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THE SELF, THE CHURCH AND MEDIEVAL IDENTITIES: THE EVOLUTION OF
THE INDIVIDUAL IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of English

in the Graduate School

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Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of English

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CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL FLAVIN, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in ENGLISH, presented on MARCH 4, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE SELF, THE CHURCH AND MEDIEVAL IDENTITIES: THE EVOLUTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Mark Amos

   This dissertation examines the construction of literary identities by medieval women, recognizable as an authorial voice that is distinct from those of her contemporaries yet congruent with the gender norms and expectations of her contemporary culture, in both religious and secular literatures from late antiquity through the waning of the Middle Ages. The argument posited here is that texts authored by women, as informed by concurrent male texts and the literary traditions in which individual authors seek to participate, can be read as a taxonomy of responses to the traditions individual authors appropriate and to their contemporaries, directly responding to and incorporating elements from each in order to position themselves within the literate culture by accessing the shared traditions, norms and memories of the community. Focusing on primary texts authored by women makes it possible to more fully examine the intertextual nature of women's identity in medieval literature, the impact of male discourse on the identities available to women as writers and as women, and the diverse positions they assign to themselves through the construction of literary identities, both orthodox and heterodox. The delimination of the culture and the traditions in which individual authors participate clarifies both the self-positioning engaged in by individual authors and the function of their text, in its native context, while placing these texts and their authors in a meaningful context for modern scholars.

The project is divided into six broadly chronological chapters which engage with key authors and place them in dialogue with both their male contemporaries and previous generations of women's writings. The first chapter, "(En)Gendering Texts," focuses on the texts from late antiquity which have the most measurable and lasting impact on subsequent women's writings and engage directly with the patristic sources for communal Christian identity in the period. The second chapter, "Perpetua and Her Daughters," highlights the role of women's texts in the education of both genders throughout the period and begins the process of contextualizing women's independent identities within the rubric of the Christian West. Chapter Three, "Constructing a New Self," approaches the letters of Heloise to Abelard and her other correspondents as a model for women's writing and the construction of polysemic identities within the traditions. Chapter Four, "Re-Envisioning the Passions," places mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich in dialogue with the patristic traditions and medieval philosophy in order to illustrate the degrees of self-determination possible in women's texts while continuing to be viewed as orthodox. The fifth chapter examines the phenomena of affective piety, ascetic mysticism, and the uses of the body in creating a tangible identity for women writers in the period. The final chapter examines the tensions between the medieval and patristic traditions and the changing political and social geography of the later Middle Ages and the impact of these cultural shifts on women's writing and their access to the traditions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The construction of literary identities for medieval women, recognizable as an

authorial voice that is distinct from those of her contemporaries yet congruent with the

gender norms and expectations of her contemporary culture, is grounded in and partially

determined by the literary and cultural traditions in which the author seeks to participate.

In many ways, their texts form a taxonomy of responses to the traditions they appropriate

and to their contemporaries, directly responding to and incorporating elements of each in

order to position themselves within the literature by accessing the shared traditions and

memories of the community. By focusing on primary texts authored by women and

contemporary accounts which provide outside referents for their specific texts, it is

possible to examine the intertextual nature of women's identity in medieval literature and

the traditions within which these women saw themselves as participating. The

delimination of the culture and the traditions in which the individual authors participate

clarifies the function of the text itself in context and allows the reader to engage with the

ways in which specific elements of their culture and material environments impact

modern perceptions of medieval literature and society. In this context, the literature and

the culture can be examined as separate but overlapping areas of study. This separation

makes it possible to identify the impact of individual texts and events on medieval

literature and thought as a whole, and helps to place these texts and their authors in a

meaningful context for the modern scholar.

Examining the traditions as the basis for later women's writings, and the

representation of women as a part of the tradition, necessitates an examination of the

earliest representations of women within the community, an attempt to find the origins of

feminine identity within the community. This is complicated by the number of

representations of women which survive from the early periods, and the polysemic nature

of their appearance within the community. Margot H. King's analysis of the origins of the

anchoretic tradition provides a virtual catalog of women's lives from the early centuries

of the church which were in wide circulation in the medieval West.

> There are many lives of these women. In the fourth century we find Alexandra
> who shut herself up in a tomb and was visited by Melania the Elder; Mary the
> Egyptian; Thaïs; the sisters Nymphodora, Menodora, and Metrodona, recluses in
> a tumultus at Pythiis; Photina who took possession of Martinian's rock for six
> years after the abrupt departure of that terrified man; and, of course, Sara and
> Syncletica, to name only a few. From the middle of the fifth century to the middle
> of the sixth, we find, among others, Anastasia, Apollonaria, Athanasia,
> Euphrosyne, Hilaria, Theodora, Matruna, Eugenia, Marina, Eusebia Hospitia,
> Pelegia, as well as Marana and Cyra who lived in chains in a small half-roofed
> enclosure for forty-two years and who were visited by Theodoret, Bishop of
> Cyprus. (King 7-8)

To this list, Elizabeth Clark adds Melania the Younger, Olympias, Macrina, and Jerome's

descriptions of Marcella in *Epistle 127* and of Paul in *Epistle* 108 (Clark 15).

Additionally, the Biblical lives of Sarah, Mary Magdalene, Judith, and the Virgin Mary

contain elements of the feminine eremitic traditions and serve as models for subsequent

participation by women in religious life. The nature of these texts, and the limitations

placed on the individual through their example, serve to limit the range of responses

possible for later women writers by positioning them first as women and secondly as

models for Christian identity.

These texts function as both *exempla* for later women's texts and as the record of a

communal memory and identity which defines and limits the acceptable modes of

identification. The emphasis on memory, of the history of the self and its construction, in

the earliest accounts considered here remains important through the Middle Ages,

particularly as it relates to the position of women within the church. Elizabeth Castelli notes that "the concern for the preservation of Christian memory is at the heart of early Christian culture "(24), which itself is positioned almost immediately within the Christian community "within a framework of meaning that drew upon broader meta-narratives about temporality, suffering and sacrifice, and identity" (Castelli 25). The intertextual nature of the early lives, particularly in the layering of texts to provide legitimacy for the narrative within the traditions, is key to the work undertaken here.

The connection between temporality and identity emphasized in the early texts, such as the *life* of Mary of Egypt and the biographies of St. Macrina, provides a point of connection between the individual's account of themselves—their autobiography, received biography or the authorized accounts of their lived experiences—and the community to which the texts are addressed. These texts actively participate in the creation of myth, the creation of substantive stories which serve a purpose within the writer's community and address themselves to a common past. The term myth here does not necessitate fictionalization, but rather refers to "narratives that promote a coherent portrait of the past and that forge links within a community among its members and between the community and its claimed past" (Castelli 30).[1] It is within this communal context that the individual author is able to define herself and establish a unique identity within a given text.

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[1] Castelli clarifies her definition of myth in this context as being is "tied to the broader Christian project of producing a useable story—the project of mythmaking" (29). The creation of a mythos of the self or the imposition of such a definition of myth on the received life of an individual underlies several of the questions posed here regarding specific texts.

The construction of identity, particularly for religious women, is a matter of negotiation between the perceived and enforced cultural norms, as they must define themselves simultaneously through and against the collective cultural memory they are allowed recourse to as the basis for their literary selves. Neither the secular nor the ecclesiastic culture can be ignored in reconstructing their conceptions of themselves, as expressed in their work, as each influences their texts and defines the ways in which they are allowed to interact with and within their societies. The liminal state in which these women exist through their texts, in many cases never fully accepted as part of the secular world or as part of the hierarchy of the church, can be traced to the earliest hagiographic and proto-hagiographic texts and to the core documents which define the Christian, literate communities in which they seek to participate. Theirs is not only a textual, literate community, but one in which the texts are taken as absolutes and deviation from the approved roles is often seen as heretical.

The ecclesiastic questions raised in the texts considered here are central to the ways in which these women are able to construct themselves within their communities. Whether the identity put forth is orthodox, ecumenical, or heterodox is often secondary to the underlying participation in the community, although these differentiations often mean the difference between a positive reception of the author and their work, such as the papal validation of Hildegard's of Bingen *Schivas* and the positive reception of Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, or claims of heresy and social rejection, such as the trial and execution of Magerite Porete(1310) and the cultural responses to Margery Kempe's book in late medieval England. The cultural reception of the text is reflective of the author's ability to identify themselves within the perceived norms and through the use of proper

rhetorical strategies. The difference between doctrine and heresy is often a fine line when the author is automatically assumed to be Other because of their gender and education.

It is important to note that the texts under consideration here were intended for a narrow audience within the period. The women who construct themselves through their writings are participating in a chronologically and geographically specific culture, operating within a clearly defined community based in textual and doctrinal location. The religious and secular communities addressed by a given text are not interchangeable, but are often interdependent. This system of exchange and negotiation necessitates a rhetorical strategy that is in contact with the larger culture but remains grounded within the community specifically addressed by the author.[2] While the strategies used by individual authors shift over time, the central points of identification and rhetorical tropes, the *leitmotifs* that ground them in specifically Christian and ecclesiastic terms, are drawn from earlier texts and represent their participation in continuing dialogue with their communities.

The most enduring of these concepts and motifs are grounded in the philosophy and culture of late antiquity as much as they are in the Jewish traditions which the early Christians directly claimed. This is evident in the philosophies expressed by two of the authors most frequently cited in later medieval texts, St. Augustine of Hippo and the apologist Philo. Each fuses elements of classical rhetoric and social dynamics common in late antiquity with definitively Christian thought, providing a clear connection between the older philosophical models and developing Christian theology and identity.

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[2] This is further clarified by Brian Stock's definition of textual communities as, "microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script" (*Listening* 23). The script can be interpreted as either the specific text generated by women, the portrayal of the larger cultural assignations of women with in the text, or the roles granted to women within the larger framework of medieval religious thought. The community is then largely self-defined, subjective, and largely ahistorical in its operation.

Throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the writings of St. Augustine remain the

standard by which the construction of self through literature should be judged. This is

particularly important in understanding the ways in which the concepts of the individual,

especially the gendered individual, and the community are defined within the tradition in

which women writers saw themselves as participating.

Augustine's cognitive processes as expressed in his *Confessions* and *City of God*

provide a clear connection between the philosophical climate of classical antiquity and

the medieval church. Charles Radding points out that Cicero's definition of *populus* in *De

re Publica* is borrowed heavily into Augustine's own definition. Cicero's defines the term

as:

> Not any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an
> assemblage of large numbers associated by an agreement with respect to justice
> and by a communion of interests (*iuris consensus et utiliatatis communione*). The
> first cause for such an association is not so much the weakness of the individual
> as a certain social spirit which nature has implanted in man. (Radding 44)[3]

Augustine's parallel definition from the *City of God* is that the *populus* is "a gathering of

a multitude of human beings united in fellowship by their agreement about the objects of

love" (Augustine v.19). This takes literally Paul's claim that there is no authority except

from God, placing the ordering of the universe outside the individual or collective will

and creating "a reality to which men had to accommodate their existence" (Radding 45).

This adaptation of classical philosophy underscores the shift from classical to

Christianized thought that is expressed in these texts. The identities possible for writers in

the early period, the identifications and modalities which form the basis for later

medieval work on the same subjects, are grounded in classical thought and limited by

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[3] The translation is primarily Clinton Walker Keyes's from his bilingual edition of *De Re Publica* i.25.
Radding acknowledges that he has slightly modified Keyes's literal translation for emphasis and clarity.

Christian reinterpretations of them. These identities are inherently slavish and inherently

individualized, maintaining the appearance of homogeny by mirroring the traditional

sources while integrating them into a distinct social and cultural position through the

author's interpretations of the forms, but function within the limitations of their social

and historical location as a cohesive unit. The earlier text informs the later, but does not

completely limit it.

    Similar cultural hybridity is visible in Philo's work. The apologist grounds his

interpretations primarily in the Hellenistic Jewish traditions, which form the social and

cultural basis for the apostolic church in the early centuries of its development, but is

clearly influenced by Greek and Latinate philosophy. This secondary influence

underscores what is often seen as the misogyny of the early church, which is more fully

developed in the Middle Ages as a codified social structure. R. Howard Bloch finds the

origins of medieval misogyny in Philo's interpretation of Genesis. Bloch claims that:

> Woman is by definition a derivation of man, who, as the direct creation of God,
> remains both chronologically antecedent and ontologically prior. This is at any
> rate how Philo understood things [*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.4-5]…Woman is
> conceived from the beginning to be secondary, a supplement. Here the act of
> naming takes on added significance. For the imposition of names and the creation
> of woman are not only simultaneous by analogous gestures thoroughly implicated
> in each other. Just as words are the supplements of things, which are supposedly
> brought nameless to Adam, so woman is the supplement to, the 'helper' of man.
> (Bloch 10)[4]

Bloch places the reading within a Platonic or neo-Platonic context, emphasizing the

dualist, secondary nature of women in the text. However, claiming that this interpretation

of Platonic dualism is expressly misogynistic is not fully contextualized in Bloch's text or

in the original. As David Winston notes, Philo only uses the term misogyny in its original

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[4] David Winston notes the popularity of this interpretation of Philo among modern scholars in ""Philo and
the Rabbis on Sex and the Body." Winston claims that Bloch is not alone in his limited reading of Philo,
and argues that the Hellenistic dualist philosophy is not monolithic in Philo's text cited above.

context once in his text, to refer to men who have tired of their wives (55). A more

fruitful approach to the origins of misogyny in medieval texts, and its role in defining the

identities of women writers, would be to approach the issue from the perspective of social

and cultural normative imposed on them by their originating cultures. These issues are

not always transparent, but rather represent the confluence of heavily intertextualized

exegesis and a cultural hesitancy toward the body that, for early Christian writers, is not

limited to the abhorrence of women. Rather, the fear of the body and the desire to move

beyond the temptations of the flesh is often grounded in specifically masculine terms by

which women are almost automatically Othered based on lingering Platonic philosophy

and latent Greco-Roman medical discourse. They are physiologically different, and

therefore must be psychologically different as well. Yet, it is possible for women to move

beyond the body, although they can only experience religious transformation *through* the

body.

While this emphasis on feminine corporeality is not uniquely Christian, it is reinforced

by the exegetical tradition. Joan Ferrante claims that Biblical exegesis is among the least

sympathetic genres toward women. Focusing on the divisions between the masculine

spiritus and the feminine *anima*, the disparities between the higher rational soul and the

lower sensible soul, every woman

> is Eve, part of man that is vulnerable to the temptations of the devil, the part
> responsible for his fall from grace. And those women to whom the bible ascribes,
> instead, great moral strength—Judith, Ester, Ruth—are divested of their human
> nature by commentators and are made to represent impersonal abstractions like
> the church; even the bride of the Canticles is identified in early exegesis primarily
> with the collective church. (17)

Yet, the early patristic texts demonstrate that it is possible for the individual woman to

distance herself from the Eve motif and to assume aspects of the higher *spiritus*. By

distancing themselves from the body, denying the corporeal elements inherent in the conceptualization of "woman," and becoming as ascetic, if not more so, as their male contemporaries, it is possible for the female saint to transcend their sexuality and physical gender and effectively become neuter if not male.

The potential for gender shifting within the community is problematized by the gender roles assigned in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the core of the developing Christian community in late antiquity. Particularly problematic are the books of Mosaic law contained in the Old Testament, which codify the proper roles for men and women within the community. Leviticus and Deuteronomy seem to directly contravene the gender flexibility inherited from Greek and Latin secular culture, particularly in pronouncements such as the injunction in Deuteronomy that " woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 22:5).[5] Attempts by early hagiographers and apologists to both construct female identities that conform to both the secular expectations of the community, appealing to potential converts and reinforcing the inclusiveness of the community itself, and to obey the biblical injunctions against gender transgressions complicate the reading of the early texts and those authored by women in the Middle Ages who refer to the earlier texts for models of their own identification within the Christian community. The appearance of transvestite saints,

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[5] In *Sex, Ideology and Religion*, Kevin Harris compares the implied cultural position of this verse to Leviticus 20:13, which is regularly used by modern, conservative Christians as a Biblical basis for the refutation of homosexuality (14). While those who claim membership in the group may not be aware of the particular verse, the underlying ideologies and social tenets are undeniably present within the society and the verse provides exegetical proof for their beliefs. Harris suggests that many scholars are unwilling to acknowledge the tangential connections between the structure of the bible and logical, but problematic forms of social adaptation represented within the text. Harris provides a number of biblical passages he sees as being the source of exegetical misogyny in medieval texts, beginning with Genesis 1: 26-7 and working through Revelations.

masculinized women, and miracles that would come to be considered heretical, as examined in subsequent chapters, represent a negotiation between the secular and the ecumenical communities as well as between a coherent, Christian identity and the traditions from which that identity springs.

   One aspect of this negotiation is the emphasis on the already defined masculine identity. The emphasis on Christianized masculinity is reinforced by the distinctions between the social and political functions of women in late antiquity. While it was possible for women, outside of the texts, to be patrons of Christian authors, the establishment of the church hierarchy and the exegetical emphases quickly leads to a situation in which the "inferiority of women was ideologized by classical Christian (i.e. male) authors. Religious intellectuals developed an ideology that justified the low social position of women and explained why women could not aspire to leadership in the church. One key element in this ideology was the idea that woman was created after man. Another element was the belief that a woman committed the first sin" (Swatos 9). The beginnings of this ideology can be found in the First Epistle to Timothy, particularly in the statement that "It was not Adam who was led astray but the woman: she was deceived into transgression" (I Tim. 2:14). The fall is the fault of Eve, and therefore the fault of all women as daughters of Eve. While William Swatos and Paul Hégy argue that this connection between the misogyny evident in the early writings of the church in late antiquity is symptomatic of "ideological thinking," while still referencing the social hierarchy inherited from the Greco-Roman tradition, there is a much more logical rationale behind these pronouncements (Swatos 11). The texts which establish the exegetical tradition of Christian thought are ideologized and deployed as cultural

normatives, but more effort in them is devoted to the construction of a Christian identity that is both continuous with the Jewish traditions adopted by the early Church and independent from them. A uniquely Christian collective identity is being formed by these writers, and part of the culture is the discussion of the role of women in that community and as part of that overarching identity.

This level of intertextuality and cultural adaptation refocuses the question of belonging and textual construction of identity in a new way. It is not a question of sterility or creativity, conformity or rejection of the models, but rather the underlying historical, philosophical, and ideological implications of a given identity to the writer's community at the time of its composition. While the question initially seems entirely esoteric, unanswerable when isolated from the entirety of the generative culture, but is more accessible when considered in terms of the medieval church in its adaptation and deployment of these models as *de facto* community. The question can be refined and disseminated further, examining the specific traditions in which the authors sought to participate or the ideals they sought to disseminate as the church expanded in the first through sixth centuries. The local community is an important level in analyzing the composition of a text, but the church as a whole is equally important in understanding the functions of a particular saint or their cult.

Part of the difficulty in positioning women ideologically, socially, and historically within the early church, and by extension throughout the Middle Ages as the hagiographic and social models established by early patrician authors become the norm for Christian biography and autobiography, is the conflict that arises due to the disparities exhibited within texts by the same author or community. The conflict is grounded in the

tension between traditional gender roles, gender identities, and the need for the male author to define themselves as male and Christian through proximity and differentiation from their feminine subject. The construction of the woman, or the image of the woman, who serves as the subject of the text represents a process of identification and rejection that can only be staged in contrast to the male ideal. Gail Ashton clarifies the limitations of feminine identity, noting that the masculinization of the traditions in which they wrote:

> imposed a self upon women, defined her in relation only to men. Thus, she is mother, wife, daughter, virgin, or penitent whore. Her holiness, embraced as an alternative and enabling space, is affirmed only by texts denying her a full identity. Privacy and interiority thus become particularly associated with the female. (73)

There exists a fundamental tension which comes to full fruition in the expression of later medieval piety. The inherent limitations of such a definition, the limitation of women to being defined as "not male," must be qualified and contextualized to account the work of authors whose lives in late antiquity or the Middle Ages included significantly different interpretations of gender. Roberta Gilchrist notes that the fluidity of gender, particularly in terms of religious women whose social mobility is often a focal point in the texts by and about them, is essentially a social construct in that it represents "an aspect of social structure which is socially created and historically specific, in contrast with the categories of male and female sex" (1). The transvestitism in *The Life of Pelegia*, the masculine voice that appears in Gregory of Nyssa's biography of his sister Macrina, and the compliments paid to the spirit of Paula in Jerome's *Epistle* 108, receive their power not from their deviance from the perceived norm, but from their participation in this fluid consideration of gender. As much more social structures than actual distinctions between what modern scholars would consider when using the terms, their deployment is the

source of their strength. However, the deployment of these concepts in an environment whose essential functions are dominated by a textual and exegetical tradition complicates the reading of these women and emphasizes the liminality of their experiences and being in the context of their texts.

