peculiarly feminine state, and one necessary to achieve union with the feminine Divine.[90]

This excess of weeping is reinforced further in the chapter when Mechthild's affective contemplation upon the crucified Christ renders her speechless, uncontrollably weeping, and overcome with an intense inner heat:

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[88] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.30, p. 364.
[89] F. Tyler Sergent, 'William of Saint-Thierry's Sources and Influences: '*Ratio Fidei*' and '*Fruitio*', in *A Companion to William of Saint-Thierry*, ed. F. Tyler Sergent (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 35-66.
[90] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 199.

> Circa Dominicam passionem miro ferebatur affectu, ut raro de ipsa sine lacrymis loqui posset; et saepius cum de Christi passione sive amore loqueretur, tanto fervore succedebatur, quod facies eius et manus in modum decocti cancri rubeae apparerent. Unde credimus eam multoties sanguinem suum spiritualiter in Christi amore fudisse.[91]
>
> Around Passion Sunday, she was affected by such wondrous devotion, that she could rarely speak about it without weeping, and often, when she would speak of Christ's suffering or love, she was overcome by such a great heat, that her face and hands looked as ruddy as a cooked crab. From this we believe that she poured forth in her spirit a great deal of her own blood in her love for Christ.

Like Christ at Lazarus's tomb, Mechthild is inarticulate, unable to communicate except through tears. In sympathy with Christ's suffering, her face and hands become red with blood, but the image of the shared Passion is conveyed in terms of an overflowing, liquid desire, her devotion matching that of Christ. Once again, the physical, fertile aspect of Mechthild's devotion is crucial to her union with Christ. Mechthild's spiritual love for Christ finds a material outlet in her weeping and blood ('eam multoties sanguinem suum spiritualiter in Christi amore fudisse'), allowing Mechthild to embody the bleeding Christ, as it were; and, by physically responding to humanity, Mechthild reinforces the association of Christ's wounds with the faulty, uncontained feminine.

The comparison of Mechthild's appearance to a cooked crab ('facies eius et manus in modum decocti cancri rubeae apparerent') further associates Christ's body with the feminine both by locating Mechthild and Christ in the female-coded, enclosed space of the kitchen – a motif Mechthild explores elsewhere in the *Liber Specialis* in the context of the Eucharist – and by celebrating the outlandish excess that union with Christ necessitates. Mechthild's spiritual affective bleeding arises from the *tanto fervore* which overpowers her. The prime meaning of *fervor* is 'boiling', or 'seething', so it makes sense that Mechthild uses it in the context of her 'cooked crab' visage. In medieval and classical texts, however, *fervor,* also

[91] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.30, pp. 365-66.

refers to an emotional excess - raging, burning, excessive love, anger or hatred. Mark Amsler notes its use in descriptions of affective and proto-affective devotion by writers such as Augustine, Isidore of Seville (d. 636) and Anselm, who regards it as a 'letting go of physical control, reasoned understanding or textual regulation' in order to attain, 'a higher state of religious consciousness'. Furthermore, *fervor* was never without its carnal connection, despite its spiritual context. [92] It is an ultimately feminine word, therefore, allying the sufferer with the feminine and the flesh. Mechthild's *amor* for Christ boils away inside her, and just as Christ's love pours from his wounds in the form of blood and tears, so Mechthild's love is manifested in her wound-like flesh, through her ruddy complexion, lack of articulation and tears, outlets for the liquid-like love seething inside her flesh. Mechthild and Christ mirror each other in the display of their devotion, demonstrating the interdependence and oneness possible in a female-centred, luscious and flowing theology.

Wounds as tears

There is a strong sense of liquidity and excess when Christ's wounds as tears are presented as gifts to Mechthild and others in the *Liber Specialis.* Like many of Mechthild's visions, the image centres on the Eucharist, when Christ's body quite literally is offered to God and the communicants as part of the betrothal ritual between Christ and the Soul, thereby intrinsically linking tears with Christ's wounded and bleeding body. By witnessing and partaking of Christ's bleeding body, Mechthild responds affectively to Christ's Passion and love, thus proving herself suitable consort and intercessor and achieving the desired union with Christ,

[92] Mark Amsler, 'More Than Words Can Say? Late Medieval Affective Vocabularies', in *Later Middle English Literature, Materiality, and Culture: Essays in Honor of James M. Dean*, ed., Brian Gastle and Erick Kelemen, (Maryland: University of Delaware Press, 2018), pp. 3-24, (p.14).

the bridegroom. In 1.1, for example, Christ presents Mechthild with gifts, including the gift of tears, which appertain to his earthly life and passion, in order to perfect Mechthild's devotion.[93] Already absolved of her sins and clothed in gold, Mechthild's Soul reclines on the breast of her beloved:

> Dominus autem advocans animam, manus suas ponebat ad manus animae, donans illi omnem laborem et exercitationem operum, quae in sua sanctissima humanitate perfecit. Deinde oculos suos benignissimos animae oculis applicuit, dans illi exercitationem sanctissimorum oculorum suorum et lacrymarum effusionem copiosam. Dehinc aures suas animae auribus adaptans, dedit illi omnem aurium suarum exercitationem. Post haec os suum roseum ori animae imprimet, tradidit illi exercitationem laudis, gratiarum actionis, orationis et praedicationis, in suae negligentiae supplementum. Postremo Cor suum melifluum cordi animae adunavit, tribuens illi omnem exercitationem meditationis, devotionis et amoris, omnibusque bonis abunde ditavit. Sicque anima tota Christo incorporate et amore divino liquefacta, tamquam cera a facie ignis, totaque absorpta in Deo, sicut cera sigillo impressa, similitudinem illius praetendit. Sic beata anima tota cum dilecto unum est effecta.[94]
>
> (The Lord, however, summoned her Soul, and placed his hands upon the Soul's hands, giving to the Soul all the labour and exertion of his deeds, which he perfected in his holy humanity. Then he applied his blessed eyes to the Soul's eyes, giving her the exercise of his holy eyes, and the copious flow of tears. After this he touched the ears of her Soul with his ears, and gave to her all the exercise of his ears. Then he pressed his rosy mouth on the Soul's mouth, and gave to her the exercise of praise, thanksgiving, prayer, and preaching, as compensation for her negligence. Finally, his honey-flowing heart anointed the Soul's heart, bestowing upon it all the exercise of meditation, devotion and love, and enriched it abundantly with all good things. In this way the Soul, completely incorporated into Christ, made liquid with divine love, just as wax in the face of fire, and completely absorbed in God, as wax is impressed by a seal, put on his likeness. Thus, the blessed Soul was made completely one with her beloved).

Christ's gift of tears is one of five that he presents to Mechthild, all of which come from openings in his body. They are in the form of blood, honey, tears, divine breath, and hearing, are loosely related to the five senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, sight), depend on openings

[93] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 8-11.
[94] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 8-9.

in the body, and are part of the Soul's mystical union with Christ.[95] The openings are the wounds Christ receives as Man of Sorrows, through his crucifixion, and the mocking, scourging and buffeting leading up to it. As Gertsman observes, because of the conflation of his tears and blood in devotional writing, Christ's eyes can be equated with his wounds.[96] Through the acts of weeping and bleeding, Christ's body leaks goodness from his wounds and eyes, which, in turn, nourishes Mechthild when Christ touches her corresponding parts. Christ tears/wounds make him the perfect nurturer. Through its extreme openness and incontinence, Christ's salvific body is hyper-feminised; in Christ, imperfect female flesh becomes 'hyper-perfect', as it were; and this perfection flows into Mechthild, in a manner which recalls Jantzen's theory of flourishing and divine/human symbiosis.

Significantly, Mechthild's disruptive un/orthodoxy is part of a collaborative discourse both between herself, Christ, and the celestial community of her vision, and between Mechthild, her scribes, the female community of Helfta, whose members share, value, and endorse her revelations, and who regard them, and the woman to whom they were given, as of part of their wider discourse outside the convent walls. Such 'communities by of discourse' (a term initially used by Bernard McGinn in relation to the collaboration of ideas Meister Eckhart and the beguines), as, for example, McAvoy, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, Carolyn Meussig and other feminist medievalists demonstrate, were essential in nurturing, developing, and disseminating the female-centred theology in late-medieval Europe, as well as in giving authority to the female voices from which they came. [97] Such communities,

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[95] Mechthild uses the metaphor of senses several times in the *Liber Specialis*. See, for example, Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 5.21, p. 352.
[96] Gertsman, *Crying in the Middle Ages*, p. xii.
[97] Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 4. For a collection of important intervention in this aspect of female authorship, see *Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2009). See, in particular, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy, '*Experimentia* and the Construction of

however, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three, were denied to woman such as Auda Fabri whose own un/orthodoxy could not transcend the theology of abjection and flesh and the feminine, so instrumental in her crisis of faith.

The theme of Christ's perfect humanity compensating Mechthild's lack is reiterated throughout the passage. The language is one of excess and abundance: Christ's humanity is, *sanctissima*, (most holy), as are his eyes (*sanctissimorum)* , and they weep, *lacrymarum effusionem copiosam* (a copious flow of tears).[98] As Christ's wounds/openings come into contact with Mechthild, the liquid imagery becomes more intense. When, therefore, Christ finally touches Mechthild's heart with his, there is such an outpouring of liquid love from Christ's *Cor mellifluum* (honey flowing heart), that Mechthild is entirely overcome. She melts like wax in the heat of Christ's love, and is incorporated so completely with Christ that the two become indistinguishable ('Sicque anima tota Christo incorporate et amore divino liquefacta, tamquam cera a facie ignis, totaque absorpta in Deo, sicut cera sigillo impressa, similitudinem illius praetendit. Sic beata anima tota cum dilecto unum est effecta').

In its amalgamation of the erotic with religious devotion, this episode reveals the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux and his sermons on the Song of Songs. Its privileging of the feminine is also resonant of Irigaray's 'sensible ecstasy'. Mechthild experiences the 'liquid' and 'living mirror' in which the Soul and "God" mingle with and reflect each other.[99] Through her union with Christ, Mechthild is hyper-feminised, and this hyperfeminisation depends on that of Christ. Christ weeps perfect tears. Christ is the perfect God-human

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Experience in Medieval Writing: An Introduction', in the same volume, pp. 1-14. Also in the same volume, see Koen Goudriaan, 'The New Devout and their Women of Authority', pp. 25-46; Carolyn Muessig, 'Communities of Discourse: Religious Authority and the Role of Holy Women in the Later Middle Ages', pp. 65-82; Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'Two Women of Experience, Two Men of Letters, and the Book of Life', pp. 83-102; Liz Herbert McAvoy, ' "[A]n Awngel al Clothyd in white": Rereading the Book of Life as The Book of Margery Kempe', pp. 103-22.

[98] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 8-9.

[99] Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 196-97.

because he is the perfect woman. Through the gift of tears, Christ's perfect humanity is transferred to Mechthild's imperfect one, and by uniting so entirely with Christ, therefore, Mechthild also achieves a state of perfect femaleness which she demonstrates by weeping.

The gift of tears and their association with Christ's wounds also appear in 1.18, Mechthild's vision during the Good Friday Mass. In the vision, Christ uses the instruments of his Passion to instruct Mechthild in her devotion. However, Mechthild's ostensibly conventional desire to concentrate on the abject nature of Christ's wounded body is disrupted by Christ himself, who transforms his tortured flesh and the instruments of this torture from the horrific and abject into the sublime.[100] This transformation is effected through the devotion of the faithful, in particular Mechthild and her sisters and wider audience for whom the revelations are recorded.

Devotion, Christ explains, is demonstrated in the tears of the faithful. Christ informs Mechthild, '"Dico tibi in veritate, si quis ex devotione passionis meae lacrymas effuderit, suscipere volo ac si ipse pro me sit passus." Tunc anima: "Eia, mi Domine, quali modo debeo pervenire ad has lacrymas?"'[101] ('"I tell you truly, if anyone sheds tears from devotion of my Passion, I will receive her as though she had suffered for me." Then the Soul replied, "Ah, my dear Lord, how should I come upon these tears?"'). In keeping with Good Friday liturgy at this point, Christ instructs Mechthild to meditate on aspects of his suffering. Mechthild is told to think on the different examples of Christ's Passion: the arrest in Gethsemane, the

[100] For example, 'Et anima,: "Quid autem laudis, o amice fidelissime, referat pro dolore quem passus es, cum imperilae capiti tuo corona imprimebatur spinea, ita ut roseo sanguine deliciosa facies tua, in quam Angeli desiderant prospicere, tota velatur?" Respondit: "Ut homo, cum tenatur, totis viribus fortiter resistat, et quot tentationes in nominee meo superat, tot in meo diademate gemmas ponit pretiosas."'(And the Soul asked, "What praise, most faithful friend, should you receive, for the pain you suffered when the crown of thorns was pressed upon your royal head, so that your sweet face was completely covered with rosy blood, the face upon which the angels delighted to look upon?" And he replied, "When a person is tempted, let her strongly resist with all her might; and as many temptations she resists in my name, as many precious jewels does she set in my crown"). Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, pp. 51-52

[101] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, p. 52.

blows, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the crucifixion, and the piercing of Christ's side. Such meditation, he says, will teach her to weep tears of devotion (the six examples, corresponding in number to the wounds on his hands, feet, side and head). While there is nothing unusual in Christ's claims and Mechthild's response, Christ's explanation of the power of his passion and the potency of the tears is unconventional. In Mechthild's vision, the wounds inflicted on Christ's body and the instruments and those inflicting him become transformed into something beautiful and sublime. Moreover, Mechthild's tears are brought about through devotion to the feminised nurturing and protecting body of Christ which prevails over masculine aggression, a vision present in Jantzen's proposal for a flourishing, feminine pantheism to replace the patriarchal Western religions with their underlying othering of what is not the dominant male.[102] Here, Christ the mother allows female affectivity towards Christ's suffering. When, for example, Christ is attacked by the enemy, his response is that of a mother who stands in harm's way to rescue her child. Christ tells Mechthild, 'Cogita quali amicitia dilectione meis inimicis obviam processi, qui me cum gladiis et fustibus ad mortem quaerebant, tamquam ad latronem et malificium, sed ego, tamquam filio suo mater, illis me obviam dedi, ut eos de faucibus luporum erueram' (Think of the loving kindness with which I came before my enemies, who sought to kill me with swords and clubs as though I were a thief and a criminal. But I, like a mother for her child, gave myself to them, to snatch them from the jaws of wolves.').[103]

[102] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 157.
[103] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, pp. 52-53.

Maternal flourishing of the Divine

Parallels to Jantzen's philosophy are also evident in Christ's 'desire to save all, even the worst offenders, which he demonstrates with his wounded body. Christ the judge is replaced by Christ the mother, and Mechthild's tears of devotion enable her to tap into, as it were, the perfect feminine. The 'cruel beatings' of 1.18 (*alapis immitibus*) become 'sweet kisses' (*dulcia oscula*) bestowed by Christ on the saved; the scourges Christ endures become his prayers to the Father, whereby many of the tormenters are saved ('cum me ferocissime flagellarent, tam efficacem pro eis fudi orationem ad Patrem cielestem, ut multi ex eis converterentur' (when they fiercely scourged me, I poured out so powerful a prayer to the Father on their behalf, that many of them were converted).[104] The thorns on the crown are precious stones in the crown of the afflicters, arguably akin to that of the Virgin crowned in Heaven. The feminine imagery continues with Christ's description of his crucified limbs. Stretched out on the cross they draw the souls of the chosen to him, their welcome resonant of the earlier mother image: 'tota mea virtute attraxi animas eorum ad me omnium, qui mea divina aeternam sunt praedestinati'. Finally, Christ declares, 'cum lancea latus meum aperiret, ex Corde meo propinquavi eis poculum vitae, qui per Adam hauserant poculum mortis, ut essent omnes Filii aeternae vitae et salutis in me qui sum vita' (when the spear opened side, I offered the cup of life from my heart to those who, through Adam, had drunk fully from the cup of death, so that they all became sons of eternal life and salvation in me, who am life).[105] The inclusivity is remarkable: by including *tota, omnium* and *omnes* Mechthild offsets *praedestinati,* to suggest a theology of universal salvation. Christ the judge is replaced by Christ the mother who loves all her children; and Christ's conversion of his afflicters echoes the identification of the sisters with the Jews who spit in Christ's face, at the

[104] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, pp. 52-53.
[105] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, p. 53.

beginning of the revelation, and includes the Jews as recipients of salvation.[106] Jantzen's interpretation of feminine divine is one of cooperation and intermingling rather than classical, masculine hierarchy. It foreshadows Julian of Norwich's reluctance to accept the condemnation of any soul (suggesting Mechthild's influence on Julian), and is reiterated in Margery Kempe's fears for the souls of 'Jewys, Saraȝinys & alle fals heretikys' whose salvation she claims from Christ himself.[107]

Mechthild's devotion is rewarded when, having received communion, she sees her union with Christ, 'tamquam per lucidum crystallum, et animam suam velut aquam purissimam et fulgidam, per omne corpus Christi fluentem' (as though through clear crystal, and her soul as pure and shining water flowing through Christ's entire body).[108] Mechthild's promised tears have metamorphosed into the crystal of the reliquary and the water of Mechthild's soul which runs through Christ like blood, mingling with his in the ultimate elevation of female flesh.

Wounds as food

Mechthild's association of Christ with the female is also evident in her treatment of his wounds as food. Mechthild was not alone or original in such an association: Christ's body had long been associated as the food and drink of the Eucharistic feast, and the doctrine of

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[106] 'Et anima: "Quid vero laudis tibi faciet quod immundis Judaeorum sputis es consputus, et colaphis caesus immitibus?" Cui Dominus: "Dico tibi in veritate, omnes qui praelatos suos contemnunt, in faciem meam conspuunt. Si quis ergo contumeliam illam mihi cupit emendare, praelatos suos debet honorare.'" (And the Soul asked, "What praise should you receive since you were spat upon with the fouls spittle of the Jews?" And the Lord answered, "I tell you truly, all those who despise those in authority spit in my face. If someone desires to emend their insults to me, therefore, let her honour those in authority"). Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, p. 51.
[107] *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, 32. 1070-1115 <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/the-shewings-of-julian-of-norwich-part-1> [accessed 3 October 2020]. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, Early English Text Society o.s. 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 57, pp. 140-141.
[108] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.18, p. 53.

transubstantiation was made dogma by papal decree in 1215. As discussed earlier, women seem to have been particularly drawn to the notion of Christ's wounded flesh as a source of food and nourishment. Bynum cites some startling examples: Ida of Louvain (d. c. 1300) and Dorothea of Montau (d. 1394/1397), claimed to become mystically pregnant in preparation for, or as a result of, the Eucharist; Hadewijch of Brabant's response to Christ's wounded flesh seems to be the perfect paradigm for Irigaray's *la mystèrique*, envisioning herself, in the ecstasy of love, eating Christ and being eaten by him, while both remain paradoxically unconsumed.[109] Divine sustenance materialised as the bloodied limbs of a dismembered child, to blood, honey, milk, a heavenly liquor, a sweet smell, or even a marriage bed, as in Hadewijch of Brabant's (d. 1248) revelation. [110] As with Christ's wounds as tears, the vision of his wounds as food frequently centred around the Eucharist, the moment when Christ himself was miraculously ingested and thus intimately united with the communicant. Such notions of Christ's nourishing flesh were particularly prevalent among, though not exclusive to, female religious communities in the Low Countries, and among them, the convent at Helfta.

Given that milk was believed to be the result of blood heated in the body to provide food for the infant, portraying Christ's blood as milk or another nourishing substance seems a pretty logical action. As discussed earlier, this image had long been exploited by the Church, and led to the parallel imagery between Christ and the Virgin Mary, enhancing Christ's maternal characteristics and his feminised, physical identity. Christ's wounded, feeding flesh was part of his *compassio* – his ability to identify with humanity, the female bit with which, as McNamer and Bynum argue, women felt affinity, and became a favourite trope of female

[109] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 172-73.
[110] The Flemish Beguine, Hadewich of Brabant's works comprise of letters, poems and visions, in which she communes with Christ. For an edited translation of her complete works, see Hadewijch of Brabant, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

mystics.[111] Through their understanding of the nurturing properties of Christ's wounded flesh, and of the reciprocal nature of their relationship with him, women such as the beguine, Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg attempted to present a union which was mutual, nourishing, fluid and inclusive.[112] As food, Christ's body is both a source of erotic despair, desire and pleasure - Irigaray's 'God' – and a maternal provider who cares for her offspring, akin to Jantzen's notion of a female-coded understanding of the divine.[113] Central to their revelations is Christ's body, whose wounds continually issue nourishing liquor, like mothers, and at the centre of that body is the Heart, accessed through the wound in Christ's side, resonant with its female-gendered identity, and epitomising Christ's feminine humanity.

While Christ frequently assumes the male roles of champion, judge, redeemer and lover in devotional writing, such aspects of his identity are noticeably absent in the *Liber Specialis*. Mechthild of Hackeborn, it seems, is challenging androcentric orthodoxy by showing her readers a Christ who is altogether more female - one of the Helfta community, as it were. Mechthild highlights Christ's femaleness through the fluidity of her imagery, the reciprocity of Christ as nourisher who is in turn nourished by the believer, the organic abundance and excess flowing between Christ's wounds and the bodies of Mechthild and her sisters. Although the erotic is present in Mechthild's presentation of Christ's body as food and feast, the femaleness of Christ, with Mechthild's emphasis on the mother-child, oneness, mutuality, and the confidence such relationships engender, overpower or displace much of the sweet despair which features so prominently in the writings of other female mystics. Christ's body, with its wounds and femaleness, is essential to this. In Mechthild's visions, it

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[111] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, as before.

[112] For an example of Mechtild of Magdeburg's response to Christ's wounds as food, see Tobin, *The Flowing Light*; 6.13, p. 239: 'It (God's food) also gives eternal praise and boundless honour/to the fathomless spring from which it has flowed/ when it swirls up again, having borne full fruit,/ to where it has flowed forth from me. Both his wounds and his breasts were open/ the wounds poured forth/ the breasts flowed/ the soul was invigorated and completely restored/ as he poured the sparkling red wine/ into her red mouth'.

[113] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, pp. 155-70.

is possible to share Christ's divinity just as he shares humanity, but this is through the distinctly feminine/female body which gives birth and feeds and nurtures through the blood which flows incessantly from it. This blood and the holes from which it pours become transformed from the abject to the sublime. But crucially, the believer is also part of this sublimation, being one with, and indivisible from Christ through the celebration of the Eucharistic union.

Wounds, food and the domestic

In her use of food imagery, Mechthild draws from a number of sources which include the Song of Songs (as interpreted by Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons), the Apocrypha, and the Gospels. She uses the domestic, female-coded space of the kitchen in her revelations as well as images of the enclosed garden which provide food and healing to the beloved. In the *Liber Specialis*, the garden can be both an everyday thing like a kitchen garden which needs to be tended, a place of delight and erotic encounter.[114] Christ's body also appears as the banqueting hall, with its accompanying association with the gendered, bridal eroticism and spirituality found in Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, and, to a lesser extent, secular poetry of courtly love. Running through the metaphors is the image of Christ's wounded body nourishing and healing the child or the betrothed, with solid food such as fruit, flesh, fish and bread, or liquids such as honey, milk, water, or a divine, golden and sweet liquor. In Mechthild's visions, Christ's body appears as objects such as a table or the dishes, the nourishment served to the beloved, or the place where the nourishment is received. Essential to the feeding of the beloved are the wounds which allow the beloved to access this life-

[114] See, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Virgin in the Hortus Conclusus: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul', in *Medieval Feminist Forum* 50.1 (2014), pp. 11-32.

giving sustenance. Because these wounds are always open, they allow the beloved to enter Christ's body in order to feast or rest in it, and they also permit the unhindered and constant emission of Christ's salvific liquor. In this way all Christ's wounds feminise Christ. However, this distinctly feminine lack of containment is particularly reinforced by the wound in Christ's side and its association with female physicality and sexuality, and the accompanying female capacity to carry, give birth to and nurture her young, and as a means of accessing the other female space, Christ's heart.

As a metaphor for Christ's nourishing wounds honey features prominently. Its ability to crystalize, solidify, melt and dissolve; its apparent formlessness – much like the wax with which Mechthild also compares herself; its stickiness, sweetness, oozing properties; as well as its ability to heal and nourish, made honey a suitable metaphor for Christ's feminised body and blood, and the union between Christ and Mechthild's Soul. Mechthild's use of the honey motif in relation to Christ's wounded body demonstrates her familiarity with Bernard of Clairvaux, whose influence she acknowledges, and also suggests an awareness of Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167), the English Cistercian abbot and friend of Bernard, whose instruction on female anchoritic life, how an anchoress should inwardly and outwardly behave, *De institutione inclusarum*, was a widely disseminated and influential text, as Ayoush Lazikani has demonstrated.[115] Laura Kalas argues for the significance of honey and sweetness as

[115] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'De institutione inclusarum' in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: 1 Opera Ascetica*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot. For the Latin text together with the Middle English version from MS Vernon along with commentary and full glossary, see, J. R. Ayto, *An edition (with commentary, a full glossary and an introduction on the language and the literary interest of the text) of the middle English version of Aelred of Rievaulx's de Institutiona Inclusarum in the Vernon MS:* http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/10196/1/10196_6990.PDF?DDD11+UkUDh:CyT [accessed 27 December, 2019]. 'Tunc unus ex militibus lancea latus eius aperuit, et exiuit sanguis et aqua. Festina, ne tardaueris, comede fauum cum melle tuo, bibe uinum tuum cum lacte tuo. Sanguis tibi in uinum uertitur ut inebrieris, in lac aqua mutatur ut nutriaris. Facta sunt tibi in petra flumina, in membris eius uulnera, sanguine eius fiant sicut uitta coccinea labia tua, et eloquium tuum dulce.'(Then one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance, and there exited blood and water. Hasten, tarry not, eat your honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is altered to wine to intoxicate you, the water is changed to milk to nourish you. For you there are streams in the

medicine in female and feminized devotion, with specific reference to *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Mechthild was therefore employing a conventional motif to describe Christ and his relationship with the Soul.[116] Indeed, as Catherine Innes Parker also observes, the presence, and multi-valent significance of honey both within scripture and among its medieval commentators was widespread: honey represents the abundance of the Promised Land, wealth and desire, the sweetness of God's laws, God-given wisdom, erotic desire and love, and represents the image of God to be consumed by the soul. [117] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Mechthild avails herself of this powerful motif.

The concept of Christ's feminised body/wounds as food is manifested very clearly in 1.1, which sets out, as it were, Mechthild's approach to Christ's wounded body.[118] Mechthild describes Christ as *mellifluus* (honey-flowing). In her vision, Mechthild sees herself standing as a penitent before Christ in whose presence her sinful nature disintegrates and is transformed into gold: 'Cumque in tali perstiteret contritione, vidit Dominum Iesum in solio sublimi sedentem; in cuius aspectu mellifluo cinis ad nihilum redactus, stabatque in eius praesentia rutilans velut aurum). (And when she continued in this state of contrition, she saw the Lord Jesus sitting on a high throne, and before his honey-flowing/honey sweet countenance (at the honey-sweet sight of him), her ashes [of penitence] were reduced to nothing, and she stood in his presence glowing like gold).[119] Mechthild's use of the adjective is significant. While, *mellifluus* is generally translated as 'honey-sweet', its literal meaning is

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rock, in his limbs wounds, clefts in the wall of his body, in which like a dove you hide yourself and kiss each one; from his blood, your lips become just as a scarlet ribbon, and your utterance sweet). *De institutione inclusarum*, in Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: 1 Opera Ascetica, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot. *Corpus Christianorum Continuati Mediaevalis*, i (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), p. 671. For Lazikani's discussion, see A. S. Lazikani, 'Seeking Intimacy in the Wooing Group', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 43.2 (2017), pp. 157-185.

[116] Laura Kalas,' The 'Swetenesse' of Confection: A Recipe for Spiritual Health in London, British Library, Additional MS 61823, *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 40 (2018), pp. 155-190.

[117] *The Wooing of Our Lord and The Wooing Group Prayers*, ed. Catherine Innes-Parker (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2015), pp. 113-114.

[118] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, pp. 5-11.

[119] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, p. 5.

'honey-flowing', reflecting its liquid state, fresh from the hive and in the honey-comb. This liquidity is resonant of the fluidity that comes across in Mechthild's notion of a feminised Christ. It is resonant of Christ's blood which flows from his wounds, but which appears as honey or heavenly liquor in the *Liber Specialis*. It also reflects the fluidity of identification characteristic of Mechthild's writing: Christ's lack of concreteness, aligns him with Aristotelian notions of feminine inherent formlessness rather than, as discussed in chapter one, a forming masculinity. This fluidity is further demonstrated by Mechthild's synecdochic use of *mellifluus*, which is used to describes Christ as a whole, rather than referring specifically to his wounds, and thus Mechthild actually makes Christ the sum of his wounds. Christ's honeyed presence here thus has transformative and curative properties, converting the ashes of penitence that clothe Mechthild into some sort of heavenly gold, and thereby making Mechthild reflect Christ's own honey-gold form. It is significant, also, that Mechthild herself, not her clothing, is described as 'rutilans velut aurum': she herself is transfigured into something that resembles, but is not necessarily, gold, thus reinforcing the feminine slipperiness of identification that Mechthild and Christ share, and the mutuality of their identities.

In her use of *mellifluus*, Mechthild is clearly invoking the encounters between the beloved and the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs. [120] Mechthild does not ignore the obvious eroticism, but she works it into a particularly female-centred ideal in which Christ's gendered, female physicality is key - the flourishing excess that Jantzen discusses, and the incoherence of Irigaray's female mystic. Reclining on her beloved's breast – the site of the feminised side-wound - Mechthild both feeds and is fed by her conversation with Christ. Her

[120] For example, 'Favus distillans labia tua, sponsa; mel et lac sub lingua tua: et odor vestimentorum tuorum sicut odor thuris' (Thy lips, my spouse, are as a dropping honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments, as the smell of frankincense). Song of Songs, 4.11.

words to Christ exploit the honey motif, are described as a source of inexpressible sweetness (‘ineffabilis dulcedinis verba’) and allow Mechthild to fulfil the role of lover and mother, feeding Christ with honeyed sweetness, while simultaneously being rendered inarticulate.[121]

The honey motif figures elsewhere in the chapter, when Mechthild associates it directly with Christ’s heart from which Christ feeds her and draws her into union with him: ‘Postremo Cor suum mellifluum cordi animae adunavit’ (After that he united his own honey-flowing heart to the heart of the Soul), thus associating Christ’s body and its wounds (in particular that in his side) with union, abundance and nourishment.[122] While Christ’s wounded body, therefore, assumes the maleness of the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs, who feeds his lover honey, it also identifies him with the femaleness of the nursing mother. Indeed, this femaleness is so overwhelming and facilitates so complete a union, that Mechthild’s soul is absorbed into Christ himself, who conceives her Soul and gives birth to her, making Christ a sort of hyper-mother, an image which serves to unite Christ with another example of perfect female flesh, his own mother, the Virgin Mary.

The wounded heart as feminine motif

Christ’s wounded heart as a specific source of honeyed nourishment is a recurrent metaphor in the *Liber Specialis*, and one which cements Mechthild’s notion of Christ as an integral, feminized part of the all-female Helfta community. In 1.27, for example, Mechthild and the Helfta sisters drink sweet liquor (‘liquarem […] dulcissimum’) from Christ’s breast, through a ‘fistula aurea’, a Eucharistic reed made of gold:

[121] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, p. 8.
[122] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.1, p. 9.