Later medieval biography and autobiography operate within many of the same ideological limitations. While it is possible for women who author their own lives to deploy more iconoclastic versions of the self, they are also limited by the same culturally grounded limitations of conceptualized womanhood. They are only able to create themselves or versions of themselves, within the literate conventions and established motifs available to them as women. While the degree of individuality permissible within their texts does change over time, the core images and gendered assumptions change remarkably little. Many of the limitations are, interestingly, further reinforced by more tolerant forms of female ideological expression and through women's use of the tropes in their own works. The establishment of specifically feminine identities within the extant corpus is the establishment of the Other and the individual author's use of their own perceived limitations as a means of self-definition.

The texts considered here, when placed in dialogue with each other represent individual women's attempt to both participate in and to interrogate the traditions. The narrative practices established by the early patristic texts, particularly the archetypical models examined in the next chapter, form the basis for the textual construction of women's identities throughout the Middle Ages in both ecclesiastic and secular literatures. These traditions and conventions form the basis upon which women from Heloise to St. Teresa build their presentations of themselves as orthodox, and yet they are

also the foundation for accusations of heresy in the case of Marguerite Porete as well as affective piety of Angela of Foligno and Margery Kempe. Each text, in its own way, reinterprets the traditions and simultaneously accepts and challenges what it means to be a woman, and to write as a woman, within their culture.

CHAPTER 1

(EN)GENDERING TEXTS: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WOMEN'S LITERARY TRADITIONS

The existence of a holy typology, established relatively early in the hagiographic tradition, which informs the biographies and later the autobiographies of religious women from late antiquity onwards is not a new idea. The archetypical stories represent the core typology adapted by later women in crafting their own textual identities, texts widely circulated in both Latin and the vernaculars, adopted into the secular and ecclesiastic calendars, and integrated into the communal consciousness of the textual communities in which many of the women considered in this survey wrote.

It is helpful to recall Thomas Heffernan's distinction between purely hagiographic materials and "sacred biography." The differentiation between the two forms, the didactic, encyclopedic argument of traditional hagiographic texts as opposed to the narrative and intertextual form of biography, is important in approaching the texts which most directly influence the construction of identities in the work of medieval women. These women create themselves within their biographies, sometimes autobiographical but more often as interactive narratives through which they project a sense of themselves. Such projection is a logical outgrowth of the tradition they seek to participate in, particularly in light of the models provided for women's identity in the examples to which they would have had access. The distinctions between these two forms, particularly the specific ends to which each genre is used within the community, are particularly important in examining the impact of the earlier texts as models for later women's autobiography or dictation. The archetypical texts considered here are, in many

ways, outside of Heffernan's definition of pure hagiography. Early texts, such as the narratives of Perpetua, the multiple redactions of the *Life* of Mary of Egypt, and the adoption of feminine voices by patristic authors, including St. Gregory's interpretations of St. Macrina, position women in specific contexts within the Christian community and are frequently staged as historical documents rather than as hagiographic texts with the generic limitations imposed on officially sanctioned *lives*. The texts are often ambivalent, self contradictory, and occasionally openly hostile in many ways towards their subjects. Under these circumstances, they do not present a single, linear argument for the sanctity of the subject, but rather prove it by discussion, conflict, and example. These holy women are, undoubtedly, holy and worthy of emulation by the community for whom their texts were intended. However, the texts themselves, and often the authors of the texts, exert a level of social control and instruction that draw their authority from structures outside the feminine identity which they display and that is independent of the representation of women within the texts themselves.

Larissa Tracy succinctly describes the effect of the hagiographic tradition as giving rise to a specifically medieval genre which "captured both the religious and secular imagination and gave women a new position in society" (1). The elevation of women as subject, and the underlying clarification of their expected roles within society, serves to focus the reader's attention on the performance of women within the *vitae* and the performance of the identities assigned to them. While Tracy acknowledges the role played by the virgin martyr as the highest level of sanctity, the materials also demonstrate the need, especially in the earliest materials, to include the diverse spectrum of womanhood, including "mothers, wives, repentant sinners, and holy transvestites" (2).

The inclusion of this diverse typology in popular literature throughout the Middle Ages, particularly in compilations such as de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and its translations, provides a means of direct contact between later medieval women in search of identity models and the traditional models imposed on feminine identity by male authors whose ultimate goal in composing the texts was to locate the role of women within Christian culture. Leslie Donovan's claim that the facts about the subjects "lives encoded in these texts provide evidence for understanding the history of women in Christianity, medieval religious thought, and medieval popular culture as well as the development of women's spirituality" is at once sweeping and problematic (Donovan 12). The history which they present must be read in light of not only its effect on medieval women's lives in general, but also as a male reading of history and a specifically hierarchical assignation of roles within the society. The early texts considered in this chapter, many of which are indeed included in de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* as well as widely attested elsewhere throughout the medieval world, must first be understood in terms of their content and structure, the tradition which the texts themselves serve to establish, before their impact on the writings of later medieval women can be fully understood. The texts specifically considered as models for later feminine identity: the lives of Mary of Egypt, Thaïs, and Pelegia of Antioch, the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and the official lives of St. Macrina as written by her brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa; represent only a small sampling of the official and unofficial *lives* and *acts* attributed to male and female saints as either subject or author in late antiquity and retold throughout the Middle Ages. However, these examples provide clear examples of the ways in which the earlier lives and the established traditions within the Church and medieval society as a whole serve as models

for a plastic and transient concept of identity as it is broadly deployed in medieval

women's biographies and texts.

The popularity of these particular *lives* as models for medieval women, particularly

the transvestite saints and repentant harlots, is grounded in issues of class as much as it is

in issues of gender. Despite Leyser's claim that "noble blood is an essential prerequisite"

for sanctity as a model for medieval noblewomen, a sentiment somewhat reinforced by

Tracy's analysis of the hierarchy of early hagiography (Tracy 7), there is limited textual

support for such claims. Rather, many of the women represented in the most traditional of

the tales and specifically those considered here would be more closely aligned with the

merchant classes and skilled tradesmen whose roles within the medieval Church were at

times as problematic as those of women. Mary of Egypt claims no noble blood, nor does

Thaïs or Pelegia, but rather that they are from "good families" and had fallen astray.

Thecla is, arguably, from aristocratic stock and well connected within Iconium, but

attribution of nobility in its medieval sense is, at best, a stretch of the term. Gregory of

Nyssa is particularly careful to emphasize the fact that his family, and therefore that of

his sister Macrina, is not of noble extraction but rather had been granted a measure of

success through the bounty of God. The possibility of success through the Church,

through the providence of God, and that of personal sanctity, reflects a much more

medieval sense of Christian valuation of the individual and a recognition of the

peculiarities of the Church than a purely nobilicentric emphasis. While the elite classes

tended more toward literacy throughout the period, the advancements in the production

and dissemination of the written word ensured that the audience for such tales was not

limited to a select elite. Rather, these tales also circulated widely in the oral culture, often

drawn directly from the textual exemplars available which hastened the adoption of some

elements of the texts into both popular folklore and vernacular literature.

   This is particularly visible in the early performance of the tales within the church itself

and the use of these lives as the source of visceral referents easily accessible to converts

in late antiquity or by medieval illiterate audiences as:

> Their lives would have been used by preachers seeking edifying stories to
> illustrate a sermon and thus would be known to the general public as well as the
> monks, priests, and literate nobles or bourgeois who read devotional works. The
> church had an interest in spreading the message of repentance as widely as
> possible, but what is relevant here is not the purpose or intention of the writers but
> the meaning to readers and listeners. While preachers used the tales to illustrate
> the general theme of god's mercy to the contrite, a more specific message about
> gender was also implicit in the tales, to be read by both women and men. (Karras
> 31)

The success of this aspect of the lives considered here is attested by their popularity

throughout the period. In addition to recognized collections, such as de Voragine's, and

inclusion in psalters and devotional books for aristocratic families, the lives circulated

widely in individual manuscripts or as part of collections intended for educational use

throughout the Church. One example of this promulgation of women's lives is the

number of extant variants of the *life* of Mary of Egypt. Manuscripts which include the

tale are attested in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, German, and Latin meter

variants, as well as abbreviated forms such as Adgar's Anglo-Norman collection and

fragmentary mentions in the vernacular lives of other saints.[6] This phenomenon is not

limited to the Middle Ages, but the medieval practice is the logical inheritance of earlier

intertextuality. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the lives themselves often

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[6] Karras, p. 8, provides a more extensive list of concurrent manuscripts containing individual *lives*
throughout the period.

contain clear references to other lives or the larger traditions of the Church which the individual tales serve to reinforce and further disseminate.

The success, and accessibility, of a given tale depends largely on its relevance to the lives of its audience. Symbolic connections form the basis for this relevance, and add to the currency of the text in the mind of the audience. This phenomenon may, in part, explain the popularity of tales such as the life of Mary of Egypt, Thaïs, and Pelegia, whose fallen state and redemption are particularly appealing to the marginalized elements within the society in which the texts were composed as well as later medieval culture. That all three are represented as wantons, courtesans, actresses or prostitutes, depending on the manuscript considered, makes a clear statement about the general view of women among the early Church Fathers and those they sought to enlighten converts to the faith and to reinforce the core values of the early church. The motif of the prostitute saint embodied a universality of sin and promiscuity, as the "prostitute could represent Everywoman more easily than, for example, the murderer could represent Everyman. The prostitute represented Everyman as well, for the primarily monastic authors who developed the theme of woman as temptress recognized that men too, both monastic and secular, sinned through lust. But the mechanism for their downfall was a woman; the blame fell on her" (Karras 6).

Yet, the texts themselves function as models of redemption and as proselytizing texts, in part, because of the distance established between the audience and the performers within the texts. The harlots, transvestites, and even the holy virgins are temporally and spatially isolated from the reader/listener in order to both universalize the message contained within the text and to enforce the ultimate redemption and social norming the

texts are meant to embody. The specific distance between the reader and the subject of the lives, even in late antiquity, is far from accidental. The "holy harlots" in particular were deliberately

> placed at a chronological distance, muting somewhat the message of repentance and salvation. Though that message was directed at men as well as women, the fact that the dramatic conversion from sin to repentance took place with women displaced all sexual sin onto women and made feminine sexuality, not just sexuality in general, the greatest evil. A murderer could serve as an example of repentance (and often did so in medieval handbooks of exempla). But few such became saints. Authors chose sexual sins to depict most dramatically the process of repentance and women as sinners. The vast majority of female 'sinful saints' had committed sexual sins. Holy virgins and dutiful wives could become saints too, of course. But the penitents were prostitutes. Sexuality, for the Middle Ages, constituted a woman's life; if she sinned it would be by abusing her most salient quality. (Karras 32)

The distance established between the reader and the penitent saint only reinforces the "prostitute paradigm," in which the sins of feminine sexuality underscore the need for feminine models of perfection and chastity in ways that male readers need not be reminded of directly. The abandonment of traditional roles and the display of carnal excess stand in sharp contrast to the depths of asceticism into which many of these holy harlots plunge.

It is important to note that the referent texts for both the *Life of Mary of Egypt* and the *Life of St. Pelegia* are nearly contemporary with each other in their most popular forms. Both date to the late sixth or early seventh century in their Latin rescensions, but exist in multiple Latin and vernacular manuscripts. While each provides an ascetic model of feminine identity, the individual lives also provide a specific mode of identification and a form of communal identification which lend themselves to later feminine biography and autobiography.

The lives themselves undergo significant transformations within the early church, which in part explains the variants which exist in later vernacular forms. The transmission and alteration which the *Life of Mary of Egypt* undergoes is particularly representative of this phenomenon. While the most common form of the life in circulation in the Middle Ages is the late sixth century or early seventh century composition attributed to Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem. However, the life itself, as Jane Stevenson notes, appears in its earliest, incomplete version as an episode in the life of Kyriakos by Cyril of Scythopolis, *c.* 560 (20). In Cyril's text, Mary is described as a *psaltria*, a harpist, in the church of Anastasis in Jerusalem who had fled to the desert after becoming the object of scandal. There, she is discovered by John, a disciple of Kyriakos, who serves as a narrator for the tale but does not take the same active role in the pursuit and adoration of the solitary. The simplicity of Cyril's tale is in stark contrast to Sophronius's text, in which Mary is given an elaborate background as an Alexandrian harlot who repents and is sent into the desert under divine aegis. Zosimus, substituted for John, takes an active role in chasing Mary across the desert, and Mary's death is attended by miracles. Stevenson argues that the more elaborate version indicates an exegetical and cultural reappropriation of the story, providing the reader with an Old Testament resonance (Ezekiel 23.2-3) and a redemption motif appropriate for a secularized Christian audience (21). Mary's life in isolation in the desert, the effective removal of her temptation from the populace at large, is particularly telling of the conflicts within the early church regarding the role of women. Long before the rise of Marian devotion, the prefigurement of the Eve motif that dominates medieval theology appears in lives such as this. Stevenson notes that when Mary is allowed to tell her life story, particularly in

relating her carnal excesses, her life becomes "a creation of male paranoia about women. Her days as a nymphomaniac (it is not wholly accurate to describe her as a whore since she did not seek payment) can be located within contemporary masculine views of women's sexuality" (26). The emphasis shifts from her redemption through divine intervention, her direct reception of divine inspiration and visions, to her own repeated emphasis of her fallen state prior to these revelations and the shame of her feminine inclinations. In Donovan's translation of the Anglo-Saxon rescension of the tale included in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, Mary's account of her lustful nature and deprecation of her sex consume 115 lines, her supplications to the Virgin consume 58 lines, and the revelations granted her by the Virgin (including dialogue) occupy just 35 lines (Donovan 107-113). Even after her revelations, and self-imposed exile to the desert, Mary spends an additional 50 lines recounting her sinful thoughts while alone in the desert.

Despite the emphasis the saint places on her own failings, Zosimus recognizes her immediately as a saintly figure. His validation of her experiences, especially her redemption in the desert, is grounded in both the extremity of her asceticism and asexual exposure. Mary is naked throughout his pursuit of her through the desert, burned black by the sun and elements. Her nudity is emblematic of her return to near perfection, a fallen mirror of the Edenic state, which could only be achieved in this context through the complete denial of the flesh. Yet, once he has caught up with her, the monk turns his back on her until she dons the cloak which he gives her in an attempt to preserve his own chastity from temptation. After she is covered, a second—spiritual—exposure ensues, in which she lays bare her sordid past and subsequent redemption through divine love. This double exposure, indeed overexposure in terms of history and social commentary, stands

in contrast to Zosimus's argument, and indeed the *life*'s argument, that Mary of Egypt is worthy of emulation. This ambiguity, which is only resolved with the saint's death and miraculous burial, reinforces the ways in which "Mary's characterization as a female ascetic saint can be used to illustrate underlying assumptions about women, the body, and sanctity" (Stevenson 38). It is only through the denial of the flesh, and the renunciation of one's position in society, that women can hope to attain sanctity under this model. The body must be effaced, denied, destroyed, in favor of the life of the soul. While these are core tenets of the early church, particularly ascetic movements with the church, their deployment as a complete, narrative model for feminine identity functions to define the subject as both "not male" and as unsuitable as a model for emulation without being separated from the sins of the flesh. While male ascetics endure many of the same trials as the women considered here, it is the application of the double remove from inherent carnal laxity and flawed nature that makes the ascetic model problematic when applied to women.

A similar theme of carnal laxity appears in the *Life of St. Pelegia*. Pelegia is an actress, whose pomp and beauty strike the assembled bishops silent when they see her procession passing by. The exception to this is the Bishop Nonnus, who sets out to convert the actress, in some versions she is described as a courtesan, and guides her on her path of ascetic redemption. As part of Pelagia's conversion narrative, she sells her worldly goods and gives the proceeds to the church before donning male robes and hiding away in a monastery. It is only after she has entered the masculinized world of asceticism that she is able to accept the teachings of the church and distance herself from her worldly sins. Like her contemporary, Thaïs, the details of Pelegia's life after her conversion are almost

interchangeable with other redeemed harlots. The emphasis is placed on her shedding of

her female identity as a means of redemption and the denial of the extant self is the key to

her saintliness and is the recognizable core of the identity she is given by her male

biographer.

These lives represent an interpretation of the Magdalene figure, the repentant harlot

who finds redemption through faith. While they feature women as their protagonists, the

lives are not about the women themselves, but rather reinforce the fact that

> holy harlots are images of repentance whose basic function is symbolic: either
> they are construed as images of human salvation, or they are seen as a product of
> the male monastic imaginary that uses the figure of the courtesan to bring home to
> the monk his state as a sinner. Both of these *vies* vitiate the specifically female
> aspect of these hagiographic images, the one by universalizing them, the other by
> seeing them as objects for exchange between ascetic men. (*Harlot* 422)

They are aspects of women made manifest in the text by men who sought to explain the

roles of women within the church and within their own monastic culture. The

ambivalence with which they approach their subject, and their attempts to fit the "fallen

woman" into their world view, leads to the construction of *topoi* rather than individuals,

the idea of women rather than individualized women inserted into the text.

Miller's view of masculine constructions of women is particularly valuable here, in

that she chooses to see the harlot-saint as a "grotesquerie—a not-quite-coherent

construct—and as such brings to its most acute expression the problematic quality of

early Christian attempts to construct a representation of female holiness" (423). This is

only highlighted within the texts themselves by the ephemeral or phantasmal descriptors

used to identify the women. Mary of Egypt is described by Zosimus as a "ghost, a specter

with the shape of a person," Pelegia is described by Bishop Nonnus as a "fantasy," and

even saintly and chaste Macrina is described by Gregory of Nyssa as an "apparition" as

she nears death. Miller views these descriptors as dialogic cues to the reader that the

women are indeed simulacra, that they are "'concepts without form' just beyond the

reach of coherence…anomalous beings, they will continually pass in and out of focus"

(425). The transition between autonomous lovers, actualized women, and agents with

their own agendas to phantasms and images is a remarkably short remove in many ways.

Focusing specifically on Mary and Pelegia, Miller notes that autonomous women, such as

the repentant harlots before their conversion experiences,

> disrupt male norms of subjectivity. And, as harlots typically did in the Roman
> imagination, Mary and Pelegia cross forbidden boundaries between domestic,
> private, female-gendered space and public, male-gendered space. Even after their
> conversions, they continue to occupy positions of agency, not only by switching
> teaching and priestly roles with their male interlocutors but also by practicing
> their spirituality in solitude, apart from male ecclesiastical structures. The
> grotesque violates categories and threatens to de-center cultural norms. (429)

This threat to cultural norms necessitates the masculinizing of the saints in order for them

to approach holiness, a paradoxical approach given the biblical and cultural injunctions

against this seemingly free exchange of social and gender roles, which only serves to

reinforce the perception of the image of woman, the simulacra effect, rather than identity

and actual sanctity. Miller further argues that while both Mary and Pelegia "approach the

holy," their actualization is undermined by gendered contradictions which both elevate

and debase the roles in which they are placed (430).

In order for these women, the most fallen of the fallen sex, to approach sanctity it is

necessary to not only isolate them spatially and temporally from the reader but to isolate

them from their own gendered identities. While this is often accomplished in early

hagiography through the reinforcement of ascetic practices which distance the individual

from their biological gender, saints such as Pelegia are also marked by their adoption of

outwardly male appearances and participation in transvestitism in order to further erase their sexual nature. The imposition of male appearances and masculinized identities on the female subject is also in keeping with the language available to the authors of these lives. In classical Latin, the "virtus" of the subject, in virtue and virility, refers not only to their virtue but also to their manliness, and to act virtuously was to act like a proper man within the community. While this application undergoes a shift in later periods, coming to refer specifically to the saint's powers and thamaturgic capabilities, the virtue of these early women is defined liminally by their abilities to demonstrate masculine traits and to assume the roles of men within their communities, by their ability to pass as men.

The transvestite motif is marked by its liminality and flexibility as a symbol. Some of the early saints dress in male garb to escape from stifling homes and arranged marriages, while others "disguise themselves as men in order to mark their conversion to Christianity and the monastic life" (Davis 4). For reformed prostitutes such as Pelegia and Mary of Egypt, the shedding of feminine finery represents a break from sinful pasts, while for others, such as Mary Meretrix, it frees them from familial and social ties which would otherwise limit their position as holy women. The outward signs of masculinity serve as a symbol of the degree to which these women reject their assigned social roles and family obligations, and the depth of their conversions. Davis suggests that the number of transvestite *lives* produced in the early centuries of Christianity may stem from monastic guilt, the tensions aroused as the authors attempt to "raise up heroic examples of women's piety to atone for female guilt, as well as to atone for the guilt of the monks themselves" (Davis 8).[7]

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[7] This argument is taken a step further in Anson's examination of early examples of this genre. See Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism," 13-30.

The monks' guilt is tempered by the recognition that the portrayal of such lives, and the elevation of the female subject to sanctity, is distanced from their own existence by degrees through the text. The women themselves, in the legends and lives the monks choose to record, are almost universally masculinized and isolated from the community. This distancing allows the monastic scribe to express a degree of ambivalence toward the subject that an actual, physical woman would negate. Hotchkiss notes that this trend is continued in the popular adaptations of these lives throughout medieval literature, in a marked ambivalence toward cross dressing in general as "the stories of disguised women draws attention to the strict gender codes, yet the positive image of the transvestite presupposes a tolerant view of the transgression—at least from a distance" (12). Within the context of the medieval church, this ambivalence is given additional resonance as the women represent "actualizations of male metaphors for faith, cross-dressed women symbolically depict the power of Christianity to 'transform' its adherents" (19). Such transformations serve to both reinforce male supremacy and underscore the hierarchical nature of the church, along with its position as the agency for change in both the ecclesiastic and secular worlds.

The model of female sanctity proposed in these texts, as the feminine is negated, erased, or sealed, serves as an effective mirror for masculine continence. While male saints undergo a process of desexualization through asceticism, the distancing of the individual from their sexuality and sexual identities takes on additional layers of meaning. The sealing off or erasure of the outward symbols of womanhood serves as both a means of isolating the physical woman, allowing the inner ascetic to transcend their bodily nature, and of urging women to adopt the ascetic practices outlined in the

literature itself. This transformation is ritualized and codified within the texts, not every

holy harlot resorts to transvestitism, but "by producing this ritual of transformation, early

Christian monastic culture was defining itself as it tried to resolve its own inconsistencies

and ambivalence regarding the spiritual status of women" (Davis 9). The texts

themselves—their plots and their characterizations of the heroines—are in fact

composites of intertextual references (Davis 14). This opinion is supported by the

absence of interpretation or exegesis within the texts themselves, which suggests that the

hagiographers presumed that their readers were already familiar with variants of the tales

and "other discourses that would have helped make sense of the transvestite motif"

(Davis 16).

    The author's awareness of these textual and contextual gaps is reflected in the

physical, as well as spiritual and intellective portrayal of women in these texts.

> The intertextual fragmentation and defeminization of the transvestite saint is
> frequently mirrored in actual physical deterioration of the saint's body through
> ascetic practice. While the woman's body is obscured—elided—by the act of
> transvestitism, it is often physically deconstructed through the rigors of
> asceticism. Thus, one reads in the *Life of Hilaria* that her breasts became
> 'shrunken with ascetic practices' and her menstrual flow dried up. Apolinaria's
> body turns hard and rough like the hide of a tortoise: the narrator describes her
> body as having 'melted away' through self renunciation. (Davis 28)

To this list should be added the descriptions of Pelegia becoming "emaciated by fasting"

(Ward 74), with sunken eyes and fleshless limbs. This continues the dislocation of the

physically and spiritually feminine from the saint themselves. They progressively shed

layers of physical and social normalcy in pursuit of spiritual perfection and fulfillment,

becoming more than women but also progressively more isolated from the mundane

world which they have left behind.

Feminine identity is, in this context, effectively transformed into a non-identity. It becomes a form of *tabula rasa* onto which the precepts of the church, secular society, and the author themselves can project an idealized form of propriety and faith. Especially in terms of these comparatively brief *lives,* the image of the woman, as outlined in the previous chapter, takes precedence over the presentation of actualized experience or an independent identity. In all of these texts, the imposed identity is more a reflection of male construction of women than of the women themselves. Yet, throughout the Middle Ages, these models are given as authorized modes of belonging and being for women. In late antiquity and throughout the medieval world, the degree to which "Christian sacraments, doctrine, and iconography were enmeshed in the deployment and daily legitimations of power, as well as in resistances to that power" has been the focus of significant scholarly attention (*Powers* 16).[8] While feminine resistance to what is often read as the masculine power of the Church is central to the discussion undertaken here, it is often more fruitful to examine how these women write themselves into traditional modes of identity and use established motifs in order to put forth a unique and explicitly female identity.

Examining the place of early hagiography in the formation of medieval notions of women, Tracy observes that, in regard to the early female saints,

> it stands to reason that these are women whom the Church Fathers would elevate as role models for the women of the Middle Ages. But in doing that, medieval women were presented with vocal, defiant role models that allowed them to reconsider their own position in society. By the medieval period, however, female speech was viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, even from the mouths of saints. (Tracy 119)

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[8] Ayers specifically references the contributions of Karma Lochrie, Sara Beckwith, Miri Rubin, Janet Coleman, and Gail Ashton within his article on the subject of direct access to these tropes in late medieval literature. See also Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*; Bell, *Holy Anorexia*.

In addition to the intended modeling for women's socialization and cultural norming, the texts considered here "exemplify the dualities intrinsic in medieval life" (Donovan 5). Culturally and textually, the lives are themselves accretions of earlier stories, oral traditions and authorial intentions and interpretations. As will be discussed in later chapters, these interpretations were often imposed on the texts at their creation, bringing works that could be considered marginal, if not heretical, into a semblance of concord with male expectations of female writings in the period. It was often a fine line between heresy and moderate orthodoxy in many spectrums of medieval thought; but, this demarcation was often much finer when applied to women's texts and their personal interpretations of the traditions.

The issues raised by early ascetic saints are only compounded when they are compared to similar texts with which medieval women would likely be familiar. Both the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the more scholastic *vita* of St. Macrina, along with Gregory's fuller description of the saint in his *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, present alternative versions of women's identities that more directly connect with the social and literary milieus in which many of the women considered here lived and wrote. While these texts are stylistically and contextually more accessible in some ways than the abbreviated lives of the transvestite saints and redeemed harlots discussed above, their popularity throughout the Middle Ages and the rhetorics they employ position them as equally viable models on which later women could base their own literary and cultural identities.

Dyan Elliott's positioning of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* within the tradition reflects the prevalent view of the text as a hybrid form, crossing generic

boundaries between traditional interpretations of hagiography and the popular romance of late antiquity. In Elliott's view,

> this document is the earliest full-fledged hagiographic romance, composed perhaps as early as the last third of the second century. The story opens with a journey. St. Paul is on his way from Antioch to Iconium… the heroine, Thecla, is a perfect romance heroine—seventeen years old and beautiful. She hears Paul preach about virginity and sits in her window, enraptured, watching and listening, refusing to move. (48-9)

Elliott observes that earlier scholars have noted the abundance of novelistic motifs in the text, including the presence of "jealous rivals, Thecla's spurned fiancé, travel, imprisonment, miraculous escapes from mortal peril, and so forth" (49). While common in the novels of late antiquity, these are the motifs which characterize hagiography in general, and specifically women's hagiography, throughout the medieval period. Thecla also becomes the model for later hagiographic heroines in her perfection of faith and her association with St. Paul.

Qualifying the *Acts* as a hagiographic text is, in itself, problematic. The text does not follow the common conventions of early hagiography and seems deliberately self-problematizing. While the *Acts* are not alone in this deviation from the generic norms, the text serves as a benchmark by which other gynocentric texts in the period may be judged in terms of their deviation from the standards of the time. Elliott notes that:

> Most *vitae* end with the saint's death and burial, but in a number of accounts this event signals more than the end of the hero's earthly career. Particularly in tales of women saints, it serves as a moment of recognition; it is, therefore, doubly an ascent theme, for the saint mounts to heaven and the world gains knowledge. The motif of disguise is especially common in accounts of women, many of whom flee home clothed as men, a stratagem for which there were good practical reasons in that it made pursuit more difficult and also protected the heroine from unwelcome sexual advances. In some cases the woman abandons the disguise after she reached safety (e.g. Thecla), but others continue as men until their deaths. (Elliott 119)

While the motif of transvestitism appears only briefly in *Acts,* it forms the central motif of many other early *Lives.* Examples include Euphrosyne, who lives for 38 years as a monk named Smaragdus and consoles her own father over the loss of his daughter, and Marina's disguise as "Brother Marinus," which is only removed as the monks prepare her body for burial. Interstingly, the protagonist's gender is similarly revealed after their death in the *Golden Legend* version of Pelegia.

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is unique among the texts considered here in that the *Acts* seems to offer multiple versions of feminine identity in a single text. Unlike Mary of Egypt or Pelegia, whose conversions are marked by denouncing their previous lives and linear, the character of Thecla is fluid and recursive. She is considered by many to be the first female martyr, even though she does not die (Eliott 148). Rather, Thecla is preserved through the punishments inflicted on martyrs by divine intervention; only to be entombed in a rock which miraculously opens to preserve her chastity decades later (*Thecla* 28.7). The symbolic and repeated martyrdom represents one layer of intertextuality that can be discerned. Thecla's near deaths from fire, water, animal attack, and human actions mirror both biblical and later hagiographic motifs. The image of the protective or divine animal, such as the she lion that defends Thecla in the amphitheater until its own death, frequently recurs throughout the corpus.

The motif of the animal's mercy is widespread and diverse, particularly in relation to the redemption of pagans and women: Daria is defended in the brothel by a lion which attacks a man who enters her room with malicious intent; Anicetus, martyred under Diocletian, was bathed by a lion's paw and tongue to assuage his fear; and St. Mamas's sweat was licked away by a wild leopard. These, and other motifs, can be partially traced

back to the biblical account of Daniel in the lion's den, but the image is considerably extended and revised in the hagiographical tradition. In the story of Daniel, the lions serve as protectors, companions, and judges on behalf of those protected by God (Daniel 6:4-27). Similarly, Thecla and Daria are protected by lions, while the stories of St. Jerome and the lion with a thorn in its paw, the identical story of St. Gerasimus in the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus, and the assistance of lions in burying a number of saints including Mary of Egypt extend the beast metaphor and reduce the pagans to less than beasts in their opposition to God's will.

These extratextual influences are clearly visible in the reception of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Life of Macrina*, as recorded by her brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and these texts provide examples of two of the most common tropes for the representation of women in the middle ages: the Thecla presented in *Acts of Paul and Thecla* provides a model life for ascetic women, emphasizing the physical, social, and bodily nature of women's experience of religious doctrine; Gregory of Nyssa's Macrina becomes the feminine Other, the one who can speak about the experience of religion and inspiration but cannot engage with the higher orders of theology without a male interpreter to authorize her voice. The story of Thecla is reflected in many of the concurrently circulated texts, and provides a doctrinal voice for the developing community. She becomes the symbol of the rejection of the pagan social order, a paragon of the young church, and the companion of its greatest proponent, yet also reinforces the gendered divisions within the received social order.

Clark describes the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as "an excellent example of a text being both consequence and cause" in terms of its theological and social placement as it both

complicates the image of Paul and his views on women presented in other sources and reinforces established elements of the apostle's philosophy.[9] Based on the models provided by early proto-hagiographic texts and the circulating manuscripts, the question posed by later attempts to enact the feminine through literature are less about issues of gender and sex than about issues of community and belonging. The early texts provide few models for a communal feminine identity, emphasizing the value of male community and the secondary nature of feminine belonging. Thecla, disciple of the apostle and later saint in her own right, is not recognized as a fully participatory member of the community by Paul. This disparity between the acknowledged apostle, whose own messages of acceptance and community form the basis for many of the philosophical treatises of the Middle Ages, and his own disciple, often cited by later generations as the model of woman and bolsters the perception, particularly after the resurgence of classical knowledge and rhetorics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that woman, as material source, must be a lesser being—less worthy of God's love—according to her grounding in the flesh (*Summa Theologica* II.ii.26.10-12), cannot be dismissed by the later theologians and scholars who seek to emulate Paul's style and message.

   The Acts of Paul and Thecla recounts the events after Paul's flight from Antioch to Iconium. The tone and language of the first chapter mirrors those of the earliest epistles attributed to the saint, serving as a litany of Paul's doctrinal teachings throughout Asia Minor in the early decades of the apostolic mission. The surviving text is modeled on the Greek novels of late antiquity, containing the masculine intrigues against the apostle by those resistant to conversion as well as the conversion and subsequent martyrdom of

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[9] See Dennis R. MacDonald's The Legend and the Apostle for a fuller discussion of the text's Pauline philosophy, St. Jerome also discusses the impact of these *Acts* on his patron, Paula, in *Ep*. 22.

Thecla herself. What is striking about this tale in terms of its influence on later perceptions of women is the means of Thecla's conversion in light of her subsequent actions.

The indoctrination of Thecla is presented as secondary to the Pauline mission in Iconium, she is not present at Paul's sermons but rather "by the advantage of a window in the house where Paul was, she both night and day heard Paul's sermons concerning God, concerning charity, concerning faith in Christ, and concerning prayer; nor would she depart from the window, till with exceeding joy she was subdued to the doctrines of the faith" (*Thecla* II.2-3). Unlike that of her biographer or her mentor, Thecla's conversion is entirely aural; it is not until she has absorbed Paul's teachings for three days that she feels worthy to approach him. Even at this point, Paul's position remains central to the text, including his betrayal by his companions to Thecla's fiancée, her mother, and, ultimately, the governor of the province. When Paul is sent to prison for his activities, Thecla demonstrates surprising resolve in bribing the guards so that she is admitted to his cell, where she sits at his feet to receive "the great things of God" (*Thecla* IV.11). To this point, Thecla's silence and aural conversion are in keeping with the early exegetical tradition. Her physical presence and worldly activities mark her as a bodily presence, grounded in the feminine world of mundane life, while the descriptions of Paul, including a rare physical description of the apostle (I.7), are almost exclusively intellectual or angelic. This silence continues through the governor's inquisition at which she is condemned to death. Rather than speaking on her own behalf or that of Paul, she "stood still, with her eyes fixed upon Paul" even as her mother demands that she should "be burnt in the midst of the theater, for refusing Thamyris, that all women may learn from

her to avoid such practices" (V.8). Paul escapes as Thecla is prepared for the pyre, taking refuge in a cave even as God sends a storm to put out the flames, preserve a naked Thecla's purity, and to smite the pagan residents of Iconium.

It is only after this first martyrdom that Thecla is free of her social position and the obligations of her mundane life. Setting aside her sexuality and subjective position, her ordeal recasts her as the object of divine grace and allows her to finally address the apostle after her escape. The text is pointed in its positioning of the apostle, and its positioning of Thecla herself. When Thecla reaches Paul, she found Paul upon his knees praying, "O holy Father, O Lord Jesus Christ, grant that the fire may not touch Thecla; but be her helper, for she is thy servant" (*Thecla* VI.7). This prayer of intercession serves two purposes here: first, it reinforces the centrality of Paul to the text, as the male agent of God he is the only one with the authority to make such a petition and he represents the earthly embodiment of the Church and its mercies; secondly, Thecla herself is entirely dependent on Paul for his guidance through her conversion and as impetus to move her from silence to speech and action. The second point is reinforced when Thecla asks the apostle if she may be baptized and receive the gift of Christ. Paul denies her baptism, but says that she may follow him. As with the repentant harlots discussed above, as well as in scriptural examples, Thecla is insufficiently removed from her worldly existence and the sins of the world to be acknowledged as belonging within Paul's society. This provides the author with the opportunity to emphasize Thecla's patience, an embodiment of a cardinal virtue, and the humility expected of women within the community. However, these roles are promptly reversed when she follows Paul to Antioch and experiences her second martyrdom.

In Antioch, she is accosted by a magistrate and humiliates him in front of the crowd after Paul has both denied her and abandoned her again. Thrown naked to wild beasts for her insolence, Thecla is protected by a she-lion, and then baptizes herself in a pit of water in the amphitheater (IX.7-9). These actions not only provide points of intertextual identification, they also allow for a degree of Christology not attainable in the shorter lives previously discussed. Thecla becomes, in her desperation, a Christ-like figure herself and takes on her predestined role within the church and the community. Her self-baptism, and symbolic deaths, mark major renunciations of her female social and political functions within the community and makes it possible for her to make the final steps to becoming a fully participatory member of the Christian community and to serve as a model of idealized womanhood. What is striking in the life of Thecla is not the double martyrdom, or the adoption of male modes of behavior as part of her rejection of the mundane world. Rather, it is the appearance of equality with the apostle that she is granted that makes this tale unique. The ability to baptize herself effectively makes her ecclesiastically superior to Paul, whose flight in the face of tribulation effectively negates his doctrinal position and his validity as the focus of a sacred biography in the context presented here. Yet, in the context of the text itself, "Thecla acts on the assumption, and Paul confirms, that self-baptism is valid. The baptism itself is presented not as an act of faith or repentance but as the result of providential occurrence that rewards Thecla's courage and continence with enlightenment (Boughton 379). The reader is left at an impasse regarding feminine identity and agency in the text. While Thecla's actions are extraordinary, they are grounded in proscribed doctrines and are validated by male ecclesiastic opinion. Her identity, then, is less tied to her actions or her own volition than

it is to divine and ecclesiastic authorization and confirmation. Her actions are meaningless if they transgress the dogma of the church and are not substantiated by her male precept, she effectively does not exist as such without these authorizations.

Such limitations are understandable within the context of the hagiographic materials discussed here; the imposition of male concepts of feminine identity is only explicated by Thecla's reliance on Paul's validation of her identity. In this way, Thecla's transformations and shifts in identity and belief would appear to be limited in their application as a basis for later female models of being. However, even after her self-baptism Thecla's transformation is incomplete and she must further deny her flesh and her sense of self in order to atone in Paul's eyes.

The final transformation of Thecla is marked by her cross dressing in order to reunite with Paul after she escapes from Antioch. She sets aside the remnants of her pagan and feminine identities in this transformation, she becomes masculine when she puts "on a girdle, and dressing herself in the habit of a man, she went to him to Myra in Lycia, and there found Paul preaching the word of God" (IX.25). Yet, despite her need to reunite with her master, she does not immediately approach him, as her following disturbs the elder saint. At Paul's recommendation, Thecla becomes a hermit at Calamon, where she is tempted by the devil and gains monastic followers. Unlike the redeemed prostitutes or acknowledged martyrs, Thecla is denied a passionate death. When set upon by rogues hired by a local physician who becomes jealous of her miraculous healing of the sick, aged Thecla slips into a space opened by God between the rocks of her cave and ascends into Heaven. This denial of a final physical martyrdom problematizes the text, in that "the

passionate death of the woman is also the genesis of hagiography, the matrix of biography's afterlife in Christian literature" (*Sex Lives* 59).

The schismic nature of the text, and the seeming disconnect between Thecla's experiences and other early hagiographies, support Lynne Boughton's claims that the received text of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, either as a conjoined text or as separate entities, "display a second-century cultural perspective, inconsistencies with first-century thought and expression, and neglect of issues relevant to diaspora-based ecclesial communities" (363). These doctrinal inconsistencies seem to have had little impact on the story's popularity among early Christian communities, although that acceptance may have been far from universal. This is especially true in that "the popularity of the Thecla episode in the second through fifth centuries did not indicate its de facto acceptance as a revealed scripture but instead reflected the story's appeal among unstructured Christians who had difficulty understanding the ideas and values of apostolic writings" (363-4). While she is shown as a strong woman, and an individual dedicated in their faith, Thecla also serves to reinforce the social and political position ascribed to women within the early church with little that challenges accepted doctrine or conflicts with the explications of those beliefs which arise in subsequent hagiographies. Referring again to Boughton's analysis of the text,

> in the Thecla narrative, the roles attributed to the heroine are those that church hierarchies have traditionally recognized as appropriate for women. The service of women catechists and missionaries is alluded to in epistles formally accepted into the New Testament canon…Since nothing done by the Thecla character suggests leadership of the worshiping community or a position in the emerging hierarchy, the story of her adventures can hardly constitute a long-suppressed record of women exercising sacerdotal powers. (377)

Yet, Thecla's narrative is not without its tensions in Boughton's analysis. Boughton's

insistence that Thecla's adoption of men's clothing would be unacceptable to "people

familiar with the prohibitions of the Mosaic Law or Paul's first letter to the Corinthians"

(I 1:2-16), has a basis in fact but overlooks the numerous female saints of the early

church who actively engage in transvestitism as a means of escape or defense (378).

Issues of tradition and law are secondary here to discussions of how Thecla fits into the

medieval concept of women and the nature of the adaptations which use her tale as a

model for feminine identity.

There are complimentary and conflicting models which must be examined in order to

fully understand the impact of Thecla on later medieval women and their constructions of

the self. Among these are narrative biographies, some of which cross into theology and

raise their own issues of womanhood. Included in these are St. Gregory of Nyssa's texts

which focus on the life of his sister, Macrina. The question which arises from a close

reading of the text is which Macrina Gregory intends as a model for feminine identity

within the Christian community.