> Congregatio autem tota ad mensam illam accedens, unaquaeque sub brachio beatae Virginis quasi geniculando accepit Dominicum corpus de manu Domini; et beata Virgo crateram auream cum fistula aurea ad latus Domini tenebat, per quam sugebant omnes liquarem illum dulcissimum qui de pectore Domini emanabat.[123]
>
> (The whole Congregation approached the table, and each one of the women received the body of the Lord from the Lord's hand, as they seemed to genuflect beneath the blessed Virgin's arm. And the blessed Virgin held a golden bowl/chalice with a golden straw to the side of the Lord, through which all sucked that most sweet liquor that flowed from the Lord's breast.)

Mechthild privileges feminised imagery in this vision, combining that of suckling infants with the umbilical cord which feeds the unborn child and is visible at the child's birth. The breast is the source of maternal feeding – the nuns suck (*sugebant*) the liquor which flows from his breast like mother's milk; while the reed itself connects each woman to Christ's body and proceeds from the vagina/vulva side-wound. Indeed, the *fistula aurea* further feminizes Christ's body with its resonance to the umbilicus which attaches the unborn infant to its mother and nourishes it before birth. This nourishing connection of Christ and the sisters is recurrent in the *Liber Specialis*. The reed is sometimes replaced with a rope, but both serve to connect and nourish Christ and his beloved, and both come from Christ's womb-like heart. In 1.10, for example, Mechthild sees a rope emanating from Christ's heart as the sisters share in a Eucharistic banquet:

> Viditque funem de Corde Dei procedere in animam, per quem illa omnes ad Deum qui in eius praesentia stabant trahebat. Funis vero ille amorem designabat, quem Deus animae illi beatae abunde infudit, per quem omnes Deum trahebat bono exemplo suo et doctrina. Tunc ipse Rex

[123] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.27, p. 96. Although honey is not specifically mentioned in this passage, the golden colour it assumes, the gleaming gold of the reed and the bowl, its liquid state, and its similar appearance elsewhere in the *Liber Specialis*, identifies the liquid if not as honey, per se, then something sweetened or honey-like.

> gloriae extendens manum suae omniptentiae benedixit eas, dicens: "Vultus mei claritas sit vobis aeterna jucunditas."[124]
>
> And she saw a rope proceeding into her soul from the Heart of God, by which she dragged to God all those standing there in his presence. The rope indeed represented that love which God poured out in abundance upon those blessed souls, and through which God dragged all by his good example and his doctrine. Then the King of glory himself, extended the right hand of his omnipotence and blessed them, saying, "May the shining clarity of my face be for your eternal joy."

The identification of Christ's wound with the feminine here is reinforced by the presence of the Virgin, whom Mechthild identifies so closely with Christ in the *Liber Specialis*. Mary assists in the feeding of the sisters, presenting them with the breast-like chalice/bowl into which the liquor flows. The image of the Virgin as co-feeder with Christ is reminiscent of similar imagery present in Mechthild of Magdeburg's, *The Flowing Light*, a work with which Mechthild of Hackeborn was familiar, as we have seen. In 1.22 of *The Flowing Light*, for example, during a dialogue between Mary and the Soul, the Virgin explains how, as universal mother, she suckled Christ, the banished, the blessed, and compares her milk to the blood that flowed from her son's wounds, after which declaration the Soul begs the Virgin to suckle her and 'the rest of God's children' until there is no one left to feed. [125] The excess of maternal milk, breast and love of which Mechthild of Magdeburg writes is present in the younger Mechthild's vision, but here it is referring to Christ whose open wounds and body are the breasts and whose blood, now metamorphosised into divine liquor, is the milk, the delivery of which is aided by the Virgin Mary and serves to associate Christ's body with female, sexual flesh.

Likewise, in 2.16 of the *Liber Specialis*, Christ's heart via the wound with which it is conflated is a source of food for Mechthild's Soul, and the erotic encounter between Christ

[124] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.10, p. 34.
[125] Tobin, *The Flowing Light*, 1.22, pp. 50-52.

the Bridegroom/Lover and the Soul as the betrothed is overlaid with the mother/daughter relationship enjoyed simultaneously by Christ and Mechthild. As the passage below demonstrates, the Song of Songs and *fin' amor* lover reclining in the bosom of her beloved and drinking all manner of sweetness from a goblet are also the infant who feeds at the breast of her mother; and that mother is Christ, the wound of whose *melliflui Cordi* Mechthild's Soul sucks (*esuxit*).

> tunc Amor assumens animam duxit ad Dominum; illa vero reclinavit se ad vulnus melliflui Cordis Salvatoris sui unici, hauriens inde pocula omnis dulcoris et suavitatis plenissima, ibique omnis amaritiudo eius versa est in dulcedinem, et timor eius mutatus est in securitatem. Ibi etiam de Corde Christi suavissimo esuxit fructum dulcissimum, quem assumens de Corde Dei in os suum posuit: per quod significabatur illa aeterna laus, quae de Corde Dei procedit; quia omnis laus qua ipsa laudatur, effluit ab illo qui est purus etiam fons omnis boni.[126]
>
> Then Love, taking the Soul [by the hand], led her to the Lord; and indeed, she rested herself upon the wound of the honey-flowing Heart of her only Saviour, drinking there from the cups brim-full with all sweetness and delight. And there all her bitterness was turned to sweetness, and her fear was changed to safety. There, indeed, she sucked the sweetest of fruit from the Heart of Christ, which she took from the Heart of God and placed into her mouth, which signified that eternal praise which proceeds from the Heart of God, because all praise with which he is praised, flows from the one who is the pure fount of all good.

Christ's body is here described in terms of female fecundity and flourishing, and the language that Mechthild uses is that of excess – *hauriens* (draining); *plenissima* (very full), *suavissimo* (very sweet), *dulcissimum* (very delightful); the praise overflows (*effluit*) from the Heart of God like a pure spring of every good thing (*purus etiam fons omnis boni*). This complexity in the relationship centring around Christ's Heart is reinforced almost immediately afterwards in the chapter when Christ reworks '*Minne*', a term used in *minnesang*, German medieval love poetry composed from the twelfth century onwards, to describe the relationship between two

[126] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.16, p. 150.

lovers. *Minne* became identified as the Lady Love of *Fin' Amor*, the facilitator of passion and erotic desire between the courtly lady and the bold knight. In discussing the use of *Minne* in female devotional writing, Newman notes that the motif of Lady Love had already been adapted to convey the spiritual love between God and humanity. She was identified as *Caritas*, by Hildegard and Bernard, for example, who used her to explore the maternal and queenly aspects of the God, thus investing the image with a more complex and nuanced identity.[127] Newman observes that Hadewijch further complicates the concept of *Minne* who appears (in the context of spiritual longing) as a destructive and tyrannical lover, a source of joy and pleasure, a personification of God's unity, the possessor of Hadewijch, and even embodying Hadewijch herself.[128] In *The Flowing Light,* Mechthild of Magdeburg, further develops the *Minne* metaphor, presenting her also as one who facilitates the union between Christ (the ardent Knight/Bridegroom), and the Soul (the passionate Lady).[129] In a clear reference to *The Flowing Light,* Mechthild adopts the *Minne* motif, but queers the metaphor, shifting the focus (although not abandoning the erotic) from the male centred Bridegroom/Beloved relation to filial/maternal:

> Et Dominus: "Tu matrem tuam nominabas MINNE, et amor meus erit mater tua: et sicut filii sugunt matres suas, sic et tu ab ea suges internam consolationem, suavitatem inenarrabilem, et illa te cibabit et potabit ac vestiet, et omnibus necessitatibus tuis, velut mater filiam suam unicam, te procurabit."[130]
>
> And the Lord said, "You used to call your mother, '*Minne*', and my love will be your mother. And just as children suck upon their mothers' breasts, so you will suck from your mother's breast inner consolation, inexpressible sweetness; and she will feed you, and give you drink and clothe you, and provide you with all that you need, just as a mother does her only

[127] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, pp. 154-55.
[128] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, p. 155.
[129] Newman, *From Virile Woman*, p. 155.
[130] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.16, p. 150.For discussion on grafting and affective devotion in the images of *Minne* and *Amor* in the *Liber Specialis*, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, Patricia Skinner, and Theresa Tyers, 'Strange Fruits: Grafting, Foreigners, and the Garden Imaginary in Northern France and Germany, 2150-1350', *Speculum*, 94.2 (2019) 467-493 (pp. 478-479).

> daughter." tamquam per lucidum crystallum, et animam suam velut aquam purissimam et fulgidam, per omne corpus Christi fluentem'

Christ's motherhood constantly juxtaposes and defines the erotic in the *Liber Specialis*. Mechthild's response to Christ's promise to make her complete with the outpouring of his love, is one of inarticulate ecstasy, akin to Mechthild of Magdeburg's gasps of pleasure in 1.22 , and resonant of Irigaray's *la mystèrique*: 'tunc illa ex nimio affectu gratitudinis dixit: Eia, eia: amor, amor, amor!"' [131] (Then she, so overwhelmed with gratitude, said, "Ah, Ah: Love, love, love!"). What moves Mechthild to ecstasy is an intense bond between a mother and daughter, an entirely female set up in which the feminine and physical, defined by Christ's nurturing wound/flesh, are valued, and the masculine is absent. In feminising Christ in this way, Mechthild has rewritten the rulebook, and even 'out-Jantzens' Jantzen.

Wounds and reciprocity

Crucial to Mechthild's understanding of oneness with Christ and the Divine is reciprocity. Reciprocity is not limited to Mechthild and Christ, but is enjoyed, in the visions, by the other sisters and those who love God, as well as Christ, the Virgin, and all the saints, angels and souls that make up Heaven - what Newman defines as a 'communism of merits', in which identity, thoughts, riches, pain and delight are held in common, and given and received in a sort of *perpetuum mobile*, with Mechthild frequently acting as mediator, interpreter or representative of her sisters or humanity itself. [132]Food and feeding are highly significant in the performance of such sharing. Reciprocal nourishment between creator and created is key

[131] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis,* 2.16, p. 150.
[132] Newman, *Mechthild*, p. 23. In 2.23, for example, Mechthild describes Christ's heart as a kitchen, the seat of divine, Eucharistic nourishment, which is 'communis et pervia omnibus' (common and accessible to all), and 'semper patens […] omnibus' (always open to all). Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.23, p. 165.

to Jantzen's notion of flourishing and the feminine divine. It depends, she asserts, 'from an inner dynamic of growth', and results in 'luxurious self-sufficiency' and 'an inner impetus of natural energy' and 'overflowing vigour'.[133] The nourishing relationship enjoyed by Christ and his brides displays such characteristics, and is reflected in their resultant union in which the identities of mortal and divine, male and female, feeder and fed are hard, if not impossible, to distinguish.

Reciprocity is particularly well illustrated in 1.5. in which, after witnessing Christ's Nativity, Mechthild and her sisters perform the acts of mother, lover, child and even Christ himself, simultaneously feeding and being fed by the infant Christ, with Mechthild also assuming the roles of the Virgin and priest, offering the Eucharistic infant to her sisters. [134] Mechthild's vision is one of communal feeding. Just as Christ feeds the congregation with his body and blood, Mechthild, the sisters, the Virgin, Love, and even God the Father perform the function of mother and child in feeding and being fed by one another at the same time. The notion of the maternal and female flesh, reciprocity, fluidity and union completely dominates the male-dominated performance of the Mass. Christ's 'uber'-wound, his heart – the source of birth and Eucharistic nourishment – is central to the performance, worked out in a complex choreography of imitations.

The motif of Christ's wounds as a site of reciprocal feeding is established at the beginning of the vision in which Mechthild witnesses Christ's nativity. In her radical reinterpretation of Christ's birth, Mechthild transports the female-centred, physical act of birthing, traditionally enclosed within the female-coded space of the home, onto the open, verdant mountain-top outside Bethlehem. In so doing, she appropriates a potentially male-

[133] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 161.
[134] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.5, pp. 15-21.

identified, public space for an intrinsically female act, amalgamating the Birth with the shared Eucharistic feast.

> In sacratissima nocte mellifluae Nativitatis Christi, visum est sibi quasi esset in monte petroso in quo beata Virgo vicina partui sedebat. Et cum tempus instaret pariendi, beatissima Virgo ineffabili laetitia et iubilo replebatur; circumfulsitque eam lux divina, ita ut cum stupore cito surgeret et infinita humilitate procedens, se in gratiarum actione usque in terram reclinaret. Eratque sic attonita ut nesciret quid sibi esset, donec puerum in gremio prae filiis hominum speculosum.[135]
>
> On the most holy night of the honey-flowing Nativity of Christ, it seemed to her that she was on the rocky mountain on which the blessed Virgin, near to giving birth, was sat. And when the time approached for the birth, the most blessed Virgin was filled with inexpressible happiness and rejoicing. And there shone around her a divine light so that she rose as though in a stupor, and, going forth with infinite humility, until, in an attitude of thanksgiving, she lay down upon the ground. And she so astonished that she did not know what was happening until she saw the boy, the fairest of all the sons of men, in her lap.

As expected, due to the Virgin's sinless state, the messiness, pain, and danger associated with human birth are absent from Mechthild's Nativity. Their absence instead is replaced by a vagueness, a *fait accompli* event in which the protagonists, including the Virgin herself, are largely unaware of what is happening to them, and are instead presented with ready-made vignettes, culminating in the baby in his mother's lap. Absent, too, are the shepherds, the animals, the stable, even Joseph and the angelic host, elements included in the Nativity from late antiquity. Mechthild, rather, presents her readers with a distinctly female-centric scene, in which the Virgin, Mechthild, and the Helfta women, and the child function in self-sufficient communality. Mechthild's response to the public aspect of the Nativity starkly contrasts with the horror experienced by Auda Fabri, who cannot disassociate the image of a birth in the street with polluted and polluting female flesh, and Christ's Eucharistic body.

[135] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.5, p. 15.

Like Mechthild herself, the Virgin experiences the joyful ecstasy of the mystic: she is unaware of what is happening to her ('attonita ut nesciret quid sibi esset'), she is unable to express the joy that fills her ('ineffabili laetitia et iubilo replebatur'), she cannot stand, and, overwhelmed by divine light, she moves as though in a trance ('cum stupore cito surgeret et infinita humilitate procedens'). The Virgin's ecstasy is caused by her own divine fecundity, the birth of her son and bridegroom, and is a combination of the erotic and the maternal which is shared with Mechthild and the sisters later in the vision and centring on the Eucharistic feast of her son's body. When Mary lies down upon the ground, therefore, she does so as a mother to bear the Christ-child, the prostrate mystic in her trance, and the Bernardian bride of the Song of Songs, who reclines upon the breast of the Bridegroom at the banquet of their union. Mary's lap (*gremium*) likewise has erotic and maternal associations, as a space of comfort and fecundity. The food of the banquet is the 'puerum in gremio prae filiis hominum speculosum', the Eucharistic Host, which miraculously materialises from the Virgin's woundless body ready to feed the Souls present.

The heart is presented as a form of reciprocal nourishment towards the beginning of Mechthild's vision. The Virgin hands the new-born Christ to the Soul who takes him to her own heart with such fervour that the image of the infant is impressed upon it ('At illa cum ineffabili amore puerum suscipiens cordi suo ipsum impressit' (But she, receiving the child with an inexpressible love, impressed him upon her heart).[136] The Soul is moved to ecstasy, and addresses the Christ-child as a source of nourishment, the marrow located in the Heart of God, his Father, and whom she, in turn, will feed with the marrow of praise and glory from her own heart: "Salve, paterni cordis medulla dulcissima, languentis animae meae sagina et refectio beatissima. Tibi offero cordis et animae meae medullam in aeternam laudem et

[136] Paquelin, *Liber* Specialis, 1.5, p. 16.

gloriam."[137] ("Hail, sweet marrow of the Father's heart, blessed nourishment and restorative to my languishing Soul. I will offer to you the marrow of my heart and soul, in eternal praise and glory".) In describing the Father's marrow as *dulcissima, sagina* and *beatissima refectio,* moreover, Mechthild is attributing the Father with maternal, nurturing attributes, similar to those afforded his son, thus incorporating the masculine into a feminine imaginary. Mechthild is not unique or original in attributing God with maternal qualities: taking their cue and inspiration from Scripture, Cistercians like Bernard and William of St. Thierry had also identified in this way, as I mention in the introduction. However, Mechthild's feminizing of the Father is unorthodox and idiosyncratic in that, by including the Father himself in her all-female banquet and uniting him thus with the Heltfa participants, she makes the feminine divine the default and one into which the Helfta women are incorporated.

Mechthild further develops the imagery of inclusive maternal when she envisages the marrow infusing humanity with love and joy ('medulla vero animae est Gaudium illud dulcissimum quod anima a solo Deo per amoris infusionem sentire meretur' (in truth, the marrow of the soul is the sweet joy which the soul is considered worthy to experience through infusion of love from God alone)), imagery resonant with those of Christ nursing the Church with his blood/milk and the Virgin feeding her son, and consoling the devoted with her milk, and which Mechthild further develops in the communal feeding that follows.[138]

> Viditque de corde Dei splendorem procedere qui cordi animae in similitudine infantuli perlucidi adhaesit, quem illa his verbis salutavit: "Salve, splendor aeternae gloriae", etc.. Post haec puerum singulis personis circumferens unicuique eum dabat; mansitque cum singulis, et tamen nihilominus eum supra cor suum ipsa portabat. Puer autem supra pectus singularum se reclinans, corda earum tribus vicibus sugendo osculabatur. Primo, esuxit omne desiderium

[137] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.5, p. 16.
[138] Paquelin, *Liber* 1.5, p. 16.

> earum; secondo, bonam voluntatem; tertio, omnem laborem quem in cantu, inclinationibus et vigiliis caeterisque spiritualibus exercitiis perfecerant, sibimet sugendo intraxit.[139]
>
> (And [Mechthild] saw proceeding from the heart of God a splendour which attached itself to the heart of the Soul, in the likeness of a very beautiful little baby, whom she addressed with this words, "Hail, splendour of eternal glory" etc.. After this she carried the boy round to each of the people and gave him to each one, notwithstanding, however, she still carried him upon her own heart. The boy, however, bending down over the breast of each sister, kissed their hearts by sucking upon each one three times in turn. Firstly, he sucked all their desire; secondly, their good will; thirdly, he drew into himself by sucking all the labour which they had performed in chanting, prostrating, and vigils and other spiritual undertakings.)

In the above episode, Mechthild assumes the role of the priest and the Virgin in offering the Christ-child to the Helfta congregation, the Christ-child's kisses and the devotion of the sisters being the reciprocal and simultaneous, circular act of feeding and consuming. In an elaborate *imitatio Mariae*, the sisters feed the infant Christ from their own breasts. The nursing image is reinforced by Mechthild's repeated use of *sugere* to suck. The women's performance as nourishers, dependent on God's/Christ's feminised flesh, collapses the boundaries between God the Father, Christ, the Virgin, and the women of Helfta. The splendour emanating from God's Heart and attaching itself to Mechthild's is akin to an umbilical cord which connects and nourishes the child within the womb; the umbilicus being the Christ-child, splendid and glorious, rather than bloody and needing to be severed - the sublimation of the abject that is female flesh.[140] The metaphor is further complicated by Christ's being presented to the sisters both as the Eucharistic host offered as salvific food to the communicant by the priest, and as a tiny infant seeking the nourishment from its mother. Mechthild is at pains to convey Christ's fluidity: he remains miraculously on her breast while held by the other women. Christ's fluidity, as I argue above, is indicative of his feminized,

[139] Paquelin, *Liber* 1.5, p. 17.
[140] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 100 and 127.

human identity, and the significance of this humanity – the link with the feminine and the body - is underscored is when Love also announces her role as Christ's nourisher. As a manifestation of Christ's love for his Church and that of the Virgin for her Child and Mechthild's love for Christ, she also crosses the boundaries of gender and humanity/divinity. Of crucial importance to Mechthild is the union that it is possible to achieve with God; and this union depends on the human nature assumed by Christ.

Mechthild also manipulates the Eucharistic imagery of Christ's wounded female flesh as source of nourishment in 1.20.[141] During the mass for Feast of the Assumption, Mechthild witnesses the resurrected Christ returning in triumph to his Father in Heaven. Christ's humanity – the suffering that humankind endures as a result of the Fall, and which is embodied in Christ's own wounded body – becomes transformed into gift worthy of God himself and the angels in Heaven. God the Father is presented with 'omnem pauperierim, opprobria, contemptum et poenas, omnemque laborem et opera humanitatis suae, quasi novum acceptissimum quoddam munus nunquam antea in coelo visum' (all his poverty, shame, disgrace, pains, and all the labour and toils of his humanity, which were, as it were a new and welcome gift, never before seen in Heaven.) [142] The angelic spirits receive 'lac humanitatis suae ipsis antea inexpertum, novam scilicet superaffluentem dulcedinem in sua deliciosa humanitate, in augmentum gaudii et gloriae suae'.[143] (The milk of his humanity, unknown to them before, a new, superabundant sweetness in his own delicious humanity, to increase his praise and glory.) By offering God and the angels, humanity - the feminine, fleshly, flourishing part of the descendants of Adam and Eve - as opposed to the masculine, superior, spiritual, necrophilic, Christ affords the flesh, and therefore the feminine the ability

[141] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*,1.20, pp. 71-76.
[142] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.20, p. 73.
[143] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.20, p. 73.

to complete the celestial and the divine. Mechthild takes the image of Christ feeding the church with his blood, and, audaciously reinterpreting Augustinian and Thomasian theology of Christ's humanity, presents the reader with Christ feeding the angels. The female is no longer the *mas occasionatus et deficiens*. Leaky female flesh can't get much better than this.

Mechthild revisits the image of the Heart as food in 2.23, in which Christ's body, specifically his Heart, is contextualised in the female-coded space of the kitchen.[144] Overcome by a sense of utter wretchedness, Mechthild tells Christ that she is unworthy even to fulfil the lowly task of washing the dishes in his kitchen. Christ converts her confession into an elaborate and extended metaphor in which his Heart is the source of abundant, delightful nourishment available at all times to all people, regardless of rank. He tells Mechthild:

> "Coquina mea est Cor meum deificum quod in modum coquina, quae domus est communis et pervia omnibus tam servis quam liberis, semper patens est omnibus, et promptum ad cuiuslibet delectamentum. Huius coquinae coquus est Spiritus Sanctus, cuius inaestimabilis suavitas illud sine intermissione abundantissima Liberalitate infundit, et replet, replendoque facit abundare. Scutellae meae sunt corda omnium Sanctorum et electorum meorum, quae ex superaffluentia divini Cordis mei continue mirabili suavitate infunduntur".[145]
>
> (My kitchen is my divine heart which, just as a kitchen is the part of the house free to everyone and accessible to all whether slave or free, is always open to all and open to all manner of delights. The cook of this kitchen is the Holy Spirit, whose inestimable sweetness pours forth in free abundance without ceasing, and fills and in filling makes it to flourish. My dishes are the hearts of all the saints and my elect, and upon them are continually poured wondrous sweetness from the overflowing of my divine heart.)

As elsewhere in Mechthild's writing, Mechthild's vision of divine nourishment here is feminized. Christ's heart is not in the kitchen, but is the kitchen itself, a distinctly female-

[144] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.23, pp. 165-66.
[145] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.23, p. 165.

coded, domestic space, something reinforced by the imagery of fluidity, the dissolution of boundaries, and excess that permeates the text. Christ's kitchen is for all (*omnibus*) and always open, (*semper patens*); and such is Christ's generosity, that the food he supplies is unmeasurable (*inaestimabilis*), ceaseless (*continue* and *sine intermission*) and uncontainable (*superaffluentia*). Moreover, Mechthild's repetition of 'flowing' vocabulary (*infundit; replet; replendoque facit abundare*; *superaffluentia*; *infunduntur*) reinforces the notion of fluidity and moveable/blurring of boundaries. This image, with similar vocabulary, continues a little further in the vision when Mechthild sees the river gushing from Christ's heart onto the platters of the saints and angels, and flowing back into the heart in an unending act of reciprocity. Mechthild's feminising of the divine is further emphasised when the Virgin, so intimately associated with Christ, presides over the ritual:

> Et ecce vidit beatam Virginem proxime Deo adstantem, cum omni multitudine Angelorum et Sanctorum. Qui Angeli corda sua in modum aureorum discorum quasi de pectore suo Domino regi suo praesentanbant ad influendum. Quae singula torrens deificae voluptatis egrediens a profluvio divini Cordis copiosissima videbatur supereffluentia influere, quae rursus influentia de corde Sanctorum reinfluens cum mira gratitudine Cor Dominicum repetebat.[146]
>
> (And, lo! She saw the blessed Virgin standing next to God, with the whole multitude of angels and saints. And the angels were presenting their hearts from their breasts to God their king, as though they were golden platters, to be filled. And a single torrent of divine pleasure gushing from the river of the divine Heart seemed to flow in a plentiful overflowing, and the flowing again flowing back from the hearts of the saints sought once more the Heart of the Lord with wondrous thanks.

Mechthild also uses the motif of the kitchen in 2.7, in which, placing her ears to Christ's feet, she can hear the sound of boiling oil coming from the wounds. While not directly the source of food and nourishment, by locating Christ's body in a domestic female-

[146] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.23, pp. 165-66.

coded space, and in a particularly mundane context, the metaphor nevertheless feminises that body and the wounds it bears. Christ is not the lover, or the knight, but merely a vessel, a mundane cooking pot on the fire, providing basic nourishment, and urged on by a harsh master or mistress (Love, in this instance) without respite, until absolutely everything is done and it can do no more:

> Tunc audivit vulnus illud quasi ollam ferventem ebullire. Et dixit Dominus ad eam: "Quem sonum dat coquens olla?" at illa dum cogitaret se nescire, respondit Dominus: "Olla ebulliens semper sonat ac si dicat: "Curre, curre, sic fervens et ebulliens amor Cordis mei semper instigavit me dicens: Curre, curre de labore ad laborem, de civitate ad civitatem, de praedicatione ad praedicationem; nec umquam quiescere me permisit, donec omnia saluti tuae necessaria ad finem usque complevi.[147]
>
> Then she heard the wound bubbling like seething oil. And the Lord said to her, "What sound is the oil making as it cooks?" And while she was thinking that she did not know, the Lord answered, "The seething oil always sounds as if it says, "Run! Run!" thus the boiling and seething love of my Heart always urges me, saying, "Run! Run! from labour to labour, from city to city, from preaching to preaching"; and it never allows me to rest until I have fulfilled to the last all those things necessary for your safety.

In contrast to the domestic, homely setting of the kitchen, however, Mechthild elsewhere uses the motif of the banquet to explore the Soul's relationship with Christ. Again, in doing this Mechthild is not original (she is following both Bernard and Mechthild of Magdeburg here). Nevertheless, Mechthild's treatment of the motif demonstrates the fluidity and feminisation which characterises her writing and her approach to the theology of Christ's wounded body. The banquet celebrates the mystical union between Christ, the bridegroom, and his beloved, the Soul and is therefore often, though not always, presented as a wedding feast. The union is achieved through the Eucharist in which the beloved consumes Christ's

[147] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 2.7, pp. 142.

body and blood in the form of the Host. Mechthild's visions usually precede the actual Eucharist, and thus prepare her for the sacrament itself. Notable in the banquet motif are the ever-shifting images, with Christ's body taking centre stage. Christ's heart is at once the location of the feast and its food and drink, with Christ as bridegroom, priest, bishop, food and recipient of the food of the devoted. Christ's wounds are therefore both the whole and the specific.[148] Again, the fluidity, lack of stability and the emphasis on the flesh/body demonstrate Mechthild's rejection of the Classical, linear, and masculine theology of orthodox religion, and her adoption of the fluidity and reciprocity associated with inferior and feminine flesh.

The shifting, lack of stability and liquidity represented in Mechthild's Christ, is epitomised, I suggest, in 1.10.[149] Mechthild sees Christ enthroned on a flowery mountain, and surrounded with various symbols of his love and suffering, and accompanied by the faithful who are fed from trees, whose fruit corresponds to their particular types of devotion. Approached by other souls, who present him with their sins and the penance that they have undergone, Christ transforms the sins into golden objects, and commands a banquet be prepared for those present:

> Statimque visa est ibi mensa coram Domino scutellis et scyphis aureis undique referta; facies autem Domini quasi sol radiens splendore singula vasa pro cibo et potu implebat. Dehinc omnes qui aderant, genua flectentes coram mensa, amicti splendore faciei Domini quasi vestimento, sumebant cibum et potum, qui est refectio suavissima Angelorum et omnium Beatorum. Illis vero qui eadem die ad vivifica sacramenta non accesserant, et tamen cum devotione aderant, misit Dominus per sanctum Ioannem Evangelistam, quasi in paroside refectionem secundum regale suum honorem.[150]

[148] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.10, pp. 31-34.
[149] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.10, pp. 31-34.
[150] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.10, pp. 31-34.

> (And straight away a table seemed to be filled before the Lord with dishes and golden cups; but the face of the Lord, shining with the radiance, as it were, of the sun, filled each vessel in the place of food and drink. Then all those who were present, clothed in the splendour of the Lord's face as though in a garment, bowed the knee before the table and partook of the food and drink which is the sweet refreshment of the angels and all the Blessed. To those indeed who that day had not received the life-giving sacrament but had attended [Mass] with devotion, the Lord, at the hands of Saint John the Evangelist, sent refreshment in a dessert dish in a manner according to his royal state.)

In this vision, Christ's wounded flesh is perhaps most emphatically feminized. Christ's wounded face, already a manifestation of is incontinent flesh, is further identified with the abject and female through its association with a menstruous woman, Saint Veronica. Veronica, said to have wiped the face of Christ with her veil as he made his way to Calvary, which ever after bore the imprint of Christ's face, was identified as the woman in Luke's gospel whom Christ cured of a perpeutal issue of blood.[151] Far from being a source of pollution and taboo, however, the veil is a reflection of Christ's divine and salvific humanity. This point is emphasised by the feast's setting: a flowery mountainside where the trees are over-full with fruit, in the midst of which stands Christ himself. During the banquet which follows the reader is confronted with a remarkable transformation of the abject into the sublime. The sins that are presented to Christ are transfigured into gold and incense, becoming thus suitable offerings to God and mirroring Christ' s own sacrificial body. The banquet assumes the identity of the Eucharist: the table is the altar and the dishes are the dish and chalice, and the eucharistic representation is reinforced by the garments worn by the

[151] Veronica is said to have wiped the face of Christ with her veil as he made his way to Calvary. The veil thereafter bore the imprint of his face. It was said to be kept in the church of St Peter in Rome, and later, in the Basilica of St Peter, and was an object of pilgrimage. Pope Innocent III instituted the Feast of Veronica's Veil in 1297, the year before Mechthild's death, although it had been an object of veneration from at least the eleventh century. In the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, Veronica is identified as the woman cured of the issue of blood by toughing the hem of Christ's garment (Luke 8: 43-48). See Gospel of Nicodemus 6: 26.

guests, the contents of the cups and plates, and the ritual behaviour of the guests who approach the table and bow their knees before they partake of the feast.