St. Gregory's open letter to Olympius provides the official *vita* of the saint. The

biographical details he provides are immediately complicated by Gregory's inability to

articulate his sister's position or actualized gender. Gregory's ambivalence in claiming

that when discussing Macrina with his friend, "we spoke of a woman, if one may refer to

her as that, for I do not know if it is right to use that natural designation for one who went

beyond the nature of a woman" (Gregory of Nyssa 163) encapsulates much of the

uncertainty as to the position of women outlined in the preceding *lives*. Given Macrina's

achievements, her intellect, and her sanctity, can Gregory indeed describe her as a

"woman" within the tradition? This question underscores his need to further explicate the circumstances surrounding her most unusual life. His description of his sister's conception and gestation reflects the intertextuality evident in the early traditions and provides a point of reference for later attempts to model feminine identity on these early lives.

> When the time came in which she was to be freed from her pain by giving birth to the child, she fell asleep and seemed to be holding in her hands the child still in her womb, and a person of greater than human shape and form appeared to be addressing the infant by the name of Thecla. (There was a Thecla of much fame among virgins.) After doing this and invoking her as a witness three times, he disappeared from sight and gave ease to her pain so that as she awoke from her sleep she saw the dream realized. This, then, was her secret name. It seems to me that the one who appeared was not so much indicating how the child should be named, but foretelling the life of the child and intimating that she would choose a life similar to that of her namesake. (164)

Evoking both the Annunciation and the apocryphal life of Thecla, Gregory seems to be negotiating a theological borderland. While placing his own mother and sister within larger biblical traditions naturally creates parallels and tensions between the current text and the traditions, the comparisons between Macrina and Thecla add nuances which strain the orthodoxy of Gregory's text. Gregory himself had been subjected to complaints about his orthodoxy based on his attempts to reform Origenistic dualism to reflect a more heterodox theology. For Gregory, this appears to be crux of the problem in terms of constructing a viable identity for women within the tradition as he knew it. The iconic women to whom he had access, characters such as Mary of Egypt, Pelegia, Mary Magdalene, and other early ascetic women, conflicted with the iconoclastic and socially current woman he must construct within his *vita* to achieve his goal as postulator for his sister. Yet, his use of more iconoclastic women as models for her identity runs the risk of

placing him in danger of heresy. These tensions are only accentuated with his continued

masculinization of Macrina's intellect and spirituality in the text.

This masculinization is, in part, an extension of Gregory's attempts to ratify his own

neo-Originistic philosophies within the framework of the early Church. This task is made

easier by displacing the argument onto his sister and invoking the long-standing tradition

of feminine wisdom and given revelation. By establishing her sanctity before using her to

explicate his own philosophies, Gregory is able to access aspects of the tradition that

would otherwise be outside the purview of the male ecclesiastic society to whom he

addressed the letter. Espousing his own beliefs using Macrina's voice, Gregory notes that

> she rehearsed such arguments, explaining the human situation through natural
> principles and disclosing the divine plan hidden in misfortune, and she spoke of
> certain aspects of the future life as if she was inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that
> my soul almost seemed to be lifted up out of its human sphere by what she said
> and, under the direction of her discourse, take it stand in the heavenly sanctuaries.
> (175)

This displacement is comparatively minor in the *life* itself, as the arguments are relatively

restrained while the thrust of the document is to establish Macrina as a source of wisdom

and given philosophy as prerequisites for her sanctity. However, these tendencies are

further refined in the dialogic format of Gregory's subsequent text about his sister, On the

Soul and the Resurrection.

Gregory's second Macrina text is substantially longer, and takes the form of a

dialogue between himself and his sister on her deathbed. While this meeting is mentioned

briefly in the composed *vita*, it becomes the cornerstone of the later text. One of the most

interesting aspects of the text is the emphasis that Gregory himself places on the physical

situatedness of his sister as she lays dying in the convent. Like Pelegia, Mary of Egypt,

Thecla, and other ascetic female saints, Macrina reaches the apex of her sanctity only

after the complete isolation and mortification of her physical sex. Gregory describes her as both a living symbol of holiness and an apparition within the same monologue. This somewhat schismic perception of his sister in the text serves two purposes: the first being the effective erasure of her biological sex, freeing Macrina from the constraints of her own biology and allowing her to function within the text as an equal to Gregory and worthy of possessing the wisdom she displays; the second, related, purpose is the temporal and social isolation of Macrina, much as the holy harlots and desert saints were isolated, as he deprives her of contact with or referent in the world outside the convent and further isolates the intellective construct of "Macrina" from the physical woman who was his sister.

Despite her physical infirmity and the effective erasure of her biological gender, Macrina is able to sustain lengthy discussions on the nature of the soul and the doxology of the early church. Yet, it is important to note that the apparent eloquence of Macrina is a projection of Gregory's voice, not the voice of the woman he names as Macrina. Rather, she is an amalgamation of traditions and a simulacrum based on earlier literary portraits of women. Callahan notes a number of points of comparison between St. Gregory's On the Soul and the Resurrection and Plato's Phaedo, as well as the Platonic device of Socrates' attribution of his own insights to Diotima's worldly wisdom in the *Symposium* (195). Similar parallels exist between the work of the early church, such as Boethius's dialogues with Philosophy in the first book of the *Consolation* and St. Augustine's conversation with his mother in his *Confessions*. While Callahan describes the text as "an inspiring model of those pursuing the goal of the ascetic life" (197), in the context of this discussion the text serves as a model dialogue for later iterations of

feminine identity. The version of Macrina present in *On the Soul* is allowed a great deal more personality and expression than the Macrina of her didactic *vita*, but in the tradition of the Augustinian dialogues and Sophistic philosophy, Macrina herself is an extension of St. Gregory's views on the topic and serves more as an explicative device than as a functional individual possessing a separate existence from either the text or her brother's philosophies. Gregory projects himself through her in order to access the earthly, physical wisdom associated with women in both the Hebrew and early Christian traditions, fields of knowledge and contemplation his own, albeit equally constructed, gender would normally bar him from. Gregory must adopt the voice of Macrina for the dialogue to occur, to complete his own philosophical discourse, and therefore he must limit her identity to that which he can effectively use as model and means. Macrina is more icon than mouthpiece within the text, though she serves both functions.

While the texts considered above present a broad spectrum of the means and motifs employed by the male writers of late antiquity to position women within the community, it is impossible to conclude such a discussion without commenting on the impact of St. Jerome on the medieval conceptualization of women. The writings of St. Jerome, whose letters and works were among the most frequently cited texts throughout the Middle Ages, provide a starting point for the discussion of both the methods employed by male authors in constructing female subjects and the inherent difficulties their portraits create for later women who use these texts as the basis for modeling their own literary identities. At one extreme of Jerome's writing are the *Life of Malchus* and the issues raised by the presence of women in his *Life of Paul the Hermit*, at the other lies his letter in praise of his ascetic companion Paula.

The most striking image from the *Life of Paul the Hermit*, and one of the most memorable portrayals of women in any of Jerome's texts, is the temping harlot in the garden.

> Another who was in the bloom of youth was taken by his command to some delightful pleasure gardens, and there amid white lilies and blushing roses, close by a gently murmuring stream, while overhead the soft whisper of the wind played among the leaves of the trees, was laid upon a deep luxurious feather-bed, bound with fetters of sweet garlands to prevent his escape. When all had withdrawn from him a harlot of great beauty drew near and began with voluptuous embrace to throw her arms around his neck, and, wicked even to relate! To handle his person, so that when once the lusts of the flesh were roused, she might accomplish her licentious purpose. What to do, and whither to turn, the soldier of Christ knew not. Unconquered by tortures he was being overcome by pleasure. At last with an inspiration from heaven he bit off the end of his tongue and spat it in her face as she kissed him. Thus the sensations of lust were subdued by the intense pain which followed. (*Vita Pauli* 1.3)

The affirmation of male chastity, and the condemnation of the harlot as the icon of all women, is not unique. The concept of self-mutilation as a proof of piety and masculine identity, effective self-castration as a means of maintaining one's devotion to God, can be found in various forms throughout the literature of late antiquity and in early Christian thought. As Tamás Adamik notes, "biting off of one's own tongue occurs in the Pythagorean tradition, and Cyprian also tells such a story. But in these two examples the motif of spitting the tongue into somebody's face is missing, which seems to suggest that Jerome took the motif from the *Acts of John*, where a young man castrates himself and casts his balls before his temptress" (Adamik 177). While representing a level of intertextuality within Jerome's work, these cultural references also serve to reinforce the negative views of women and the necessity of masculine denial of the flesh. What is particularly interesting here is the physicality with which both the temptress and the captive are described, the degree to which the body, and the rejection of the body, is

central to Jerome's message. In this vignette, the monk is effectively feminized until he maims himself; it is only by destroying or otherwise refuting the needs and desires of the flesh that he is able to maintain his male identity and not be drawn into the corruption of feminine corporeality. Such a negative perspective of the body seems odd given the emphasis Jerome places on the physicality of his companion Paula in his letter of praise for her and his account of her religious experiences.

Jerome's praise of Paula seems to run toward excessive and extremely affective piety, and is marked by the physical extremes to which she goes in order to experience her faith. Her excesses are well documented in Jerome's letter to Euchisolm, the saint vigorously describes Paula's reaction to their visit to Golgotha, throwing herself to her knees before the Cross "in adoration as though she beheld the Lord hanging upon it" (9). Later, she both kisses the stone "which the angel had rolled away from the door" and "licked with her mouth the very spot on which the Lord's body had lain" (12). While Jerome's narrative of Paula's travels continue beyond this point, her infectious and possibly excessive passion have been established for the reader within the context of the Christian communities of late antiquity. In describing Paula's compulsive travels and excessive displays of piety and emotion, Jerome's text seems itself to be in many ways a female parallel to the *life* of St. Hilarion, whose pursuit of St. Anthony led to a lifetime of wandering asceticism which ended only with the death of the elder saint and was regularly marked with outpourings of desire and emotion.

Jerome's biography of his companion appears to be grounded fully in the body, using Paula's emotional and visceral outpourings as a means of characterizing the saint in a way that distances her from the biography which Jerome recounts and feminizing her

through her excesses. Paula experiences her visions with her entire being, recounting and physically reenacting her visions of the life and passions of Christ with a physicality that seems to at once fascinate and disturb her biographer. This dependence on the physical is partially explained by a section of Jerome's letter which is often seen as a digression, but is in fact a carefully reasoned argument against the neo-Originistic view of a sexless resurrection. For Jerome, the resurrected body would be as physically and emotionally gendered as it was in life. In light of this argument, it is necessary for Jerome to ground his version of Paula in the body, as it is only through the physicality associated with the feminine that he is able to capture what it means for her to be a woman and to express her experiences through her passions.

Jerome's seemingly obsessive need to describe Paula, even in his praise of her, in terms of physical locatedness and action represents an aspect of early hagiographic tradition which directly impacts the ability of women in later periods to articulate their own experiences. The question which Jerome artfully avoids is how, if a woman is a purely physical and grounded being, it becomes possible for the individual to exceed the limitations of their sex and become "holy." Like Thecla and Macrina, Jerome's vision of Paula must transcend the social and theological limitations of "women" while keeping her grounded in her physical state.

The concept of women being able to transcend the limitations of their sex is a common feature in early Christian legends. Stephen Davis notes that this transcendence is often marked by contradictions, signs of the "hostility and yet at the same time lurid fascination with which early Christian men viewed their female counterparts" (4). Jerome's depictions of women are no exception to this trend. The seductress in the

opening scene of *The Life of Paul* is an iconic portrayal of feminine corruption and temptation, unrelenting in her attempts to make the male body answer to its basic, animalistic needs to the detriment of the soul. The detail and finesse which goes into the portrayal of the seductress as "wicked," "corrupt," and "the flesh" speaks far more loudly than any dialogue she could be given. Jerome's own descriptions of the woman, of woman as symbol, embody this fascination and repulsion. However, the idealized representation of the chaste "marriage" between the freed captive and his converted bride in his proto-romantic *Life of St. Malchus* represents a modification of the type and a potential for escape from the fallen state of the flesh.

In his analysis of Jerome's hermitical lives, Edoard Coleiro notes that the woman who shares Malchus's captivity plays a heroic part, perhaps more so than the focus of the life, but her personality is hardly discussed other than as a spur for Malchus's actions, in the end "we are not even told her name" (168). While the bride in this text is still the weaker partner and wholly subject to the guidance of the monk, she is not the temptress in the garden. Rather, she is the repentant literally in the desert, sheltering in the cave and appreciating the mortification of her sex for the sake of sanctity and cleansing of her soul. While allowed no identity beyond the two extremes of wonton worldliness and ascetic continence, she offers a glimpse of possible salvation although it is never guaranteed in any of Jerome's texts. Each of these portraits is a far cry from Jerome's effusive praise for his patron and companion found in his *Epistles*.

Discussing the *Vita Malchi*, William Robins observes that it is the most romantic of Jerome's lives, and is less about saintly life than about the ways in which "true Christians resist all ties of family and marriage, supplanting them with the *copula*

spiritus" (535). This renunciation, coupled with the heroic tone of Jerome's lives in general, has led some scholars to describe the *Vita Malchi* and the *Vita Pauli* as romances of renunciation and as the logical inheritors of the Silver Age romantic traditions. These lives focus on a single individual, and their heroic responses to the world around them, without providing a full social or historical context in the modern sense for the reader. Rather, the modern reader is left with a sense of the text as an ahistorical narrative of the protagonist's adventures rather than a biography. The deliberately open questions of historical accuracy, as well as questions of form and emphasis, are made all the more striking by Jerome's willingness to share his own personal struggles in the desert which serves as the background for his saints' lives.

In *Epistle* 22, in addition to his praise of Paula, Jerome acknowledges his own distress during his sojourn in the desert.

> When I was living in the desert, in that vast solitude…inflamed by the burning heat of the sun, how many times did I imagine myself among the delights of Rome! Although in my fear of Hell I had condemned myself to this prison, with scorpions and wild beasts as my only companions, I was often surrounded by troupes of dancing girls. My skin was pale with fasting but, though my frame was chilled, my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust bubbled up while my flesh was barely alive. (*Ep*. 22.7.1-3)[10]

The failure of the desert to purge Jerome of his lust, and in fact to intensify it through his isolation, displays a degree of ambivalence about the monastic undertaking as a whole. Compared to his portrayal of the desert in the *Vita Sancti Pauli Primi Eremitae*, Jerome's descriptions of personal experiences in the desert seem particularly conflicted. Paul the Hermit's desert is a place of intense loneliness, but also of attraction and wonder. Paul

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[10] Among the most famous passages from Jerome's letter to Eustochium, these lines are also among the most scrutinized and problematic to position within Jerome's corpus. For intensive readings of *Epistle* 22, see Miller, p. 211, Blamires' Woman Defamed, Woman Defended, and Peter Brown's The Body and Society, p. 215.

heroically enters the cave where he is to spend the remainder of his life, is excited by the promise it holds and the miraculous nature of its bounty. While not tempted by the erotic visions Jerome complains about, Paul is nonetheless tempted by the isolation and the thrill of exploration. This is redeemable within Jerome's framework given that curiosity, in its positive interpretation, is a male trait and his super-saint is still able to deny the temptations of the flesh even as he satisfies his intellectual and spiritual desires. Despite the obvious ambivalences within the text, Jerome disparages the earlier lives of Paul, condemning them for their "lack of historical truth, comparing their fanciful fiction with his own sobriety" and his emphasis on ascertainable facts (Coleiro 177).

These stylistic choices are, however, in keeping with the constructions of male and female identity which Jerome would have been familiar with. Particularly in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, such as those of Paul above, the texts "always deal with the life and deeds of a single apostle. It is natural that they do not mention the childhood of the apostle since the Gospels and the canonical Acts of the Apostles did not refer to it" (Adamik 174). This historical isolation of the subject, as well as the physical isolation of the desert in Jerome's lives, borrows from the ancient novel, as does the use of motifs such as "love teratology, and aretology" which are taken directly from popular literature (174-75). The absence of viable models for feminine identity, beyond the iconic stoicism and practical faith of the nameless bride of the *Vita Malchi* or the temptress in the same text, Jerome's absence of women seems to speak louder than any interpretations of them which he does provide.

The intertextuality and cultural awareness displayed in Jerome's work, and in all of the texts considered here, complicates the medieval views of women more familiar to

modern readers. These foundational texts remained popular throughout the Middle Ages, and are indeed often directly referenced by women in their writing. This becomes problematic in that the portraits of women provided by many of these texts, describing them as biographies in their own right poses problems of genre and historicity, are marked by internal ambivalence and a clearly male-oriented perception of the world. This ambivalence, internal conflict, and the issues of cultural and social currency discussed above, limit the number of viable models provided for women within the tradition. These limitations are compounded by the social and economic realities of the period. Given the stark contrast between the realities of daily life for women in late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages and the binary positions assigned to them by their male biographers and the Church itself, it is difficult for women to argue directly against the roles given to them or to establish identities for themselves that are free of the underlying philosophies inherited in the official and unofficial documents which form the basis of their society. Rather, it is more expedient for them, in many cases, to apply the typologies that they inherit—the motifs, rhetorics, and identities established by the early *lives* and the writings of the Church fathers—to themselves and to control the interpretations which can ensue.

The popularity of the source materials available to them, the wide dispersion of the texts considered here in both Latin and the commonplace vernaculars of medieval Europe provide points of connection between the established traditions and the seeming polyphony of women's writing in the Middle Ages. The authorized forms of feminine identity: the abbess, the repentant, the fallen woman, the ascetic, the anchoress, and the visionary, are, even within the tradition, subject to a surprising degree of latitude in their

application. It is equally rare that women, working from these models, adopt a singular identity within their work. Rather, there is a degree of hybridity visible in their texts. Unlike the simulacra of the earlier works, the constructions of women which merely mimic the feminine and embody male anxiety and approbation, the works of later medieval women show a degree of agency, of self positioning, of the deliberate construction of independent identity which is constructed from the same raw materials. These women position themselves within the traditions, creating versions of their lived lives and their conceptualizations of themselves and the meaning of "woman" which mimic and displace the images used by earlier generations of writers. By participating in the traditions, and diverting them slightly to reflect their own interpretations of womanhood and identity, these women are able to maintain access to the traditions while still placing themselves into the text. Rather than men creating images of women, these women create women; women who are able to speak with their own voices from within and often against the traditions, as iconic women rather than the icons of womanhood.

CHAPTER 2

PERPETUA AND HER DAUGHTERS: MYSTICS, MOTHERS, MARTYRS AND TEXTS

The traditional, inherited views of women established in early Christianity examined in the previous chapter have a lasting impact on women's abilities to conceptualize themselves through literature. However, there are other texts which show the degree of self-construction possible within women's literature from the beginning of the Christian epoch. These texts were known, directly and indirectly, throughout the medieval world and have recently become more recognizable for their influence on later women's writings. Pertinent to the discussion underway here are focal texts authored by women prior to the year 900, some of which predate the patristic texts discussed earlier, but which did not have the level of cultural currency in the early periods that they achieve after the twelfth-century renaissance.

Chief among the early texts is the second-century life of Perpetua. Predating the *lives* of Mary of Egypt, Pelegia, and possibly the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, it represents a rare example of female autobiography in late antiquity that survived in its original form through the Middle Ages. The text itself is written in colloquial Latin, primarily narrated from the perspective of Perpetua, a young convert to Christianity, with additional sections narrated by Saturus and an introduction and redaction supplied by an unnamed scribal compiler, usually assumed to be Tertullian. What makes this text unique is the position of a young woman from the merchant classes as the central narrator of her own life and martyrdom. The male authorizations included in the text serve to bracket the experiences of Perpetua herself and only provide a framework of authorization that is not structurally

inherent to the primary narrative. This text is also unique in the number of visionary episodes included within Perpetua's narration of events that prefigure both the rise of affective female piety in medieval literature and the rise of mysticism as a vehicle for feminine expression. These confluences of concurrent literary motifs and prefigurement of later trends in women's writing led Heffernan to describe Perpetua's *Passio* as the "primal document in the development of conventions which were to shape the female sacred biography for a millennium" and as providing the matrix on which later models of feminine heroism were built (*Passion* 186).

The early date of this text, likely before the year 300, and the confluence of patristic sensibilities and feminine identities, reinforces the value of contextualizing the text in terms of both its chronological placement and the impact it has on later women's texts. The future of patristic studies and other early Christian writings, and their realized value to current scholarship is, according to Elizabeth A. Clark, "less theology, more history" (*State* 3). The evolution of motifs and literary thematics in early patristic texts provides a clear insight into the evolution of Christian theology, but more valuable in establishing the relationships between patristic texts and later literatures is a more longitudinal view of patristics as the "*telos* of Christian scholarship" (*State* 4). The evolution and dissemination of patristic texts, particularly as they impact medieval thought, provides the modern scholar with clear schemas for the distribution, control, and reformation of ideologies and social norms. The reference to specific patristic texts and traditions by medieval scholars, particularly women, can serve as a yardstick to judge the influence of traditional thought on women's formation of identity in literature as well as the

confluence of traditional modes of thought and the influences of modernizing literatures and cultures.

While it is not the only text to survive from late antiquity to have a significant impact on medieval women's writing, Perpetua's narrative is unusual in a number of ways. One peculiarity associated with Perpetua's text is its rapid dissemination and equally rapid retreat into the background of the church. Rader notes that shortly after the original Latin rescension began circulating, "two other documents were produced from it; one in Greek, the other, a shorter Latin version which was generally used as part of the official church services" (11). Both of these texts are widely attested in the manuscript record, as are documents that indicate that as early as the fourth century there was a basilica at Carthage dedicated to her memory. The popularity of the text is further attested by Augustine's sermons in her honor, her insertion into the official calendar of the church at Rome, and her inclusion in the canon of the Mass of the Latin Christian church. Despite its wide circulation and the recorded popularity of the text, Perpetua was eclipsed by later saints' lives and pseudo-hagiographic tales, including several discussed in the previous chapter, for a number of reasons. Some earlier martyrs, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, were bishops and therefore more relevant to the male hierarchy of the early church as examples of the idealized Christian life. Others, such as Mary of Egypt, Pelegia, and Thecla appear to be much more orthodox in their construction and more fully validated by male redactors than Perpetua's autobiographical account. Rader suggests a particularly interesting possibility for the decline in the popularity of Perpetua's narrative if Tertullian was, as has been widely suggested, the redactor of Perpetua's original Latin account. She suggests that Tertullian's rejection of the church at

Rome because of his own Montanist affiliations may have "cast doubt on Perpetua's own loyalties to that church" (11). Such doubts as to Perpetua's loyalties within the church may well have helped facilitate the marginalization of her autobiographical text, particularly as it provides a model for feminine Christian identity which conflicts with many of the male authored *vita* in concurrent circulation.

The *Passio* text, in its Latin form, can be divided into three broad sections: the frame (chapters 1-2, 14-21), the narrative of Perpetua (chapters 3-10), and the narrative of Saturus's vision (chapters 11-13). The framing narrative, in which the unnamed redactor admits to editing the text (2.2) and tells the brief story of Felicity who was martyred alongside Perpetua (20), provides the hagiographical apparatus which authorizes and demarcates the Perpetua the reader is presented in the text. A similar function is performed by the narrative of Saturus's 'diary,' which attests to parallel visions given to Saturus while imprisoned with Perpetua and validate the visions and experiences she described in her longer narrative. These layers of proscription and authorization serve to emphasize the *simplicitas* of Perpetua's narrative and validate the model she provides for Christian women in their pursuit of sanctity. However, Perpetua's text remains problematic in that she transgresses many of the normal generic boundaries and establishes herself as separate from her fellow martyrs and independent of the normal hierarchies for validation and Christian grace.

The emphasis placed by some scholars on the genesis and genre of texts "privileges such questions as manuscript tradition, authorship, date and place of production, sources, and the placement of the text within the social and political history of its time of production" (Halporn 223). While each of these elements is important to the recognition

of the text and helpful in establishing it within a larger literary framework, these elements, on their own, are insufficient to fully contextualize the impact and influence of a given text on the traditions they seek to participate in or have been thrust into by scholars. Particularly when examining the texts of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the degree of intertextuality deliberately achieved through exegesis and reference creates a situation in which, as J.W. Halporn points out, "there is no *text*, but rather a series of texts, superimposed and interconnected" (223).

This is particularly true in the case of texts authored by women, as they seldom conform to comfortable generic expectations and are frequently overwritten or bracketed by male redactors who lend the text a sense of orthodoxy and social normativity. This conflation of texts complicates the ways in which a given narrative can be approached by modern scholars, and occasionally misinforms the reading of the text itself by further overwriting the voices of women or imposing literary forms that are not inherent to the original text. This is not a new problem, but rather can be traced to the earliest women's writings in the Christian traditions. Here, it is helpful to examine the *Acta* and *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicity and the axioms which are applied to the texts in order to categorize them and assimilate them into the traditions.

Referring again to Halporn's thoughtful analysis of the texts, the applied axioms and their repercussions on the understanding of the texts are myriad. Halporn notes that the major assumptions about the text: that the *Acta* and *Passio* are historical documents; that the first-person accounts included in the texts, both Perpetua's narratives and the "diary" of Saturus, are the *ipsissima verba* of the martyrs; and that the historicity of the text has not been unduly influenced by subsequent readers or editors; are not inherently false, and

have offered "valuable insights for our understanding of them" (224). However, these

broad categorizations, while facilitating numerous approaches to the text,[11] provide little

insight into the *persona* of Perpetua within the text, or indication as to the authenticity of

that identity, on their own. These categorizations provide markers by which the text can

be unraveled to address the questions of identity and social attachment, but we must turn

to the text itself in order to understand these functions.

The differing emphases in the *Acta* and the *Passio* seem to indicate not a direct

derivation, but a contextual shift in the message intended in revealing Perpetua's

narrative.

> The *Acta* seems to be a series of confrontations with authorities, with parents,
> with the crowd, leading to quick deaths in the amphitheater in exposure to wild
> animals. The report of the events was to serve the community as an edifying
> example of the rejection of worldly ties for the sake of the community of
> Christians. The *Passio*, however, seems to be a series of stories and visions tied to
> the idea of martyrdom as a glorious set of trials, followed in each case by a
> triumph. (Halporn 230)

The major differences between the texts, the emphasis on the triumphant martyrdom and

the visionary nature of Perpetua in the *Passio* as opposed to the confrontational,

community centered narrative of the *Acta*, transcend generic concerns and, regarding the

discussion here, serve to reinforce the central question of who Perpetua is, or attempts to

be, in her narrative which is, in turn, made edifying for the community by the redactor in

both texts. It is important to note that the redactor is in control of the elements which

most closely align the text with the Biblical traditions and emphasizes the complete

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[11] Halporn lists inquiries into the linguistics of the texts, stylistic markers, relationships of the text to each other and the dates assigned them, questions of authorship and authorization, and the historic, psychological and mentalities demonstrated within the texts (224-5). While this list is by no means exhaustive of the approaches applied to the texts, Halporn argues that these general forms of inquiry demonstrate the flexibility of the applied axioms and the need for a refinement of the approaches in order to evaluate them more holistically and to minimize the influence of later interpretive layers on the reception of the texts.

nature of Perpetua's martyrdom. Perpetua is not only made the vehicle for revelations and visions which emphasize the core Christianity of the text, but the redactor's emphasis on her connection to the fulfillment of Biblical allegory and to the heroine motif common in late antiquity adds a level of intertextuality and cultural reference Perpetua does not provide in her own, simpler, narrative.

Rosemary Rader agrees with Herbert Musurillo's analysis of the text, ascribing the importance of the document to both its firsthand account of the suffering of the martyrs and its "apocalyptic" tone (2). The apocalypsis in the text is contained in the numerous visions the martyrs experience before their own deaths, but the tone of the visions themselves are more readily ascribed to the victorious martyr tradition which becomes more fully established in subsequent centuries. Rader sees clear connections between Perpetua's account of her own suffering and the widely circulated Shepherd of Hermas and the now apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter (2-3). The intertextuality of this early account of martyrdom, if Rader is correct in her analysis, prefigures much of the writing engaged in by medieval women. This is only reinforced by the clear influence of Perpetua's text on later Christian martyrologies, either in form or content, especially the accounts of female martyrs and saints.[12] The gender transgressions in Perpetua's narrative serve as a graphic assertion of the underlying "manly" essence required for martyrdom, regardless of the subject's biological gender (Clark 45).

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[12] Rader lists a number of recurring themes and symbols which she claims are first fully articulated from a female perspective in Perpetua's narrative. These motifs: the ascent to heaven by means of a narrow ladder (typically edged with blades); the devil as adversary in the form of men and beasts; the branch of victory; visions and dreams; angels as assistants to the martyr; elders/prophets enthroned with angels; the garden of Heaven; celebration of a love feast; and the martyr's scorn for their persecutors (15), recur throughout women's writings in the middle ages, particularly in the visionary literature of women such as Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen. Similar motifs are used in vernacular literatures as well as male literature about women. The integration of the tropes into the feminine traditions indicates the degree to which this text has influenced women's literature as a whole in the period if Rader is correct in dating this narrative as the earliest example of their appearance in Christian literature.

Perpetua's psychological, if not physical, escape from the gender limitations of early third century Carthagian society through her prophetic visions represent a conscientious objection to the limitations placed on women. While Rader insists that the recurring themes of "protest and liberation, which explain the idealism prompting Perpetua to make the choices she did…served as inspiration and exhortation for future generations of Christians" (3), it is more beneficial here to consider the social and political locatedness of the text in light of its feminine authorship. The text itself does embody elements which appear to reject the social hierarchy enforced on the author, however, the intertextual elements of the account, and the degree to which it is reliant on male authorization in order to allow for its' circulation within the wider community, limit the possible readings of the text in its original social and political milieu and reinforce the sense of orthodoxy it is given through male authorization. Perpetua is shown to be an exception to the perceptions of feminine identity through her rejection of her pagan social position and her adherence to Christian philosophy, an anomaly to be admired and emulated, rather than the norm.

One aspect of Perpetua's narrative that proves particularly troubling in the context of the early church is the apparent rejection of male authorization within Perpetua's personal account. While Rader sees this as a deliberate challenge to the authorization of the individual through the male priesthood, citing specifically Saturus's vision in which Perpetua is invoked by a bishop and a priest to settle their differences (6), this incident is not narratologically problematic within the tradition. Other saint's lives and subsequent documents which establish female identities, including the eighth-century Irish life of St. Brigid and Margery Kempe's late medieval *Book*, invoke similar images of feminine

intervention in ecclesiastic affairs. The difference here is both the extremely early date of the text, marking both the beginning of a separate feminine tradition and the fragmentation of early Christian literature in the vernacular, and the distinctly feminine narrative style employed in the construction of the visions themselves. This grounds the text in the body of the narrator and her unique psychology rather than limiting it within the extant traditions and classical recursive styles.

The level of rhetorical sophistication evident in Perpetua's narrative is belied by the simplistic language she employs. Rossen notes the number of image parallels developed in her visions, particularly the connections between the first vision and the fourth as well as connections between the second and the fourth, and the oppositions and tensions which exist between the first and third visions and the second and third (294). These connections and tensions are further mirrored in her accounts of her public confrontations and statements, lending the entire text attributed to Perpetua the rhetorical sequencing— debate, trial, rhetorical analysis—common to both classical education and the popular literature of late antiquity. The most common mask for these rhetorical tropes is the common address of the community, particularly the Christian community, which both mirrors the catechetical expressions common in early Christian writings and "anticipates the didactic use of the work" by elevating the rhetoric to the level of universal address typically found in oratory (Rossen 294). Such an approach is not surprising given that Perpetua's narrative emphasizes her own role as catechumen and recent convert to Christianity. Nor is it surprising in light of her acknowledgements of her pre-Christian life; as the daughter of a wealthy Roman citizen she would have likely had some classical

education and, in any case, would have been familiar with the forms of oral argument common throughout the Roman world.

   The didacticism within Perpetua's narrative is also simultaneously overwritten and reinscribed by the unnamed redactor. Chapter 21 reflects the final sentiments expressed by Perpetua in her personal account, that her narrative should serve as model for future generations (14.4), and the prolegomena of chapter one.[13] This didactic intent is particularly evident in the emphasis that is placed on the visceralization of the visions, further fueled by the redactor's comments, as opposed to the physical symbolism provided by the concrete events. In Perpetua's narration of the events, her confrontations with the authorities and with her family are described in terms of oratory and theater, while her experiences in her Christian, intellective visions are made more concrete for the reader through her physical descriptions, especially images of consumption. The physical and immediate are reduced to symbolic parts, while the visionary, mystical elements are made manifest and experienced through her description. This inversion of the perceived norm displaces the influence of Perpetua's lived society and reflects her participation in "new social relationships as well as distinct perceptions of time and being" (Rossen 300). This performance of the self, in the Butlerian sense discussed above, is heightened by the redactor's insistence, immediately before the beginning of Perpetua's section of the text, that "This very woman has already thus recounted the entire sequence of her testimony in the same way it was diligently recorded by hand and remains a memento of her

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[13] Rossen further suggests that chapters 19 and 20 are crafted to reflect the fulfillment of the individual martyr's prediction of their deaths in their prayers (297), while Heffernan would argue that the entire text has been revised and streamlined in the *Passio* to ensure such a balance (230). Neither directly questions the historicity of the narrative, but each reminds the reader that the text itself has been appropriated and revised, with Perpetua's voice remaining central, but authorized, in the received versions.

sensibility".[14] The memory and the self recorded in the text are both validated and pacified by this statement, validated in their authenticity and as a model for subsequent generations while being pacified through reinscription and further remove from the author; as that performance of identity is reinforced and brought to the audience's attention. Perpetua is isolated from her performance within the text.

Perpetua, for all of her self-authorization and self-construction within the text, is still aware of the gender differentiation within her culture. While she is the chief character in her narrative, she is never "detrimental to or pejorative of the male members of the group" (Rader 10). Such gender equality is not, as it might appear, the notable exception to early Christian dogmatics; rather, it is more beneficial to read this equality as a reinforcement of the gender neutrality of the soul and the loss of biological gender before God which figures prominently in early apocalypsis and within early hagiography as a whole. Just as Mary of Egypt, Pelegia, and Thecla are able to "unwoman" themselves through the transgression of gender dichotomies, Perpetua is able to become "virile," to masculinize herself through discourse and description rather than via direct engagement with the reader and the authorizing hagiographer.

The redactor describes Perpetua as "well-born, liberally educated, honourably married, having father and mother, and two brothers, one like herself a catechumen, and an infant son at the breast. She was about twenty-two years of age" (II). Perpetua is, then, the ideal martyr for both her youth and her station. The portrait provided by the redactor, perhaps deliberately, does not provide any indication of the personality of

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[14] The Latin text reads "haec ordinem totum martyrri sui iam hinc ipsa narrauit sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit" (cited in Rossen, 300). Rossen emphasizes the ongoing nature of the original, but qualifies her translation within the social and cultural norms of the time. By her own admission, the translation is open to alternative readings based on the suitability of other values for individual terms.

Perpetua or an indication of the assertiveness she shows immediately in the *Acta* and only

slightly later in the *Passio*. Her debate with her father demonstrates a fundamental grasp

of classical rhetoric, challenging the nominalist assumptions of the older man that is

remarkably similar to the challenges the ninth century Catherine of Alexandria places

before her judges. Perpetua's martyrdom in the arena is another point in the text in which

the fulfillment of her rhetorical and Christian positions is reinforced, which serves to both

reinforce her connections to the nascent Christian traditions and to differentiate her from

the cultural norm.

Addressing the scene of her actual martyrdom in the arena, Halporn notes:

> She dies by the sword, as she must, according to her first vision, but since she
> must in a sense will her own death, she directs the shaking hand of the novice
> gladiator to her throat. As she is the Heroine of the beginning of the narrative, so
> she is also the heroine of the end. The combination of late classical and Judeo-
> Christian elements…are unmistakable. (234)

The sense of heroic community, much more present in the *Acta* than in the *Passio*, is

further reinforced in the Middle Ages by de Voraigne's version of the text in the *Gilte*

Legenda.[15] The preference for the shorter, more heroic form of the text provides a

cultural context which, while outside of Perpetua's narrative control, does serve to situate

the text for the medieval reader and provides another level on which the identity put forth

by Perpetua in the text can serve as a model for self-expression within sanctioned

dialogic channels.

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[15] De Voraigne was likely familiar with the Latin texts of both the *Passio* and the *Acta*, but took the *Acta* as the basis for the version he recounts with some embellishment. Halporn suggests that this might be due, in part, to the communal nature of the *Acta* as well as the heroic elements which are much more present in that text (234-5). Ronse (294-7)suggests that this decision may be more based in an evolving sense of the saint as archetype and icon than as an example of proper community. In either case, the personal and internal elements of Perpetua's narrative, and the most private visions she relates in the *Passio*, were excluded *de facto* from de Voriagne's account which would have been the most accessible version of the text for most medieval women. While the private visions are considered here, their circulation, either culturally or liturgically, must be discussed within the context of the available texts in the period.

Perpetua's divine favor is reinforced through her account of her vision and prayers of her deceased brother, Dinocrates. While still in prison, she sees a vision of the boy recounted in the language of Christian symbology intimately familiar to converts of late antiquity.

> There was a great gulf between me and him, so that neither of us could approach the other. There was besides in the very place where Dinocrates was a font full of water, the rim of which was above the head of the child; and Dinocrates stood on tiptoe to drink. I grieved that the font should have water in it and that nevertheless he could not drink because of the height of the rim. And I woke and recognized that my brother was in trouble. But I trusted that I could relieve his trouble, and I prayed for him every day until we were transferred to the garrison prison, for we were to fight with the beasts at the garrison games on the Caesar Geta's birthday. And I prayed for him day and night with lamentations and tears that he might be given me. (VII)

The gulf, representing the isolation of the Christian Perpetua from her unbaptized brother, and the unreachable font of redeeming water were common tropes in the allegorical literature of the early church. What is particularly interesting in this passage is the lamentation and tears that facilitate Dinocrates redemption. Like the tears of later saints, Perpetua's lacremesis has a healing and purifying effect on those for whom she weeps. Perpetua's weeping for her brother functions as a baptismal motif within the text, bringing him into the bosom of the church even after his death and allowing for his salvation. The next time Perpetua has a vision of her brother, she tells the reader that:

> Where there had been a wound, I saw a scar; and the font which I had seen before had its rim lowered to the child's waist; and there poured water from it unceasingly; and on the rim a golden bowl full of water…And when he had drunk enough of the water, he came forward being glad to play as children will. And I awoke. Then I knew that he had been released from punishment. (VIII)

While Perpetua does not claim direct responsibility for her brother's salvation, her vision of his restoration and symbolic conversion—being allowed to drink from the holy font that had been out of reach—includes the unstated argument for the power of her prayers

and intervention on his behalf. Like the self-baptism of Thecla, or the miraculous occurrences in the life of Pelegia, Perpetua is granted—or grants herself within her narrative—an unusual degree of agency. She further transcends the limits of her biological sex, an idea that is emphasized in her next vision when she prepares to confront the devil in the guise of a massive Egyptian wrestler. In the *Acta*, she simply says that after stepping into the arena "I was stripped and was changed into a man" (X).

During the combat in the arena, Perpetua fights as a man and overcomes her foe. Unlike the experiences of later hagiographic women discussed in the previous chapter, her transformation is not merely a matter of appearing as a man but rather a transformation into a man. She becomes virile, in the patristic sense, and is able to battle her foe on her own terms. It is only after the Egyptian has been defeated through her newfound strength that she reverts back to her true self and her success is acknowledged by the judge with the phrase "peace be with thee, my daughter" (X). Perpetua's transformation, like her martyrological journey, is incomplete at this stage and her transformation into both perfect Christian subject and perfect soul can only be achieved through the fulfillment of these visionary dreams and her own death in the arena. She must both triumph over the pagans—as she does over the Egyptian, by demonstrating the depth of her faith and setting an example for subsequent generations of Christian women—and renounce her gender by dying with *vis* and joy.

The male redactor emphasizes these elements in chapter 18 of the *Passio*, describing Perpetua entering the amphitheater as "the true wife of Christ, as the darling of god, abashing with the high spirit in her eyes the gaze of all." Perpetua and her comrades enter the arena willingly and accept the martyrdom that her visions have foretold for them with

steadfastness and zeal which authorizes and reiterates the tone of Perpetua's visions. She becomes the perfect martyr, the image of a Christian woman worthy of both her visions and later veneration. While her text—like those of Hildegard and Julian which follow in the mystical, visionary tradition—would have been perfectly orthodox and within the tradition of women's experiences without these embellishments, the layering of male appropriation and authorization serves to contain and control the narrative and to emphasize the masculinization, thereby the perfection, of the subject. The reiteration of the masculine features displayed by Perpetua's text, including those which are not emphasized within Perpetua's first-person narrative, places the text outside of the norm and elevates the subject to a position worthy of veneration. While Perpetua's narrative is not unique in being overwritten by male authorization, the model of the feminine mystical visions it provides is reflected in the stylistic balance achieved in medieval women's writings and represents an earlier thread of women's self construction through their texts.