At this point in Mechthild's vision, Christ's wounded face literally materializes in the cloth which appears on the redeemed bodies of the communicants, transforming into sunlight and radiance, which, in turn, become food for the angels and the guests at the banquet. The food itself (that is, Christ's body and blood) is unstable – being liquid, solid and radiance – and inclusive – even those who did not receive communion that day can participate in this heavenly, mystical one. The hierarchy and Other of androcentric orthodoxy, therefore, is markedly absent. Female authority is reinforced by the absence of a male presence. There are no priests at this table and the only males named are Christ and John the Evangelist, whose identities Mechthild effectively feminizes in the *Liber Specialis*.[152]

When, moreover, Mechthild returns to the face of Christ a little later in the chapter, Christ's humanity is further emphasised. Christ's face radiates light, but now the beams are accompanied by a rope – another umbilicus – which proceeds from his heart of God, joining it to Mechthild's soul:

> Viditque funem de Corde Dei procedere in animam, per quem illa omnes ad Deum qui in eius praesentia stabant trahebat. Funis vero ille amorem designabat, quem Deus animae illi beatae abunde infudit, per quem omnes Deum trahebat bono exemplo suo et doctrina. Tunc ipse Rex gloriae extendens manum suae omnipotentiae benedixit eas, dicens: "Vultus mei claritas sit vobis aeterna jucunditas."[153]
>
> And she saw a rope proceeding into her soul from the Heart of God, by which she dragged to God all those standing there in his presence. The rope indeed represented that love which God poured out in abundance upon those blessed souls, and through which God dragged all by his good example and his doctrine. Then the King of glory himself, extended the right hand of his omnipotence and blessed them, saying, "May the shining clarity of my face be for your eternal joy."

[152] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*, 1.6, pp. 21-24. In 1.6, Mechthild includes John (the beloved disciple) in the sisters' devotion. In this she follows a practice common among female religious houses.
[153] Paquelin, *Liber Specialis*,1.10, p. 34.

Manipulating the doctrine of the Trinity, Mechthild conflates God the Father with God the son, thus feminizing the former's identity, as she does in 1.20, and thereby incorporating all into a reciprocal, inclusive and nurturing whole of which she and her sisters and humanity itself are a part.

Conclusion

Mechthild's metaphors of Christ's wounds as tears and food, as expounded in this chapter, in fact represent a small part of an extensive stock of imagery which she uses to articulate her theology of a feminine divine, shaped in the privileged, female environment at Helfta. Operating within the bounds of orthodoxy, nevertheless Mechthild's conception of God and creation disrupts the necrophilic patriarchal ideal by privileging the feminine, physical and the natal, in keeping with Jantzen's proposition, through Christ's transgressive flesh: the 'Christa', as it were, of this thesis's title. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, however, in my examination of Auda Fabri's crisis of faith, the same flesh, without a recourse to a suitable 'discourse community' to offer it affirmative meaning, could elicit a very different response.

CHAPTER 3

Christ's Body as Female Filth: Auda Fabri's Mystical Heresy

Chapter Three focuses on the implications of Christ's transgressive, gendered flesh for female lay belief in early fourteenth-century southern France. I contest that the gender-coded spaces (so significant to the thought-processes of the medieval female mystic, as we have seen) and the encroachment upon such spaces by androcentric secular and religious authority, also influenced the thought-processes of women far removed from the rarefied atmosphere of the cloister or anchorhold. I take as my example Auda Fabri, a young woman from the Pyrenees village of Merviel, who, during the heresy trials at Pamiers of 1318-1325, confessed that, after hearing of a local woman who had given birth to her baby in a street of Merviel, she had associated Christ's eucharistic body with what she is recorded as terming, the *turpitudo* (filth) expelled by women during childbirth, and that she had consequently ceased to believe in Christ's real presence. Like Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Hackeborn and other mystics – both female and male - Auda's notions of Christ's body were profoundly shaped by the female-coded, enclosed spaces within which she existed – her house (in particular, her chamber), and the cell in the ecclesiastical prison in which she was incarcerated during her trial. Through her un/orthodox belief in the transgressive nature of Christ's flesh, I will argue that Auda encroached upon the male-coded, public spaces of church, courtroom and street, and thus threatened to destabilize the gender-identification of these spaces.

As I explain in my introductory chapter, Auda's conflation of female birthing matter with Christ's eucharistic flesh, and the subsequent horror that this conflation elicits, recall Kristeva's theory of abjection, transgressive and reproductive flesh, with its *potentia*l for mystic expression. As such, therefore, Auda's experience can be compared with other female

mystics such as Mechthild of Hackerborn. However, Auda's unsublimated self-abnegation and the resulting aborted mysticism she experiences starkly contrast with Mechthild's glorious transcendence into the female Divine, and the nun's ability to articulate it in the supportive community of discourse that was the convent at Helfta. In common with Chapters Two and Four, and for the purpose of clarity, I outline Kristeva's theory of the abject towards the beginning of this chapter, as it pertains to my argument, and make reference to the theory throughout the chapter. Chapter Three becomes, as it were, a sort of bridge between the extreme female-centred notion of the Divine dependent on Christ's fleshly manifestation – the 'Christa' – and John Mirk's resistance to an such feminised Christic theology which, becoming increasingly prominent in England towards the end of the fourteenth century, challenged androcentric traditional orthodoxy, which I examine in Chapter Four.

A substantial proportion of this chapter is devoted to a break-down of Auda's trial and deposition, with large sections of the Latin text included, along with my translation of them. The reason I have done this, is that no English translation of the complete transcript of Auda's trial has been published, and the translations that do exist are either severely redacted or take the form of a dialogue between the witness and the inquisitor, thereby failing to convey the distance between the what was reported and what was actually said, a distance which, I discuss later in the chapter, is significant when considering Auda's struggle to find her own mystic 'voice'.[1]

[1] Caterina Bruschi outlines the trial procedure in her study of the inquisition trials in Toulouse from 1237-1289. She catalogues a series of 'filters' which would have modified the original words of the witnesses; such as manipulation if the witness by the inquisitor, the actual process of recording, translating, reporting the statements and the final recording the finished work, and the reliance on the skill of the notary, whose Latin might not have been adequate to translate correctly. Caterina Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 13-26.

Account of the document

Auda's trial forms part of the inquisitional Register of Jacques Fournier (d. 1342), a vigorous ecclesiastical reformer, who, as bishop of Pamiers, was commissioned by Pope John XII (d.1334) to stamp out the remains of Cathar heresy in his diocese by conducting a lengthy programme of inquisitional trials which were held at his palace in Pamiers from 1318 to 1325.[2] Fournier's inquisition was a success and led to his ordination as bishop of Mirepoix, a diocese to the east of Pamiers, in 1326. He became a cardinal in 1327 and in 1334 was elected as pope, assuming the name, Benedict XII.[3] Fournier reluctantly retained the papal court at Avignon, thus becoming the third so-called 'Avignon pope', a practice that continued until 1377-78, when Gregory XI finally returned the see to Rome. Throughout his ecclesiastical career, Fournier enjoyed a reputation as someone meticulous, scholarly and severe. These characteristics become apparent in the Register which, due to Fournier's interrogation of those brought before him, provides the reader with a detailed picture of the lives, beliefs and politics of the inhabitants of the district.[4] Fournier commissioned the final copy of the Register in 1326 when he was Bishop of Mirepoix, and kept it in his private library. It accompanied him to Avignon in 1334 on his election as pope, where it was placed

[2] Jean Duvernoy, ed., *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*, 3 vols. (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1965), vol. 2, 133a-138d, pp. 82-105.

[3] As Pope Benedict XII, Fournier became the third so-called 'Avignon pope'. His predecessors, Clement V (d.1314) and John XXII, had fixed their residence in that city due to continued conflict between the Church in Rome and the French crown. In total, there were nine Avignon popes. The last, Gregory XI (d.1378), returned to Rome in 1377, in response to increased hostility towards papal authority by various Italian city-states.

[4] For a collection of biographies on Fournier, see Étienne Baluze, *Vitae paparum avinionensium hoc est historia pontificum Romanorum qui in Gallia sederunt ab anno Christi MCCCV usque ad annum MCCCXCIV*, ed. Guillaume Mollat (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1916), vol. 1, pp. 195-240; pp. 566-580: https://archive.org/stream/vitaepaparumave01balu#page/n0/mode/2up [accessed 20/04/2017]. *Vitae paparum avinionensium* contains eight biographies of Fournier. For a recent comprehensive study of Fournier's theology on heresy, and his rationale behind the 1318-24 inquisition, see Irene Bueno, *Defining Heresy: Inquisition, Theology, and Papal Policy in the Time of Jacques Fournier*, trans. Isabella Bolognese, Tony Brophy and Sarah Rolphe Prodan (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

in the pontifical library, and thence to the Vatican when the pontifical court returned to Rome in 1377.[5]

The Register, known as Vat. Lat. MS 4030, originally comprised three volumes: two recording the depositions, and one containing the sentences pronounced on those tried. Of the three, only one survives, but the material from the third volume can be found, in condensed form, in Phillipe van. Limbourch's *Historia Inquisitionis cui subjungitur Liber sententiarum Inquisitionis tholosanae ab anno christi MCCCVII ad annum MCCCXXIII*, a seventeenth-century discourse concerning heresy and the Inquisition; and in Vols. 27 and 28 of *Collection Doat*, a collection of 258 volumes of material copied from various inquisitional registers from southern France. Volumes 27 and 28 were edited by Jean-Marie Vidal and used for his analytical summary of each trial.[6] The surviving parchment manuscript, Vat. Lat. MS 4030, measures 375 x 260mm, contains 325 parchment folios, is covered in white vellum and wood, with evidence of the clasps used to keep the manuscript together.[7] Vidal observes that Vat. Lat. 4030 is the work of five or six scribes, with three responsible for copying out the actual depositions, and two or three for the table of depositions and the pontifical documents also included in the volume.[8] Although incomplete, therefore, Fournier's meticulous document provides a valuable insight into the lives of the inhabitants in and around Pamiers,

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[5] Vat. Lat. MS 4030. The manuscript was still in the pontifical library in Avignon in 1369 when Urban V (d. 1370) commissioned an inventory of its contents, in which are recorded two manuscripts concerning the trial of heretics at Pamiers: 'Item processus domini Benedicti pape contra hereticos, dum erat episcopus Appamiensis, coopertus corio albo, qui incipit in secundo folio post tabulam errorum dictus et finit in penultimo folio in crimine …Item processus contra hereticos cooperti corio viridi qui incipiunt in secundo folio sumn et finiunt in penultimo folio capellanos'. J.-M. Vidal, *Le Tribune d'Inquisition de Pamiers. Notice sur le Registre de l'èvêque Jacques Fournier* (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1906), pp. 15-16.

[6] Between 1663 and 1669, Jean de Doat and a team of copyists and proof-readers were commissioned to copy and preserve inquisitional documentation kept in the archives throughout southern France. The result is a massive collection of registers which not only provide valuable information on Catharism, but also shed light on the limitations of such documents. For a more detailed study of *Collection Doat*, see Caterina Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 24-26; Phillipus van Limbourch, *Historia Inquisitionis cui subjungitur Liber sententiarum Inquisitionis tholosanae ab anno christi MCCCVII ad annum MCCCXXIII* (Amsterdam: Henricus Wetstenius, 1692); Vidal, *Le Tribune d'Inquisition de Pamiers*, as before; *Collection Doat*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, vols 27-28.

[7] For a detailed description of the Vat. Lat. MS 4030, see Vidal, *Le Tribune d'Inquisition de Pamiers*, pp. 7-15.

[8] Vidal, *Le Tribune d'Inquisition de Pamiers*, p. 9, n.4.

and their understanding of the divine and carnal in the face of an increasingly authoritarian Church. It is in this context that Auda admitted her loss of faith.

The Cathar context

Although the Catholic Church was no stranger to heresy, it was largely undocumented from the sixth until the eleventh century, when it manifested itself in what John Arnold defines as 'discrete and unconnected cults […] centring around one individual or small group of individuals'.[9] By the twelfth century these groups had by and large disappeared, replaced by more organized and coherent movements which spread throughout mainland Europe. This development in heretical movements coincided with an increased interest in spirituality and zeal for Church reform within the Catholic Church, and was aided by an increase in literacy among the laity, and a resulting desire to interpret Scripture independent of, and even opposed to, orthodox doctrine.[10] Catharism was a dualist heresy which spread from eastern Europe and Asia Minor and became particularly prominent in Italy and parts of France; in particular, the north and the Languedoc, an area which also included what is now Catalonia.[11] The movement possessed a religious hierarchy, including priests and bishops; was organised into diocese; observed rituals and sacraments; and preached strict codes of conduct. It survived well into the fourteenth and even the sixteenth centuries, when it experienced some

[9] John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 23.
[10] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the 11th and 12th Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 92-151, cited in Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, p. 23.
[11] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, p. 23. See also Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in the Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 22-24.

sort of reincarnation in the Protestant reformation, and still attracts followers throughout eastern and western Europe.[12]

While some earlier movements, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Beguines, desired reform from within the Catholic Church, Catharism was fundamentally opposed to its teaching and structure: it refused to acknowledge the pope as supreme head of the Church, for example, and rejected the sacraments of transubstantiation and confession to a priest, who had the power to absolve sins. By the thirteenth century, such beliefs were considered abhorrent by an increasingly authoritarian Church fearful of any non-conformity within its definitions of orthodoxy and which sought its total extirpation and destruction. This is evident in the creation of Inquisitional tribunals and several papal decrees which encouraged and ordered the faithful to root out heretics and their sympathisers. [13] For example, the third canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, issued by Innocent III in 1215 (six years into his military campaign against Cathar heresy) is, as its title *De haereticis* suggests, specifically concerned with dealing with heretics and promises that, 'Catholici vero qui crucis assumpto charactere ad haereticorum exterminium se accinxerint illa gaudant indulgentia illo que sancto privilegio sint muniti quod accedentibus in terrae sanctae subsidium conceditur.' (Catholics who have armed themselves with emblem of the cross for the extermination of the heretics, shall enjoy the same indulgences and holy privileges granted to one who leaves to defend the Holy Land.)[14] This anti-heretical stance was reinforced nearly fifty years later by

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[12] Barber, *The Cathars*, pp. 203-25.

[13]The Church's hardened attitude to non-conformity is also apparent in its attitude towards female spirituality, as Elliott clearly demonstrates in *Proving Women: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); see also Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

[14]*Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*: Editio Critica, ed. A. García y García, P. Gemeinhardt, G. Gresser, T. Izbicki, A. Larson, A. Melloni, E. Miethke (that is, J. Miethke), K. Pennington, B. Roberg, R. Saccenti, P. Stump (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 230-271. For an English translation of the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, see: *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215*: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp> [accessed 10 June 2017].

the papal bull of 1252, *Ad extirpanda*, in which Innocent IV sanctioned and defined the use of torture in the extraction of confessions from heretics. [15]

Cathar beliefs

Catharism was a dualist interpretation of Christianity, maintaining that as an omnipotent and all-good God could not have created the flawed material world which they inhabited, its creation must be attributable to an Evil God who co-existed with, but was independent of, his good counterpart. While the Good God, therefore, was responsible for the creation of the spirit and the spirit realm, and dwelt in the heavenly spirit realm, the material world was created by an Evil God who was believed to have either fallen from Heaven along with a number of angelic beings whom he had seduced and entrapped with him on Earth.[16] As part of the material world, the human body was also an object of Cathar antipathy. Cathar doctrine stated that it was Satan, not God, who created Man and woman in his image, filling them with lust, the result of which was the multiplication of the human race, whom it identified as 'children of the devil and the serpent'.[17] This antipathy towards the body, in particular the reproductive, maternal body, is resonant of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, discussed in more depth below; and, it is also apparent, albeit perhaps unconsciously, in Auda's definition of, and response to, female flesh.

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[15]Innocent III, Bulla 'Ad extirpanda', *Bullarum diplomatum et privilegiorum santorum romanorum pontificum : taurinensis editio locupletior facta collectione novissima plurium brevium, epistolarum, decretorum actorumque S. Sedis a S. Leone Magnus usque ad praesens*, 25 vols., vol. 3 (Turin: Franco, Fory & Dalmazzo, 1858), *Lex* 25, p. 556a: <https://archive.org/stream/bullarumdiplomat03cath_0#page/n3/mode/2up> [accessed, 23 March 2017].

[16] Barber, *The Cathars*, p. 1.

[17] *Interrogatio Iohannis apostoli et evangelistae in cena secreta regni coelorum de ordinatione mundi istius et de principe et de Adam* Walter, ed. L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*: Records of Western Civilization (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 458-65.

Cathar antipathy to the flesh also had ramifications for its doctrine concerning Christ's humanity. While Cathars referred to themselves as Christians, their concept of Christ differed from orthodox doctrine. Pierre Authié, burned at the stake in 1310, preached that the Son of God could not be born of a woman because it was impossible to believe that 'the Son of God was born of a woman, or that the Son of God adumbrated himself in a thing so vile as a woman'.[18] Moreover, Christ's humanity was also denied, in that 'he who as called the Son of St. Mary came to Earth and preached, but nevertheless did not eat or drink, nor experience hunger or thirsty or cold or heat'. Nor did Christ really die on the cross for man's sins, since he was not really human; and his resurrection was more of a reappearance after his post-crucifixion vanishing.[19] This meant that the cross, an image fundamental to Christian devotion, could not be accepted or revered by Cathars. Moreover, according to Pierre Authié, the cross became something abhorrent rather than something salvific and should be destroyed. Likewise, the sacraments of baptism, marriage, confession, the Eucharist, and final unction also had no place in Cathar theology, being replaced by specifically Cathar rituals, such as the *consolamentum* (whereby men and women promised to abstain from meat, wine and sexual relations) and the *endura*, a ritual involving the dying person denying himself or herself food or drink. These rituals of extreme abstinence allowed the soul of the believer to free itself of the foulness of its physical body, and while only the most devout performed them, their existence demonstrates Catharism's abjection of the flesh.[20]

Although no evidence could be found associating Auda, her family, or her friends and acquaintances with Cathars or Catharism – Merveil, Auda's village, was heresy-free – it is highly unlikely that Auda would have been completely ignorant of a movement that clung on

[18] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 406-11, cited in Barber, *The Cathars*, pp. 101-2.
[19] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 406-11, cited in Barber, *The Cathars*, pp. 101-2.
[20] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 406-11.

so tenaciously in the villages and towns nearby. Moreover, Auda's own rejection of the female and physical, formed in response to the necrophilic misogyny that orthodoxy espoused, overlapped with Catharism's antipathy to the physical and thus, arguably, accounts in some way for and intensified Auda's panic and the horror of those around her.

Auda Fabri and Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject

Auda's violent rejection of Christ's body, and her horror of female flesh, is in sharp contrast to the exuberant pleasure expressed in Mechthild of Hackeborn's visionary revelations. Auda's response is one of revulsion and denial, resonant of Kristevan horror and abjection.[21] Kristeva defines the abject as, 'one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.'[22] Our response to the abject is extreme: it 'provokes tears', 'vomiting', even 'sight-clouding' and 'dizziness'. We must reject it 'violently', and yet it forever 'challenges its master': 'radically excluded', Kristeva argues, the abject also 'draws me towards the place where all meaning collapses'. Beyond language, it 'beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out'. The abject, moreover, is paradoxical: it is something that is somehow familiar, yet it 'cannot be assimilated'; it both 'annihilates' and 'safeguards'; and can be a source of profound joy as well as inexpressible anguish. Kristeva argues, then, that we experience horror or disgust at certain things – vomit, excrement, nail parings, the skin on warm milk, for example – which causes us to violently reject them.[23] Kristeva defines this reaction as, 'abjection', a word she chooses because it is derived from the Latin, *abiectio,*

[21] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* as before.
[22] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* p. 1.
[23] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* p. 2.

which means ‘a throwing or pushing away’; and the thing that is pushed away she terms the ‘abject’. Abjection, she writes, emerges in infancy when the child begins to develop an awareness of self, separate from its parents, and, in particular, the mother, but is confronted nevertheless with its need for the mother who has expelled it from her body. Because the infant is unable to speak, this awareness cannot be expressed through words, so instead is conveyed through the rejection of the food offered to it by the mother and the father. Maternal love becomes maternal hatred, with the subject’s attempt to rid himself of the mother.

Kristeva further defines the abject as a ‘somatic symptom’: ‘a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable monster, a tumour, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire.’[24] It is possible to control the abject, however, through ‘sublimation’ – that is, ‘the possibility of naming the prenominal’, which ‘edges’ the abject.[25] Through sublimation, the individual can transcend the horror of the abject and experience a kind of pleasure in it:

> Not at all short of but always with and through perceptions and words, the sublime is a something added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here, as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling. A divergence, an impossible bounding. Everything missed, joy – fascination.[26]

Such an awareness, Kristeva asserts, is akin to mysticism, for mystics are ‘aware of what grows out of the abject’.[27] Mystical Christianity, she argues, ‘turns abjection of self into the ultimate proof of humility before God’.[28] Kristeva cites as her example Elizabeth of Hungary

[24] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 11.
[25] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 11.
[26] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 12.
[27] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 12.
[28] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 14.

(d. 1261), who, despite being royal, debased herself completely before God. She refers to the 'ordeal' of abjection whereby the individual 'presents himself […]as the most precious of non-objects. They are no longer seen in their own right but forfeited, abject'.[29] Mechthild of Hackeborn also experiences the sense of annihilation, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, in sharing it with Christ through the fluidity of their union, she quickly seems to skip over, as it were, any sense of abjection, to enjoy a transcendence that Auda is unable to experience.

Kristeva provides several examples of the abject. Food, she argues, is the most archaic because of its association with the maternal and the basic need of the child.[30] The maternal, nurturing body is also abject since it expels the child through birth. Associated with this are the substances emitted from that body – menstrual and birthing blood and the placenta.[31]. Birth, she maintains, is, 'a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides.'[32] But the ultimate image of abjection, Kristeva argues, is the corpse, since it signifies death without any gloss or chance of recovery, and thus forces the individual to confront 'what [he/she] permanently thrust[s] aside in order to live.' The corpse, 'without God and outside of science', is particularly powerful because of its ability to transgress the boundaries of life and death: it is a 'border that has encroached upon everything.' It is 'death infecting life'.[33]

In developing her theory of abjection, Kristeva modifies Jacques Lacan's (d. 1981) concepts of the Real and the Symbolic.[34] Lacan's Real is that which the pre-language, neo-natal infant experiences: it is a state of nature without the language and rules of society, and

[29] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 14.
[30] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 12.
[31] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 16-17; pp. 99-101.
[32] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 101.
[33] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.
[34] For a summary of Lacan's theory, see Adrian Johnston, *Jacques Lacan* (Fall 2018): <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/>, [accessed 15 October 2020].

consists of nothing but need. Once we have language, we are in the realm of the Symbolic: our world is constructed through language and, although we live in the realm of the Symbolic we believe it to be 'real'. Trauma occurs when we are confronted by the Real without the protection of the Symbolic, which is why the corpse elicits so extreme a reaction, and why the maternal body, with all the accompanying mess and leakage which defies the language of male-centred society and reminds the individual of his own place within the Real, is identified as abject.

Auda's horror at the Host and her association of it with the female *turpitudo* is a similar eruption of the Real – female flesh and the corpse which she is meant to consume – within the Symbolic – in this case, the language of the Church which has sought to suppress the Real through the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Virgin's immaculate body. While Auda can experience an abjection similar to that encountered within female mysticism, she is unable to translate the abject into the sublime and thus translate her horror into the joy – *jouissance* – experienced by these women.

I examine Auda's response through Kristeva's theory later in the chapter. However, in order to set the scene, as it were, it is first necessary to examine briefly past scholarship on Auda's trial and to summarise the transcript itself. As mentioned in the introduction, Auda's extraordinary admissions have attracted relatively little scholarly attention, and no critical edition of Fournier's Register in English exists. Also, while extracts of Auda's deposition have been published and translated, the entire transcript in English has not. Often, it is the seemingly minor and overlooked encounters or turns of phrase that reveal Auda's potential mysticism. My intention, therefore, is to provide as detailed an account of the trial transcript, as is possible within the confines of a single chapter, before engaging in my argument itself.

Previous scholarship

Auda's startling admissions have attracted some scholarly interest, but any recognition of her mystic potential has been hindered both by her sex and her social status: Auda is neither a high-born, literate, conventual sister like Mechthild, nor a man. In a way, therefore, Auda's struggle to be heard in the male-centred, hierarchic social and religious settings of early fourteenth-century France are repeated in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship. Here, Auda has been presented as an unstable, hysterical peasant woman, the victim of post-natal paranoia, an example of over-scrupulosity in religious devotion, as well as an example of adherence to Marian devotion in later-medieval Europe. While there is, in different degrees, a measure of validity to these analyses, I suggest that none satisfactorily addresses Auda's incipient mysticism and her response to Christ's gendered and transgressive flesh.

Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie discusses Auda in his microhistory of Montaillou, a Pyrenees village in the Sabarthès/Foix region of France, which became a Cathar stronghold in the early thirteenth century, and whose inhabitants were strongly represented in Fournier's Register.[35] Ladurie is somewhat dismissive of Auda, however. He considers her crisis of faith to be an example of the 'dangerous deviation […] of disbelief' present in 'some aspects of [Catholic] dogma' revealed in the Register, although 'more serious' than the 'scepticism' and 'childish pranks' relating to Eucharistic evident in the region. [36] Ladurie attributes Auda's

[35] Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 299-300; pp. 303-4; pp. 307-08; pp. 322-24.
[36] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, pp. 306-26. In keeping with his stylistic practice of vernacularizing the Latin names of those in his study, her refers to Auda Fabri as Auda Fauré. This practice is no longer observed in current research, and I have not followed it, wanting to adhere as faithfully as possible to the text. These 'childish pranks' concerning the Eucharist seem rather thin on the ground in Ladurie's study (although he mentions the heretic Bélibaste who made light of taking the 'little biscuit' offered by the priest (ii.55), he places more emphasis on the significance of the Eucharist in the lives of the regions inhabitants). The Register, itself reveals that, while a certain amount of scepticism, disbelief and even horror at the Eucharist existed, especially among Cathar followers and sympathisers (for example i.462), it was nevertheless a potent sacrament among the inhabitants of the region. See also i.169 and ii.311. Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 304.

disbelief to her youth and a neurotic disposition which was exacerbated by her marriage at a young age. She is an hysteric, a point he drives home with repeated use of vocabulary of excess: 'married at seventeen, neurotic, over-scrupulous, Auda Fabri had convulsions during which she tore off her clothes.'[37] Furthermore, 'she was only twenty-two when she stops believing in the real presence.'[38] Auda's 'attacks of guilt' were accompanied by 'an obsession with defilement', and her lack of belief in the Host, made her sometimes believe she was mad.[39] Auda, moreover, was also subject to 'masochistic tendencies' which 'drove [her] to implore the bishop to impose public penance on her' and to '[seek] out the rebukes of other women'.[40] In addition, Ladurie asserts, Auda courted reproach by 'deliberately creating a repressive father and mother in the persons of her husband and aunt'.[41] Interpreting the statements from Emengardis, a family friend, and other witnesses in the trial, Ladurie also maintains that it was the 'atmosphere of morbid hysteria' which resulted from Auda's mental imbalance which 'affected not only [Auda Fabri] but also her female relations and servants'.[42] Finally, Ladurie mentions Auda's reliance on the Virgin Mary to cure her, although he refrains from commenting on Auda's faith in the Virgin.[43] Auda's turmoil over the open-air birth and her association of the female *turpitudo* with Christ's body holds little interest for Ladurie, who seems to view it as just another episode in a catalogue of hysterical outbursts, all of which point to what he sees as Auda's mental imbalance. Ladurie effectively offers the reader an example of female instability, unreliability and excess, diametrically

[37] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[38] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[39] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[40] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[41] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[42] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.
[43] Ladurie, *Montaillou*, p. 323.

opposed to the classical, contained masculine as expressed by Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, as presented in Chapter One, above.

Peter Dronke 's interpretation of Auda's behaviour is altogether more nuanced.[44] He affords Auda a 'spiritual intensity', admits that her ideas 'have not yet been fully or correctly understood', and likens her 'thoughts' to those of Marguerite Porete, 'for, together with a keen longing to believe and to be at one with God [she] is again and again plunged into the experience of nothingness'. However, Dronke argues, unlike Marguerite, the nothingness Auda experiences, 'does not bring mystic discovery of God beyond being' but is instead the 'nightmare' of a 'neurotic and tormented atheism', which violently ostracizes her from the rest of her community.[45] In other words, Auda experiences Irigaray's *la mystèrique* and Kristeva's abject, but without the overflowing and ecstatic joy that accompanies the despair. Dronke's analysis certainly makes sense. However, he does not go beyond Auda's 'neurosis', and while not ascribing her intense distress to a masochistic obsession with bodily filth and the female body, describes it as symptomatic 'of a more complex and far-reaching malaise of scepticism', without offering a reason for this scepticism, or recognizing the significance of Christ's own deeply ambivalent identity. [46]

Auda's psyche also interests Miri Rubin, who, like Ladurie focuses on Auda's 'obsession […] with pollution'.[47] She views it as central to her response to the Eucharist, which, Rubin attests, resulted in Auda experiencing a 'mass fantasy' - a term coined by R. E. Reynolds to explain particular responses to the Eucharist in early medieval Christianity.[48]

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[44] Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 213-15, 271-73, and 317-18.
[45] Dronke, *Women Writers*, p. 213.
[46] Dronke, *Women Writers*, p. 214.
[47] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 342-43.
[48] R.E. Reynolds, 'An Early Medieval Mass Fantasy. The Correspondence of Pope Damascus and Saint Jerome on a Nicene Canon', in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, 1984*, Monumenta iuris canonici ser. C subsidia 8, ed. Vatican, pp. 73-89; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 343.