Monastic codices record numerous texts specifically authored by women in the centuries which following Perpetua's martyrdom. One of the most interesting, and contested, is the *Probae Cento*, a short treatise composed between 351 and 379 by an author who is only clearly identified as Proba.[16] The cento, a mosaic composition pieced together from lines and half-lines of classical work, is considered somewhat radical in that by authoring the cento "Proba claimed a self-assertive identity in a Christian community which was guided by the church fathers' interpretations of Paul which

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[16] G. Ronald Kastner provides a brief description of the difficulties in accurately dating or attributing the text to a specific Proba, as there are several women described as "Proba, matron of the "gens Anicii" whose dates and involvement fit the brief description of the author provided by Isadore of Seville and other medieval cartulogists (33).

forbade women from doing theology" (Kastner 35). Proba's account of the creation, fall, expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and subsequent events in the Old Testament, culminating with the crossing of the Red Sea, was popular immediately after its publication, as indicated by the dedicatory poem frequently prefixed to the cento fulfilling Caesar Arcadius's request for a copy of the text (37). In spite of Jerome's decrying of the document in Epistle 130 and Glasius's 496 decree which made the *Probae Cento* apocryphal, it appears as a school text throughout the Middle Ages.[17]

The current consensus on the identity of the author attributes the poem to the fourth century matron Falotonia Betitia Proba,[18] based on the autobiographical elements within the text itself. Proba's construction of a self within the text is clearest in the first part of her preface to the cento. Her invocation that God should "unloose the lips of your everlasting, sevenfold spirit/ and open the innermost sanctuaries of my heart/ so that I, Proba the seer, may reveal all the sacred mysteries" (11-13) serves two distinct purposes as it is staged within the cento. The prayer positions her as a Christian writer; this reinforces her position within her community and seeks validation. Naming herself "Proba the seer" simultaneously positions her in the secular and pagan community, allowing her, as author, to access the traditions of the larger literate community. This positioning is in keeping with the tradition of the cento as a form, but also serves to distinguish this Proba from her contemporaries.

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[17] The text was often bound with Aldhelm's work, Cyprian's poems, the texts of Gregory and Fortunas, or the works of Seneca for use in the instruction of boys and monks in the composition and recitation of rhetoric (Kastner 37).

[18] This Proba as the author is supported by Andre Kadel's *Martology*, Kastner's discussion of the problematic dating of the text and its complicated attribution, and Meconi's analysis of the text, and is in keeping with one of the possible authors proposed over the past century.

The cento itself is an exercise in cultural negotiation and appropriation. Proba's cento is drawn from Virgil's poetry and reflects an aristocratic Roman sensibility in its appropriation of specific lines that would resonate with the readers. The cento, as a form, is a communal exercise as

> it carefully gathers lines out of a community's normative texts so as to form them into a daringly new story with a meaning never intended by the original author. By selecting and stitching various verses and half-lines together, the great poet's words became attached to a new historical situation. In this way, the cento is not a poetic genre per se but a technique or method of imitation and resemblance. (Meconi 110)

Meconi notes that the centoists had at their disposal a system of easily recognizable and appreciated words and expressions from which to choose their metaphors. While such wholesale acquisition of another's work is seen with suspicion in later generic traditions, the Roman centoist was seen as both skillful in their composition and selection of lines and as paying the highest form of compliment to the original author. While Proba's cento was not unique, her major contribution to the understanding of women in the literary traditions of the church lies in her claiming Virgilian poetry for specifically Christian audiences. Meconi asserts that by "claiming Virgil for Christ, Faltonia's patchwork poem gives us a glimpse into how the early Church understood and employed non-Christian literature" (110). It is this boldness which led to the text being declared apocryphal, not its content or subject. The construction of such a poem by a woman, even an established patron of writers and theologians, was problematic when considered in light of the official doctrines toward women. The matter is only complicated by the addition of the dedicatory poem after the initial circulation of the text, as it then becomes a woman's composition without overt male authorization being presented to the imperial court on its own merit.

What makes Proba's work exceptional, aside from its position as the first Christian cento widely circulated in late antiquity and its extremely long, popular circulation, is the amount of social and personal history expressed within the text. The entire poem contains 675 lines, of which fifty-five are consumed by Proba's prefatory verses. Unlike the body of the cento, the preface has only a few lines constructed wholly from Virgilian materials and recounts the author's previous work (lines 1-8), a prayer for God's help in constructing the cento (lines 9-12)[19] and a statement of her motives and methods in constructing the text (18-22). What is particularly interesting is the way in which the additional lines of the preface mirror the information that has already been provided and elaborate on it. R.P.H. Green points out the thematic differences, the emphasis on war and destruction that dominates the first half as compared to the emphasis on "prelapsarian bliss which is central to the second" (549). The balance achieved between the two complementary sections of the preface is mirrored in the construction of the cento itself, a balance that is often achieved through direct authorial intervention unusual in a woman's composition in either late antiquity or the Middle Ages.

Proba seems to simultaneously embrace her feminine corporeality and reject it within the poem. In keeping with naming herself as a seer, Proba positions herself, and her intentions in the cento, as both enlightening and limited as an author. The questions she raises regarding her own abilities are in keeping with Christian *humilitas* and recognize the limits of mortal capabilities. In her own voice, Proba states: "I shall make this story

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[19] R.P.H. Green and Hagith Sivan both note that lines 12 and 13 are problematic in that they are transposed in some manuscripts, or an additional line is inserted. While the manuscript additions or errata do not directly impact the theme and effect of the poem, they do show the effect of the text's prolonged transmission and somewhat alter the reception of the text in translation. Similar problems exist between lines 25 and 28, in which lines are reordered or completely elided in some manuscripts. While Green is most comfortable attributing these differences to scribal error, Meconi, Sivan, and others see these textual conflicts as evidence of either flexible valuation of the text by the author or deliberate revisions (particularly in the early manuscripts) for stylistic effect or social commentary.

clear to all, commencing at the very beginning, / if there is any faith in my soul, in true understanding, infused through my limbs, shapes the mass and inspiration pervades my body/ and not to the extent that harmful bodies do not clog nor earthly limbs and members moribund deaden" (24-26). By questioning her own abilities, and positioning the clarity of the product in terms of her own capabilities, Proba engages in a rhetorical move that allows her to both claim the cento for its virtues and excuse the shortcomings others may find in it. Such removes are common in classical rhetorical texts, and become a mainstay in the redaction of medieval vernacular texts, but are problematic here because of the author's gender. She effectively appropriates a rhetorical trope normally reserved for male authors, unapologetically, and tacitly places herself on the same plane as the male apologists among her contemporaries who use similar tropes in their work. This half-step towards gender neutrality or masculinization does not overwrite the female identity claimed by Proba, but it does alter the voice she uses to establish herself within the poem.

The change is marked by the sudden break inserted at the midpoint of the cento. While the early sections of the text follow the chronology of the Old Testament closely, Proba abruptly breaks off her narration and moves ahead to establishing the New Testament events that form the second half of the poem. The language of the break reflects her awareness of both her position within the community, and a degree of awareness of the targeted audience.

> The other deeds of our fathers, the wars fought one after another
> I omit and leave the telling of them to others after me.
> Now to Thee, O Father and to Thy great plans I return.
> A greater task I must commence. The prophecies of old seers
> I approach. (332-336)

That she feels no need or inclination to recount the history of her people, choosing to leave it to those who follow, indicates an awareness of the historiographical traditions associated with both her culture and the cento as a form. Staged as an aside within the text, this move allows Proba to shift her focus from history to interpretation and her goal of positioning Christianity through Virgilian poetry. Reflecting an awareness of similar transitions in her poetic sources, Proba uses the break in the narrative to reinforce specific distinctions between herself, her subjects, and her contemporaries.

This is particularly visible in the emphasis placed on "the prophecies of old seers," which serves to both distinguish Proba the Seer from the Old and New Testament prophets and her contemporary writers. That her task is greater than what she has previously undertaken serves to emphasize her (projected) self within the text. The reaffirmation of her feminine frailty and reliance on God for proper interpretation of her text, comprising the last twenty lines of the text, reminds the reader of the author's gender and simultaneously brings the cento to its expected conclusion in a Christian community.

Alongside the sacred biography of Perpetua and the composite cento of Proba existed a semi-didactic autobiographic form for women writers in the period, the travelogue. Among the clearest surviving examples of this form is the *Itinerarium Egeriae*. Thought to be composed between 375 and 401, based on the earliest and latest possible access for a Christian woman to some of the sites described in the narrative, the text autobiographically recounts the travels of the author on pilgrimage through the Holy Land and the Near East. The surviving manuscript is heavily damaged, but provides a glimpse into the personal writings of women in late antiquity. Surviving medieval

commentary also indicates that the text was in circulation in a more complete form for several centuries after its composition. This raises the possibility of Egeria's narrative being representative of both a more widespread form of women's writing in the period and as a model for later women's compositions.

The fragmentary extant manuscript of Egeria's diary is somewhat expanded when the writings of the Spanish monk Valerius del Bierzo are considered. Valerius's letter to a Galacian monastery appears to reference a more complete copy of the text than has been preserved, and emphasizes the gender differences between the Egeria constructed in her diary and the commentator.[20] While extorting the monks to follow the example set by Egeria in her piety and willingness to go on pilgrimage, Valerius's letter focuses on the journey, particularly Egeria's descriptions of her trip to the Sinai (*It. Eg*. 1-3), rather than on the experiential elements which are Egeria's primary focus. While the liturgical emphasis has been central to the argument that Egeria served either as a nun or an abbess, based on her financial security demonstrated throughout the narrative and her literacy, there is little support for such assertions within the text or within the larger historical register.

Sivan notes that the attempts to cast Egeria as a nun or as an abbess, as was asserted at the end of last century, is counterintuitive given that either a nun or an abbess would be hard pressed to be released from their duties for an extended pilgrimage—Egeria's journey lasts more than three years—and in light of the fact that "the majority of western pilgrims in the fourth century were, in fact, lay persons with a deep sense of Christian

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[20] Sivan's commentary on Valerius's letter is based on the version edited and translated by M.C. Diaz y Diaz, *SC* 296 (1987): 323-349. Citations of the text here are drawn from John Wilkinson's compendium edition of the text, *Egeria's Travels*, London: SPCK, 1971, including Valerius's letter and the text of Egeria's account itself.

piety rather than people belonging to religious orders" (*Who Was* 63). That Egeria was

likely a layperson rather than a member of an ecclesiastic community is reinforced by the

language used throughout the text.

The level of education indicated by the prose style Egeria chooses also differentiates

her from aristocratic women writers, such as Melania and Paula. From Egeria's prose,

> with its frequent repetitions, disregard for rules of classical grammar, and clumsy syntax, it is clear that her education was not what aristocratic Roman ladies received. Theirs was a classical education not unlike what men enjoyed. Both Paula and Melania the Elder knew Greek and Latin well, and possibly Hebrew. Even their Christian erudition appears deeper than Egeria's. For while her readings included the Bible and a few apocryphal writings, Melania was familiar with Origen, Gregory, Basil, and other theologians. She and Paula could even combat heretics in verbal debates. Egeria also falls short of Jerome's educational perception for a young girl of good birth and Christian upbringing. (*Who Was* 66-7)

Jerome's recommendations for the improvement of young women, including a variety of

Scripture and the writings of Cyprian, are notably absent from Egeria's reported

conversations and observations. Rather, her discussions of apocryphal texts and the

doctrinal texts of the early church seem to run contrary to Jerome's educational program.

Also, unlike Jerome's correspondents, the concept of asceticism "appears altogether

absent from Egeria's perception of a pilgrimage. Nowhere in Egeria's description does

one get the impression of an ascetic woman on the road" (67).

This impression is only reinforced by the emphasis Egeria places on the liturgy of the

holy places she visits, particularly in the recounting of the minutia of liturgical

experience. What comes through most clearly in the surviving text is the impression of a

travelogue, a particularly experiential travelogue at that, written from the perspective of a

woman whose intention was to fully participate in the experiences of the holy sites. This

makes the text unique in that *Itinerarium Egeriae* serves not only as an early description

of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but Heffernan suggest that the text itself provides a snapshot of women's liturgies and canonical hours in the early church (*Liturgy* 82). While serving to reinforce historical records of the differentiation between men's and women's religious experiences in the period, and the establishment of practices which influenced women's religious activities throughout the Middle Ages, Egeria's text presents these events from a woman's perspective in a text clearly intended for women. She writes not as a historian seeking to record the event for posterity, but as an active participant who recognizes the liturgical differences from the perspective of both a woman and a pilgrim abroad. If the complete text of Egeria's account was in wider circulation in late antiquity and in the medieval corpus, as Valerian's commentary seems to indicate it was, then the text provides a concrete example of a woman's genre which is not attested elsewhere in the surviving archive and would have provided women who read the text with a clear example of how they could establish experiential identities in their own writing.

The intention of the journal also sets it apart from the writings of Perpetua, Probia, and other early women writing in the Christian traditions. The purpose of the diary is not didactic, the tone and language clearly indicate that the diary is an account of a specific journey intended for other women with whom Egeria was in correspondence, but is a deeply personal account. The reader sees Egeria's experiences for what they are; her personal experiences are inseparable from the identity Egeria constructs within the text. The author shows little interest in directly addressing or referencing her audience once she has established her own voice in the text, beyond the obligatory, familiar salutations that begin individual entries in her journal. As Sivan notes, "in the earlier section Egeria

directly addresses her readers, calling their attention to various points. In the second, she only mentions her audience twice, once at the very beginning, and then at the opening of an account of the baptismal process in the Holy City" (Sivan 528). While this disregard for audience has been interpreted in various ways, including a deliberate ambiguity on the part of the author in an attempt to address an audience beyond her known readers, the intensely personal focus lends the text an autobiographical tone that is unusual in what is prefaced as a guide book of sorts, although the emphases within the text indicate that "it can hardly have been conceived as a conventional guidebook to potential pilgrims" (Sivan 528). The autobiographical nature of the text foreshadows later medieval women's autobiographies, and other texts in a number of ways.

The most prominent of these is the absence of the early dualistic motifs common in the patristic texts. As Carolyn Walker Bynum notes, even from the earliest periods of women's writings "women say less about gender, make less use of dichotomous gender images, speak less of gender reversal, and place more emphasis on interior motivation and continuity of self. Men use more dichotomous images, are more concerned to define 'the female' as both positive and negative, and speak more often of reversal and conversion" (*Woman* 261). Rather than focusing on the dangers of women's identities, as Jerome does, or projecting through the voice of another, Egeria simply recounts her journey and her interactions with like-minded religious individuals and provides the details she finds necessary to validate and establish the events she is describing. This direct approach is reinforced by the unadorned language she frequently uses and the openness with which she describes her own fears and confusions throughout the journey. Such a highly personalized account raises questions as to the text's original intended

audience, as well as questions regarding assumptions about women's literacy and reading patterns in late antiquity and the early medieval period.

One potential audience for such a narrative is a "reading circle" of devout and pious women who met regularly to study and discuss the Scriptures and who supported a member on a pilgrimage, asking in return for a written report on it. Both the length of the journey and the sending of that account some three years after the departure from home would logically "exclude any possibility of a more formal type of affiliation such as a monastery" (Sivan 531). The existence of such a relatively informal reading circle of non-religious women would both reinforce the impression of Egeria belonging to an elite social milieu and call into question assumptions about the state of female, non-monastic education. Based on Egeria's citation of Scripture throughout her narrative and her knowledge of Latinate and vulgar apocryphal texts, as demonstrated in her conversation with a bishop in Edessa (*It. Eg*.19-21), the Egeria represented by the text possessed a relatively high standard of literacy. The absence of elaboration on specific passages within the narrative and the familiarity with which Egeria addresses problems raised in her own theological education by specific liturgical elements—such as the baptism rites in Jerusalem (*It. Eg*. 22) and the processional in Constantinople (30)—suggest that her readership was well educated. Egeria assumes that her audience will be familiar with the quotations and her own experiences and offers no additional commentary to position the events. The interpretation of these circumstances, and their meaning for scholarship on women's education in the period, is complicated by the same need for *locatedness* which clarifies the tensions in Perpetua's narrative and disturbs the attribution of Proba's cento. Egeria does not locate herself in the manuscript as it survives, she does not identify her

homeland or the location of her readers, a lacuna that has led to varying degrees of appropriation and relocation of the text over the centuries.

One example of this appropriation and collocation of the text can be found in Valerius del Bierzo's *Epistola de beatissimae Echeriae laude,* which extols the virtues of Egeria as a model for both piety and pilgrimage and emphasizes the knowledge of the liturgy of the church that could be gleaned from her text for the edification of his monks (Blázquez Martínez 164). The way in which Valerius appropriates Egeria's text is as important to the discussion here as the ends his letter achieves. Valerius's letter uses tropes similar to those found in the patristic texts in order to both elevate and contain Egeria's text. In the opening paragraph of the letter, he extorts his monks to remember the "vigour with which we must perform the various tasks which fall to us, if we are to obtain the reward of the kingdom of heaven," emphasizing that the reverence with which they approach the models provided by male saints must turn to amazement "when still more courageous deeds are achieved by weak womanhood" made all the more magnificent by their courage in overcoming their own gender (Wilkinson 174). While the majority of the letter recounts the content of Egeria's journal, emphasizing the tradition in which Egeria seeks to participate and shaming the monks for their own lack of initiative in following her example, the conclusion of his epistle assumes the tone of a male *vita* and emphasizes the ways in which Egeria was able to overcome her sex in pursuit of the divine.

> We cannot but blush at this woman, dearest brothers—we in the full enjoyment of our bodily health and strength. Embracing the example of the holy Patriarch Abraham, she transformed the weakness of her sex in to an iron strength, that she might win the reward of eternal life; and while, compassed about with her weakness, she trod this earth, she was obtaining paradise in calm and exultant glory. (177)

Valerius's language mirrors that of Jocimus in the life of Mary of Egypt, as well as the unnamed redactor of Perpetua's autobiography. Similarities also exist between Valerius's turns of phrase and the uses of shame and male fascination visible in Gregory's Macrina texts, emphasizing the failures of male religious to fulfill the examples set by women. The male appropriation and location of the text, generally speaking, serves to authorize it within the community, albeit differently than earlier examples of the same literary move.

The general tone of the letter also serves to appropriate the author herself for Valerius's male monks and locate her within his specific geographic and social community as well as the ecclesiastic traditions he enumerates in his letter. Valerius claims Egeria for the Spanish church, appropriating her text and positioning her as a Spanish *doña, l*ocating her text and her audience within his own community and aligning her with earlier Iberian women writers such as Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger. Given the scarcity of biographical information included in the extant manuscript, it is possible that Valerius, working from a more complete text, may be correct in claiming Egeria belongs to the elite of Hispania. However, arguments for Egeria's Gallic, Germanic, and Italian identities have also been posited which are equally well supported by the manuscript itself.[21]

The issue that such multi-community positioning raises in regard to women's writings is the possibilities for appropriation and over-inscription by male authorities. Even if Egeria's travelogue were intended for circulation beyond the intimate circle of readers to whom she addresses her journal entries, the audience for whom the text was written is substantially different from the audience to whom Valerius directs the text. Egeria is both

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[21] Both Sivan and Green provide arguments for locating Egeria and her circle in Gaul or Germany, but Sivan provides the most comprehensive discussion of the arguments for Egeria's origins in "*Who Was Egeria*", particularly pg. 62-66.

validated by Valerius's appropriation of and elaboration on her text and negated in terms of the identity she constructs within the text itself and the validity of her experiences of the journey as a woman. Like the male redaction of Perpetua's autobiography, the comments and appropriations of Valerius and other monastic authorities of Egeria's text on the grounds of her exceptional reporting of the journey itself and the liturgical events she documents *as a woman* both enhance the credibility of her text for a wider readership and negate the significant agency she displays in the creation of her text and the selection of the events she chooses to recount. Valerius does not need to create a holy woman, or the voice of a holy woman, in order to edify and control his monks, as Gregory does in his careful construction of Macrina, he needs only to position Egeria as a model for them and to use her text to his own ends. He is able to appropriate her voice by inscribing his own views of the text and the events over Egeria's account and validating the text for a male audience.

The appropriation of feminine perspectives by male, or potentially male, authors is not limited to ecclesiastic works nor is it a specifically Mediterranean phenomenon. There are a number of surviving texts in vernacular languages from the earlier periods in which ambiguous authors put forth female voices in their texts without hesitation, although modern scholarship seeks to qualify the texts in terms of authorial gender and the "validity" or value of the voice based on social biology.

The writings of women from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages are complicated by a number of factors, not the least of which is concurrent circulation of vernacular literature in women's voices whose provenance is uncertain because of anonymous authorship. Compared to the number of manuscripts acknowledged to have been written

by Mediterranean and Byzantine women in the same period, the appropriation of feminine voice in vernacular literatures, and the presentation of a female perspective within Germanic cultures, appears much less frequently. However, the scarcity of such texts makes the appearance of female voices in the vernacular corpus much more noticeable. This has made Anglo-Saxon poems, such as *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the subject of a great deal of scholarly scrutiny because of their use of feminine voice and the possibility of female authorship. While these are not the only poems to receive such treatment which survive from the period in vernacular languages, the volume of scholarship dedicated to the *Wife's Lament* in particular makes it an excellent point to begin such a discussion. Karl Wentersdorf asserts that the Old English text of the *Wife's Lament* is indeed a "woman's lamentation" (492), although he does not directly address the gender of the author.[22] Susan Schibanoff compares the lament, particularly in its imprecise grammar and emphasis on the corporeality of the female narrator to concurrent and later medieval *frauenlieder*, "women's songs," which are sometimes, although not exclusively, authored by women.[23]

One of the strongest arguments for female authorship of the poem is grounded in its divided nature, the narrator describes herself as being both emptied of everything, separated from the center of her being, and possessed by emotions. Compared to the

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[22] Wentersdorf cites numerous articles which have attempted to interrogate the gender of the author and the form of the narrative in the past hundred years (fn. 1, 492). While the consensus has become that the elegiac form and the feminine perspective are indeed a feminine perspective, the discussion in recent scholarship has shifted to the phonomological anomalies present in the text and the pluperfect tenses which show literary awareness of both other Anglo-Saxon poetry and contemporary insular and continental poetry which change the form and content of the lament.

[23] Schibanoff's analysis is heavily indebted to Peter Dronke's *Medieval Lyric* (1968), Peter Davidson's work on the role of women in early literatures, and subsequent work on the medieval love lyric. While the love lyric as a discrete genre is not central to the discussion undertaken here, it is important to note that the possibility of female authorship of anonymous works in the period opens the discussion to include a number of genres that have been traditionally considered to be the exclusive domain of male authors.

rationalist tones adopted by the majority of male authors in the period, such an overt

display of emotion locates the poem well within the feminine traditions, and the

generative culture in particular. While Davidson and Leo Spitzer have independently

argued that the genre expresses romantic fantasies of women, either actualized women or

the romantic fantasies of men about women, the possibility of female authorship of works

in women's voices provides a new perspective on the extant corpus and the positions of

the texts within the traditions.

   Any such consideration of the text is complicated by the noted absence of discussion

of women's writings by their male contemporaries. As Shibanoff notes,

> Medieval rhetoricians such as Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf
> display no interest in this subject; one looks in vain through their classically-
> oriented treatises for any awareness that women wrote at all in the Middle Ages.
> But within the practical criticism which medieval poetry itself offers implicitly,
> there is discernible interest in and comment upon differences in men's poetry and
> women's poetry. (194)

This observation is in keeping with the analysis of Egeria's text above and Proba's cento,

both of which are verifiably in circulation around the time of the *Wife's Lament* and

contemporary continental poetry in women's voices. The absence of official recognition

or sanction is insufficient evidence for an argument that presupposes the complete

absence of women's writings when there are extant texts clearly attributable to women in

the period.[24] However, attempting to attribute feminine authorship to anonymous texts

from the period is not without its perils. A number of the most vehement arguments for

female authorship, such as those undertaken by Marilynn Desmond and to a lesser degree

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[24] The differences between male and female authored texts, stylistically and contextually is amply
discussed elsewhere. In particular, Schibanoff's analysis of the lament through the differences expressed
between "men's writing" and "women's writing" in Chaucer and his contemporaries is particularly
compelling.

Virginia Burrus, often complicate the issue with untenable illocutions and suppositions.[25]

Examining the text in light of its circulating culture does provide practical models both

for and against female authorship, while the specific poetic tropes used in the text are

decidedly what has been described as "women's writing" given contemporary models

(Shibanoff 194).

This Anglo-Saxon text is not the only example of anonymous text to which tentative

female authorship could be attributed, albeit problematically, although it is one of the

most frequently analyzed in terms of its gendered language and cultural currency. Similar

texts exist in the insular and continental traditions as well, including the ninth century

Irish poem the *Hag of Beare*, which is frequently anthologized in collections of women's

poetry from the early periods, and the surviving work of continental *trobaritz*, such as the

Duchess of Dia, as well as traditional women's poems and songs.[26] The vernacular

writings of women have proved particularly difficult to analyze in a meaningful context,

due in part to delays in the recording and attribution of the texts and the incomplete

archival record. What can be gleaned from the surviving anonymous works in women's

voices is the deeply-seated sense of tradition and participation associated with individual

texts, the value placed on the female voice within the culture in order to access specific

sensibilities normally outside the purview of male authorship, and the estrangement many

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[25] See Desmond's application of Gilbert and Gubar's feminist pedagogy to the Anglo-Saxon elegy as a genre in "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy," *Critical Inquiry* 16.3 (Spring 1990): 572-90, p. 574. While there is sound theory for reading the text through a feminist lens, the wholesale application of methodologies foreign to the source culture problematizes the reading of the text and obscures the traditions in which the text itself immediately participates.

[26] Particularly interesting in this tradition are women's work songs and oral-formulaic compositions which become folk commonplaces before the modern period. In particular, Donald MacCormick's work with the Gaelic folk songs of the Hebrides and Campbell's comparisons of Insular women's songs with continental forms suggest a wider pattern of women's interests and possible authorship for utilitarian ends in the Middle Ages and after. Davidson has noted that variants of these songs appear in miscellanies in the early Middle Ages and reappear relatively unchanged in the written and oral traditions centuries later when women's songs became the subject of scholarly scrutiny.

of these texts suffer from their original social contexts. Unlike later medieval writings that participate in the same traditions, and are frequently geographically and culturally collocated, the unattributed texts are more prone to temporal and cultural displacement.

What the texts considered here do provide are earlier examples of the exemplum for later medieval constructions of identity by women in their own texts. As noted above, texts such as Perpetua's *Passio* and Proba's cento enjoy long circulations among the literary elite but are frequently overlooked as potential models for subsequent female biography and autobiography. Yet, as in the case of Egeria's travelogue, there are examples of these same texts being appropriated by male authors as models for female identity within the first few centuries of their circulation. Many of the women who compose their own biographies in the Middle Ages would have been familiar with both the original, female authored texts and the male appropriations and reconstructions of them. The focus, then, becomes how the later medieval authors access the traditions participated in by these earlier texts and redeploy them in their constructions of self within the text.

CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTING A NEW SELF: HELOISE, ABELARD, AND TRUTH

The importance of the traditions established by the patristic texts, as discussed here, to the formation of women's identities in literature throughout the medieval period is difficult to overstate. These lives and narratives represent the basis from which many medieval authors drew models for women; the early texts also provide the iconic and iconographic language by which these ideas of womanhood could be conveyed within the culture. The texts themselves are often directly cited as sources of authority, particularly the biographical and autobiographical materials such as Jerome's epistles and the lives of particular saints who become aligned with distinct communities or schools of thought. However, the Church and the secular community, despite the veneer of homogeny the continuation of traditional tropes provides, were significantly impacted by changes from within.

These changes, including a renewed emphasis on the corporeality of women in both liturgical and vernacular literature, directly impact the ways in which women as authors were able to envision and position themselves within their communities. The emphasis on homogeny, or at least the appearance of homogeny, which developed in the wake of the Gregorian reforms served to simultaneously limit and redefine the ways in which women could access the traditions and the degree to which they could actively participate in them. One result of these social changes was the need for women to either more fully embrace their culturally assigned gender roles or, based on the earlier traditions of transvestitism and gender renunciation, to disavow their biological gender in favor of

spiritual and intellectual masculinization. It is this latter trend, the masculinization of the mind while maintaining a feminine voice, which leads us to the discussion of Heloise, and her attempts to perform *muliebriter* while engaging with male images of her and the male intellectual traditions.

Heloise's constructions of a gendered identity in her texts are closely aligned with her perceived audience and her position in relation to them. Unlike Perpetua, Egeria, or the subjects of the patristic *lives*, whose construction of identity relies heavily on passive integration of traditions and tropes, Heloise is dynamic in her construction of identities in her texts. At different times within her extant writings, she portrays herself as a courtly and worldly woman at odds with her current situation, as a dutiful, if neglected, wife in need of her husband and superior's guidance, and as the accomplished abbess of a recognized nunnery who is appreciative of the validation her male contemporaries and superiors can lend her establishment. Her performance of self in her letters is closely tied to her access to medieval rhetorics of identity and the roles assigned to her by her correspondents.

The ability for women to construct independent identities for themselves through literature, in hagiographic biography, autobiography, or personalized narrative, is closely aligned with the history of education and the reformations that occur within the intellectual community. The shifting emphases within the intellectual and literary traditions, particularly in the twelfth century, change the ways in which women are authorized, internally or externally, to interact with texts and to insert themselves into the narratives. As Armando Petrucci notes, the linguistic and cultural changes of the twelfth

century mark an important turning point in the conceptualization of literature as a whole

and literary language specifically:

> In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the framework of written culture
> underwent profound changes due to a variety of well-known factors that can be
> listed rapidly as including: the general increase in the diffusion of reading and
> writing; the progressive increase in the production of written documents and
> private acts of writing; the marked(although difficult to measure) increase in the
> production and circulation of books; and the creation of new cultural structures
> and institutions (advanced schools, universities). The more intense circulation of
> written products that resulted from these trends in turn provoked in society a need
> for reading that was considerably stronger than previously. In its wake there also
> appeared a specific demand for written products that were organized in a way to
> facilitate rather than impede reading itself, a tendency that was also furthered by
> the emergence among the most educated readers of a new relationship with the
> text and the progressive affirmation of new modes of reading. (137)

This revolution in reading is itself tied to the resurgence of classical forms and

knowledge through the rise of the scholastic educational system. The foundation of the

university system expanded knowledge, reading and interest in reading not only in

official Latin texts but also aided in furthering vernacular literatures as the necessity for

reading became more widespread. It was not enough for individuals to be able to

comment or merely conduct business in the *lingua franca* of their region, it became

increasingly necessary for the language itself to standardize and adapt to the needs of the

population.

These traditions themselves were further adapted due to a groundswell of reformations

within the Church. Jo Ann McNamara notes that:

> Between 1050 and 1150, the configuration of power changed. Catholic prelates
> were no longer aligned with a conquered class, seeking a bridge into the ranks of
> their oppressors. The masculinized Gregorian church sought to disentangle itself
> from the power of lay patrons, bringing the system that had produced so many
> saintly women into disrepute. The old proprietary monasteries were attacked as
> corrupt by a clergy who were neither particularly sympathetic to the ambitions of
> women nor anxious for their support. (*Need* 204)

This trend had begun much earlier, particularly in light of the disputes over the nature of woman which informed much of the monastic literature prior to the eleventh century, as the role and nature of women was redefined in light of the patristic texts and in the face of numerous reforms to the medieval Church. This is particularly evident in the hagiographic materials produced between the fifth and eleventh centuries, as the tendencies toward associating the feminine solely with the body, particularly in terms of purity or corruption, were refined in both Latin and vernacular literatures to emphasize the connections between women and the lower soul.

The vernacular versions of saints' lives are particularly reflective of this shift. Sts. Eulalia, Fides, and Catherine, in their old Provençal versions, emphasize the connection between the image of the *anima* as a pure, naked woman borne aloft to heaven and the expression of devotion through the vernacular literatures. The feminized image of the human soul, and the emphasis placed on the perfection of the martyred, female saint as abstract concepts are tempered by the increasingly masculinized clergy and the church as a whole. The shift in hagiographic practices after the Council of Tours in 875, with the adoption of vernacular modes into Provençal and Occitan hagiography and a renewed emphasis on the role of *copula sancta* in the lives of the saints, illustrates the need for specific situatedness when examining these texts. The early vernacular texts, such as the sixth century manuscript of Eulalia and the ninth century emergence of Catherine of Alexandria, are deployed in an environment in which the development of a sense of culturally specific Christian community is the ultimate goal and in which the texts are intended to provide a model for their beliefs and actions. These vernacular lives also elaborate on the narrative traditions inherited from the earlier Greek and Latin lives,

focusing the life through the intervention of a narrator within a progressively more limited historiographic and geographical lens. Karl Uitti argues that the specificity employed by the narrator in the construction of the "life" of Saint Fides, specifically the movement of the saint from the Basque territories, to Conques, then to Rome and Marseilles after her death, "constitute the historical stage upon which the consequences of the 'life of Saint Fides' are acted out, or to put the matter otherwise, where that 'life is lived', so to speak by all of us in the world of human history, in the very specificity and reality of the Occitanian 'vernacular community'" (259). The community is directly tied to the liturgical uses of the vernacular lives. Sherry Reames elaborates on Uitti's argument about the construction and reinforcement of community in the vernacular lives, particularly in the ways in which situating the life in the community often alters the text itself. As Reames points out, while St. Cecilia's confrontation with Almachius is the climax of her original *vita*, as it is in the Franciscan Breviary, Chaucer's account of the tale, the *Legenda Aurea* and most of its translations, many of the vernacular breviaries deliberately avoid the conflict or minimize the event as much as possible. The net effect of these changes is a radical change in the tenor of the *life* recounted, "Cecilia's combativeness is transformed into something more acceptable—most often, exemplary firmness of principle" (267). This "firmness of principle" brings the life more in line with local expectations and gender norms, presenting the saint as the representative of positive femininity as defined by the community rather than as a combative, sometimes caustic, though saintly woman who proves herself to be superior to the men who challenge her sanctity and authority.

The emphasis placed on the community as the basis for identity and identification through the text helps establish a distinct social and cultural system of associations, which becomes increasingly important when considering the influence of vernacular literature on women's writing practices. More important is a simultaneous universalization of the human condition within the Church and practical application of the philosophies behind the earlier patristic lives, particularly when considering the work of religious women in the period. Uitti states: "[w]hat was represented by Fides, Eulalia, Catherine, Margaret, and the others is something quite central to a coherent understanding, within the Christian tradition, of humankind in both its atemporal essence and its historical variety" (263).

The implied universality of these lives, and therefore the nature of holy women, is partially obscured by modern, empirical notions of truth and nationality. Ruth Morse's claim that "the rise of empiricism, that great watershed in western culture, has erected barriers between us and the Middle Ages…To ask why medieval writers claimed that what appears to us obviously 'invented' material was 'true' is another reminder of the incommensurability of our cultures" (Morse 2) emphasizes the key difference in the modern and medieval notions of truth. The truth of the text and of the example it puts forth was much more valuable for the medieval audience than the modern, empirical concept of truth. The truth of the text, for the individual and the community, is both specific and demonstrable, as represented by the diversity found in individual Latin and vernacular lives and the interchangeability of elements within individual lives. The underlying, representative truths of the lives, and the examples they set, did not change significantly, even as the details and embellishments made them more specifically

relevant to the community. The vernacularization of the saint, and the increased

geographic specificity attached to them,[27] relies on the iconic systems established by

earlier lives and grounds them in localized traditions. Simply stated,

> [t]he composition of lives follow patterns, but the lives themselves were often, in hagiography almost exclusively, *signs* of something. The life of a person through time, like history, or the natural world, could be interpreted like a book. That is, incidents were included (or invented) because they belonged to a pattern, because they signified something quite specific about the status, the symbolic being, of their subject. (Morse 128)

This symbolic state was closely aligned with what are now considered to be authorial and

narratological functions within the text, and were often further defined by the gender of

both the author, if known, and the saint whose life was being depicted. All of these

elements influence the possibility of a distinct social self within the extant literature,

particularly those texts composed by women.

Discussing both vulgar and Latin women's writing, Stephen Nichols notes:

> Women did write in the twelfth century and their texts were noncanonical. But, since all vernacular writing in the twelfth century was noncanonical, the interesting questions lie in the direction of women writers' relation to literary language, their success in crossing over from the discourse of the everyday world to that other language, the discourse of writing. (78)

The crossing of the median between the commonplace and the literary, in Nichols's

opinion, was largely a matter of dialectics. Most of the writings by medieval religious

women remain outside what is still consider the medieval canon, largely because they

continue to be misconceived as exceptional, unrepresentative of the sex or the culture of

the authors, or else as derivative, assimilated too slavishly to the dominant male aesthetic

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[27] Barbara Abou-al-Haj's <u>Cult of the Saint</u> expands on the concept of a particular saint being both universal and specifically located in literary and artistic traditions across Europe. The specific rites and feasts associated with a local or national saint do not interfere with their ability to represent universal ideals of the Church, but rather allow the individual a level of access to their patron saints that was not possible prior to the lives being translated, or composed anew, in vernacular languages more accessible to individual groups.

(Greenspan 217). Greenspan's claim that these misconceptions have "muted the very voices modern readers have been straining so hard to hear" (217) is neither shocking nor overtly controversial. However, the muting of the feminine identity portrayed in these texts is central to the discussion here. The misinterpretation of these voices, and their appropriation outside of their original cultural and social functions and the perceived audiences constructed by the authors, leads to many of the fundamental problems inherent in many modern approaches to these texts. Scholars such as Greenspan claim that the failure of modern scholarship is twofold: first in failing to fully locate the many forms of women's writings within their traditions, and secondly in either their lack of credence to the importance of their writings or in the exaggeration of the text's ability and intention to represent the actualized self of the author and their sex (218). The performance of male dialectic discourse in women's writing further mutes the feminine aspects of their texts, giving them the appearance of complete conformity with male ideals and conventions where this alignment may not exist. This is particularly true of women such as Heloise, whose works rely heavily on traditional dialectical forms and rhetorical conventions as a means of displaying equality with their male counterparts. In the case of Heloise's letters, this involved her use of "carefully constructed rhetorical propositions" based in the principle of *aesthesis*, the ideal of mind and body joined by *voluptas* (93). She must make Abelard "see" her, within the limits of medieval conceptions of optics, in both mind and body, reestablishing their relationship on terms beyond the carnal he emphasizes in his *History*, and determining her position in relation to him. She does not deny the physicality and grounding associated with the feminine in the traditions of both the Church and the philosophical canon; rather she uses that

physicality to create an image of herself, an icon which can stand in for her absent body and through which she can then begin to project herself. The visible Heloise is not a two-dimensional mouthpiece for masculine interpretations of the feminine, but her projection of herself does remain grounded in the same traditions which allowed St. Gregory to speak in his sister's voice and Mary of Egypt to represent the whole of feminine redemption.

It is almost impossible to discuss Heloise's writings to Abelard without examining his contributions to the discussion as well. His *Historia Calamitatum* has been amply discussed elsewhere, but key points are well worth rehearsing here. Abelard's long letter of consolation to his—likely fictional—friend Olympius focuses on Abelard's own life as an exemplum of trial and success within a heavily philosophized framework. Of importance here is his portrayal of Heloise in the letter, and specifically his emphasis on the idealized state he projects onto her in order to reinforce his own failings. While the letter itself is widely praised as one of the earliest examples of modern autobiography, Abelard himself portrays his purpose in writing the letter as belonging to the traditions of Augustine of Hippo and St. Jerome, whose autobiographical writings serve as models for and reference points within Abelard's text. Despite advertising itself as a letter of consolation, the emphasis throughout the text remains on Abelard and his tribulations. This specificity of focus, and the rhetorics used to emphasize Abelard's position within the medieval academy and the church, provides an environment in which Abelard is able to bring his formidable skill as a rhetorician and author to bear on the subject of his own life. Commentators such as Radding insist that the scholastic reinterpretation of Aristotle,

and Abelard's *Sic et Non* in particular, is responsible for the visible shift in authority from

the original text to the modern interpreter (Radding 205-6).[28]

Abelard himself cannot recount his tribulations without including a version of Heloise.

Yet, Abelard's treatment of his wife is uneven in his *Historia Calamitatum.* Immediately

after recounting the coup by which Abbot Suger forced Heloise and her nuns from the

convent of Argenteuil, which included charges of immorality and licentiousness against

the nuns as well as the right of the monastery of St. Denis to the buildings and property,[29]

Abelard claims:

> As women are the weaker sex, their need more moves our human passions and
> their virtue finds more favor with God as well as men. And on her, my sister, who
> had direction of the nuns, God bestowed such favor in men's sight that bishops
> loved her as a daughter, abbots as a sister, the people as a mother, and all alike
> marveled at her wisdom and dedication, her unmatched gentleness and patience in
> all things. If she appeared in public only rarely—to devote more time to prayer
> and meditation in the cloister of her room—the world outside was only the more
> eager for her presence and her spiritual counsel. (38-9)

Even this praise of Heloise, and his deliberate portrayal of her piety, is rhetorically

motivated. The paragraph which immediately follows this observation compares the

suspicions voiced about Abelard's motivations in installing his wife in his former oratory

to the accusations leveled at St. Jerome for his closeness with women as both confidant

and teacher.[30] Abelard cannot convey the depths of his own supposed suffering and

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[28] Similar arguments are made against the scholastics by their contemporaries, including Bernard of
Clarvaux, Anselm of Laon, and Gilbert of Poitiers.