Rubin adapts this definition to explain examples where 'the eucharistic symbol incited a highly unusual and personal reading,' markedly distinct from the other examples of eucharistic response.[49] Crucial to Rubin's argument is what she regards as Auda's traumatic experience of childbirth which, she claims, fed her pre-existing doubts regarding the Eucharist. She writes:

> In the period after childbirth, the body had become so estranged, terrifying, painful-yet life-giving- that the stark physicality taught about Christ in the eucharist became mingled with it, each superimposed upon the other in her thoughts.[50]

Auda's 'tensions of disbelief', she maintains, made worse by her 'state of self-disgust' and 'the constraining requirement to imagine Christ as physical as the placenta', materialized in an 'act of transgression, of associating the holiest with the most polluted, the lining of the womb expelled from the mother's body'.[51] As Rubin succinctly expresses it, 'the eucharist coalesced as a centre of meaning for these intimate doubts and fear'. [52] Rubin's study highlights the potential difficulty faced by women in later medieval western Europe, who had to negotiate the Church's doctrine regarding female flesh, and the theology of transubstantiation and Christ's own sinless flesh and birth. Her argument, however, is also problematic, in that it makes assumptions regarding Auda's reaction to her own body and her experience of childbirth, which are not necessarily present in the text, and it overlooks the

[49] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 342-43.
[50] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 343.
[51] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 343.
[52] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 343.

complexity of Auda's theological reasoning, seeking to present Auda as an anomaly, and suggesting a uniformity of faith which is not supported in the Register.[53]

Dyan Elliott also discusses Auda Fabri in her study of the Church's changing attitudes towards female spirituality and its fight against heresy in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. [54]For Elliott, Auda is a perfect example of the Church authority's 'failure' to separate the confessional and the inquisitional tribunal, and the dangers this slippage could pose for penitent women (women being particularly affected by the post-1215 directives regarding confession and penitence). [55]Elliott demonstrates how the emphasis on meticulous examination of the penitent both by the penitent itself and the confessor not only became mirrored in the inquisitional procedure, but could create enormous stress for the penitent, potentially leading to a deterioration in her mental health, and even to her condemnation.[56] Auda's trial, she writes:

> demonstrates how scrupulosity (a term coined by Jean Gerson (d. 1439) to define the zeal of someone to confess becoming so great that the person is ready to confess to something he or she has not done, thereby turning virtue into a vice, but which was nevertheless fostered by the Church) could spin a web of guilt and self-doubt and could hold a woman in an agonized state of paralysis. [57]

Auda's ravings, seizures, delirium and 'violent outbursts of despair', the ill health that made her take to her bed, even her identification of the Host with the placenta are, Elliott maintains,

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[53] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 343. See also, 'The Common Woman in the Western Church in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries', in *Women in the Church*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 145; and Wendy Love Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France', *Church History* 75. 4 (December 2006), pp. 748 – 767; p.749.
[54] Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 223-29.
[55] Elliott, *Proving Women*, p. 229.
[56] Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 226 and 229.
[57] Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 212-3; and p. 228.

a direct result of this scrupulosity which stem from her unconfessed sin.[58] Elliott observes certain parallels between Auda and women such as Margery Kempe and Angela of Foligno, who were also affected by the atmosphere of religious scrupulosity and worried about omitting sins in confession.[59] She also demonstrates how the lines of demarcation between confession and inquisition were often made indistinct with their intentional similarity of language, procedure and purpose. This lack of demarcation, she argues, accounts for Auda's conduct during her trial: for example, her intense self-examination between interrogations, her readiness to involve and inform others in order to give as accurate a confession as possible, and her desire to sustain the pastoral self-image of Fournier, her confessor-inquisitor.[60]

Another approach to the case of Auda Fabri is adopted by Wendy Love Anderson.[61] Arguing that scholars 'have been slow to recognize the fundamentally theological nature of Auda's dilemma', Anderson examines Auda's crisis of faith 'from the perspective of the history of Christian spirituality and belief rather than the annals of abnormal psychology'.[62] She maintains that Auda's understanding of eucharistic doctrine exemplifies the lack of uniformity in religious belief among the ordinary laymen and women of the area; and indicates that such people were tackling complex and evolving religious doctrine regarding eucharistic devotion with relative sophistication.[63] Auda's trial, moreover, 'emphasizes the

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[58] Elliott, *Proving Women*, p. 226.
[59] Elliott, *Proving Women*, p. 227. Elliott notes Jean Gerson's (d.1429) concern regarding the large number of 'reserved' sins (sins - often sexual - which could be confessed only to the bishop rather than the local priest, thus preventing the possible disclosure of information to interested parties,) of women who were both embarrassed to confess them to their local priest or afraid that he would somehow inform their husbands of their misdemeanour. Elliott points out that Auda was 'outed' in a similar way, when the priest hearing about her unbelief from Ermengarde manages to get round the *sanctity* of the confessional. See Jean Gerson, Ep. 24, to an unnamed bishop, in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, Oeuvres 2:90-93, trans. Brian McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), pp. 240-44, cited in Elliott, *Proving Women*, p. 227, n. 175.
[60] Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 227-28.
[61] Wendy Love Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France', *Church History* 75. 4 (December 2006), pp. 748–767.
[62] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 750; p. 749.
[63] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 749.

elasticity of orthodox Christian belief' in southern France at that time, and 'depicts the complexity of late medieval Marian devotion as it intersected with both eucharistic controversy and definitions of orthodoxy'.[64]

Anderson partly attributes the limited scholarly interest in Auda to the difficulties presented by the text itself. The text, for example, is a written Latin translation of testimonies given orally in Occitan (some of which is left untranslated) and under a certain amount of coercion, and it reflects the limitations imposed upon areas of lay spirituality in inquisitional documents from southern France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. [65]The text, therefore, cannot be taken at face value. Anderson also highlights the discrepancies in Auda's own testimony, which, Anderson argues, she initially 'tailored' to suit her an inquisitorial audience'.[66]

It is Auda's altered testimony, however, which, Anderson argues, is key to our understanding of her crisis. Anderson maintains that the initial account of Auda's crisis of faith, which was attributed to an unconfessed sin, should have proved sufficient to close the case.[67] However, due to the increased prominence of priestly confession in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Auda's initial confession was insufficient and unconvincing, which explains why Fournier summoned her so many times .[68]Anderson notes that in her third appearance, during which she dramatically changed her testimony, Auda discounted her

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[64] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 749.
[65]Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 750. As well as drawing attention to the potential unreliability of these transcripts, which I discuss briefly at the beginning of the chapter, Bruschi also notes that ample opportunity was afforded the inhabitants of towns that were first-time offenders to sort out what they were going to say during their trial. This was known as a 'period of grace' and resulted in a less severe penance for those who voluntarily confessed to heresy. Pamiers, where Fournier held his trials and the surrounding towns and villages were also granted this period of grace, so it is possible, indeed, probable, that Auda's initial testimony like that of her husband and her friend Ermengarde, were composed at this time with the view to a speedy conclusion and light penance. Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, pp. 13-26; p. 15.
[66] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 750.
[67] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 753.
[68] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 753.

unconfessed sin as the cause of her spiritual crisis.[69] Far from regarding Auda's reaction to the 'public parturition' as symptomatic of a 'psychiatric disorder', therefore, Anderson argues that Auda's reasoning, was 'eminently rational', the result of her 'combined experience of recollected childbirth and eucharistic celebration'.[70]As a good, orthodox Catholic, Auda believed that Christ was born from the intact flesh of the Virgin Mary. However, Christ's humanity was also inextricably linked with the *turpitudo* emitted from female flesh in the form of menstrual and birthing blood.[71]Auda's association of Christ with female *turpitudo* was an attempt to reconcile the Church's attitudes towards the inherently polluting female flesh, and the more secular attitudes towards women's bodies evident in medical texts.[72] Her reaction, Anderson claims, was also influenced by Cathar dismissal of the doctrine transubstantiation, and its antipathy towards the reproductive body.[73] Furthermore, Auda's attempt to rationalize Eucharistic theology was not shared with her family and acquaintances, some of whom accused her of heresy.[74]

Crucial to the doctrine of the Eucharist, Anderson continues, was the developing theology of the body of the Virgin Mary, which seemed to conflict with Church teaching on the inherent uncleanness of female flesh.[75]Anderson argues that although the sinless nature of the Virgin's flesh distinguished her from the rest of womankind, her 'distinctively female body and her role as Christ's human mother stood at the centre of both theological and popular disputations throughout the late Middle Ages'.[76] Anderson draws attention to the identity of the Virgin as intercessor for the sinner, and the importance of her distinctly

[69] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 755.
[70] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 755.
[71] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', pp. 755-56.
[72] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 756.
[73] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 756;
[74] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 758.
[75] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 758
[76] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 759.

female, maternal flesh in this performance.[77] She also observes that Mary acted as intercessor and saviour for sinners guilty of far greater iniquities than Auda, and her miracles were used to 'provid[e] evidence (miraculous or otherwise) to bolster orthodoxy and eliminate the doctrinal problem of disbelief, especially on matters pertaining to Christ's incarnate flesh, featuring in miracle stories concerning unbelieving Jews and even clerics who had sold their soul to the devil.[78]Anderson writes that, 'where orthodoxy was questioned and confession (to either priest or inquisitor) was impossible or simply insufficient, Mary was the appropriate object of prayer and invocation'.[79] Because Auda was, Anderson maintains, not even considered a heretic but one who had erred, she was therefore able to take advantage of Marian spirituality. This, she argues, explains why the Virgin's intervention in Auda's spiritual crisis remained a constant and central element in Auda's testimony. Anderson demonstrates that at key moments, when male clerical intervention was ineffectual, it was the Virgin to whom Auda turned. Anderson argues that Auda elected the Virgin to explain her cure instead of confession or admitting to heresy. The intervention of the Virgin serves both to exonerate her and to explain the penance she had to fulfil.[80]

Anderson's also interprets Auda's confession of the 'public parturition' as a reasoned attempt to gain Fournier's sympathy and understanding.[81] Anderson suggests that this might be because Auda distinguished her confidants according to social standing and gender in order to help her address the issues of doctrine that trouble her so deeply. She points out that these 'overlapping discursive communities' of laywomen 'recognized the difficulties posed by both orthodox eucharistic doctrine and inquisitionally defined orthodoxy itself'. While

[77] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', pp. 760-61.
[78] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 761.
[79] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 762.
[80] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 764.
[81] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 766.

their help on doctrinal matters was limited, however, they also understood 'the usefulness of appeal to Mary's unique status under those circumstances.'[82]Auda told Fournier of her association of the *turpitudo* with Christ's body because he (rather than her husband and female acquaintances) would be likely to understand her dilemma. Both sets of Auda's listeners, however, could accept the intact Virgin's cure of the erring woman. Auda's use of her audiences' understanding thus demonstrates that she possessed a 'highly specific and sophisticated current of Marian eucharistic spirituality' with which she has not previously been credited. Anderson's analysis reflects a growing interest in medieval lay spirituality and is an aspect which I develop in what remains of this chapter.

Auda's trial: the procedure

Procedures for inquisition tribunals were set out in various manuals small enough to be carried around and consulted by the inquisitor and his legal advisers.[83] Usually included in these manuals were a list of questions to ask the defendant and witnesses during interrogation; sentences and formulae; and consultative texts to use during the tribunal.[84] The Inquisitional tribunal would commence with what was known as a *tempus gratiae* a 'period of grace', during which the inhabitants of the affected district were invited to come forward and with the promise of a more lenient penance to either confess or inform.[85] The trials themselves were initially recorded by the notary, supposedly verbatim and in 'real-time'. In the Fournier inquisition, this would have been in Occitan or, occasionally, Gascon. The

[82] Anderson, 'The Real Presence of Mary', p. 766
[83] L. J. Sackville gives as one example of such a book the volume containing *Explicatio super officio inquisitionis*, which measures just 20 x 14 cm. L. J. Sackville, 'The Inquisitor's Manual at Work', *Viator* 44. 1 (2013), pp. 201-216, p. 205.
[84] See again Sackville, 'The Inquisitor's Manual at Work', as before; and John H. Arnold and Peter Biller, eds., *Heresy and Inquisition in France, 1200-1300* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), a sourcebook of translated and annotated primary texts appertaining to heresy and the Inquisition in thirteenth-century France.
[85] Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, p. 15.

witness could appear before the inquisitor several times before judgement was delivered. On each occasion the record of the previous interrogation was reread out in the vernacular to the witness who was asked to confirm that his or her testimony had been correctly recorded, and if anything needed amending. The accuracy of the final document as a record of what was said is, to some extent, questionable, depending as it did on various factors, not least being the linguistic skill of the notary who had to be able to understand both potentially complex legal Latin and the language and local dialects of those interrogated. Such limitations, which I discuss further in this chapter in relation to Auda, become apparent in the Registers when the notary has attempted to write down phonetically in the vernacular something that the witness has said, and which the notary has not understood and cannot therefore translate into Latin. Finally, the document was transcribed in Latin on parchment, and preserved in a volume or volumes. This last stage could happen sometime after the original tribunal, as is the case with the Fournier Register, which was transcribed in 1326, a year after the tribunal ended.[86]

The trial itself

Auda 's trial was one of the first to be conducted during the Pamiers inquisition. The trial itself was brief, lasting merely a fortnight, from 15 July,1318 to 2 August of that year, with the sentence being delivered on 9 August.[87] The deposition is also quite short in length, occupying just six of MS 4030's 325 folios.[88] Auda appeared before Fournier accused of heresy and speaking to others against the Catholic faith.[89] Present at the trial to assist Fournier were Pierre du Verdier, archdeacon of Majorque; Hugues de Bilhères, appellate judge of Pamiers; Guillelmus de Saint-Julien, *iurisperitus* (jurist/legal expert) of Pamiers;

[86] Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, p. 18.
[87] Duvernoy, *Registre d' Inquisition*,17c-18c; and pp. 123-12, and pp. 40-122.
[88] Limbourch, *Collection Doat*, pp. 263-267.
[89] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 82, 133a.

Bernard Gaubert, *iurisperitus* of the diocese of Narbonne; and Guillelmus de Pardailhan, public apostolic notary who recorded her deposition.[90]Auda was eager to reassure the bishop of her orthodoxy: asked by Fournier if she had erroneously departed from the articles of faith and from the doctrine of the Eucharist, as he had been informed, Auda quickly denied any heretical beliefs, setting out her beliefs in a paraphrase of the creed:

> Auda statim dixit et respondit quod credebat dominum Ihesum Christum carnem suscepisse de Beata Virgine Maria et natum fuisse ex ea, ipsum passum et crucifixum pro genere humano fuisse, et resurrexisse et celos ascendisse, venturum etiam ad iudicandum bonos et malos, et quod profitebatur et credebat fidem et sacramenta prout tenet sancta romana Ecclesia.[91]
>
> (Auda immediately replied that she believed that the Lord Jesus Christ assumed human flesh from the blessed Virgin Mary, and was born from her, that he suffered and was crucified for the human race, and that he rose again and ascended into Heaven; that he would come again to judge the good and the evil; and that she professed and believed the faith and the sacraments as held by the Holy Roman Church.)

After further questioning, however, Auda confessed to a prior inability to belief in Christ's real presence. This, she claimed, had occurred about six years previously. She had received communion for the first time about a year and a half after her marriage to Guillelmus Fabri, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, about eight years before.[92] On the first Easter after her marriage, she had confessed her sins to a priest but had declined to receive communion. When her husband rebuked her for doing so, she told him that it was because, 'in loco de Fagia unde ipsa fuerat oriunda, non consueverant iuvenes homines et mulieres recipere corpus Christi.' (In the village of Lafage, where she was from, it was not the custom for young men and women to receive the body of Christ'). [93] The following Easter, Auda

[90] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 82, 133a.
[91] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 82, 133b.
[92] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.
[93] For different practices regarding the Eucharist, see Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.

received communion. However, she had failed to confess 'quoddam grave peccatum' (a certain serious sin) committed before her marriage. Auda claimed that this omission had a marked and immediate effect on her: 'stabat […]tota perterrita et turbata, quia receperat corpus Christi sine confessione dicti peccati' (she stood totally terrified and in turmoil, because she had received the body of Christ without having confessed the said sin).[94] It was after three years, however, Auda stated, that she came to believe that, although 'ille Deus omnipotens esset in celis' (the all-powerful God was in Heaven), 'tamen non credebat quod ille Deus esset in sacramento altaris, nec quod per verba sancta que dicit capellanus, esset ibi corpus Christi', (she did not, however, believe that God was present on the sacramental altar, nor that the body of Christ was present through the holy words spoken by the priest).[95] Furthermore, she claimed that:

> stetit continue [in isto errore], ut dixit, usquequo nunc fuit ducta pro premissis ad dictum dominum episcopum supra dictis, in cuius presencia dixit quod de novo Beata Virgo Maria immerserat in cor suum quod credebat in sacramento altaris esse carnem et sanguinem Christi.[96]
>
> (She persisted continually [in that error], so she said, right up until that moment when she was led on account of it to the said Lord bishop, in whose presence she said that the blessed Virgin Mary had put it into her heart that she believed that the body and blood of Christ was in the sacrament of the altar.)

Auda denied any heretical influence, the thoughts she experienced were her own as a result of her failure to confess ('supervenit sibi, ut credit, es perserverencia supradicti peccati, quod non fuerat confessa illud'); and she kept her error, she said, from everyone, even the priest, until, having become seriously ill, she told her husband and a friend of the family,

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[94] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.
[95] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.
[96] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.

Emengardis Garuda , also from Merviel. [97]Auda recounted Guillelmus's horror at her admission: 'quomodo, maledicta, loqueris in bono sensu tuo?' (How, you cursed woman, can you say such things in your right mind?).[98] He told her to confess to a priest and threatened to dismiss her from the house.[99] According to her testimony, Auda was more forthcoming in her confession to Emengardis, admitting in her lack of belief in the ability of the priest to transform the Host into Christ's body.[100] Emengardis, she said, roundly rebuked her, and told her 'multa verba inductiva ad credendum' (many things to help her believe). One *exemplum* was the story of Gregory the Great (d. 604) and the woman who did not believe in the transubstantiated host, which Auda recounted in great detail.[101] Auda seemed suitably reassured, and thanked Emengardis for her help: 'O tia, tam bona verba habetis, et tam bene confortatis me!' (O tia, you speak such good words and you comfort me so well!).[102]

The same day, Fournier questioned Guillelmus Fabri and Emengardis Garuda. Their testimonies, by and large, supported Auda 's, although significant differences in the accounts of each nevertheless exist. In Auda's defence, and possibly to protect himself against the charge of aiding a heretic, Guillelmus said that had always considered his wife to be a good Christian and Catholic whose generosity to the poor indeed, threatened to ruin the

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[97] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b.
[98] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133c.
[99] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133c.
[100] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 84, 133c.
[101] According to the legend, during a celebration of the Mass which he was officiating, Gregory caught sight of a woman in his congregation laughing at the elevation of the Host. When she told him that she laughed because the bread she had kneaded was becoming Christ's body, Gregory prayed to God and the bread became a child's dismembered finger, thus proving that Christ was present in the elements. The woman was terrified and believed in the real presence of Christ at the Eucharist. The finger once again became bread. Miri Rubin observes that the legend is first recorded in Paul the Deacon's *Vita* of Gregory and remained a popular story used to prove the argument for transubstantiation, being found in numerous sources such as *The Golden Legend* of Jacobus Voragine (d. 1298 or 1299) and John Mirk's *Festial* (discussed in the next chapter). Variations of the legend exist, of which Auda's rendition is one. Elsewhere Christ himself appears as the Man of Sorrows. The legend became a popular subject of devotional art from the latter half of the fourteenth century. For a recent study of the Gregory Mass in fifteenth-century art, see, Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century' in, Anne-Marie Bouché and Jeffrey Hamburger, eds., *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 208-40. Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 84, 133c.
[102] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 84, 133c.

household.[103] However, he did acknowledge that Auda had confessed to a disbelief in God and the transubstantiation of the elements, during her illness just before she had received communion around the Feast of John the Baptist (24th June). Moreover, in Guillelmus's version Auda confesses to some sort of aversion to the Host:

> In infirmitate, quam habuit dicta Auda uxor sua, cum recepisset dicta Auda corpus Christi, prius fecit vocari et venire ad se dictum Guillelmum Fabri, cui dixit dicta Auda, 'Sancta Maria, domine, qualiter potest hoc esse? Nam quando sum in ecclesia et elevator corpus Christi, non possum orare ipsum nec possum ipsum respicere, set quando puto respicere ipsum, supervenit quoddam anbegament ante occulos'.[104]
>
> (During the sickness, which his wife the said Auda suffered, during which the said Auda had received the body of Christ, before that she called the said Guillelmus to come to her, and the said Auda said to him, 'Sancta Maria, sir, how is this possible? For whenever I am in church and the body of Christ is elevated, I cannot pray to it, nor can I look upon it, but when I think to look upon it, some sort of hindrance/dazzling appears before my eyes').

Auda attributed her disbelief to her failure to confess to the unnamed sin she had committed before her marriage. Not only that, but she said that from the moment that she had received communion in this sinful state: 'non credidi quod Dominus posset michi parcere dictum peccatum, nec eciam quod posset me iuvare.'(I have not been able to believe that the Lord could forgive me my said sin, nor even that he can help me').[105] Guillelmus said he was terrified at Auda 's confession, thought his wife mad to say such things and threatened to expel her from the house: 'Male accidit vobis! Perdita estis! Dyaboli portabunt vos in corpore et anima, et ego dimittam vobis, si talis estis qualem vos dicitis. Confiteamini statim!' (A curse on you! You are lost. The devils will carry you off, body and soul and I will send you

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[103] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 85, 133d.
[104]The word, *abegament* seems to be unfamiliar to the notary and/or copyist who leave/s it untranslated. Dronke suggests that it could correspond to the Provençal, *esbayment* or *esbleugimen* which corresponds to the French *éblouissement*, meaning 'dazzling', 'glare' or 'hindrance'. I discuss the significance of this anbegament later in the chapter. Dronke, *Women Writers*, pp. 273-4; Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 85, 133d.
[105] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 86, 134a.

out of the house if you are what you say you are. Confess immediately!). [106] Guillelmus further highlights Auda's supposed madness when, explaining his failure to report Auda 's confession, he says that, 'credebat […] esse extra mentem racione infirmitatis quam patiebatur. Nam in dicta infirmitate plura verba vana et oribilia dixerat sicut homo vel mulier que loquitur extra mentem' ('He believed that […] she was mad because of the illness from which she was suffering. For she had said many false and terrible things, just as a man or woman speaks when mad').[107]

Emengardis also reported her alarm at Auda 's words. In a mixture of Occitan and Latin, the notary recorded her immediate and highly-charged response, keen to distance herself and her household from the stain of heresy: 'Co, na traytoressa no sia, nam iste locus et istud hospicium semper fuit mundus de tot mal nec de ygregia! Et caveatis vobis ne vos asportetis nobis de alio loco, nec vituperetis locum istum nostrum.' ('Hey! Don't be a traitoress! For this region and this household has always been clean of so much evil and filth! And watch out that you don't bring it to us from elsewhere, or curse our region.)[108] She advised Auda , 'in hoc nullatenus dubitaret, set firmiter bene crederet' (not to doubt in any way, but to firmly believe') otherwise, 'perdita esset' (she would be damned) and, in addition to a rendering of the story of the Mass of St Gregory, Emengardis provided her with two prayers to say to help her regain her lost faith.[109] These prayers were, once again, transcribed

[106] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 86, 134a.
[107] Fournier asked Guillelmus why he had neglected to inform himself or an inquisitor of Auda's words – a curious distinction since, as Elliott points out, the two roles in this case, were one and the same. Fournier was present in nearly all the depositions. Guillelmus also said that he had called a priest to Auda to whom she had spent a long time confessing. Elliott, *Proving Women*, p. 224; Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 86, 134a.
[108] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 87, 134b.
[109] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 87, 134b.

in Occitan: one was to be said during the elevation of the host, and the other on rising from bed in the morning.[110]

Emengardis noted Auda's gratitude to her: 'Osta tia, ta be m'avetz coffortata, tam bona verba scitis et tam bene scitis rogare Deum. Si vos non fuissetis, perdita essem, et si contingeret me mori, putrifieret corpus meum in ecclesia Sancti Christofori, et dyaboli portassent animam meam'. ('Osta tia, how you have comforted me. You know such good words and how well you know how to pray to God if it weren't for you, I would be lost, and if I were to die, my body would rot in the church of Saint Christopher and devils would carry off my soul. ').[111] However, Auda's distress persisted: 'incepit percuterre faciem suam cum palmis et flevit et dixit dicte Ermengardi et rogavit eam ut amore Dei frequenter venire ad eam ad confortandum eandem.' ('she began to strike her face with the palms of her hands, and weep, and ask the said Emengardis, for the love of God to visit her often in order to comfort her').[112] Emengardis was terrified and took to her bed, seriously ill.[113] She confessed her encounter with Auda to the local priest, who, in turn, reported the matter to the bishop.[114]

Fournier duly summoned the priest, who confirmed Emengardis's testimony.[115] Guillelmus said that he had praised Emengardis for the thoroughness of her confession and

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[110] 'Senher, veray Dieus e veray hom, tot poderos, que naquestz del cors de la verges Maria ses tot peccat, e presetz mort e passio sus l'aybre de la veray crostz e fosz per las mas e pels pes clavelatz e per le cap de espinas coronat, e pel costat de lansa nafrat, don esshic sanc e ayga, don tostz em rezemitz de peccat, Senher, tramestz me una lagrema de aquela vostra ayga que lave le mieu cor de tota legesa e de tot peccat.' (O Lord, true God and true man, all-powerful, who was born from the body of the Virgin Mary, without any sin, and suffered death and pain on the wood of the true cross, by your hands and feet that were to the trunk, and by your head crowned with thorns, and by your side pierced by the lance, from which flowed blood and water, forgive us our sins. O Lord, send me a tear from that water to wash my heart from all the ugliness of sin). 'Senher Dieus tot poderos, a vos coma l'arma e'l cors; Senher, vos me gardastz de peccar e de falhar e de l'autra peccada, e de la mieua meteysha e de fals testimoni, e m'amenastz a bona fi'. (Lord God, all-powerful, I commit to you my soul and my body; O Lord, guard me from of falling short, and from the sins of others and of my own, and from lies and false witness, and bring me to a good end'). Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 87-88, 134b.

[111] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 87-88, 13.

[112] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134b.

[113] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134c.

[114] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134c.

[115] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134c; pp. 88-89, 134c.

had made a special visit to tell her so persuading Emengardis to repeat what she had told him to four witnesses in the privacy of her home. He had therefore summoned four local men, one of whom was Emengardis's son, to witness Emengardis's report.[116] Guillelmus's testimony largely corroborated Emengardis's. His emphasis, however, focused on Emengardis's devoutness and eagerness to follow the Church's instruction regarding both confession to a priest and the treatment of heretics, and his attention to following the correct procedure in such matters, which he illustrates somewhat emphatically through her abhorrence of Auda 's heresy and her own eagerness to fully confess.[117] This focus on confession and penitence, and the horror at what is seen as heresy, is also conveyed in the testimonies of the other four witnesses.[118]

On Friday, 21 July, Auda was summoned for the third time to confirm the accuracy of her previous testimony. Auda said that she wished to correct her statement. These corrections, however, were substantial. Not only did she change the date that she had first committed the error, but she changed the cause of her error:

> Dixit praedicta Auda corrigendo dictum suum in eo quod supra dixerat quod octo anni erant vel circa quod fuerat in errore, videlicet quod ex illa cogitatione turpis (sic) non credebat quod corpus Domini esset in altari, et quod pernoverat sibi et(sic) cogitatione et perseverantia peccati de quo est facta mentio superius, dicens modo quod IIIIor anni sunt vel circa solum quod fuit in dicto errore, et quod incidit in ipsum errorem ex alia cogitatione; contigit enim, sibi, ut dixit, quod cum quadam die iret ad ecclesiam Sancte Crucis ad missam audiendam, audivit a quibusdam mulieribus, de quarum nominibus dixit se non recordari, quod nocte precedenti quaedam mulier quondam filiam [pepererat] in via intus castrum de Muro Veteri, ita quod non poterat pervenisse ad hospicium, quo audito cogitavit turpitudinem quam emittunt mulieres pariendo, et cum videret elevari in altari corpus Domini, habuit cogitationem ex illa turpitudine quod esset infectum corpus Domini et quod et[ex] hoc incidit in dictum errorrem crediente videlicet quod non esset ibi corpus Domini Iesu Christi.[119]
>
> (The aforesaid Auda corrected her statement in which she had said that it was eight years ago, or thereabouts, that she had fallen into error as a result of that foul thought (that she didn't believe that the body of the Lord was on the altar) and from the persistence of the sin

[116] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134d.
[117] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 88, 134d.
[118] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 91, 135a-d.
[119] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 94, 136a.

> which had arisen from the previous thought. She said that it was about four years ago, or thereabouts, that she had fallen into the said error, and that she had committed that error due to a different reason. It happened to her, so she said, that on a certain day when she was going to the church of the Holy Cross in hear mass, she heard from some women whose names, she said, she didn't remember, say that the previous night, a woman had given birth to a girl in the street inside the town of Merviel, because she had been unable to reach her home. And when Auda had heard this, she thought about the filth that women expel in childbirth; and when she saw the body of the Lord lifted up on the altar, she had the thought on account of that filth that the body of the Lord was infected; and from this she fell into the said error, believing that it wasn't the body of the Lord Jesus there (on the altar).)

Any reaction that this new confession may have evinced is not recorded. All we know is that, on the following Monday, 24 July, Auda was summoned to appear before the court. This was her fourth appearance before the bishop and those assisting him. Auda altered her statement yet again, backtracking on her previous confession concerning the body of Christ being infected by female *turpitudo:*

> Dixit et correxit quod ex cogitatione turpi predicta non fuit sibi visum quod corpus Christi esset infectum illa turpitudine vel alia, tamen occurebat sibi illa turpis cogitatio quando elevebatur corpus Christi, et non poterat credere quod corpus Domini esset ibi in altari, nec poterat ipsum rogare nec inspicere bene, impediente ipsam cogitatione predicta et multis aliis cogitationibus que sibi in dicta elevatione occurrrebant.[120]
>
> (She said in correction that from the aforesaid foul thought, it did not seem to her that the body of Christ was infected by that filth or by any other. However, that foul thought occurred to her when the body of Christ was elevated, and she was unable to believe that the body of the lord was on the altar, nor could she pray to it, nor look properly at it, because the aforesaid thought, and many other thoughts which came to her during the said elevation, stopped her.)

Auda further complicated her testimony by introducing other women into the equation. Although, she said, she previously claimed to have confided in her lack of belief solely to her

[120] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 94, 136a.

husband and Emengardis, she now admitted that she had also told other female acquaintances and servants of her error. Auda declared that Aladaycis de Pregolh, the woman who had been employed as a nurse for her son, and whom her husband had hired to help Auda during her recent illness, fell ill shortly after she had started to work for Auda and her household, and so desired to receive communion.[121]Auda , along with two women, Aladaycis , widow of Arnaldus Gamicius , and Ramunda widow of Petrus Gamicius, witnessed Aladaycis receive communion.[122] On returning to the room in which the sick woman was lying, after the priests had left, Auda displayed great anguish.

> dicta Auda incepit turbari et moveri, dicens ad interrogationem dictarum duarum mulierum que eandem interrogabant quare sic turbabatur et movebatur, que dixit quod pro eo quia non poterat credere Deum, que mulieres dixerunt ei: 'Sancta Maria, quid dicitis, revertamini ad Deum et habeatis spem in eo!'[123]
>
> The said Auda began to be in turmoil and disturbed, saying in reply to the two women who were asking her why she was thus in turmoil and disturbed, that it was because she was unable to believe in God. And the women replied, 'Sancta Maria! What are you saying? Turn back to God and have faith in him!'

Once alone with Aladaycis, Auda admitted her inability to believe in Christ's presence in the elements:

> 'Tu recepisti corpus Christi, credis quod illud quod recepisti sit corpus Christi?' que nutrix respondit quod credebat firmiter, cui dixit dicta Auda: 'quomodo potest quod ego non possim credere?' Et dicta mulier dixit ei, 'Domina, revertamini ad Deum et credatis firmiter illud esse corpus Christi.' Et dicta Auda dixit dicte nutrici quod rogaret Deum quod poneret in corde suo quod crederet, et dum dicta nutrix, ut melius poterat, rogaret Deum, supervenit Guillelma,

[121] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 94, 136a-b.
[122] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.
[123] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.

> ancilla dicti hospicii dicte Auda , cui dixit dicta Auda: 'Guillelma, pone te in orationem et roga Beatam Virginem Mariam de Monte Gaudio ut illuminet me quod ego possim credere Deum.' Quod et fecit dicta Guillelma flexis genibus. Et cum orasset, statim dicta auda fuit, ut dixit, illuminata, et credidit firmiter in Deum, et credit adhuc prout dixit.[124]
>
> 'You have received the body of Christ; do you believe that what you received was the body of Christ?' And the nurse replied that she firmly believed. And the said Auda said to her, 'how is it possible that I myself cannot believe?' and the said nurse said to her, 'Madam, turn back to God and believe firmly that it is the body of Christ.' And the said Auda told the said nurse to pray to God that he should put it in her heart that she would believe. And while the said nurse, as she was more capable [of doing so] prayed to God, Guillelma, the maid of the said Auda 's house, arrived, the said Auda said to her, 'Guillelma, go on your knees and pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mons Gaudi (Mongauzy) to enlighten me, so that I can believe in God. And this the said Guillelma did, on bended knee. And when she had prayed, at once the said Auda was, so she said, enlightened, and believed firmly in God, and did still believe, so she said.

Auda then , 'humiliter […] cum magno contritione cordis' (humbly […] and with great penitence of heart', declared that she was ready to accept and fulfil whatever penance Fournier wished to impose, 'quantumcumque duram' ('no matter how severe').[125] Nevertheless she asked that 'non imponeretur sibi pentencia publica seu talis que duceret eam ad verecundiam et vitiuperium seculi' (a public penance not be imposed upon her, or one which would subject her to the shame and curses of people).[126]

Auda was summoned for the fifth time on 29 July, the Saturday after the feast of Saint James the apostle.[127] Once again she corrected her testimony; Aladaycis, the nurse, she said, had received communion at the home of Guillelmua den Ramundo of Merviel, not Auda's home as she had previously stated, 'petens (sic) misericordiam et supplicavit prout

[124] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.
[125] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.
[126] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.
[127] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 95, 136b.

supra peciit et supplicavit in ultima sua confessione predicta' ('she sought and begged for mercy just as she had sought and begged it before in her last aforesaid confession').[128]

Guillelmus Fabri was then called to answer questions concerning his wife's testimony, and broadly confirmed what Auda had said.[129] Auda was again summoned before Fournier. This was the sixth time she had been called, and the second time that same day. 'Reducta […] ad memoriam' (lit. having been led back to memory), she corrected her previous confession, thus confirming her husband's testimony.[130]

Aladaycis, Ramunda and Guillelma, Auda 's maid, had already been summoned by Fournier via a letter to Guillelmus, the priest, the previous day.[131] Their testimonies, however, differed substantially from Auda and her husband's. All three women were interrogated 'diligenter' (carefully). Both Aladaycis Gamicii and Ramunda Gamicii said that throughout the eight years that they had known Auda, they were unaware that she had any conversation with heretics or with those 'susceptis de fide' (under suspicion regarding their beliefs). Auda's parents were also innocent of this, and all were considered 'boni et fideles' (good and faithful). Nor were they aware that Auda had ever confessed an inability to believe in God or the sacrament of the altar, an assertion they maintained even after rigorous and repeated interrogation. The diligence with which the women were questioned is conveyed clearly in the record of Aladaycis's deposition which reads: 'Interrogata sepe et sepius et frequenter si umquam audivit a dicta Auda quod non posset credere Deum, dixit quod non' (questioned (lit.) often, more often and frequently if she had ever heard from the said Auda that she could

[128] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 96, 136c.
[129] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 96, 136c.
[130] The notary's use of the phrase, *reducta ad memoriam* reflects the style of questioning encouraged both in by the priest in confession and in the inquisitor during a heresy trial. The idea was that, by a series of questions, the inquisitor could draw the truth out of the witness. The manipulation of the witness's voice is something I discuss later in the chapter. Fournier was exceptional in this, reverting to torture just once during the entire six years of the Pamiers inquisition. Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 96, 136c.
[131] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 96-97, 136c, d.

not believe in God, she said, no).[132] Ramunda's deposition is similar, except that Fournier's questions become more specific: 'Interrogata sepe et sepius et frequenter si umquam audivit a dicta Auda quod non crederet vel non posset credere Deum, dixit quod non'. (questioned (lit.) often, more often and frequently if she had ever heard from the said Auda that she did not believe or could not believe in God, she said, no).[133]

Fournier was clearly unconvinced by the women's testimonies, for he summoned Auda (for the third time that day) to repeat her version of the events, in the presence of the two women.[134] She again emended her testimony, claiming that Ramunda had not been present at the house of Guillelma den Ramundo, although she had visited Auda later that evening and found her, 'iacantem supra pulvinari et se molestantem et ravatantem et dicentem: 'Sancta Maria, succurre michi'' (lying on a couch and harming herself and raving and saying: 'Sancta Maria, help me!').[135] Initially Auda told the women that her distress was due to her failure to confess thoroughly ('bene'), to which Ramunda replied: 'E domina, et que peccata fecistis vos? Numquam fecistis nisi bonum, et sustenatis omnes paupers huius valle.' (Oh, madam, and what sins have you committed? You have never done anything except good, and you sustain all the paupers in this valley').[136]At that point, Auda said asked the women why she was unable to believe. They, she claimed, 'confortaverunt eandem et dixerunt ei quod confideret in Deum, quia non erat aliquid qui tantum confortaret eam sicut Deus, nec in quo tantum deberet credere sicut Deum et Sanctam Mariam.'(they comforted her and told her to trust in God, because there wasn't anything that could comfort her as

[132] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 97, 136 d.
[133] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 a.
[134] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 a.
[135] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 a.
[136] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 a.

much as God, and that she should not hesitate at all to believe in God and Holy Mary).[137] Confronted with Auda's testimony, Aladaycis and Ramunda capitulate: 'reducte ad memoriam, ut dixerunt, recognoverunt et confesse fuerunt ita facta processise et actum fuisse sicut supra dixit et asseruit dicta Auda.' (made to remember, they acknowledged and confessed that the events had occurred it had happened just as the said Auda had said and asserted).[138]

Later that same day (29 July), Auda's servant, Guillelma de Athone was also called to give evidence.[139] She had worked, she said, for Auda and her husband for about a year, and was unaware of any heresy or association with heretics committed by Auda or any of her family.[140] Unlike Aladaycis and Ramunda who, initially, flatly denied any misdoing on the part of Auda, Guillelma seems to have been intent to minimise the extent of her mistress's transgression, while not quite denying it. When Fournier asked her, 'si unquam ipsa testis audivit dictam Audam dicentem quod non crederet vel non posset credere Deum' (If ever that witness heard the said Auda saying that she did not believe or was unable to believe in God), she said no.[141] Guillelma also denied that Auda had visited the nurse Aladaycis when she had received communion. She did, however, admit that on that day mentioned, she had seen Auda in her house 'stantem in aula dicti hospicii et iacentem prope dictam Aladaycim et ravatantem intra se et molestantem'; but she claimed that that when Ramunda had asked her why she was behaving in this way, Auda confessed that it was 'quia non poterat rogare Deum'. Fournier, keen to clarify the nature of Auda's disbelief, and not convinced that the servant was telling the truth, repeatedly asked Guillelma, as he had done Aladaycis and Ramunda, if she had ever

[137] The manuscript reads *confrontaret* instead of *confortaret*, but this seems likely to be a scribal error, as Duvernoy points out. Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137a.
[138] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 a.
[139] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 b.
[140] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 b.
[141] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 98, 137 b.

heard Auda mention that she was unable to believe in God, but Guillelma continued to deny this.[142] The next day, Guillelma was asked to repeat her previous statement, but this time in front of her mistress, brought into the court-room for the eighth time. Auda then gave her version of events before Guillelma, who admitted that her previous testimony had been wrong.[143] All three women were subsequently charged with, and punished for, perjury, although there is no record of what form that penance took.[144]

The following Wednesday, 2 August, Auda's nurse, Aladaycis de Pregolh, presented her evidence. [145] She stated that around the feast of John the Baptist (24 June) she had heard that the priest was visiting the home of Guillelma den Ramundo to administer communion to a sick young man, and so she decided to visit the house so that she too could receive it.[146]Auda, who, she said, 'fuerat graviter infirma de qua infirmitate nuper inceperat convalascere'(had been gravely ill with the infirmity from which she had recently begun to recover) wished to do the same: 'dixit ipsi Aladayci quod ipsa volebat ire ad dictum hospicium cum ipsa ut videret corpus Christi'.[147] According to Aladaycis, after the Eucharist had been celebrated, she and Auda had returned to Auda's house together. However, 'cum stetisset per magnam pausam, predicta Auda incepit molestari et clamare ac expoliare se raubuis' (when she had stood still for a long time, the aforementioned Auda began to harm herself and shout and tear at her cheeks). [148]Aladaycis, the nurse, and Guillelma, believing that Auda was suffering from an attack of epilepsy – 'morbum caducum Sancti Pauli' (the falling sickness of Saint Paul) – from which she was wont to suffer, asked Auda why she was

[142]'Interrogata sepe et sepius et frequenter si unquam audivit dictam Audam dicentem se non posse credere Deum, dixit quod non.' (Asked frequently, again and again, if she had ever heard Auda say that she was unable to believe in God, she said no). Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 99, 137b.
[143] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 99, 137b.
[144] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 99, 137b and d.
[145] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 100, 137c.
[146] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 100, 137c.
[147] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 100, 137c.
[148] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 100, 137c.

thus harming herself. She replied, 'Osta, quid faciam? Nam amisi sensum et sum anrava et non possum rogare Deum nec Beatam Virginem Mariam' (Oh! What shall I do? For I have lost my reason and I am mad and I cannot pray to God or the blessed Virgin Mary.)[149] Auda then asked Aladaycis and Guillema to pray to the Virgin Mary to aid her; which they did. On being asked by Fournier if Auda had ever admitted to an inability to believe in God, Aladaycis, said that as far as she could recall, no. However, just like Auda's husband during his testimony, she drew attention to Auda's state of mind, likening her insanity to some sort of delirium caused by her recent illness : 'nam tantum erat tunc debilis et frivola propter gravem infirmitatem quam passa fuerat, […] quod vix poterat bene percipere vel intelligere verba que tunc dicebat dicta Auda' ('for she was then so weak and pitiful on account of the grave illness from which she was suffering […] that she [Aladaycis] could scarcely make out or understand the words that the said Auda was saying'.[150]

Later that same day, Auda was brought before the court once again (this was the ninth time) and 'de voluntate dicte Auda' (at the wishes of the said Auda), the testimonies of all the witnesses were read out. As was customary, Auda rejected her former disbelief and begged for mercy, not justice, and was told to appear in court on 7 August to receive her sentence.[151] On Thursday, 3 August, Fournier summoned an impressive collection of twenty-seven men (twenty-eight if you include Guiilelmus de Pardelhanis, the notary), described as 'venerabiles, religiosos et discretos' (reverend, devout and discrete), representing ecclesiastical and secular authority, to discuss how to proceed with Auda's sentencing.[152] The list is both lengthy and impressive, and included four priors and a sub-prior, several brothers from the local monasteries, two judges, one town official from Pamiers, four lawyers, an

[149] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 101, 137d.
[150] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 101, 137d.
[151] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 101, 137d.
[152] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 101-2, 137d-138a.

advisor to the king, and a priest from the Cathedral. Fournier considered so large a council to be necessary, Bueno suggests, due to, 'the unclear nature of Auda's heresy'.[153] For, as she observes, although 'Auda's experience does not easily match Fournier's interpretive classifications, [Auda's] denial of the eucharistic miracle no doubt called to mind the preaching of the heretics and their criticism of the sacrament of the altar.'[154] Faced with this dilemma of classification of Auda's error, therefore, Fournier called together experts, as it were, in secular and religious law and custom, 'in order to wind up the trial with an appropriate sentence'.[155]

The verdict and the sentence

Auda appeared for sentencing on Monday, 7 August, the day prescribed, suitably contrite and humble. [156] The charge was read out and Auda's disavowal of her previous beliefs was noted, as was her profound penitence:

> demum renunciato et concluso in causa presenti per dictam Audam et secum agi misericorditer humiliter supplicato et cum magno (sic) cordis contritione, ut per eius verbis et actis apparebat, offerente sepe et sepius se paratam recipere et complere penitentiam quamcumque quam idem dominus episcopus pro predictis sibi duxerit inponendam[157]
>
> (and, finally, in this case, with the renunciation by and imprisonment of the said Auda, and that she had begged humbly and wretchedly, with great contrition of heart, so it seemed from her words and behaviour, over and over declaring that she was prepared to receive and fulfil any penance whatsoever that my Lord bishop considered should be imposed for the aforementioned sins).

[153] Irene Bueno, *Defining Heresy: Inquisition, Theology and Papal Policy in the Time of Jacques Fournier*, trans. Isabella Bolognese, Tony Brophy and Sarah Rolfe Prodan, (Brill: Leiden, 2015), p. 141.
[154] Bueno, *Defining Heresy*, p. 141.
[155] Bueno, *Defining Heresy*, p. 141.
[156] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 102, 138a.
[157] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 103, 138b.

The summing-up of the trial, as it appears in the record of Fournier's pronouncement of her sentence, is very brief. There is no mention of Auda's association of the Host with female *turpitudo*, her recollection of the woman who gave birth in the street, or the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary.[158] Auda was sentenced to regular confession, and a rigorous programme of fasts and pilgrimages to take place over a three-year period.[159] The fact that she was neither imprisoned nor made to wear the yellow cross that would have marked her out publicly as a heretic, and that the penance of confession, fasting and pilgrimage to neighbouring churches dedicated to the Virgin who had intervened to save her, suggests that Fournier did not perceive her former error as heretical, but an 'error'. Nothing more is recorded of this seemingly orthodox woman and her unorthodox, transgressive crisis.

[158] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 103, 138b.

[159] 'Iniungimus eidem pro condigna pentencia ut in posterum usque ad tres annos continuos et completes quolibet anno de dictis tribus confiteatur peccata suo proprio sacerdoti in solempnitalibus videlicet Pasche, Pentecostes, Omnium Sanctorum et Nativitatis Domini et in eisdem festivalibus recipiat heucharisie sacramnetum. Item quod quodlibet de predicits tribus annis teneatur se representare nobis vel successori nostro in festo Santi Antonini martiris mensis septembris. Item quod usque ad dictos tres annos ieiunet in pane et aqua omnes sextas ferias nisi esset infirmitate corporis prepedita; si tamen in dicta sexta feria festum Nativitatis Domini vel Beate Marie aut Omnium Sanctorum pervenerit, transferat et transferre possit dictum ieiunium ad diem post dictum festum proxime sequentem. Et ultra hoc ieiunet eodem modo per dictos tres annos vigilas solempnitatum Beate Marie. Item imponimus et iniungimus sibi ut in primo anno de predictis tribus visitet et visitare teneatur ecclesiam Beate Marie de Rupe Amatoris, in secondo anno ecclesiam Beate Marie de Podio, et in tercio anno ecclesiam Beate Marie de Valleviridi. Et in nihilominus quolibet de tribus annis visitet et visitare teneatur ecclesiam Beate Marie de Monte Gaudio.' (We impose upon her as a most deserved penance, that for the next three years, continuous and complete in each of the said three years, she should confess her sins to her own priest at the feasts of Easter, Pentecost, All Saints and the Nativity of the Lord; and that she receive the eucharistic sacrament at these festivals. Item: that in each of the aforementioned three years she should make sure to present herself to us or our successor at the feast of Saint Antoninus the Martyr in the month of September. Item: that throughout the said three years she should fast on bread and water for all six feria, unless she be prevented by sickness of body; if, however, the feasts of the Nativity of our Lord, or Our Lady, or All Saints should fall on the six *feria*, she should transfer or be able to transfer the said fast onto the day after the said feast which has just gone. And in addition to this, she should fast in this way during the said three years on the vigils of the feasts of Our Lady. Item: we impose upon and command her, that in the first year she should visit and ensure that she visit the church of Our Lady of Rocamadour; that in the second year, the church of Our Lady of Puy; and that in the third year, the church of Our Lady of Vauvert. And notwithstanding, in each of the three years, she should visit and ensure that she visit the church of Our Lady of Montgauzy). Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 103-4, 138b-c.

Auda the 'mystic', female spaces and inaccessible communities of discourse

Central to Auda's affective response to Christ's gendered flesh and her subsequent rejection of her 'vision' are the gender-coded spaces in which she experiences and develops her response. The significance of such spaces is discussed in detail by Liz Herbert McAvoy, who explores the multivalent properties of the physical and metaphorical spaces assigned to women in the Middle Ages with particular reference to Julian of Norwich (d. c.1416) and Margery Kempe (d. c.1438/1440).[160] Referring to the scholarship of Barbara Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka on medieval notions of space, McAvoy observes that while there existed a sharp delineation of the spaces occupied by men and women during the Middle Ages - while 'women occupied rooms, houses, quarters in the cities and villages' […] men's activities took them further abroad to streets, highways, fields, cities, oceans, battles and council tables'- and while female incursion into the spaces outside the realms of female-specific activity such as child-rearing and nurture was often regarded as 'suspect' and transgressive, the delineation of these gender-identified spaces was more fluid than Hanawalt and Kobialka suggest, with women participating in the agricultural, urban and religious activities both instead of and alongside men.[161] Such women – from peasant women working alongside men in the fields, to women in cities occupied in commerce independently of husbands, to the beguines communities of non-enclosed religious women who belonged to no religious house – McAvoy argues, existed on the margins of both male and female-coded spaces, and were therefore able to operate in both spheres while not fully accepted into the male-coded spaces in which they could be located.[162] This freedom, however, had to be negotiated with care, for,

[160] Liz Herbert Mcavoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).
[161] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, pp. 3-4; Barbara Hannawalt and Michal Kobialka, eds., *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. x, cited in McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 3
[162] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 4.

as Mary Douglas argues in her seminal study of concepts of purity and pollution, when the boundaries of such gender-identified spaces are breached, their gender-identification is thereby destabilized. As a result, the transgressor, often the woman, can be seen as polluting the space upon which she encroaches.[163]

An example of this pollution is Auda's Kristevan abjection of the female body and the body of Christ, triggered by the fact that the birth she hears about happened outside the female-coded space of the home and the birthing chamber (places where a woman was expected to give birth): in the male-coded space of the street. Thus, the rituals surrounding the preparation for the birth, the birth itself and the immediate lying-in of the woman could not be observed. Instead of being contained within the female-coded birthing chamber, the fluid, blood, and mess accompanying the birth are exposed to the male-coded space of the street. Recalling Douglas's theory of the transgressive female polluting the forbidden areas upon which she has encroached, Christ's body becomes polluted by the filth of the female body from which he is born, just as the filth of the woman's childbirth has polluted the male-coded space of the public street.[164] Auda commits a similar transgression when she conflates the Host with female *turpitudo* in church, assigning the Host with polluting properties – the unclean female, and even worse, female effluvia – thereby disrupting this male-coded space.

Douglas's gendered spaces are not confined to the physical; they can also be 'abstraction[s]', 'culturally constructed ideologue[s] which combine both location and social relations, which then proceed to reinforce on another.'[165]Examples of this multivalence, McAvoy notes, are the bedroom and anchoritic cell of Julian on Norwich, which, she argues, become, 'central to [the visionary's] articulation of her own transition from lack of

[163] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), pp. 140-157, cited in, McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 5.
[164] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 140-158.
[165] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 5, referring to Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 2.

knowledge and youthful naïvety to the mature expression of a seasoned wisdom which characterizes her later writing'.[166] The multivalency of these spaces affect Julian's writing , 'not just because of their locational specificity but also because those meanings are inscribed upon them by Julian herself'.[167] As a result, Julian's anchoritic cell, a space of 'apparent privation' and stricture, paradoxically allows her the freedom to develop her writing.[168]

Auda's notions of Christ's abject body are also profoundly shaped by the enclosed spaces within which she existed – the bedroom and the cell in the ecclesiastical prison in which she was incarcerated during her trial; and her encroachment upon the male-coded, public spaces of church, court-room and the street threatens to destabilize their gender-identification. Like Julian's sickroom and anchoritic cell, Auda's house, and, in particular, her chamber, are female-coded domestic spaces in which (with the exception of Guillelmus Fabri, her husband, to whom she initially confessed her trouble) she is either alone or with select female company.[169] Confined to her sick-bed following her vision and ensuing crisis of faith, Auda receives a number of female visitors: the family friend, Ermengardis Garauda; Aladaycis de Pregolh, who had been employed as a nurse for her son, and was now helping the sick Auda in the house; Aladaycis, widow of Arnaldus Gamicius; and Ramunda widow of Petrus Gamicius; and Guillelma de Athone, the household's maid of all work.[170] To these women, at particular points of her 'crisis', Auda admits her inability to believe, and asks for help.

Auda's initial confidante is the family friend, Emengardis Garauda, whom she calls for, being too sick to leave the house. Ermengardis finds Auda is enclosed in her chamber – *in camera*. This phrase is used several times throughout the deposition, in specific reference

[166] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 6.
[167] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 6.
[168] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 6.
[169] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133c.
[170] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 83, 133b; p. 94, 136a-b; p. 95, 136b.

to Auda. J. F. Niermeyer and C. Van de Kieff define *camera* principally as a 'vault', 'vaulted space', 'small room' or 'bedroom'.[171] By being *in camera*, therefore, Auda is doubly enclosed, as if in a nunnery or anchoritic cell (in a female-coded space within another such identified space) before she attempts to articulate her fears.

In her own version of events, as we have seen, Auda declares, 'Osta, tia, quomodo potest esse non possum credere Dominum, nec eciam possum credere quod hostia que elevator in altari per capellanum sit corpus Christi?'(Oh, *tia*, how is it that I cannot believe in the Lord, nor even am able to believe that the Host, which the priest raises on the altar, is the body of Christ?).[172] In an attempt to bring Auda to her senses, Emengardis then tells Auda the story of the Gregory Mass, which Auda subsequently repeats to her inquisitors:

> Quedam bona mulier antique tempore fecit placentam, que postea fuit sanctificiata per cappellanum in altari, et postea corpus Christi inde confectum ex dicta placenta, consecrata dicta placenta, et cum dictus cappellanus communicaret populum de dicta placenta consecrata, dicta mulier que fecerat dictam placentam hoc videns incepit ridere, vidente hoc dicto cappellano. Et cum appropinquaret dicta mulier ad communicandum dictus cappellanus dixit sibi: 'Trahatis vos retro!', et interrogavit eam de quo riserat, que respondit: 'Domine, et potest esse corpus Christi de placenta quam ego pistavi? De hoc ego risi.' Et statim dictus cappellanus posuit se ad oracionem ut Deus ostenderet miraculum super hoc, cum populo qui erat in ecclesia. Qua oracione facta, cum vellet dare de dicto pane consecrato dicte mulieri, panis quem sibi offerebat consecratus ad communicandum apparuit ut digitus alicuius pueri, et vinum consecratum in calice apparuit ut sanguis coagulates. Que videns dicta mulier perterrita posuit se ad oracionem. Et idem fecit cappellanus cum populo; qua oration facta dicta muliere conversa, et creden(te) in sacramento illo esse corpus Christi, dictus digitus et sanguis in prima specie panis et vini apparuerunt sicut prius, et dicta mulier communicavit devote.' 173
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> (Long ago, a certain good woman made a loaf of bread which was afterwards consecrated at the altar by the priest, and after the body of Christ had been brought about from the said bread, the bread having been consecrated, the said priest offered the consecrated bread to the people. And the said woman who had made the said loaf of bread, seeing this, began to laugh, and the said priest saw this. And when the said woman come forward to receive communion, the said priest said to her, 'Keep away!', and he asked her why she had laughed. And she replied, 'Sir, is it possible for the body of Christ to come from the bread that I baked? That is why I laughed.' And straight away the said priest prayed to God to perform a miracle over the

[171] J.F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft., rev. by J.W.J. Burgers, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 157-8.
[172] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 83-84, 133c.
[173] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 84, 133c.

> bread, in the presence of the people who were in the church. And when he had finished praying, when he wished to give the said consecrated bread to the said woman, the consecrated bread which he was offering her in communion appeared as the finger of a child, and the consecrated wine in the chalice appeared as coagulated blood. When she saw this the said woman was terrified and began to pray, as did the priest along with the people. And after they prayed the said woman was converted and believed that the body of Christ was present in the sacrament, the finger and the blood appeared as the bread and the wine, just as before, and the said woman received communion with devotion).

This version of the legend is particularly telling with regard to Auda's horror of female flesh. The story existed in several versions, with some versions naming the woman, and others having Christ as the Man of Sorrows, bleeding profusely from his many wounds. In Auda's or Emengardis's rendition, however, not only does the bread appears as flesh, but the wine in the chalice becomes coagulated blood.[174] The inclusion of blood is significant, I suggest, for several reasons. Appearing distinct from the finger, the blood assumes, as it were, a separate identity, thus drawing attention to it. Furthermore, the blood's coagulated consistency clearly identifies it with specifically female blood of birthing and menstruation, aspects of female flesh which so horrified Auda but which she only admits to later in her trial. The inclusion of the blood in the chalice, therefore, I suggest, acts as a substitute for the real, unvocalised

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[174] As noted earlier in this chapter, a version of the story is to be found in Jacobus Voragine's life of Saint Gregory, located in his compilation of Saints' Lives, *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend). 'lt happed that a widow that was wont every Sunday to bring hosts to sing mass with, should on a time be houseled and communed, and when S. Gregory should give to her the holy sacrament in saying: *Corpus domini nostri*, etc., that is to say: The body of our Lord Jesu Christ keep thee into everlasting life, anon this woman began to smile tofore S. Gregory, and anon he withdrew his hand, and remised the sacrament upon the altar. And he demanded her, tofore the people, why she smiled, and she said: Because that the bread that I have made with my proper hands thou namest it the body of our Lord Jesu Christ. Anon S. Gregory put himself to prayer with the people, for to pray to God that hereupon he would show his grace for to confirm our belief, and when they were risen from prayer, S. Gregory saw the holy sacrament in figure of a piece of flesh as great as the little finger of an hand, and anon after, by the prayers of S. Gregory, the flesh of the sacrament turned into semblance of bread as it had been tofore, and therewith he communed and houseled the woman, which after was more religious, and the people more firm in the faith.' 'The Life of Saint Gregory' in *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saint*s. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931), vol. 3, pp. 27-32: < http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume3.asp#Gregory> [accessed 29 April 2017]. In John Mirk's account, which he includes as an *exemplum* for his Corpus Christi sermon, the bread becomes 'raw flesse bledyng'. As I discuss in chapter four, Mirk's response to Christ's feminized physicality is distinctly uneasy. Mirk, *Festial*, vol. 1, p. 159.

reason for Auda's profound distress: her horror of pollutant female flesh and, by association, Christ's own body. Here we have an example of how, for Auda, the Kristevan abject in the form of female physicality – here literally embodied in Christ's feminized flesh (Auda's own pre-verbal 'Real') – cannot be expressed, whether in the Symbolic realm of male-centred theology or, for her, as *la mystérique*, and thus results in trauma. Being so profoundly female-centred, Auda cannot articulate her fears outside a female-coded space, yet equally is denied the language, audience or discourse community to voice her fears adequately.

The enclosed space of the female-coded chamber therefore also acts as a substitute, this time for the confessional wherein she hopes to achieve some sort of absolution and penance. Indeed, Guillelmus tells Fournier that when, having heard Auda confide in him her crisis of faith, and having asked her how such a thing had happened, she would only confess fully when she was sure that they were alone and in her chamber. [175] Auda, albeit through the filter of her husband's testimony, uses the language of the confessional ('in confessione') in the bedchamber. In an effort, therefore, to find some sort of redemption from her sins which centre on abject female flesh, Auda attempts to supplant the male-coded ecclesiastical space with the female-coded domestic one. Furthermore, believing the former, with its priestly hierarchy, to be hostile to her plight (especially in the context of its treatment of heretics), she replaces the father-confessor with a series of alternatives, one of whom is her husband, to whom she confides in the domestic space in which she has a measure of control.

Significantly, it is also in the domestic space alone that the unbelieving Auda confesses to a disbelief in the Eucharist and asks for help with her lack of belief. And it is

[175] 'Quibus verbis auditis dictus maritus dicte Auda dixit ei qualiter sibi hoc acciderat, et tunc dicta Auda dixit dicto viro suo si erat aliquis alter in camera et dictus Guillelmus dixit quod non, et tunc dicta Auda dixit quod volebat aliqua dicere in confessione dicto viro suo.' (When he had heard these words, the said husband asked Auda how such thing had happened to her; and then the said Auda asked her said husband if anyone else was in the room and the said Guillelmus said that there wasn't, and then the said Auda said that she wanted to say something in confession to her said husband). Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, pp. 83-84, 133c.

also in the female-coded domestic space that Auda reaches the climax of her suffering – and is cured through the intervention of the Virgin Mary, the perfect and whole woman, the feminine abject transfigured and sublimated. Her cure, as related by Auda's servant, Guillelma, is particularly dramatic. Seeing her mistress abject, raving and fallen on the ground, Guillelma asks, 'O domina, et quid habetis, quare molestatis vos ita?' ('Madam, what is the matter? Why are you harming yourself?'). To which Auda replied, ''Osta, quid faciam? Nam amisi sensum et sum anrava et non possum rogare Deum nec Beatam Virginem Mariam!' dicens dicta Auda ipsi Aladayci et dicte Guillelme pedissece quod flectis genibus ponerent se in orationem et rogarent Beatam Virginem Mariam quod iuvaret dictam Audam, quod et fecerunt dicte Aladaycis et Guillelma. ('Oh, what shall I do? For I have lost my mind and I rave, and I cannot pray to God or the Blessed Virgin Mary?'). At this point, Auda orders Aladaycis and Guillelma to go down on their knees and pray to the Virgin Mary to help her, which they did, resulting in Auda's healing.[176]

However, as the above examples demonstrate, in spite of her 'healing', this gender-identified space also proves unsatisfactory for Auda, who is never able to allow the female reproductive body to transcend its 'filthy' state. It is possible to attribute this incapacity to Auda's exclusion from what Mulder-Bakker has termed, 'communities of discourse', discussed in the context of Mechthild in my previous chapter. Such communities testify to informal settings which allow for the sharing and validation of experiences, such as those enjoyed by the women of Helfta, Clare of Montefalco or Julian of Norwich. When she does share her 'revelation' in the female-coded space of the home, Auda's words are met with horror and incomprehension. Ermengarde, for example, calls her a traitoress and tells her that

[176] Dunernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 100, 137.

she will be burned as a heretic; her other female acquaintances simply advise her to believe or say she believes.[177]

Auda faces a similar predicament when she is visited by her servant and acquaintances who are concerned for her well-being. They find her, 'in aula […] iacentem supra quodam pulvinari et se molestantem et ravantem ac dicentem: "Sancta Maria, succurre michi!"' (lying on a couch in the hall, tearing at herself, and raving and saying, "Sancta Maria, help me!").[178] Auda's inability to vocalise her anguish causes her to resort to the same physical, inarticulate communication as presented in common practices of *imitatio Christi* or *imitatio Mariae*. Her 'raving', tearing at herself', and pleas to the Virgin Mary again recall the utterances other women mystics – Margery Kempe's 'roryng' and writhing in Jerusalem, for example, or Mechthild of Hackeborn's uncontrollable tears – in their performance of the despair and self-loathing that Irigaray so eloquently discusses in 'La Mystérique'.[179] This abjection is made especially powerful for Auda, I suggest, because it is presented without the usual filters of devotional or mystical texts; it is also more poignant because, unlike her visionary sisters, Auda does not recognise her anguish as something already validated by a discourse community, but as an inability to believe. She is thus unable to access the means to express it. While not consciously identifying with Christ's suffering, therefore, Auda nevertheless makes that suffering her own by a behaviour that collapses the boundaries between the divine and the human.

[177] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 87, 134b; p. 95, 135b.
[178] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition*, vol. 2, p. 85, 133d.
[179] Margery similarly faces incomprehension and hostility from those witnessing her devotion: 'for summe seyd it was a wikkyd spirit vexid hir; sum seyd it was a sekeness; sum seyd sche had dronkyn to mech wyn; sum bannyd hir; sum wished sche had ben in þe hauyn; sum wolde sche had ben in þe se in a bottumles boyt'. Allen, *Margery Kempe*, 1.28, pp. 68-71, p. 69.

The contested spaces of prison cell and courtroom

Gender-coding can also be applied to the prison cell in which Auda was confined during her trial. Unlike Mechthild of Hackeborn or Julian of Norwich, Auda was neither alone nor solely in the company of other women during her incarceration. Fournier had a prison built specifically to contain those arrested during his Inquisition, and the cells were occupied by several inmates at a time, and contained both men and women.[180] Nevertheless, the enclosed nature of the cell in which the inmate was shut, and from which she emerged, fundamentally resembles the cell of the cloister or the anchorite. McAvoy refers to Julian's cell as both a tomb, in which she was ritually walled up as one already dead to the world, and a womb from which she would emerge as one reborn after death.[181] Julian developed the metaphor of the cell as womb through her use of childbirth and blood imagery: Christ bleeds from an unseen wound and bloodily labours on the cross to give birth to human redemption.[182] Julian thus reinterprets medieval ambivalence to female reproductive flesh and redeems this flesh through the body of Christ.

Auda, too, experiences a sort of rebirth from the 'anchorhold' of her prison cell. It is here, for example, that Auda decides to confess her eucharistic vision. As far as we can tell from the trial record, Auda told no-one but Fournier of this vision. Such a choice of confidant may seem strange: not only is Fournier a man to whom she is confessing something uniquely feminine, but he can potentially send her to prison or to her death. However, as Elliott observes, following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, there existed an increasing correlation between the role of confessor and penitent, and that of inquisitor and defendant.[183]

[180] I thank Delfi I. Nieto-Isabel from the University of Barcelona for her valuable information concerning Fournier's prison in Pamiers.
[181] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 71.
[182] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, pp. 80-81.
[183] Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 223-29.

Just as in confession to her priest, Auda was expected to search meticulously her memory and confess fully to Fournier, who would then set her the penance which would absolve her of her sins. As we have seen, before testifying, Auda is asked if she needs to emend her previous statements, and she alters her testimony six times. Sometimes the emendations seem relatively trivial, but sometimes Auda's emendations critically change the course of the trial, as, for example, her account of the birth in the street. Crucially, between each appearance Auda is returned to her cell where she examines the accuracy of her previous testimony. Her relationship with Fournier, therefore, closely mirrors that of visionaries and their confessors to whom, following a period of contemplation and communion with God in their cell or anchorhold, they confessed even the most trivial things.[184] Auda's prison cell, therefore, like her bedchamber becomes such a space: it is in this 'anchoritic' womb/tomb that she works through her vision of Christ's contaminated and contaminating flesh in an attempt to expedite her salvation; and it is from here, with the help of her confessor, that she is 'reborn', ready to confess finally to the Inquisition and obtain absolution.

However, Auda's cell was also a problematic space, as it is here that she decides to relinquish her vision, acknowledging that her salvation ultimately depends on confession in the male-coded space of the courtroom. After her appearances in the court-room – ten in all – Auda is returned to the cell, where she waits to be summoned again. The womb-like space of the cell, therefore, suffers continual intrusion from the male-coded space of the courtroom, and Auda's cell becomes a space where male and female voices contend for supremacy. This tension emerges in the numerous dialogues between Auda and Fournier throughout the course of the trial. For example, Auda's admission of equating the *Corpus Christi* with female *turpitudo* – a term so loaded with Cathar heresy – clearly necessitated an enormous amount

[184] For example, Marie d'Oignies confessed to Jacques de Vitry sins she had committed as a child, for which see Brown, *Three women of Liege*, pp. 282-4.

of courage and desperation, yet Fournier refuses to engage with her on a subject of such theological importance. Nevertheless, Auda persists with her admissions and re-merges from her cell to recriminate herself further, even inculpating those who tried to protect her.

(Un)Satisfactory resolution

Unlike the confessors who listened to, record and affirm the revelations of their mystic charges, Fournier ignores Auda's explanations for her distress. He never questions her on her association between female flesh and Christ's body, nor on the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary; but instead pursues Auda's possible connections with Cathar heretics. By encouraging Auda to examine the truth of her confession in her cell, therefore, Fournier attempts to direct her thinking, and so stifle her voice in the courtroom. This contention recalls Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater' in which her personal experiences of childbirth and maternity are lyrically set alongside, and interrupt her drier, academic essay on the cult of the Virgin Mary, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis.[185] While Auda grapples with the complexity and paradox of Christ's body, Fournier seeks to reduce Auda's crisis to a matter of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. However, Fournier's position of authority means that only with his approval could Auda's expression be sanctioned – and in his treatment of her, Fournier thus makes it impossible for Auda to resolve her sense of abjection through mystic expression. This may explain Auda's assertion that she had been rescued ultimately through the intervention of the Virgin Mary: as Wendy Love Anderson argues, with the cult of the Virgin so prominent a part of religious orthodoxy in the later Middle Ages, Auda 'tailored' her defence 'to suit her inquisitorial audience'. [186]

[185] Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', as before.
[186] Anderson, *Real Presence*, p. 750 and p. 758.

Auda appeared for sentencing on Monday, 7 August, suitably contrite and humble.[187] The charge was read out and Auda's disavowal of her previous beliefs was noted, as was her profound penitence. In the summing-up of the trial the abject feminine is eradicated: there is no mention of Auda's association of the Host with female *turpitudo*, or the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary.[188] Auda is spared imprisonment or the public disgrace of wearing the yellow cross of heretics, and sentenced to regular confession and a rigorous three-year programme of fasts and pilgrimages.[189] Fournier, it seems, did not consider Auda to be a heretic, although Fournier possibly considered Auda's crisis to be more complicated than the deposition suggests. For, as, Irene Bueno observes, although 'Aude's experience does not easily match Fournier's interpretive classifications, [her] denial of the eucharistic miracle no doubt called to mind the preaching of the heretics and their criticism of the sacrament of the altar'.[190] The penance of fasting, confession and pilgrimage to neighbouring churches dedicated to the Virgin who saved her, might suggest that Fournier recognized in Auda an unexpected devotion and depth of thought that needed to be addressed, though not encouraged. As for Auda, even if she was not granted the attention that her extraordinary revelation merited, her response to Christ's gendered flesh succeeded in collapsing the boundaries of the male- and female-coded spaces she inhabited, and allowed her eventually to experience at least part of the *jouissance* which marks the mystic through her penance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, in identifying Christ's eucharistic body and blood with the 'filth' of female flesh - a 'filth' she naturally shares - Auda demonstrates her ability to think

[187] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition* vol. 2, p. 102, 138a.
[188] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition* vol. 2, p. 103, 138.b.
[189] Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition* vol. 2, pp. 103-4, 138 b-c.
[190] Bueno, *Defining Heresy*, p. 141.

beyond the orthodox necrophilic and androcentric dogma with its suspicion of the flourishing, fleshly and feminine, and engage with something more akin to female mystical expression. However, it becomes clear from the transcript that Auda cannot move beyond self-loathing and attain the ecstatic joy of a mystic's union with Christ. Helpful in explaining Auda's response is Kristeva's theory of the abject. While Auda can assimilate her own flesh with that of a feminised Christ, she lacks the language to articulate this. Therefore, while finding the language of male authority inadequate (a lack she shares with more 'conventional' mystics), because she cannot access the pre-verbal language that enables women such as Mechthild to transcend the despair, she cannot sublimate the assimilation. Christ's flesh and her own must therefore remain abject, contaminating and transgressive.

Auda's mystic potential and impotence, moreover, are dependent on the spaces she inhabits. Through her withdrawal into the feminine spaces of the bedchamber, and in the community of other women, she attempts to make sense of her reasoning. She does this, too, during her imprisonment, feminising the prison cell, which becomes a sort of womb-like space from which she should emerge, reborn and reconciled with her faith. These spaces, however, prove inadequate, due to the continued intrusion of the male-coded space of the courtroom and the incomprehension and hostility of her family and friends. It is in the courtroom, therefore, where feminine discourse is rigorously controlled and silenced that Auda must ultimately disown her unresolved vision of a feminised, fleshly Christ and adopt the masculine language prescribed to her. Such suspicion of feminine disruption to an androcentric Church, so central to Auda's experience, is also later borne out in another extraordinary image of the polluting blood of Christ: this time in the writing of the fourteenth-century priest, John Mirk, as recorded in sermon 34 of his *Festial*. It is to this episode I now turn as the primary focus of my final chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR.

John Mirk's Wicked Chapman, and Christ's Clotted Blood

Whereas in my two previous chapters I have concentrated on the varied responses to Christ's gendered flesh by women, in this chapter my focus is upon a somewhat overlooked episode in a late fourteenth-century collection of sermons, the *Festial*, written in English by John Mirk, a Shropshire priest. In sermon 34 of the collection, Mirk tells the story of a chapman who refuses to confess his sins and is eventually consigned to Hell by Christ, who reaches into his wounded side and casts his blood into the man's face.[1] As discussed in previous chapters, such manifestations of Christ's humanity, influenced by commonly held notions of gender, were used to convey an orthodox theology of the Godhead. While the paradox of Christ's divine/human identity resonated with women such as Mechthild of Hackeborn, who gloried in the femaleness that bound her to Christ, such a response was not unanimous. Christ's femaleness was potentially problematic. Auda Fabri, for example, was devastated by the theology that linked the Divine to the *turpitudo* of the reproductive female body, a profound antipathy she shared, to some extent with the Cathar heretics with whom she was originally equated. In this chapter, I argue that Mirk's *exemplum* also reveals an underlying anxiety regarding Christ's physical humanity, despite the commonplace iconographic and narrative use of Christ's bleeding body. Using René Girard's theory of the sacrifice and violence, and drawing again on the theories of Kristeva, Jantzen, and Irigaray used in previous chapters, I suggest that, by portraying Christ's blood and body as polluting, and by identifying that same body and blood with that of the wicked and abject chapman within the

[1] John Mirk, *John Mirk's Festial: Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A. ll*, 2 vols, ed. Susan Powell, EETS 334 and 335 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vol. 1, pp.130-6.

context the Plague, the Uprising (also known as the Peasants' Revolt) and the threat of heresy, Mirk, too recognises them as female and inherently transgressive.

The text

The *Festial* (*F*) is a collection of sermons, written somewhere between 1382 and 1390.[2] The sermons mark holy days and saints' days throughout the Church year and were intended for delivery by parish priests of limited learning to congregations with little or no education. It is one of three works by Mirk, who was first canon and then the prior of Lilleshall Abbey, an Augustinian establishment near Shrewsbury in Shropshire. His other two works are the vernacular *Instructions for Parish Priests* (an editorial title) and the Latin *Manuale Sacerdotis*, which contains similar material to *Instructions*.[3]

The *Festial* was enormously popular. In its manuscript form it was circulated in the Welsh Marches, the Midlands, North Wales, and possibly as far as London and Ireland.[4] From 1483 until 1532 it was published in printed form by Caxton and then Wynkyn de Worde, thus reaching a much wider readership. Its popularity has been attributed not only to the fact that its content and style appealed to the largely rural and uneducated priests and parishioners for whom it was intended, but that it also contained material for what Alan Fletcher describes as the 'bread-and-butter preaching at marriages and funerals, all being

[2] *F* and 'Group B' are editorial titles, used by Susan Powell, Alan Fletcher, and other Mirk scholars, to distinguish the different versions of Mirk's *Festial*. Alan Fletcher places it between 1382 and 1390. Susan Powell is more specific, locating it in the latter part of the 1380s. Alan Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards, *Medium Aevum* 56. 2 (1987), pp. 217-224 (p. 218). Powell, *Festial,* p.xxi; Susan Powell, 'A New Dating of John Mirk's *Festial*', *Notes and Queries* NS 29: pp. 487-9. Miri Rubin dates the *Festial* much later, at around 1415. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 222.
[3] Powell, *Festial,* p. xix.
[4] Powell, *Festial,* pp. xliv-xlviii.

conveniently available between the covers of one book'.[5] Several versions of Mirk's *Festial* exist.[6] Shortly after its completion, the *Festial* was significantly revised (this version being known as Group B), with its order changed and some material cut. This version in turn was revised and material added to appeal to a 'more sophisticated audience'.[7]

The original manuscript of the *Festial* no longer exists. Nevertheless, as Powell asserts, along with the base text (London, BL MS Cotton Claudius A.II (α)), there survive no fewer than twenty-one perfect, or once perfect, texts of the *Festial* (*F*) in either printed or manuscript form in addition to four manuscripts of the revised *Festial* nineteen manuscripts (one in Welsh), with between one and twenty *F* sermons or extracts from *F* sermons.[8] The *Festial* was substantially re-ordered and edited shortly after it was written, and it was in this form (Group B) that it was initially printed and published. It is, moreover, unique in being the only collection of sermons printed in pre-Reformation England.[9] At some point after 1434, an attempt was made to revise the *Festial*, rewriting, to some extent, the sermons by adding adding some from elsewhere and including significantly more Latin in order at appeal to a more wealthy and educated readership. However, this revised form does not seem to have attracted the same popularity as the other versions, which contain Mirk's quick pace and lively exchange.[10] The *Festial*'s publication stopped abruptly in 1532, following England and Wales's break from the Roman Church, but Mirk's sermons were still being used post-

[5] Fletcher, 'John Mirk', p. 217.
[6] Fletcher, 'John Mirk', p. 217.
[7] Powell, Festial, p. i.
[8] Powell, *Festial,* pp. xliii-xliv. For detailed information concerning the history, production and dissemination of the *Festial*, as well as an extensive and useful bibliography, see Powell, *Festial,* p. xix-cxlv.
[9] Powell, *Festial,* p. xix, lv.
[10] Powell, *Festial,* p. xix.

Reformation, even as far as the reign of Elizabeth, although more surreptitiously than before and in a more fragmented form.[11]

Mirk used several literary sources for the sermons in the *Festial*, rewriting and often simplifying them to suit his readership and the message he wanted to convey.[12] The main, but not only source of Mirk's narratives, as Mirk acknowledges in his prologue, was the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus of Voragine (d. 1298). The *Legenda Aurea* was a medieval 'best-seller', both in manuscript form, with about nine hundred copies surviving, and in printed form.[13] Written originally in Latin, it was widely translated into the vernacular, with William Caxton's printed version running to as many as nine editions, in the latter of which appeared an extensive collection of *vitae* and accounts of incidents in the lives of Christ and the Virgin, to take the reader through the Church year. It was compiled in Latin between around 1259-66 and comprises of relatively short, simply delivered, and entertaining stories, with a limited amount of exegesis and theology. As such, it was the obvious choice and an invaluable source of information for the *Sanctorale* sermons of the *Festial*, which commemorated similar events in the Church calendar, as well as for the *Temporale* chapters – those marking Lent, Easter, Christmas etc. – though to a lesser extent.[14] However, Mirk is indebted to other sources too. Besides demonstrating a familiarity with the Vulgate Bible and the writings of scholars such as Augustine, Gregory the Great and Bernard of Clairvaux, Mirk also made use of popular works such as the *Gesta Romanorum*, John Beleth's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, legendaries such as *The South English Legendary*, *Ancrene Wisse* and other

[11] Powell, *Festial*, p. xix; pp. lvii-lvix; Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) p. 10.
[12] Powell, *Festial*, pp. xxxiii-xxxv.
[13]Voragine, *Golden Legend*: < https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/goldenlegend/> [accessed 20 October 2020].
[14] Powell, *Festial*, p. xxxii.

collections of lives and *exempla*.[15] This manipulation of such material is evident in sermon 34, in which Mirk demonstrates a familiarity with the *Gesta Romanorum*, and possibly Robert Manning of Brunne's (d. c. 1338) *Handlyng Synne*, both of which contain a version of Mirk's *narratio* of the wicked chapman mentioned above, with the *Gesta* containing a version of all three of the sermon's *narrationes*.[16] Moreover, the central role Mirk gives to blood in the latter two *narrationes* reflects its treatment in *Ancrene Wisse*, suggesting a familiarity with this work too. It is unclear how Mirk obtained access to his sources. Details of the contents of the library at Lilleshall Abbey are unknown, but, as Powell notes, Mirk could well have had access to books other than those in the library – the libraries at Oxford University, for example, or the Augustinian houses at Leicester, Southwark and Thurgaton in Nottinghamshire.[17]

Mirk was not alone in producing vernacular teaching and preaching material in the fourteenth century. Although the level of literacy among the rural and the urban communities had certainly increased from as early as the end of the thirteenth century, the vast majority of

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[15] Powell, *Festial*, p. 3; pp. xxiv-xxv. The *Gesta Romanorum* is an anonymous collection of secular and sacred stories, written in Latin probably between the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, but added to thereafter. It was a very popular collection, translated into several European languages and a favourite with European printers. Its influence is apparent in the works of medieval and early modern writers such as of Dante, Chaucer, Boccacio and Shakespeare. The *South English Legendary* is a Middle English late thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives, from the south west of England. Like the *Gesta*, it too was a popular text. John Beleth's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, also known as *Summa de Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, is a twelfth-century liturgical manual, written in Paris three strains of the Yersinia bacterium which caused the Black Death. The Bubonic plague was the least contagious and fatal, with a fifty percent chance of recovery and used throughout Europe. *Ancrene Wisse* is a guide for anchoresses, written in a West Midlands dialect somewhere between 1225-40. Although it was intended for an anchorite community, its popularity exceeded its original readership. *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum* ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, EETS 33 (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1879); *The Early South-English Legendary, or Lives of Saints*, ed. Carl Hortsman, EETS 87 (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1851); Johannis Beleth, *Summa de Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, ed. Herbert Douteil, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976); *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hasenfratz-ancrene-wisse-introduction> [accessed 20 October 2020].

[16] Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* is a collection of devotional homilies, written in English, in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, and based loosely on a French preaching handbook. It was intended for lay and clergy, and aimed at a relatively unsophisticated readership. Robert Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng synne," A. D.1303: with those parts of the Anglo-French treaties on which it was founded, William of Wadington's "Manuel des pechiez," / Vol. 1. by Mannyng, Robert, fl. 1288-1338. William, de Wadington, 13th cent.* ed. Furnivall, Frederick James, EETS 119 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner Co. Ltd, 1871).

[17] Powell, *Festial*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

the population in England we nevertheless illiterate at the time when Mirk was writing, and so religious instruction was delivered either visually or orally.[18] For those who could both read and afford them, books of hours, or Primers, were a common means of religious instruction and were intended to aid more private lay devotion. These were written in either Latin or the vernacular, or both; the anonymous *Lay Folk's Mass Book* (an editorial title), written around the same time as the *Festial*, is one such example.[19] Also available was instruction for non-Latin literate priests to aid them in their parish duties.[20] Such literature was anticipated to reach people other than the clergy, as is demonstrated by the frequent use of metrical rhyming in such literature, the prominence given to (often sensational) narrative and the absence of academic theological discussion. It is into this category that the *Festial* falls.

Previous scholarship on Sermon 34

Susan Powell's recent critical edition of Mirk's *Festial* is an invaluable aid to its study, providing a clear text, along with thorough notes and introduction, replacing Thomas Erbe's 1905 edition with a more reliable and accurate copy of Mirk's sermon collection. Powell's work, however, is not concerned with Mirk's response to a feminized Christ; and so, in her notes on sermon 34, and in the edition's introduction, Christ's extraordinary performance is not commented upon. Alan Fletcher is also silent in this respect, scrutinising the *Festial*'s date and composition and Mirk's response to the Lollard heresy.[21]

[18] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984) pp. 101-133.
[19] *The Lay Folks' Mass Book: or, Manner of Hearing Mass : With Rubric and Devotions for the People; in Four Texts ; and, Offices in English according to the Use of York : from MSS. of the Xth to the XVth Century*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons, EETS 118 (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1879).

[21] Alan Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', *Medium Aevum* 56. 2 (1987), pp. 217-224.

Despite the unusual interaction between Christ and the chapman, Sermon 34 (and this *narratio* in particular) has received relatively little scholastic attention. Miri Rubin makes reference to John Mirk's sermon for Corpus Christi, with regard to preaching, drama, fraternities and processions commemorating the feast, and its eucharistic significance, but does not discuss Sermon 34.[22] In her recent edition of the *Festial,* Powell, also makes no comment regarding this episode, neither in her introduction nor in the textual notes. The passage, however, *has* received some attention from Bynum and Eamon Duffy. Both regard Mirk's *narratio* as a warning of possible impending judgement on the unfaithful, but neither comments on the uncharacteristic nature of Christ's action.[23] Bynum associates Mirk's story with Passion Week performances and self-mortification, a phenomenon which gathered momentum in Europe in response to the plague: such representations of Christ, she declares, were intended to 'inspire terror as well as devotion'.[24] Emphasising the salvific role of Christ's blood in medieval eucharistic devotion, Bynum distinguishes attitudes to Christ's blood experienced by the pious laity (who, like the author of the popular devotional text, *A Talking of the Love of God,* 'rolled ecstatically in a sweet nest of flesh and blood'), and those more ordinary souls whom 'John Mirk's preacher might frighten […] with tales of Christ flinging blood-clots into their faces.[25]

Ford offers a much fuller treatment of the *Festial,* examining it in its historical context, and arguing convincingly that it is written in direct answer to the threat of Lollard heresy and social upheaval which characterised the end of the fourteenth century.[26] Ford maintains that Mirk offers an orthodox understanding of late-medieval Catholicism: while it

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[22] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 223.
[23] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 4-6, p. 15; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 247.
[24] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 4-6.
[25] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 5.
[26] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 71-112

was possible for the individual to obtain access to Christ without the intervention of the priest, nevertheless confession and absolution through the correct, ordained clerical channels were essential to obtain salvation.[27] It is in this context that she discusses the *narratio* of the wicked chapman: indeed, Sermon 34, which she uses to preface her study, is key to her argument regarding the *Festial*'s role in attacking Lollardy.[28] While acknowledging the unusualness of Christ's blood-flinging, however, Ford does not explore this aspect of the narrative.[29]

Without detracting from the work of the above scholars, I wish to approach a small part of Mirk's *Festial* from a different perspective. The aim of this chapter is to locate the second *narratio* of Sermon 34 within the context of what I argue is Mirk's profound uneasiness at the emphasis placed on Christ's fleshliness within affective devotional contexts, a form of devotion which exploited the Aristotelian and Augustinian notion of the inferior and faulty female and feminine (as outlined in my first chapter). In so doing my analysis will demonstrate how Mirk's *narratio* ends up inculpating Christ himself.

Mirk's *Festial* and its historical context

Mirk wrote the *Festial* towards the end of a century distinguished by a series of crises, whose consequences were far-reaching and long-lasting. The unity of the Church was threatened by heresy and internal dissent, resulting in the papal court's move to Avignon and challenges to papal authority, with the enthroning of two and even three popes at one time (the Great Schism). In England the culmination of growing dissatisfaction between the monarch and his

[27] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 147.
[28] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 48-51.
[29] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 50-1.

government resulted in the overthrow of two monarchs (Edward II in 1327, and Richard II in 1399). Furthermore, from 1337 until 1453, England was engaged in a series of unsuccessful campaigns with France (the Hundred Years War) which drained the country both financially and in manpower. On top of all this, the Black Death swept Europe, Asia and |North Africa and the East from 1346 until 1351, wiping out as much as half the population of Britain and Ireland, profoundly affecting the economy, and contributing significantly to religious and social discontent.[30] This dissatisfaction found expression in the Uprising of June 1381, when thousands of rebels led by Wat Tyler stormed London, demanding a halt to higher taxes, inflation, and lower wages.[31] Another profound effect of religious and social discontent following the Black Death in England was the rise of the heterodox Lollard movement. Influenced to a great extent by the teachings of John Wyclif (d. 1384), it promoted the authority of the Bible and the role of the individual in his or her salvation, and challenged the authority of the pope, the belief in transubstantiation, and the role of the priest as intermediary for the divine in confession and the Eucharist.[32]

As mentioned above, there is some debate as to whether the *Festial* itself was written as a direct response to the Lollard heresy, although recent scholarship favours this theory.[33] Ford, for example, observes that, while Mirk specifically addresses Lollardy in just two of his sermons (Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi), he categorically supports social and religious practices condemned by the Lollards: sacerdotal and secular authority, as well as his belief in the authority of Christian, rather than Bible-based, tradition. Despite, therefore, his support

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[30] On these and other contemporary issues, see the essays collected in *Fourteenth-Century England,* ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010).
[31] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 3-4. For a recent study of the Uprising, see Juliet Barker, *England, Arise: The People, the King and the Great Revolt of 1381* (London: Little Brown, 2014).
[32] For two of many comprehensive studies on the topic of Lollardy and Wyclif, see, Margaret Hudson, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984); and *Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England*, ed. Fiona Spencer, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pittard (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003).
[33] Powell, *Festial,* p. lv.; Alan Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', *Medium Aevum* 56/2 (1987), p. 218; Ford, *John Mirk's Festial,* pp. 144-147.

for the common, rural and illiterate, and his condemnation of the abuse of wealth and power, , in writing the *Festial*, Ford argues, Mirk was deliberately 'engaged in a program of eroding public receptivity to the threats to the establishment posed by Lollardy and rebellion' through their 'participatory engagement in the church'.[34] Indeed, Mirk spells out this intention in the *Festial*'s preface, declaring that its purpose is to produce a ready collections of sermons, enabling unlearned parish priests :

> to teche hore pareschonus of alle the principale festus that cometh in the ȝere, schewing home what the seyntes soffreden and dedun for Goddus loue, so that that schuldon haue the more deuocion in Goddus seyntys and with the better wylle con to the chyrche to serue God and pray to holy seyntys of here help.[35]

By providing a collection of accessible sermons filled with exciting stories of saints and sinners, Mirk hoped to counter social and religious dissidence and encourage orthodox worship among parishioners and the priests serving them.

While Mirk omits direct reference to the Black Death in the *Festial*, it is nevertheless present in the text. Such a specific omission is not unique to the *Festial*, however; indeed, it is a characteristic of writing in England at that time. In his examination of the Apocalypse within the writings of Julian of Norwich and William Langland, Justin Byron-Davies argues that the historical and ever-present crises of war famine and plague witnessed or feared by these writers, echoing images of disease and war contained in the Book of Revelation, materialise concertedly in the writings of these authors.[36] Likewise, David K. Coley

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[34] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 147. An excellent example of this tempered yet forceful conservative teaching is evident in Mirk's sermon for advent, the first sermon in the Festial, in which he urges acceptance of misfortune and lot, promising that Christ will 'horybuly rebuke rych men þat han don no mercy', on the Day of Judgement. Powell, *Festial*, p. 6,

[35] Powell, *Festial*, p. 3.

[36] Justin Byron-Davies, *Revelation and the Apocalypse in late Medieval Literature: The writings of Julian of Norwich and William Langland* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020).

recognises the presence of the plague in the four poems of the Pearl Manuscript.[37] He observes that, while descriptions of the effects of the plague are graphically recounted in European literature, its presence in post-plague literature in England is 'surprisingly subdued'. However, he argues, references to the plague are nevertheless present as 'allusive' and 'oblique' responses to the trauma of the Black Death, at once 'unspeakable' and refusing to be silenced.[38] Such a response he describes as, 'an unspoken symptom, not only as a conscious reaction to the personal and cultural upheavals catalysed by the Black Death, but also as an unconscious indicium', referring to Judith Herman's assertations that, while 'the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness', such consciousness cannot be entirely 'stifled', for, 'the need to speak the unspeakable […] always stands in powerful opposition to the urge toward silence'.[39]

It is possible to read Mirk's *Festial* in such a way. The plague was not only a memory, but continued to surface throughout Britain up to the fifteenth century (1361-64; 1369-71; 1374-75; 1390 and 1400). In the *Festial*, therefore, the trauma of the plague's devastation is remembered, re-enacted, and predicted. It manifests itself in Mirk's depictions of Hell and Purgatory, where the wickedness of human souls is written on their flesh. It is as a punishment for past and present sins and a reminder of the Judgement to come.[40] Evidence of the trauma of the plague may be seen, for example, in Sermon 29.[41] In this sermon for Easter Sunday, traditionally the feast when the lay people would receive Communion, Mirk tells of a bishop who, having asked God to reveal which of his congregation was unworthy,

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[37] David Coley, *Death and the Pearl Maiden: Plague, Poetry, England* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2019).
[38] Coley, *Death and the Pearl Maiden*, p. 19.
[39] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 1, cited in Coley, *Death and the Pearl Maide*n, p. 53.
[40] It was a commonly held belief that natural disasters were God's judgement on humanity because of its wickedness. For example, see 'A Notabilite of the Scripture what Causith the Pestilence', BL Sloane MS 965, fol. 143r, cited in Coley, *Death and the Pearl Maiden*, pp 49-50, n. 1, p. 80.
[41] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 116-117.

he is shown 'faces redde os blode and blode droppynge oute of her mowthes', or 'blace as any pyche'. These symptoms are strikingly similar to the *sputum ex ore sangineum* (the bloody phlegm from the mouth) of the pneumonic development of the plague, described by Gabriele de Mussis (d. c. 1356). [42] Red and black were also colours associated with Hell, the Devil, and the damned. In Mirk's *exemplum*, these corpse-like members of the congregation are:

> envious men and women and ful of dedly wrathe, and wyl not amende hem, and gnawen hem behende, and bene vsed for to swere orybul opus be Goddys blode and hys sydus and v[m]breydon God of hys passioun and done hym no reuerens', and 'lecherus men and women þat wil not leve here synne no here lust, ne wil not schriue hem of hit.[43]

The disfigurements the men and women display, therefore, reflect both the state of their souls and the Apocalyptic-like devastation of the plague. They are, moreover, presented in stark contrast to the men and women whose sins, though great, have been washed away by God's grace through their repentance, confession, and penance, and whose faces, in contrast, are 'whyte as snowe', 'fayre and rody and lysty' or 'as bryte as þe sonne', foreshadowing their state of eternal bliss in heaven, and a bodily resurrection unmarked by the disfigurement of the plague.[44]

While this chapter is not an examination of post-plague trauma in Mirk's *Festial*, trauma is evident in the work and affects his treatment of Christ's gendered body in Sermon 34. The devastation the plague wrought upon the body was visible and extreme. It was highly contagious, usually fatal, and very visible on the bodies of its victims: among the effects

[42] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 116-117.
[43] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 116-117.
[44] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 116-117.

were swellings of the lymph nodes (buboes), giddiness, intolerance to light, speech disorder, breathlessness, fluid on the lungs, internal bleeding, coughing up bloody sputum.[45] All such aspects of the disease emphasised the physical, fleshly - the feminine, weaker - part of the human, that needed to be controlled by the spiritual, 'masculine' part.

Kristeva's *correlation* between leprous and disabled flesh and the maternal, birthing body is also helpful for gaining understanding of attitudes towards the plague-infected flesh of the Black Death. [46] As she points out, whereas, in Leviticus, the male Israelite child was separated from the maternal, impure body by the outward sign of circumcision, and thus allied with God, the female child remained allied with nature and the feminine.[47] Leprosy, and other disabilities, however, blurred the boundaries and thereby associated the male body with the maternal, unclean and decaying.[48] In a similar way, the disfiguring, putrefying, and rampant nature of the plague, with its effect upon the visible flesh, blurred both the boundaries of gender and those between the living and the dead, turning living flesh, as in Mirk's red and black, blood-dribbling sinners, into corpses (considered by Kristeva as the most abject of all horrors) while yet alive.[49] This obvious and widespread contamination exacerbated the already necrophilic focus that characterised the type of orthodox, androcentric Christian theology discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and encouraged a profound distrust of the physical, fecund and feminine (as is evident in Auda Fabri's horror and crisis of faith discussed in my previous chapter). By associating the plague with flesh, sin

[45] There were three strains of the Yersinia bacterium which caused the Black Death. The Bubonic plague was the least contagious and fatal, with a fifty percent chance of recovery. The Pneumonic, which attacked the lungs and air-born, was more deadly, with just a ten percent chance of recovery. The Septicaemic Plague, which infected the blood, was fatal. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/a_to_z/plague-yersinia-pestis-a-to-z >, [accessed 24 October 2020].
[46] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 100.
[47] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 99-100; Leviticus, 12:3.
[48] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 101, 108-9; Leviticus, 13-14:21.
[49] Kristeva writes that, 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life'. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

and decay, Mirk invokes the feminine and the physical at its most extreme and abject – and in opposition to the masculine and the spiritual. As I demonstrate below, this inevitably affects his theological response to Christ's own disfigured, wounded and boundary-blurring body.

Sermon 34 and Girard's theory of sacred violence

As demonstrated later in this chapter, René Girard's theory of sacred violence is helpful here in explaining Mirk's Kristevan treatment of Christ and the chapman. Girard argues that society survives through a community's practice of mimetic violence against individuals or groups - 'sacrificeable victim' - upon whom they cast the blame for violence. The violence that the community suffers can take several forms: plague, disease or some 'small scale violence'. An individual is targeted and accused of heinous crimes which, the community claims, have caused the disaster. The purpose of sacrifice is, 'to achieve a radically new type of violence, truly decisive and self-contained'.[50] Violence is therefore used to stop violence. It is mimetic - in that it is imitated from previous violent actions – contagious, and accumulative: 'the more men strive to curb their violent impulses, the more these impulses seem to prosper'.[51]Girard argues that violence 'consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase, in proportion to man's efforts to master them […].Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred'.[52] Society thus seeks to distinguish 'good' violence from 'bad' violence, 'good' blood from 'bad' blood.[53] The ritual of sacrifice is therefore the 'regular exercise of good violence'.[54]

[50] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 28.
[51] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 31.
[52] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 32.
[53] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 33-38.
[54] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

Also, according to Girard, when selecting a victim, actual guilt or innocence is unimportant. However, for the violence to be deflected successfully, two things are necessary. The first, is that the choice of victim and the belief in the victim's guilt must be unanimous: 'unanimity is a formal requirement; the abstention of a single participant renders the sacrifice even worse than useless - it makes it dangerous'.[55] The second, is the need for the correct balance between the victim's otherness, and their similarity to the community.[56] Despite following these precautions, a 'sacrificial crisis' will sometimes arise when, for various reasons – for example, repetition of the ritual or changes in the 'hierarchical system both social and religious – and the sacrifice offered initially seems therefore ineffective. It is at this point that a surrogate victim is required: one on the margins of the community, who, as part of the ritual, is forced to commit taboo actions, thereby making him/herself a suitable substitute for the violence.[57] The victim is made monstrous, portrayed as something other than 'normal'– a beast, a god, a foreigner. The victim, too, has a 'monstrous double', assuming the role of both victim and executioner. Although monstrous and transgressive, the surrogate victim is identified as a hero, god or sacred king, who dies in the 'guise of the monstrous double'. Girard argues that the hero is often both 'transgressor' and 'destroyer of monsters', like, for example, Sophocles' Oedipus, who, 'draws to himself a violent reaction, whose effects are felt throughout the community', but whose eventual death, 'transforms into a guarantee of order and tranquillity'.[58] Girard's theory is further complicated by an

[55] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp.100-101
[56] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 41-2.
[57] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 41-46; 50-1; 70-1; 91.
[58] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp.91-2. In Sophocles' play, *Oedipus the King*, having destroyed the Sphinx, ruled Thebes for many years, married its queen, and having fathered four children by her, Oedipus attempts to rid the city of a plague. He discovers that he is the source of the city's suffering, having unwittingly killed his father and married his mother, the king and queen of Thebes. Overwhelmed by guilt and self-disgust, Oedipus blinds himself. He is cast out of Thebes, which is then released from the plague. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the exiled king dies in a sacred grove at Colonus, a village outside Athens. While Oedipus's death itself does not, in fact, bring peace to Thebes, the burial of his body, and the protection of his remains allow Athens to establish the rule of law in the city.

additional layer to ritual violence's mimetic pattern, when the surrogate victim is replaced by a substitute victim who imitates the role of the king or hero and re-enacts his/her sacrifice.

Sermon 34

The episode I wish to discuss in this light in this present chapter is, as mentioned above, contained in Mirk's additional sermon for the first Sunday in Lent – *dominica prima Quadragesime* (no. 34 in Powell's edition).[59] The sermon's overarching theme is the necessity of priestly confession in obtaining forgiveness for sins committed and avoiding the dreadful and everlasting punishment of Hell after death.[60] Mirk is at pains to point out God's beneficence and reluctance to condemn: '*Nolo mortem peccatoris sed ut magis conuertatur et vivat*. "I wil not", he saþe, "þat a sinful man be dede, but I wil raþer þat he turne to God and lyffe'". However, God's judgement upon those who refuse the offer of salvation is terrible:

> Alle þat is now helud in schryfte schal be at þe day of dome knowon to alle þe worlde with myche confusion, and þan schal he þat heluth bene demod off God þerfore into þe fyre off helle. Þerfore þe apostul saythe þus: *Horrendum est incidere in manus Dei omnipotentis',* þat is to say: hit is horribul and grisly to fallon into Goddus handus. Wherefore I amonysche ȝow þat ȝe take not þis grace of demynge in veyne, but schryue ȝow clene and leuith noȝte hydde in ȝoure herte. [61]

[59] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 130-136.
[60] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 81-4, and pp. 130-136.
[61] Powell, *Festial*, p. 134, ll. 57-60, ll. 144-150.

Mirk illustrates his point with three narratives (*narrationes*).[62] In the first and third of these, the protagonists suffer eternal damnation, not for the sins they commit but for their refusal to confess and repent: in the first, it is an impoverished knight who murders a chapman to steal his gold and marry the woman he loves; and in the third *narratio* it is the wicked chapman who gets his comeuppance.[63] Sandwiched between these two is a *narratio* concerning a woman who 'hadde done an horrybul synne and myȝte neuer for schame schryue hur þeroff', but who repents after being visited by Christ.[64] The moral of the story is that, no matter how dreadful a person's sin, through full confession to a priest, as per Lateran IV, Christ will forgive them. However, the *narratio* reveals Mirk's discomfort with the physical, feminized, Kristevan abject presented in Christ's wounded and bleeding flesh, a discomfort that is developed in the narrative of the chapman.

In this particular *narratio*, Mirk writes that, one night, as this woman lies awake, thinking of her sin, Christ himself appears before her: 'My dowthtur,' he asks her, 'why wilte þou noȝte schew me þi herte and schryuen þe of þat synne þat lythe þerinne?' The woman demurs: 'Lorde,' quoth scheo, 'I may noȝte for schame.' At this, Christ tell her, 'schew me þi hande'. He then takes her hand, places it in his side, and 'drow hit owte alle blady', saying, 'Be þou no more acshamud to opon þi herte to me þan I am to opon my syde to þe'. Mirk continues, 'Þan was þis womman agryud (terrified) off þe blode and wolde a wassone hit away, but scheo myȝte notte be no way tul scheo wore schryuen of þat synne.' Her hand

[62] Throughout the *Festial*, Mirk refers to the narratives he includes in his sermons as *narrationes*. These, as Powell explains, differ from *exempla*, being more simply delivered, and without the more learned theological discourse and exegesis which *exempla* usually contain. I follow Powell's practice in retaining *narratio* with reference to these narratives, therefore. Powell, *Festial*, pp. xl-xliii.
[63] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 132-314, ll. 74-150; and pp.134-135, ll.151-190.
[64] Powell, *Festial*, pp.134-135, ll.151-152.

remains bloody, but when the woman confesses her sin to her priest, it becomes white again. Mirk concludes, 'Þus God dothe grace in esy demynge'.[65]

What is evident in this *narratio* is that the nature of the sin is immaterial: what matters is confession. Mirk reinforces this point:

> For þus muche I presume of Goddus grace and his mercy, þat þe fende off helle, and he wolde aske mercy wit a meke hertre off Godde, God wolde ȝeuon hym mercy. Þan myche more he wil ȝeuon a man mercy þat he sched his herteblode fore.[66]

As Ford observes, the story does not appear in Mirk's primary source, the *Legenda Aurea*, so arguably it is of Mirk's own making. It includes tropes common to other sources both post- and pre-dating Mirk. Christ's intimate and direct address to an individual, for example, features in the writings of Langland, Dante, Mechthild of Hackeborn, who predate Mirk, as well as in those of, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, writing at around the same time as him.[67]

Also in keeping with the theme of the sermon, and reflecting the importance Mirk places upon orthodox confession, is the trope of the secret and shameful sin. This trope appears in other didactic works written in both Latin and in the vernacular. In an early fourteenth-century account, for example, the spirit of a certain Gy, returns from Purgatory where he is suffering for a dreadful and unnamed sin for which he and his wife have failed to do penance; in another narrative, recounted in the Middle English, the *Trental of St Gregory*,

[65] Powell, *Festial*, p. 134, l. 165.
[66] Powell, *Festial*, p. 135, ll. 186-190.
[67] Ford, *Mirk's Festial*, pp. 40-41.

the ghost of the saint's mother, who has not confessed the murder of her illegitimate child, appears to her son; Margery Kempe attributes the madness she suffers following the birth of her first child to a sin she cannot confess, but from which she is cured when Christ visits her bedside; and Auda Fabri (as discussed in chapter three) also initially attributes her lack of faith to a sin which, for shame, she had failed to confess.[68]

Ford uses the above *narratio* to demonstrate a potentially heterodox presence in an overtly orthodox text, maintaining that, while Mirk remains firmly orthodox in his teaching regarding the role of the priest in confession and the Eucharist, his sermons frequently reveal the influence of Lollard belief in the lay person's ability to approach Christ without the need for a priestly mediator.[69] By 'decentraliz[ing]' the role of the priest here and elsewhere in the *Festial*, she argues, Mirk endeavours to make confession not only 'palatable', but even 'attractive' to his readers. This is achieved, she argues by the intimacy that Mirk creates between the woman and Christ. He appears before the woman at night and in the private space of her bedchamber, for example, outside the environment of the church or confessional, which causes her so much dread. Moreover, Ford notes, in the physical act of putting her hand into Christ's side, Christ and the woman,

> engage in a voluntary and reciprocal exchange of knowledge. Christ extends to her the knowledge of his heart, allowing her to violate the integrity of his being, in return for her revelation of sins which she would rather not recount.[70]

[68] *Three Purgatory Poems: The Gast of Gy, Sir Owain, The Vision of Tundale*, ed. Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004); *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. C Horstmann, EETS 98 (London: Oxford University Press, 1892); Allen, *Margery Kempe*, ch.1, pp. 6-9.
[69] Ford, *Mirk's Festial*, pp. 39-45.
[70] Ford, *Mirk's Festial*, p. 45.

The reciprocity and physicality to which Ford draws our attention is certainly striking, and one which Mirk considers to be important, occupying as it does a good amount of the *narratio*. However, the same reciprocity and physicality of the encounter are also problematic. While Mechthild of Hackeborn can revel in a union with Christ which is dependent on a shared fleshly and feminized identity, in Mirk's narrative, however, rather than being a place of sanctuary, nurture and reciprocal, fluid joy (the 'natality' and 'flourishing' Jantzen discusses), Christ's feminized body, with its open wound, blood and heart, is a locus of sin and shame.[71] Mirk's treatment of the carnal, sexualised imagery is more in keeping with the necrophilic fear of abject flesh that Auda experiences than the flourishing positivity with which it is treated in the *Liber Specialis*. Christ's uninvited, nocturnal presence in the female-coded space of the woman's bedchamber - a space she had once shared carnally with her husband - is invasive and potentially hostile, suggesting rape rather than succour and salvation. Furthermore, the woman is terrified by Christ's presence and remains so after his departure.

Also associating the encounter with the fleshly necrophilic are Christ and the woman's subsequent actions, whose reliance on an implicit queering and gender fluidity both recall a similar divine/human fluidity in the *Liber Specialis*, but fail to achieve the sublimation afforded to Mechthild and Christ. Having asked the woman why she has not confessed, Christ takes the woman's hand and thrusts it into his open side, inviting her to feel his heart. The episode is packed with images that disrupt the orthodox acceptance of Christ's salvific body by presenting the reader with a fleshly and queer Saviour whose sexuality shape-shifts, like that of the woman he is supposed to be saving. In penetrating Christ's flesh through his feminized side wound, the woman's hand assumes a masculine, phallic,

[71] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, as before.

aggressive identity, which recalls Christ's presence in the woman's chamber and is reinforced by his feminized appearance. The sexuality with which the hand and the side are charged is heightened, too, by Mirk's oblique reference to the Song of Songs, in which the bridegroom's hand, as a key, enters and turns in the lock of the beloved, and moves the seat of her emotions, her bowels.[72] Nevertheless, Mirk's narrative undermines the reciprocal eroticism present in the scripture with its queer multivalent necrophilics.

The image is further complicated by the hand's potential identity as the feminine hand of a midwife, feeling for and aiding the birth of an infant and emerging covered in blood, imagery made particularly vivid in Sermon 20. The image of the woman's bloody hand in this context is troubling, even transgressive, since it associates Christ's blood with the polluting qualities of birthing and menstrual blood, which needs to be washed away. This is particularly significant because Christ's own sinless birth was believed to be free of pain and birthing blood. In the apocryphal Gospel of James, the miraculous nature of Christ's conception and birth is doubted by a midwife, Salome, whose hand withers on examining the Virgin.[73] This legend, was well known and Mirk himself includes it in his sermon for Christ's nativity.[74] In contrast to the episode in sermons 20 and 34, however, Christ remains untainted by birthing blood; and it is by touching his clean body, rather than through confession, that the woman's hand becomes whole again.[75]

Mirk further associates Christ's body with sin and the female when Christ says to the woman, 'Be þou no more acshamud to opon þi herte to me þan I am to opon my syde to þe'.[76]

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[72] 'My beloved put his hand through the key-hole, and my bowels were moved at his touch. I arose up to open to my beloved: my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh'. Song of Songs 5:4.
[73] Gospel of James 19-20, in *The Apocryphal New Testatment*, ed. and trans. M. R. James (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924): <http://gnosis.org/library/gosjames.htm> [accessed 12 October 2020].
[74] Powell, *Festial*, p. 25, ll. 62-68.
[75] Powell, *Festial*, p. 134, ll. 163-165.
[76] Powell, *Festial*, p. 134, ll. 161-162.

The heart, not only of the woman, but also of Christ, is a location of shame, like Auda's *turpitudo*. What unites Christ and the woman in Mirk's narrative, therefore, is a Kristevan abjection dependent upon female flesh, rather than that flesh's sublimation, fluidity, fecundity and conjoining with the divine, as experienced by Mechthild.

Mirk's uneasiness at the physical, feminized Christ, continues, and is indeed intensified, in the third narrative. Here, Christ's identity as intimate and loving, contends with, and finally and dramatically yields to, that of the patriarchal Judge, who, by throwing the clotting blood from his wounded side in the face of the dying chapman, at once subdues his own natality, and uses its abject state to pollute and damn him. Christ's actions thereby reinforce Mirk's dis-ease at the divine/human paradox that is Christ.[77] It is difficult to reconcile both Christ's actions, and the condemnatory function of his blood, simply in terms of Bynum's means of scaring the uneducated. Instead, I suggest that Girard's theory of the functions of sacrificial violence offers a more cogent explanation of Christ's dramatic behaviour and the transgressive potential of his feminized flesh.

Girard, sacred violence and the *narratio* of the chapman

Mirk's narrative is as follows: 'twey chapmen' (merchants, generally of lower grade goods) once lived near the city of Norwich. One, a 'cursud lyuer', continually refused to confess and his sins and amend his ways despite the repeated warnings and pleadings of his friend and fellow chapman, the 'gode lyuer', and thereby receive penance and absolution, saying 'how hit wher tyme inow for to schryuon whan he sculde dyen'.[78] However, the chapman fell seriously ill and lay at death's door. His friend again tried to persuade him to confess, even

[77] Powell, *Festial*, pp.135-136, ll. 191-227.
[78] Powell, *Festial*, p. 135, ll. 191-198.

calling for the priest and friars to attend the dying man. The chapman, however, would not relent, 'for he wyst wel inow þat God wolde ȝef hym no mercy for hys longe abydynge'.[79] That night, as he lay dying, Christ himself, 'bodily wit blody wondys' appeared to the chapman. He also begged him repeatedly to be shriven:

> 'My sone,' quoth he, 'why wyl þou not schryue þe and put þe into my mercy, þat am redy algatus for to ȝeue þe mercy to alle þat wyl mekely askun mercy?' Þan sayde he: 'For I wote wel þat I am vnworthy for to have mercy. Wherefore þou wylte ȝeue me none.' 'Ȝus, sone, forsoth, ask hit mekly and þou scalte haue.' And euer he answered and as he dud before.[80]

Enraged at the chapman's stubborn refusal, 'Cryste toke owte off hys wownde in his syde his hande ful of blode, and sayde: 'Ȝow fendus chylde, þis schal be redy tokun betwixt þe and me in þe day off dome þat I wolde haue ȝevon þe mercy and þou woldust notte', and 'perwit cast þe blode into his face.'[81] All too late, the chapman realised the consequence of his stubbornness: 'Allas, allas,' he cried, 'I am dampnud for ay'. And with that he died. The incident was witnessed by the chapman's companions who had been keeping watch over the chapman that night. They were so terrified, that for a long time they could not leave their bed. At last, the good chapman approached his friend's bed and saw 'þe rede blode in hys face and alle þe body as blak as spyche'.[82]

Girard's argument that society survives through a community's practice of mimetic violence against individuals or groups - 'sacrificeable victims' - upon whom they cast the blame for violence, is relevant here, and there are clear similarities between Girard's theory

[79] Powell, *Festial*, p. 135, ll. 200-201.
[80] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 135-136, l. 209, ll. 210-216.
[81] Powell, *Festial*, p. 136, ll. 216-219.
[82] Powell, *Festial*, p. 136, ll. 224-225.

of ritual violence, and the damnation of Mirk's unfortunate chapman. In turn, these correlations help to explain the role of Christ's flesh in the damnation of the chapman and the Kristevan, transgressive, feminized physicality they share in the *narratio*. In Mirk's account, Christ, as hero, takes on the role of the 'surrogate', the 'original' sacrificial victim, whose crucifixion serves to deflect from the community, *Ecclesia*, the punishment humankind has brought upon itself through sin. However, that community, as represented in the narrative by the chapman, his friends and associates, remains beset by violence in the form of heresy and pride in the chapman's refusal to confess and repent, which violence threatens to fragment and destroy the community. In order to deflect that additional violence from the community, another, substitute victim must be found to assume the guilt of the community. In Mirk's tale, it is the chapman, whom the community unanimously identifies as the cause of its suffering, and whom it condemns and finally sacrifices, with the execution performed by Christ, the original victim. [83]

Mirk's chapman certainly conforms to Girard's definition of the sacrificial victim. He is an outsider, living 'besyde', rather than within, 'þe cite off Norwyche'. Mirk's specification of Norwich – a detail absent in the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Handlyng Synne* – is significant, representing both prosperity and religious devotion. Fourteenth-century Norwich was an expanding and increasingly prosperous mercantile city, advantageously positioned for trade with Scandinavia and Northern Europe, which it continued to pursue despite the ravages of plague and war. Furthermore, the chapman's line of business, entailing (possibly lengthy) absence from the community, and inevitably involving contact with those outside that community, placed it somewhat ambiguously in the religious belief and social structure of late-medieval society. Roger Ladd observes that in late-medieval literature a largely negative

[83] Powell, *Festial*, p. 135, l. 192.

regard for this peripatetic group, which refused to be neatly categorised into the Three Estates.[84]

Indeed, Mirk is also somewhat ambivalent in his treatment of merchants and commerce. While not against wealth, Mirk is nevertheless eager to emphasise its inherent dangers, no doubt mindful of the complaints of social injustice so violently voiced in the Uprising of 1381. In his Advent sermon, for example the 'rych men þat han don no mercy' will be judged by the poor who 'schl sytte in dom wyth Crist'. But this applies to all rich men, and no specific reference to mercantilism is made.[85] In sermon 34, two out of the three *narrationes* include merchants: in the first *narratio*, a rich merchant is killed for the gold he is carrying. But it is the inherent danger of his occupation rather than his morality that proves fatal to him. He himself is seen as sufficiently devout: his possessions are honestly acquired and his prayer for vengeance is divinely answered.[86] In third *narratio*, Mirk's portrayal of mercantilism is equally ambivalent. The evil chapman's life-style, pride, and lack of faith are repeatedly contrasted to the devotion and benevolence of the good chapman who faithfully remains with his companion despite his unwillingness to do so, and is so anxious for his salvation that he himself arranges for priests to visit him and hear his confession. [87] Nevertheless, despite the fact that the chapman's occupation is not synonymous with his immorality, the negative treatment that mercantilism receives elsewhere in late medieval

[84] Roger A. Ladd, *Antimercantilism in Late Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 3-4; pp. 157-160. Ladd focuses his attention on the writings of Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and merchant writers such as Margery Kempe who, he observes, relinquishes mercantilism in pursuit of godly living. He also draws a comparison between the predominantly critical treatment of merchants in late-medieval literature (for example, the characterisation of merchants in the York Cycle) which was generally written by non-merchants, and the way merchants perceived themselves in their activities as tradesmen and -women - as members of guilds, and prominent and highly influential members of an emerging capitalist economy - while inhabiting still largely feudal and agricultural society.
[85] Powell, *Festial*, p. 7, ll. 94, 110-111.
[86] Powell, *Festial*, p. 132, ll. 80-96.
[87] Powell, *Festial*, p. 135, ll. 191-204.

English literature ensures that his occupation is sufficient to place him on the margins of respectable society.

Mirk's choice of Norwich as the setting of his narrative may also be explained by the prominence it placed upon religious devotion.[88] Norman Tanner notes that the city boasted a remarkable number of priests and religious orders (including hermits and anchorites) and charitable institutions, and appears to have been heresy-free.[89] This adherence to orthodox religion, however, did not mean that the perceived threat of heresy was ignored, as can be testified by the concern demonstrated by its various bishops. Henry Despenser (d. 1406), for example, a contemporary of Mirk, was a fierce upholder of orthodoxy and ruthless in his suppression of Lollard heresy and political and social dissent, who succeeded in introducing the death penalty for heresy in England, and personally supervised the burning of William Sawtrey in Norwich in 1401, the place of execution, known as the Lollard Pit, being within close proximity of Julian's anchorite cell.[90] The chapman, therefore, is cast as an outsider, rejecting the religious orthodoxy that was cherished by the city itself but threatened by the heresy operating outside the city walls.

Mirk does not specify the chapman's credentials as a heretic. However, his repeated rejection of confession and the ritualistic language used both by him and those who confront him identify him with Girard's sacrificial victim's performance of forbidden acts which 'eliminate [the victim's] lingering and superfluous humanity', and thus render him monstrous and alien to the community.[91] Annual confession to a priest, made obligatory in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, was essential both to obtain absolution and to receive the eucharist.

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[88] Norman Tanner, 'Religious Practice' *Medieval Norwich*, ed., Rawcliffe Carole and Wilson Richard (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 137-156 (p. 155).
[89] Tanner, *Medieval Norwich*, pp. 137-156 (pp. 154, 150-151).
[90] Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2010), p. 11.
[91] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 272, 287.

By rejecting confession, therefore, the chapman denies the authority of the Church (literally embodied in Christ's appearance) and rejects any chance of salvation. His stubbornness also ties him in with heterodox groups such as the Lollards, who denied the need for priestly confession and absolution. While not specifically defined as a Lollard, the chapman's behaviour, therefore, verges, at the very least, on the heretical, and certainly puts him in opposition to the orthodox society of his friends and neighbours.

The importance with which Mirk regarded confession is evident throughout the *Festial* and is, moreover, not only central to all three *narrationes*, but is possibly unique to Mirk's version of the *narrratio* in question: in the versions in *Handlyng Synne* and the *Gesta Romanorum*, Mirk's likely sources for the tale, it is oath-taking on Christ's body that precipitates Christ's visitation.[92] The sin of oath-taking, however, is not unconnected to that of Mirk's chapman, since both sins result in the fracturing of Christ's literal body and of the Church, his figurative one. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, as defined in Lateran IV, Christ was present in the Host. As such, Christ was repeatedly literally broken, poured out and consumed by the priest and the congregation.[93] This violence enacted upon Christ's body during the eucharist was committed legitimately by priest and communicant.

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[92] In *Handlyng Synne*, the protagonist is a 'ryche man' who 'sweryn grete opys grysly' on parts of Christ's body (ll. 691-92). In the *Gesta*, the protagonist is particularly wicked, because not only does he swear by all parts of Christ's body, but he refiuses to desist, even on his deathbed (p. 409).

[93]Canon 1, the new profession of faith, contains the following, not only defining transubstantiation, but underlining the role of the priest as sole administrator: 'Una vero est fidelium universalis ecclesia, extra quam nullus omnino salvatur, in qua idem ipse sacerdos est sacrificium Iesus Christus, cuius corpus et sanguis in sacramento altaris sub speciebus panis et vini veraciter continentur, transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et vino in sanguinem potestate divina, ut at perficiendum mysterium unitatis accipiamus ipsi de suo quod accepit ipse de nostro. Et hoc utique sacramentum nemo potest conficere, nisi sacerdos, qui rite fuerit ordinatus, secundum claves ecclesiae, quas ipse concessit Apostolis eorumque successoribus Iesus Christus.' (There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors.)' Lateran Council IV; Canon 1. Medieval Sourcebook: < http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>, [accessed 25 September 2012].

However, it would also be committed illegitimately by anyone who desecrated the Host or questioned the nature of the Host, the efficacy of the eucharist, and the authority of the priests who administered it – the heretic, for example. In committing such acts of sacrilege, these groups and individuals were considered guilty of wounding not only the transubstantiated body of Christ, but also the body of Christ as perceived in the Church, the *Ecclesia*. The latter was a powerful symbol of Christian unity, but one seen as threatened by internal and external forces, an Anti-Lollard sentiment that noticeably increased in the 1380s. The chapman is therefore considered guilty of such a crime.

Vital for the success of the chapman's sacrifice is the unanimous participation of the laity, the clergy, Christ and Mirk's readers and audience in the chapman's destruction – unanimity which Girard regards as crucial to the success of the sacrifice. Mirk carefully constructs his narrative, introducing the characters – the good chapman, the priest, the priest with friars, companions, and Christ himself – who all try in vain to persuade the chapman to repent and confess. This unanimity is emphasised at the narrative's climax, when Christ cries, 'Ȝow fendus chylde, þis schal be redy tokun betwixt þe and me in þe day off dome þat I wolde haue ȝevon þe mercy and þou woldust notte', effectively calling the company of heaven, present on the Day of Judgement, to witness and sanction the chapman's condemnation.[94] Unanimity is further demonstrated when that the chapman's condemnation is witnessed by the terrified men keeping watch at his bedside, not to mention Mirk's own readers and audience, who are clearly meant to side with the community, and whom Mirk warns to behave with due obedience and respect for religious authority: 'Wherefore I

[94] Powell, *Festial,* p. 136, ll. 217-219.

amonest ȝow þat ȝe tak not his grace in vayne, but schryue ȝow clene and put ȝow fully into hys mercy and into hys grace.'[95]

The necessity of unanimous, collective violence against the victim is further demonstrated by the inevitability of the chapman's fate.[96] While, superficially, the chapman is given ample opportunity to repent and receive salvation, in realityhis fate is a foregone conclusion. Using formulaic and repetitive dialogue between the chapman and those addressing him, Mirk steadily builds up the guilt of the chapman to point where repentance is impossible. Members of the community initiate the dialogue with an orthodox request. When the pleadings of a friend do not seem effective, higher authority is appealed to. The chapman's response, however, remains the same:

> But for þis gode man dursnot departe from þat oþur as ofte os he durste, he conseylud hym for to schryuen hym and amende hym off hys lyuyng […] Þan hyt fel aftur ao þat þis evel man fel sek and lay in hys deth-bedde. And whan hys fellow knew, he cryud on hym faste and ȝarne for to schryvon hym and sende afftur hys presete, for he was bot dede. But þat oþur euer prudly sayde nay: for he wyst wel inow þat God wolde ȝef hym no mercy for hys longe abydynge. Þan þis gode man was wondur sory for hym and made fecche prestus and frerus and alle þat he hopud þat wolde haue holpon hym þere and cownseylud hym to gode. But euer he made þe same answer to hem as he dud ti þe gode man, and sayde he wolde not schryuen hym ne none mercy askon.[97]

When Christ reiterates the request, barring a slight alteration, the chapman remains resolute in his response ('and euer he answered as he dud before'), even to the point of the implausibility of refusing Christ himself.[98] While the chapman, therefore, seems to be given

[95] Powell, *Festial,* p. 136, ll. 229-230.
[96] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 161-162.
[97] Powell, *Festial,* p. 135, ll. 191-204.
[98] Powell, *Festial,* p. 135, ll. 215-216.

the chance of freedom, his role as sacrificial victim categorically denies him that opportunity. He cannot be allowed to repent.

According to Girard, the victim's de-humanisation, vital for the success of the sacrifice, and effected by the accusation, or committal of taboo acts, is manifested in the victim's altered appearance or state.[99] In the case of the wicked chapman, his monstrosity becomes reflected in his dramatic change of appearance brought about by his violent contact with Christ's blood, a scene witnessed by his companions. The chapman's red, bloodied face and blackened corpse (Kristeva's ultimate example of the abject reinforced through his contamination by Christ's feminised blood and flesh), the colours of Satan himself, are evidence of the chapman's monstrous transformation from Christ's son and a member of the community to something demonic, a 'fendus schylde'. He is truly the monstrous sacrificial victim, suitably guilty of threatening the stability of the community. What his companions see is horrific:

> Þan þis opur men was so aferde off þis sythe and off bope here speche þat hit was longe or þei dud ryson. Þan at þe laste he rosse and lyȝte a candul at þe lawmpe and com to his fellow and fonde hym dede, and þe rede blode in hys face and alle þe body as blak as spyche. Þan þis man for ferde cryed aftur helpe, and when men comyn, he tolde hem þe case and how Cryste dud to hym and how he answered aȝayne.[100]

The association of black and red with the satanic was widespread in the later Middle Ages, and often reflected the state of the body's departed soul.[101] Joan Young Greggs, for

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[99] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 161-162, 269-273.
[100] Powell, *Festial*, p. 136, ll. 219-227.
[101] Cynthia Ho, '*Corpus Delicti*: The Edifying Dead in the *Exempla* of Jacques de Vitry', *Medieval Sermons and Society: Cloister, City, University*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse, Beverly Maine Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and Ann T. Thayer (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 203-218 (p. 209, n. 17), cited in, Ford, Mirk's *Festial*, p. 51.

example, observes the use of black to identify those in league with the Devil in the *Legenda Aurea* and Caesarius of Heisterbach's (d. c. 1240) *Dialogus Miraculorum*.[102] Julian of Norwich writes of being visited by the Devil in the terrifying guise of a red male youth with black spots, when she lies sick.[103] Mirk, as demonstrated above in Sermon 29, also used these colours to denote the unrepentant sinner.[104] Moreover, in Sermon 19, he tells of a 'foule helle-beste', 'a passing grete tode as blak as pyche, with eynon brennyng as fyre', with his talons around the throat of a worldly lord's corpse; in sermon 21, an abbess's corpse is beaten black by demons; and in Sermon 22, Mirk tells of a Satanic knight on a black horse, who pursues, slaughters and butchers an adulterous woman, and casts the bits of her body into the fires of Hell.[105] Christ's hurled blood literally demonises the chapman and consigns his soul to Hell.

The equation of the wicked chapman with the sacrificial victim is complicated, however, by the presence in the narrative of another victim and another sacrifice. In the examples of the sacrifice of the sacrificial victim and the surrogate victim cited by Girard, although the ritual is repeated and recreated, only one sacrifice occurs at one time. In Mirk's narrative the sacrifice of the chapman is committed in the presence, and at the hands of, Christ, the victim, whose own initial sacrifice is repeated by and for the community. Girard shies away from including Christ as an example of the surrogate victim, considering him as an anomaly to the rule of the indifferently guilty or innocent victim. Christ, according to

[102] Joan Young Greggs, Devils, Women and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermons (New Jersey: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 32-33.
[103] Norwich, Julian of, *A Revelation of Love* eds. Jenkins, Jacqueline and Watson, Nicholas (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) ch. 67, p. 20. For a discussion of this episode see McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, pp. 155-162.
[104] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 116-117.
[105] Powell, *Festial*, pp. 80-81, ll. 110-130; 84-85, ll. 23-39; 92-93, ll. 135-163.

Girard, is the emphatically innocent Scapegoat on whom is cast the sins of the people.[106] Nevertheless, Mirk's Christ fulfils Girard's definition surrogate victim who must attract violence from the community and to himself.

Christ therefore fits into Girard's definition of the surrogate victim. Girard argues that a sacrificial crisis occurs when certain factors undermine the efficacy of the sacrifice; for example, the repetition of the sacrificial ritual which often results in its contamination , lack of unanimity among the participants, imbalance of the victim's likeness to or difference from the community, some sort of crisis within the community. At this point, Girard maintains, a surrogate victim is deemed necessary. However, as mentioned above, the repetition of this ritual also requires a substitute victim, who replaces the surrogate victim, and is made to commit heinous acts in order to expiate the community. In the context of the crises of plague, famine, war and religious upheaval in the later Middle Ages, Girard's analysis certainly seems apposite. The surrogate victim, Girard observes, is also a sacred king or mythical hero who must fight a monstrous foe and perish in the combat. Moreover, he is himself guilty of committing acts of great violence, such as incest or infanticide, which threaten the survival of the community. At this point, considered a curse upon the community he is banished or killed. At some point in the myth, too, he might encounter a monstrous foe with whom he must fight for the good of the community and possibly die as a result. Christ, the God/man, tortured and crucified by his own community, the warrior in the apocryphal Harrowing of Hell, and the resurrected champion, would seem to fit the bill.

[106] Girard explores his hypothesis in detail in *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). See, for example, pp. 109 and 115, where the killing of Christ is portrayed as a 'mistake'.

Girard argues that there is a doubling of the surrogate victim and the substitute victim in the sacrificial ritual.[107] The substitute victim, he maintains, is made to adopt the role and characteristics -and guilt- of the surrogate victim. This phenomenon is cross-cultural, and evident in Greek Tragedy, as well as Aztec and Swazi societies.[108] 'The surrogate victim', Girard writes, 'meets his death in the guise of the monstrous double. All sacred creatures partake of monstrosity, whether overtly or covertly', 'absorb[ing]' the '"good" and "bad" difference"' in a 'marriage of maleficent and beneficent'.[109] This absorption of the differences is done, in part, by making the sacred commit forbidden acts such as patricide or incest, which forces the victim to abandon his/her humanity, as happens, Girard observes, in rituals involving the election and sacrifice of the sacred king, who is often substituted by animals or humans on the fringes of the community (children, foreigners, prisoners).[110] Girard's monstrous doubling is evident in Mirk's treatment of Christ and the chapman: both become sinful, even the embodiment of sin, in order to save the community; both are executioner, or, at least, enactor, of violence, and victim; both are sacred king and hero.

Sacrificial blood and gender

The comparison is not so straight forward, however. Girard's examples of sacrificial victims are male – the sacrificial king, the hero – and remain so, even when they seem to be transformed into something else (e.g. Pentheus into a lion). In Mirk's second *narratio*, it is the feminization of the victim that marks him for sacrifice. Christ's contaminating clotted blood, menstrual, birthing and female, oozing from his vulva/vagina-like side wound, sticks

[107] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 264-288.
[108] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 167-168, 137-138, 265.
[109] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 265-266.
[110] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 287.

to the chapman, transferring Christ's pollution onto the dying man, who can now assume the guilt of the community. For Mirk, therefore, it is the female and the fleshly that, literally, embodies sin, the sin to which the afflictions of his community can be attributed. And only by purging itself of this sin, can the community be redeemed.

Girard's discussion on the nature and power of blood goes some way to explain its significance in the *narratio*. According to Girard, in the enactment of the sacrifice, as a by-product of its violence, and as a component of the monstrous doubling, blood is a crucial element. [111] However, he contends, its presence is not without complication. Sacrificial blood is a good thing, in that it averts violence away from the community, but it is nevertheless connected with the spilt blood of violence and conflict, which threaten and frighten the community in times of peace.[112] In times of violence, Girard writes, 'blood appears everywhere […] its very fluidity gives form to the contagious nature of violence. Its presence proclaims murder and announces new upheavals to come.'[113] Nevertheless, despite its association with violence, spilt blood is not unanimously polluting. In certain circumstances it can be the 'miraculous substance', able 'not only to resist infection but also to purify […] the contaminated blood […] redirect[ing] the violence onto the victim through sacrificial ritual'.[114] Spilt in this way, free flowing and crimson, blood (the valorized, heroic, masculine blood examined by McCracken, for example) is a good thing, but – in contrast to polluting blood which remains visible, congealing and scabbing on the victim – as 'the impure product of violence, illness, or death' it must 'never be allowed to congeal', and must be 'removed without trace'.[115]

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[111] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 34-38, p. 111.
[112] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.
[113] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 31, p. 35.
[114] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 36.
[115] McCracken, *The Curse of Eve*, for example, pp. 19-20; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 36-37.

Menstrual blood is problematic, Girard contends, because its association with birth and nurture is complicated with that of violence – as, indeed, Auda's response to the 'filth' expelled from the woman during birth so succinctly expresses. Girard notes that what he defines as 'primitive' societies (societies 'lacking legal sanctions') regard such blood as impure, and menstruating women are kept apart from the rest of the community for fear that they will contaminate it.[116] The fear aroused by menstrual blood is a natural response, he argues, because it bespeaks of violence in the context of peace. However, the fear female blood engenders in men is further complicated by its sexual associations; and, because sexuality is inextricably linked with impurity and violence, menstrual blood is particularly disturbing for men.[117] Furthermore, because sexuality and violence are so powerfully connected, the female spilt blood of rape ('defloration'), menstruation, childbirth, and the death of mother and child is ' a permanent source of disorder'. [118] Nevertheless, Girard asserts that the fecundity represented by female blood means that some societies consider female blood, in the 'right' quantities and in the 'right' hands, to be a beneficial substance, an ambiguity Bynum notes regarding medieval notions of menstrual and birthing blood in relation to Christ.[119] What is crucial, Girard argues, is that the two aspects of the blood, whether male or female, remain apart and do not mingle, either literally or metaphorically.[120] Such a disruption to the sacrificial ritual, by the mingling of bloods, Girard warns, nullifies it, and even exacerbates the crisis. It is just such a scenario that emerges in Mirk's *narratio* of the wicked chapman, when Christ feminizes and condemns the merchant with the blood from his wounded side.

[116] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 34.
[117] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 34-35.
[118] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 35-37.
[119] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, for example, pp. 100, 214-215, 383 n. 99.
[120] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 37-38.

Mills argues that Christ's monstrous potential is evident in his ambiguous gendering and in the proliferation of three-headed and three-faced images of the Trinity in late-medieval iconography and devotional texts.[121] These images, he argues, combine 'differences normally considered irreconcilable' – human and god, sin and sinless-ness.[122] Mills's argument regarding Christ's monstrosity is even more credible when read alongside Girard's theory of the monstrous and the monstrous double and applied to this particular *narratio*. While Christ, as Mills argues, contains in his person a combination of opposites in what he argues is an inherent monstrosity, this monstrosity is conveyed most effectively in the doubling with the monstrous chapman I have been arguing for above.

The monstrous doubling of Christ

Christ's monstrosity, defined by his (non-) human, and sin(-less) state, is inextricably bound with his wounded body, and the blood that it fails to contain. Being human, Christ assumes the physical weakness – the feminine – that aspect of humanity which lacks masculine spirituality, is associated with sexuality and earthly things and is liable to fall into sin. This, in turn, causes the fall of the masculine, spiritual part of the human. Christ is made monstrous, therefore, through his bloody, feminized flesh. Mirk's uneasiness regarding Christ's monstrosity, apparent in the *narratio* of the woman with the bloody hand discussed earlier in this chapter, continues in that of the wicked chapman, who fulfils the role of the

[121] Robert Mills, 'Jesus as Monster' in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bildhauer, Bettina and Mills, Robert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), Ch. 2, pp. 28-54; Robert Mills, 'Queering the Un/Godly: Christ's Humanities and Medieval Sexualities', in Noreen Giffney and Myra J Hird, eds., *Queering the Non/Human* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), Ch. 5, pp.111-135.
[122] Mills, 'Jesus as Monster', pp. 38, 46.

monstrous double by assuming Christ's feminine physicality, when Christ casts his blood into the chapman's face.

As in the previous *narratio,* the bleeding Christ displays both male and female characteristics. On one level, there can be little or no doubt about Christ's maleness. He is, after all, God's son, and Mirk consistently uses the masculine personal pronoun to refer to him. Moreover, Christ's appearance before the chapman, 'wit blody wondys' is resonant of his salvific, heroic bleeding on the cross, something Mirk refers to elsewhere in the *Festial,* as, for example, in Sermon 33, in which the desecrated crucifix gushed curative water and blood.[123] Christ, also, performs his masculine role of judge and executioner when he damns the chapman. Nevertheless, in this *narratio,* as in that of the woman with the bloody hand, Christ's blood and body are also suggestive of the feminine. In Christ, Mirk is confronted with the monstrous ('differences normally considered irreconcilable'), female-centred, flourishing natality of Jantzen's theory, discussed in previous chapters, together with the androcentric necrophilic of Christian orthodoxy.[124] And although he admits the feminine in the human Christ, Mirk is nonetheless ill at ease with it, and thus attempts to control Christ's physicality and inherent sexuality with its association with sin and the abject.

As in the second *narratio*, Christ's femaleness is demonstrated by the intimacy and affection with which he appears initially and with which he addresses the chapman. Christ appears before the man 'standynge before þe seke mannus bedde', at night, and tenderly addresses him as his child: 'My sone,' quoth he, 'why wyl þou not schryue þe and put þe into my mercy, þat am redy algatus for to ȝeue þe mercy to alle þat wyl mekely askun mercy?'[125] Indeed, Christ repeats the address in an attempt to persuade the man to repent: 'Ȝus, sone,

[123] Powell, *Festial,* pp. 129-130, ll.103-125.
[124] Mills, 'Jesus as Monster', pp. 38, 46.
[125] Powell, *Festial,* p. 136, l. 210

forsoth, ask hit mekly and þou scalte haue.'[126] Christ, too, displays his capacity for the traditionally feminine qualities of mercy and compassion: he uses 'mercy' three times in his plea to the chapman, for example. Mirk repeatedly refers to God's mercy in sermon 34, and in his introduction to the *narratio*, he writes, 'for þus muche I presume of Goddus grace and his mercy, þat þe fende off helle, and he wolde aske mercy wit a meke herte off Godde, God wolde ȝevon hym mercy.'[127] Furthermore, Mirk's Christ is indisputably physical, as we have seen: his is a 'bodily' manifestation, reinforced by Mirk when Christ appears 'bodily' to the dying chapman.

However, Christ's fleshly manifestation is complicated by its maleficent as well as beneficent capabilities. In the possible sources for Mirk's narrative, for example, the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Handlyng Synne*, Christ's broken and disfigured body, and the Virgin's intense sorrow are graphically illustrated, commanding the reader's sympathy.[128] In the *Gesta,* the writer exploits the image of the *Pieta,* the (often) blood-drained, post-crucifixion Christ lying across his Mother's lap: '"here is my sone, lying in my lappe, with his hede all to broke, and his Eyen drawen oute of his body, and layde on his breste, his armes broken a-twoo, his legges and his fete also,"'[129] In *Handlyng Synne,* Mannyng echoes the Christ-child-on-a-platter image, with the infant Christ's individual body parts displayed for the man and Mannyng's audience to see:

> A nyȝt, as he lay a-lone,
> A womman he herdë make here mone;
> Þat yche womman come hym byfore,
> with a chylde yn here armys bore.
> Of þe chylde þat she bare yn here armys

[126] Powell, *Festial,* p. 136, ll. 214-215.
[127] Powell, *Festial,* p. 135, ll. 186-188.
[128] *Gesta Romanorum,* pp. 409-410; Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne,* as before.
[129] *Gesta Romanorum,* p.410.

> Al to-drawë were þe þarmys[guttys];
> Of handys, of fete, þe flessh of drawyn,
> Mouþe, yȝen, & nose, were alle to-knawyn,
> Bakke & sydës were al blody. [130]

The reader is confronted with images of Christ and the Virgin – maternal love and loss, Christ as victim of human sin and (especially in Mannyng's narrative) a source of eucharistic nourishment - intended to arouse affectivity with the suffering of Christ and his mother, resulting in the reader's repentance and salvation.

Mirk's *narratio*, in this respect, is very different. Mirk's Christ defies the convention of affective piety that is present in devotional writing contemporary with, or preceding, the *Festial*. Christ initially appears before the chapman in the middle of the night ('abowte mydnyȝte þay saw Ihesu Cryste bodily wit blody wondys standynge before þe seke mannus bedde').[131] This portrayal of Christ as Man of Sorrows is, to some extent, conventional, reminiscent of crucifixion iconography, and similar to that used by Mirk in his previous *narratio*. Christ is bleeding for, and pleading with, humanity. However, Mirk's description lacks the affective triggers that exist in descriptions and iconography of the suffering Christ, and that are used in *Gesta Romanorum* and *Handlying Synne*. Moreover, Mirk's Christ is upright, vocal, and whole (neither Mannyng's dismembered infant nor the crucified Christ is capable of similar articulation, and the Christ in the *Gesta* shares his words with his mother), in stark contrast to the chapman, who is 'seke', supine, passive, dying and helpless, and the witnesses, who, cowering from the other side of the chamber, watch events unfold in dumb fear. Christ's potential femaleness - the suffering, nourishing, maternal demonstrated in his

[130] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ll. 697-705.
[131] Powell, *Festial,* p. 135, ll. 208-213.

blood-leaking body-as-food - is thus immediately set against and dominated by his hierarchic, masculine identity.

Mirk's desire to control Christ's femaleness is further demonstrated in the chapman's damnation when he transforms Christ's body and its flourishing potential into an instrument of masculine judgement and destruction. As in the previous narrative, Christ's open side presents the individual with the opportunity for forgiveness and salvation. Furthermore, it is also the locus of sin and the abject. While the two narratives, therefore, seem to present the readers with opposing scenarios, Christ's blood in both cases is feminized, contaminating and staining, and requires the intervention of a male priest to re-establish male-centred order by making it disappear. While the woman with the bloody hand, therefore, is saved through confession, that cannot happen to the chapman because he dies determined *not* to confess; and whereas the woman regains the whiteness of her hand, the chapman's white body is stained black and red, signifying the damned state of his soul.

Christ's staining blood further represses its own flourishing potential and its association with the maternal when the chapman metamorphoses from Christ's 'sone' to a 'fendus chylde'.[132] Mirk's attitude to mother's blood as a sign of love and healing is strikingly different from texts authored, or influenced by female devotional writers, as demonstrated in chapter two above with regard to the writings of the Helfta women, for example. Indeed, for the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, too, both blood's visible presence, and its invisibility signify the reciprocal love of Christ and the anchoress. In a clear allusion to the nurturing and excessive capacity of female blood, for example, it becomes a visible sign of the anchoress's piety, while the healing blood-bath in which a mother would put her sick

[132] Powell, *Festial,* p. 136, l. 217.

child to heal it, is compared to the 'bath' of the eucharist which Christ fills with his own blood and which washes her white from her sins.[133]

Christ's blood is, of course, intrinsically connected with his Passion, which culminates in his crucifixion, the performance of which was enacted in the Mass. In order to receive communion, the individual had to confess fully and frankly to the priest. While |Mechthild of Hackeborn might interpret such requirement more freely, Mirk is emphatic in his approbation of the ruling, as the bishop's revelation makes clear in Sermon 29. Therefore, when the chapman does receive Christ's blood, rather than being washed clean of, or by, it, and thus redeemed, he is damned and marked as such in the colours of congealed blood. Indeed, in this way, the chapman's encounter with Christ becomes a corruption, or subversion, of the eucharistic ritual, marking him as the substitute victim and fit for sacrifice. Christ's feminized blood and body are essential to the chapman's transformation. Not only does Christ display to the man and his companions the vagina/vulva of his wounded side, but in imitating the actions of the woman in the previous *narratio*, he himself reinforces the physicality of his own monstrous humanity. Moreover, also like that of the woman, the hand that Christ thrusts into his own body is also heavily sexualized, being both phallic and birthing, thus reinforcing the femaleness of his flesh. And, in filling his hand, Christ's blood assumes the coagulated, abject qualities associated with the female blood, the feminine and

[133] 'In confession the living redness of the face signifies the soul, which was livid and had only a deathly colour, has been given a living colour and a healthy complexion. Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses. A Translation Based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2009), Part 5, pp. 125-26. Millett, *Ancrene* Wisse, Part 7, p. 149.'If a child had such an illness that it needed a bath of blood before it could be healed, the mother who was willing to provide this bath for it would love it very much. Our Lord did this for us – who were so infected with sin, and so polluted with it, that nothing could heal or cleanse us except for his blood – because that was what he wished. His love makes a bath for us – may he always be blessed! He prepared three baths for his dear beloved to wash herself in and make herself white and fair enough to deserve his pure embraces'. For a discussion of this episode, along with other maternal 'blood baths' see Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 85-102.

the taboo. Christ's act of demonization effectively finalises the chapman's transformation from human to Christ's monstrous double and sacrificial substitute, an embodiment of sin and contaminating female flesh that will release the community from the plague of heresy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have contended that, in contrast to Mechthild of Hackeborn's exuberant, uncontainable devotion to a feminized Christ, Mirk evinces a profound discomfort with this aspect of affectivity. But, by presenting an alternative approach to eucharistic devotion, wedded to an orthodox, male-centred theology, Mirk is pushed towards a fear of the flesh similar to Auda's own un/orthodox reasoning. Mirk offers his readers with a Christ whose femaleness he equates with the unsublimated, Kristevan abject, Girard's surrogate victim, whose ineffective sacrifice necessitates the corruption, feminization, and damnation of an unsuspecting, but stubborn Norfolk chapman. Mirk's *narratio* illustrates the threat of the female and the feminine within an inherently patriarchal Church – even during the so-called feminine 'affective turn' of late medieval devotional practices. Christ's feminine humanity might be recognised and exploited, but it clearly presented a constant threat to an androcentric order. Women like Mechthild of Hackeborn and her Helfta sisters may have explored this femaleness with impunity within the confines of their nunnery, but the desire to control this disruptive theology was very much present, even at the risk of leading the orthodox down an unorthodox path.

AFTERWORD

An Unnamed Prophetess and a Messianic Birth: Reading Christ's Gender in the Non-Canonical Text

In 1931, among the 400,000 plus fragmentary manuscripts found in the Cairo *genizah*, Jacob Mann found a letter bearing the title *Fresh Water for a Tired Soul*. [1] The date of the manuscript is uncertain, but, based on the letter's messianic-related contents, the intense anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe towards the end of the thirteenth century, as well as the messianic fervour present in Sicily and southern Italy at this time, Marcel Poorthuis and Chana Safrai suggest that it was written end of the thirteenth century.[2] The text, Poorthius and Safrai note, is the work of a 'non-professional writer', written in 'poor Hebrew with occasional misspellings'.[3] Although it fits into the genre of recording Messianic prophesies through the medium of travel accounts and letter-writing, its unsophisticated style sets in apart from similar texts, such as Maimonides' *Letter to Yemen*, or Benjamin of Tudela's *Itinerary*.[4] The document consists of three accounts of events that occur among the Jewish community in Catania in Sicily and centre on Messianic prophesies. The second of these texts, like Auda's inquisitional record discussed in Chapter Three, presents the reader with a birth that does not

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[1] Jacob Mann, 'Messianic excitement in Sicily', Texts and studies in Jewish history and literature (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1931-35), pp. 34-44, cited in Marcel Poorthuis and Chana Safrai, '*Fresh Water for a Tired Soul*: Pregnancy and Messianic Desire in a Medieval Jewish Document from Sicily', in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp.123-178; Cambridge Digital Library: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah/1> [accessed 24 October 2020]; the title, *Fresh water for a Tired Soul*, is a quotation from the book of Proverbs: 'As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good tidings from a far country' (Proverbs 25.25). A *genizah* is a repository for documents or ritual objects considered 'unusable', generally due to their poor condition, but which cannot be disposed of because they contain the name of God or are of religious significance. The Cairo *genizah* is particularly rich in its contents which date back about a millennium.

[2] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, pp. 126-128.

[3] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 125.

[4] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 125.

follow the rules prescribed to recognized child-birth rituals. In addition, as with Mechthild's visions in Chapter Two, and the bed-chambers in Mirk's *narrationes* in Chapter Four, female-coded domestic space of the home and the woman's body (in this case, the locations of childbirth) are transformed into sacred spaces, which also become sites of divine revelation.

The anonymous narrator and his companion Michael, the son of Samuel, who have arrived at the town of Catania in Sicily, first encounter the woman in the full term of her pregnancy, standing outside the synagogue during prayers. The 'good' smell emanating from the woman is experienced by those inside, including the narrator and his companion.[5] The men have already heard of the woman's reputation as prophet, and have journeyed specifically to see her.[6] The woman is seized by a trembling, returns home, and falls 'upon her face'.[7] She summons 'all the community' to her house to watch and listen to her. The travellers, accompanied by her husband, find her on the floor. Pleading and crying, she demands her husband cover her with a prayer shawl (*Talit*), a garment worn predominantly by men. On the one she is already wearing, a garment again reminiscent of many garments envisioned by Mechthild, appear saffron, moist letters, whose moistness, however, is not transferred onto the hands of those who touch it. A similar thing happens when the second shawl, and even a third, are brought in:

> And we saw her falling upon her face pleading and crying, and she said to her husband: let them bring me a shawl (*Talit*) and throw it upon me. And they brought a shawl, and as the shawl was brought from the house, the following letters appeared on the shawl she had

[5] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 129.
[6] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 129.
[7] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 129.

> already upon her: אבי(ani = I) and after it three yods (ייי) appeared thus, and in addition, and on another edge of the cover appeared אחד(ehad = one).
>
> And the writing was saffron, and the letters were humid, and each and every one standing there put his fingers into it and nothing from the humidity stuck on our hands. And she screamed: Cover me with a shawl, and they brought the shawl. And we saw that shawl and there was nothing on it, but once it was put on her, the letters סא and further או and further סו appeared, and they said: take another shawl. And they took it and brought another one, and on it appeared once more חזחד. And she was lying down in fear and trembling, and she stretched out her left hand.[8]

The woman then experiences something akin to the agony of childbirth, and 'in fear and trembling':

> She stretched out her left hand. Hiding (poss. 'she delivered') in that hand a human image was seen, and something similar to saffron was flowing down. And we all who stood there, took it and tasted it, and it tasted like oil cakes, and its smell was good as flowing myrrh, and we heard her in prayer: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One, God is longsuffering and full of grace and truth. [9]

Now covered in the prayer shawls, the woman, 'lift[s] up her hands as priests lift their hands when they step upon the pulpit'. Letters of blood appear on the shawls, and the woman instructs her audience:

> give praise and thanks to the Lord, and repent fully you as well, and in all the places wherever you go through you will show the written words and the shawls and they will repent, because thus did the holy One command me.[10]

[8] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 129.
[9] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 130.
[10] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 130.

Following the Sabbath prayers, sometime after their initial encounter, the men are invited to eat in the woman and her husband's house. Following the meal, they see the woman repair to her chamber, where 'she fell upon her face and she was suffering'.[11] The men and the woman's husband follow her. There then follows a miraculous feast in which the woman feeds the witnesses with liquid that flows from her fingers:

> and we saw her as if she was eating, and her hands were in her lap. Then we saw her three fingers and they were oozing something similar to oil, and her husband took and gave each and everyone and we ate and it had the taste of honey and its smell was like flowing myrrh. And then she wiped her fingers in her headkerchief, and the entire headkerchief was humid as if it had been dipped in water, and it had the taste of honey and its smell was very good, incomparable with any other smell in the world.[12]

Having fed those in the room, the woman prays to God, bewailing the wretched situation of her people, calling them to repent, and foretelling the Lord's vengeance:

> Lord hear, Lord our God [have mercy and compassion]. And she moaned and said: Woe to the wicked, and woe to them that do not repent, since thus swore the Holy One before the angels and before Moses [our teacher]: The End is near, and if the wicked will not [repent], behold, [m]any [will perish in s]word and in famine and in persecution, and if they will repent [they will escape], since My salvation is near to come. And that which I have been eating … the Holy One Blessed be He will give to Israel.[13]

[11] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 130.
[12] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 130.
[13] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 130.

In the next section of the letter, the woman commands the witnesses to go to the synagogue and pray. They obey, and in the synagogue receive divine confirmation of the prophesy:

> And we went and prayed and we saw the curtain as if ?..... good and strong and we saw also a fire entering the synagogue. And it went to the other corner, and two men from those [praying fell on the flo]or and were beating themselves against the ground, and later when they [stood up from the ground] we asked them each separately: What did you see? And the one [spoke and his friend] did not hear it. He said to us: We have seen the angel with [a sword in his] hand and in his other hand a huge fire, and he intended to strike me. Similarly [the other was telling] and saying likewise.[14]

This narrative, and those in the texts examined in this thesis, enjoy a shared vocabulary of mystical discourse. As a conduit for the divine, the woman in *Fresh Water* suffers an agony and prostrate incapacity similar to Auda or Mechthild; and, like them, her role as a prophetess is predicated on her femaleness – fleshly, open, liquid, fecund. She is a wife, is at least nine months into her pregnancy, gives birth, inhabits a domestic space separate from the men, and feeds her guests in her home – in exuding honey, oil and myrrh, she literally drips nourishment and hospitality - and the food she provides, while replete with references to the Hebrew Bible, nevertheless recalls the eucharistic banquet enjoyed by Mechthild, and dreaded by Auda. Moreover, like the mystics discussed in the previous chapters, the woman's vatic powers are not un-in keeping with her femininity: Hebrew Scriptures are rich with examples of prophetesses: Sarah, the wife of Abraham, for example, Miriam (the sister of Moses), Deborah the judge, and Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

[14] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, pp. 130-131.

The fact that the woman's presence, and her performance disrupts the androcentric dynamic is also resonant of such interruptions in the texts examined. Like Auda, she tries to command the private, female-coded space of the home and the public, male-coded space of the town, and beyond, and when the men initially meet her, it is outside the synagogue, and while she is unable physically to access certain male-coded spaces through her prophesies she can go beyond the walls of her chamber and enter the heart of the synagogue itself.[15] The masculine/feminine boundaries are further disturbed when the woman puts on the prayer shawls, lifts her hands in prayer hands 'as priests lift their hands when they step upon the pulpit', and recites the Shema, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One, God is longsuffering and full of grace and truth'.[16] Furthermore, by commanding the community to witness the miraculous birth and touch her body, free from contaminating menstrual and birthing blood, the woman redefines the gender-coded spaces, making the birthing chamber into a holy place, and presenting unclean female flesh as clean, sublimating the abject in a manner reminiscent of Mechthild of Hackeborn but ultimately unachieved by Auda and Mirk.[17]

Fresh Water for a Tired Soul, an obscure, fragmentary manuscript, deemed unfit and 'unusable' by the community for whom it was written, demonstrates the significance of these non-canonical texts in providing a new understanding of sex and gender in medieval European society, an understanding far more nuanced than doctrinal orthodoxy would have us believe. Just as the anonymous woman in the Hebrew text facilitates the salvation of Israel

[15] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, pp. 129, 131.
[16] Poorthuis and Safrai, *Fresh Water*, p. 136-140.
[17] Carmen Caballero Navas observes that, although the teaching and practices of pregnancy and childbirth in Jewish society were androcentric, the actual delivery was a woman-only affair in the private space of the birthing chamber. Several women would be present at the birth – the midwife to help deliver the child and take care of the mother, and various assistants to look after and pray for the woman. Men were excluded. Carmen Caballero Navas, 'She will give birth immediately. Pregnancy and Childbirth in Medieval Hebrew Medical Texts Produced in the Mediterranean West', *Dynamis*, 34. 2, 2014: < http://dx.doi.org/10.4321/S0211-95362014000200006> [accessed 20 October 2020].

through her body, which is free from the pollutants that define it, Hildegard of Bingen works within the bounds of deeply orthodox theology to present her readers with a redefined theology which exonerates and acquits the fallen, fleshly female through Christ's own transgressive femininity. Hildegard reinterprets accepted male doctrine, in order to offer her readers an understanding of the feminine divine. The female body is no longer the gateway to Hell, but a means of salvation, not just through the Virgin's miraculous pregnancy, but through the feminised flesh of Christ himself. Likewise, in the *Liber Specialis* Mechthild of Hackeborn disrupts the boundaries of male and female, human and divine, and capitalizes on the very nature of its liquidity and formlessness to offer her readers a confident conception of a female-centred theology, a notion also present, I suggest, in *Fresh Water*, with the prophetess's dissolution of physical gender-coded spaces and her liquid, whole, tormented and open body. The notion of salvific female flesh which Mechthild and Hildegard successfully present, is not so successfully negotiated by Auda and Mirk. Auda's anguish at Christ's association with female impurity, brought to a head by the public parturition of a neighbour, provides the reader with the possibility of unresolved transgression in the theology of the human/divine nature of God. And Mirk's Christ, rather than transfiguring into the sublime, reveals himself to be the ultimate pollutant through his feminized, contaminating flesh, an embodiment of the abject and a world away from the redemptive flesh of Mechthild's Christ, or the uncontaminated body of a nameless Jewish woman in twelfth-century Sicily.

This thesis, I hope, highlights the importance of such non-canonical texts for developing our understanding of orthodox depictions of Christ, who simultaneously embodies masculine and feminine, Christus and Christa. Such texts are not confined to Christian orthodoxy, but are also embedded in other faiths and cultures, existing alongside,

and so often persecuted by their Catholic neighbours. On this point, my thesis anticipates forthcoming full-length studies by Dorothy Kim, *Jewish/Christian Entanglements: Ancrene Wisse and Its Material Worlds* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021, forthcoming); and Ayoush Lazikani, *Cry of the Turtledove: Feeling Love in Christian and Islamic Contemplative Texts, c. 1100-1250* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, forthcoming). The unexpected shared discourse existing in those texts focused on in this present study hints at a reciprocity through which women, in particular, sought to channel the Divine and claim female authority so often denied them in the androcentric societies in which they lived.

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