[29] These charges were endorsed by the papal legate of Chartres, the local bishops, and the royal court.
McLeod (pp. 93-104) provides a fuller account of the charges than Levitan, though Abelard himself
provides ample concrete details. These charges are particularly interesting in light of Abelard's own history
with St. Denis, and the endorsement of Innocent II, St. Bernard, and later Peter the Venerable regarding the
work Heloise performed after settling her nuns into the Paraclete. In his introduction to the letters, Levitan
comments that as many of the antagonists involved in the eviction of the nuns from Argenteuil are also
featured prominently in the accounts of the council of Soissons, at which Abelard was forced to burn his
own book as penance, Abelard attempts to position the event in light of his own disastrous confrontations
with these men and as part of a larger plot to destroy him.

[30] Abelard cites Jerome's letter to Asella, in which Jerome claims that his only crime is his sex "and even
that is not an issue except when Paula comes to Jerusalem" (Levitan 39). Of particular interest here is the

physical depravity without praising and elevating Heloise to the level of icon. Her purity

and devotion are the foil for his own ego and narcissism as he portrays them in his text.

As Bagge notes, "[h]e lets Heloise give a long speech, full of quotations from the

Fathers and classical authorities, demonstrating the evils of the married state for a learned

man" (333). Much as St. Macrina is allowed a vocal range in Gregory's *On the Soul and

the Resurrection*, the Heloise whom Abelard puts forth in his text uses her voice to

reinforce the author's own positions and to support his identity as constructed through

writing. Heloise in the *Historia* is less of a character than a set-piece, providing enough

additional range to the discussion to elaborate on Abelard's primary points while never

negatively overshadowing the author himself. She, as woman, is both innocent and

complicit in their affair and her voice will validate his interpretations of events only far

enough to reinforce the logic of Abelard's arguments.

Abelard's text, and his other works, was not without its detractors, largely due to the

author himself. Bernard of Clairvaux's lament, in regard to the dissemination of

Abelard's work, that "Libri Volant" (books fly)[31] is grounded in prevalent fact for the

twelfth century. Bernard himself envisioned a circulation of books confined to "lettered

clerks—men who read books attended advanced schools, and studied, and who were

familiar with the practice of cultural and philosophical disputations" (Petrucci 169).

These ambitions for a carefully controlled literacy more in keeping with the antique

tradition of the sacred book than the realities on the ground were undoubtedly disturbed

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way in which Abelard picks out Jerome's claim that "the road to heaven runs through fair report and foul," which mirrors Abelard's thesis in his argument and also elaborates on it.

[31] Petrucci notes that this appears in Epistulae CLXXXIX (PL 182: 355) and has been widely cited. This letter from Bernard to the Papal legate at Chantruse is also frequently reprinted in anthologies such as Hellman's edition of The Letters of Heloise and Abelard to place Abelard's influence in the period into context.

by the rise of vernacular literacies and the explosion of writing beyond the monasteries and the circles of educated clerks.

Despite his claims of innocence and the malfeasance of others, Abelard himself engages in similar displays of power in his text. Noting Abelard's use of superlatives and quantifiers in his *Historia Calamitatum*, Evelyn Vitz claims that the narrative structure of Abelard's comparisons is etymologically grounded in the medieval conception of power, virtue and vice, in which "vice is not associated with weakness or lack but with an aggressive and diabolical strength" (*Narrative* 16). This association of both virtue and vice with power, with the display of *vis* being at the center of the narrative as a showcase for Abelard's extremes and superiorities, represents not only a display of Foucaultian power-knowledge, literally the knowledge and display of one's own capacities in this case, but also an exercise in rhetorical acumen and neo-Aristotelian metaphysics. In the same sense as Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* argues a century later that all actions taken by men are essentially motivated by a greater good and subject to divine provenance which dictates the results (*SCG* III.24.5), Abelard argues that his gifts, his superiorities, are divinely given and are the accidents which set him apart from— therefore above—those around him. However, this makes the narrative inherently unstable, as Vitz claims all medieval autobiography must be, in that the tensions generated between the extremes of virtue and vice cannot be conceived of as irreversible developments within this framework.[32] These elements are flexible, subjective, and must be quantified in order to order the narrative and provide meaning; they are the

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[32] Vitz includes repentant characters who suffer from relapses after "repenting," such as Tristan, Lancelot, and the castrated Abelard himself, as unstable reflections of this ideology. The character can only be defined in the moment, within the context of their actions and their proximity to perceived perfection, but the basic stability of the elements that constitute a given protagonist's character provide the impression of stability (17).

Aristotelian "accidents" which define the individual as they see themselves and are not truly the sum of their being.

Similarly, the actions which led to Abelard's emasculation and which bind him to Heloise are described in naturalistic and factual terms more closely aligned with romances than with theological discourse in the period.

> What was the result? We were first together in one house and then one in mind. Under the pretext of work we made ourselves entirely free for love and the pursuit of her studies provided the secret privacy which love desired. We opened our books but more words of love than of the lesson asserted themselves. There was more kissing than teaching; my hands found themselves at her breasts more often than on the book. (28)[33]

Vitz notes that Augustine, in admitting the lust of his youth says only that "amabam amari'—"I loved to be loved'"— and is not prepared to offer the details Abelard willingly divulges (27). Yet, Abelard's use of the carnal, particularly in his use of terms such as *luxuria*, *concupiscentia*, and *libido* in their medieval, Church connotations, serves to both contrast Abelard's repentance with his misdeeds and to place his *Historia* in dialogue with classical love literature—Abelard was, after all, a love poet before accepting religious orders—and the traditions of the Church. Abelard constructs himself through the typology deployed within his narrative, giving the reader nothing about *himself* physically or temporally, but constructing a sense of a self rhetorically and intertextually. The Abelard of the *Historia* is frequently constructed of superlatives and commonplaces, rather than through concrete examples. This gives the modern reader the

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[33] The original text reads: "Quid plura? Primium Domo ana conjungimur, postmodum animo. Sub occasione itaque discipline, amori penitus vaccabamus, et secretos recessus, quos amor optabat, stadium lectionis offerebat. Apertis itaque libris, plura de amore quam de lectione verba se ingerebant, plura errant oscula quam sententie; sepius ad sinus quam ad libros reducebantur manus" (72-3). The tenses and recursive structure discussed by Vitz are visible in this passage, particularly in the use of the comparatives and plurals to embellish.

impression of an episodic and fragmented narrative, which has led some scholars to suggest that someone other than Abelard, possibly Heloise herself, authored the text.

Andrea Nye, reacting to Etienne Gilson's analysis of the letters, notes the trend among commentators to suggest that Heloise's philosophy, ethics, and rhetorics are derivative of Abelard's expressed "ethics of intention and…from Cicero's view of disinterested friendship" (6). This position would insist that the conflicts expressed in the letters, and the tensions which permeate the early letters, are not based in gender or philosophy but rather represent the difference between Abelard's theory and Heloise's linguistic practice. As Nye notes, "this interpretation,…which makes Heloise's position derivative and reactive, is consistent neither with what Heloise says in her letters nor with her position of authority" as she wrote from "the one situation in which medieval women lived relatively free of men's control," that is to say as the abbess of a convent without an active male spiritual leader (6). It is important to note that the letters themselves did not circulate during either Abelard's or Heloise's lifetimes. The preserved forms of their correspondence, in the minds of many scholars, was likely transcribed and compiled at the Paraclete during the twenty one years between Abelard's death and Heloise's, under Heloise's personal supervision or that of her scribe. This theory, however, is not without its detractors.

Jane Chance cites three major iterations of "Heloise" as a fictional voice: Bernhard Schmeidler's assertions that her letters were actually Abelard's composition to provide a foil for his own didactic tracts [1913, 1935, 1940]; D.W. Robertson Jr.'s suggestion that the represented Heloise is "a more ironic literary construction of Abelard's self" [1972]; and John F. Benton's intriguing, if somewhat misguided, suggestion that Heloise's letters

were forged by a contemporary of Abelard's or sometime later [1975, 1980] (Chance 161).[34] However, the text itself refutes such readings, as does the context of the excerpts from the *Epistulae duorum amantium*, which many scholars have come to regard as the prototype for the exchange between Abelard and Heloise and have tentatively attributed the authorship of those letters to the pair.

The forgery theory forwarded by Benton is among the most controversial.[35] While he withdrew this opinion publicly in 1980 and acknowledged the authenticity of Abelard's portion of the correspondence, the debate which his assertions began continues. Particularly troubling for scholars has been Benton's subsequent assertion that "Abelard had final say over what was written," despite the fact, as noted by Braun and Newman separately, Heloise survived her husband by more than two decades. Much of Benton's basis for this later questioning of Heloise's authorship is tied to the recurrence of paragraphs, phrases, and logics which appear to have been copied wholesale into letters which would have been written months, if not years, before the letters in which Abelard introduces them into the discussion. This is particularly true in the cases of letters Five and Seven, in which entire passages and scriptural citations can be read side by side when the texts are compared.[36]

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[34] Chance's examination of the disputes focuses on the potential sources and intertextual references raised in the major discussions of provenance and influence about the letters in the last fifty years. While Chance's analysis of the underlying subject positions each permutation of the text imposes or presumes is somewhat pertinent to the construction of individual identities within the letters, it is almost inseparable from the issues associated with the broad imposition of purely classical rhetorical forms on the writings of medieval women (as discussed in the previous chapters).

[35] Benton, "Fraud, Fiction and Borrowing in the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," *Pierre Abélard—pierre le Vénérable: Les Courants philosophiques, littéraires et artistiques en Occident au milieu du XII siècle*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1972. Newman calls particular attention to the wording of Benton's argument and the subsequent fervor, noting that the vehemence expressed on each side has spurred discussion over the roles of women in the middle ages but has also served to polarize readers and critics alike (*Authority* 122).

[36] Newman evaluates these similarities in her *"Authority"* (142-48), as does Dronke in *Women Writers* (40-43). Many of the passages in question are often evaluated in terms of Heloise's critique of Abelard's

Jacques Leclercq, however, firmly refutes the possibility of Abelard, or another anonymous author, being the sole author of the letters. It is his opinion that the modern reader has "every right to conjecture that if all these texts came from a single pen, the author must have been a genius, for he was able to adopt two very different languages and to speak of experiences which seem to have been really lived" (484-5). Yet, the emphasis on the lived experience, the life of the individual as part of the experience of the philosophy being espoused, is also the source of tensions between the *History* and the subsequent letters. The concern with the self, and the image of the self within the text, is represented throughout the medieval corpus.

Susan Kramer emphasizes the "new concern with the self," particularly as expressed in Abelard's *Ethics*, as emblematic of the twelfth-century renaissance (20). The rediscovery of the personal in religious writing and the resurgence of classical philosophy within the church create an environment in which the confessional, which Abelard's *Historia* lends itself to being classified as, is able to obtain a central role in the developing literature of the period. The confessional as a genre is only strengthened by the mandate of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that all Christians should confess at least yearly or face excommunication.[37]

McLaughlin sees a particularly close thematic identification in Abelard's work, particularly in his rhetorical constructions of self, "with St. Jerome, whose 'heir in the abuses of slander' he considered himself to be and whose letters, like his own, dwell

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theology, as they are staged in the letters themselves, but the explanation above seems to satisfy many of the major points raised by the comparison of the letters internally.

[37] Kramer's analysis draws heavily on Norman P. Tanner, S.J., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), particularly on Tanner's translation of canon 21 of the council cited above, 1:245.

often on the attacks of enemies" (470). Beyond the repeated references to his adversaries in his *Epistles*, Abelard's themes mirror those of Jerome as does the emphasis placed on consolation in both of their works. The expression of identity in epistolary exchanges deeply influences Heloise's ability to define herself in her letters to Abelard and has led, among other concerns, to the suggestion by some scholars that all of the letters are indeed Abelard's compositions and Heloise's name is merely an addendum to facilitate the appearance of dialogue in the text. This position is somewhat reinforced by the appearance of circular internal references, particularly the appearance of complete passages in Letter 5 that have been excerpted wholesale from Abelard's rule for the Paraclete, commonly noted as Letter 7.

The biographical nature of Abelard's history lays the rhetorical foundation for Heloise's later letters. Levitan notes that the focus of Abelard's text is consistently on the man himself, and that the "great social, political, and intellectual movements—even those in which Abelard himself played considerable roles—exist only as dim background or at most emerge in the form of personal encounters with individual antagonists or supporters, most of whom remain unnamed" (xiv). Such an emphasis on the individual apart from their historical background is in keeping with both the Jeromian tradition of the epistle and Augustine's *Confessions*. However, the specific way in which Abelard foregrounds himself distances his text from the traditions but maintains the connection with classical rhetorical conventions, which are in turn used by Heloise in her letters to substantial effect.

Heloise's letter in response to the *Historia* conveys a sense of immediacy that is derived, in part, from her adoption of Abelard's own descriptions of her. She accepts

parts of his description, rejects others, and foregrounds herself in the text by engaging

directly with Abelard's text. Heloise does not, however, directly attack Abelard's

descriptions which she disagrees with. Rather, she posits her opposition through a series

of rhetorical moves which mark her as both a woman and as Abelard's equal. Heloise's

dissatisfaction with the position Abelard assigns to her is made clear by the salutation of

her first letter in response to his *Historia*.

> To her lord, no, her father
> To her husband, no, her brother
> From his handmaid, no, his daughter
> His wife, no, his sister—
> To Abelard from Heloise (Levitan 49)

Each of the dichotomous positions she assigns to herself in the salutation are, in a

given context, true, yet each is equally false. Abelard is in marriage her lord and husband,

just as he is her father and brother within the church. She is equally his wife, but also

daughter, sister and handmaid in the Christian community. The salutation exemplifies the

ambiguity with which Abelard has put her on display in his text, and her own dismissal of

the incomplete or untrue positions which have been assigned to her within the secular and

religious communities in which they live. That Heloise sees herself as all of these, yet

none of them, is reinforced almost immediately in her letter as she recounts her

expectations in reading Abelard's text.

> I hoped that at least by its words
> I could be restored to life,
> As if by some image
> Of the one whose real substance I have lost. (49)

Her sense of loss, reinforced by the tribulations Abelard recounts in his text, allows her to

display her knowledge of classical and patristic texts, as she cites Seneca and the Church

Fathers on absence and loss in subsequent paragraphs. However, her citations are

tempered by a rather abrupt shift from collective pronouns in her commentary on "our" history and circumstances to singular as she establishes her own voice in response to Abelard's writings. In doing this, she appears to both accept and reject the positions she assigns herself in the salutation in order to set forth her own version of events in direct response to Abelard's claims.

A point of disagreement between Levitan and other scholars who have scrutinized the text is his claim that "Heloise has no analogous story, offered either by herself or anyone else" (xviii). Despite Heloise's obvious familiarity with the patristic texts, and the feminine models they provide, the autobiographical nature of the letters and Abelard's text obscures the connection between Heloise, whom Radice and others have labeled as the first female autobiographer of the period, and earlier autobiographical texts such as the narrative of St. Perpetua. Heloise's autobiographical moments are not interchangeable with those in Perpetua's text or Egeria's, but rather follow the same general pattern of deliberate feminine grounding and referential positioning discussed in chapter three. Heloise finds a commonality with the earlier texts, her gender and her social position, and understatedly departs from the models in order to differentiate herself socially and ecclesiastically from both her feminine predecessors and her husband and superior.

Additionally, Nye calls attention to Heloise's praise of the Greek philosopher Aspasia, considered in many ways the mother-figure of classical philosophy, in her second letter to Abelard. In the context of Heloise's rhetorical evolution in the letters, her description of Aspasia's words as "truly saintly, more than philosophical opinion, they

should be called wisdom rather than philosophy" (MS XV, 71; 114).[38] This citation, as well as the flowing logic of the argument she stages, demonstrates her awareness of Abelard's prejudices against women's thought as well as the rhetorical traditions. The connection between Aspasia and wisdom is central to the system of logical polemics that Abelard himself espoused at different points in his academic career and the citation in this context may, indeed, have come from his tutelage of Heloise. The citation also serves as a reminder of the binaries that exist within Abelard's own philosophy—the male/female, logic/wisdom, black body/white soul tropes—which he revisits frequently in the early letters and again in his answers to the *Problems of Heloise*. For Abelard, these dichotomies appear to be universals and absolutes while Heloise is able to push them into play and uses the tensions they generate to put Abelard's philosophical teachings into practice in ways he is unwilling or unable to do himself.

Heloise's connection to Aspasia stems, in part, from the spectral nature of Aspasia herself within the rhetorical tradition. Like Macrina, Mary of Egypt, Pelegia, and even Thecla, her voice is never directly heard while her rhetoric, words and deeds are recounted by male authors and deployed through their texts.

> Aspasia's contributions to the rhetorical tradition are asserted but not
> substantiated or imagined. If Aspasia's conversations with Pericles or Socrates or
> Plato over rhetoric or philosophy were substantially imagined…the Aspasia
> stories would greatly help us gain insight into the inner life of Aspasia as a
> rhetorician and philosopher, a recounting that would tremendously enrich the

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[38] The two terms most at stake in Nye's evaluation of the connection between Aspasia and Heloise are *sententia,* which she translates in its literal context as "philosophical opinion" above, and *sophia* or wisdom. The distinction between the two, particularly in the formative years of the university schools in Paris, is particularly important here. Given Abelard's emphasis on the validation of male philosophical opinion, demonstrated in his *History* as well as directly exercised in *Sic et Non*, and the validation of women through granted wisdom within the traditions of both the philosophical schools and the medieval church, Heloise's linguistic turn is much more in keeping with the traditions she seeks to prove herself a part of and reiterates to the reader her own recognition of her female condition by using Abelard's own corpus and expressed logic against him while demonstrating her learned nature by citing classical philosophy.

content of feminist rhetoric. But we do not as yet have such a recounting. (Gale 366-7)

Here, the Aspasia by whom the modern scholar is confronted in the extant literature, the Aspasia with whom Heloise claimed a connection, is a phantasmal construct without an independent voice. Instead, Aspasia is filtered through male discourse, positioned and sanctioned, even as historical evidence and cultural assertions may provide alternate readings of the "Aspasia" claimed by Heloise. The connection between the fifth century BCE *meretrix* and Heloise is, however, important in that the recognition of the discourse conventions and the medieval social expectations which Heloise is able to articulate and enact in her own voice uses the iconic impression of Aspasia to substantiate Heloise's identity. In this, she is able to use the male projection of woman, particularly a skilled orator and rhetorician who was also a woman, in order to bolster her own voice in the letters. The identity which Heloise creates and claims is, just as Abelard's is in the *Historia*, based on images and rhetorical tropes, yet she confidently puts this identity in dialogue with him and projects an identity through the specter.

In addition to these models, Levitan himself seems to contradict the absence of models for Heloise when he claims that "throughout her writing, Heloise tended to cast herself in a series of roles originated by the heroines of her classical reading—Lucan's Cornelia, Virgil's Eurydice and Dido, the abandoned women of myth in Ovid's *Heroides*, and even Jerome's Paula—taking their words and gestures for herself. It is less learned imitation, though, than performance" (Levitan xx). By performing these roles, Heloise projects an identity onto her response. Each of these performances are as ephemeral as her invocation of Aspasia, but also serve to anchor the sense of self she constructs within the larger, secular traditions rather than within the limited range of identities allowed for women in

ecumenical orders. Similar points are made by Dronke in his analysis of Heloise's letters

and the tradition in which she participates (95-100), positioning her simultaneously

within the religious community of the time and as part of the broader cultural traditions.

These impressions are only reinforced if the series of letters, largely preserved in

excerpts, edited by Ewald Könsgen in his edition of the *Epistolae duorum amantium* are

accepted, as many scholars suggest, as the earlier exchanges between Abelard and

Heloise.

These letters, written from a man in Troyes to a woman in praise of her virtue,

learning, and beauty, contain many of the same literary and rhetorical devices found in

the acknowledged correspondence between the pair. Sexual innuendo and double

entendre are richly represented in the *Epistulae duorum amantium*, and the intertextual

references support the attribution of the letters to Heloise and Abelard. What is

particularly interesting here is the possibility of viewing the exchange that ensues after

Abelard's *Historia* as a continuation of these letters. As Ward and Chiavaroli note, the

rhetoric and linguistic turns found throughout the earlier exchange recur with surprising

regularity in the later letters, particularly in the reflexive and reflective phraseology used

by Heloise in her salutations and discussions of their shared history (Ward 54-58).[39]

The tone of the letters, including "misunderstandings, quarrels, alleged infidelities,

reconciliations" and the exchange of philosophical and theological points (Dronke 93), is

strikingly similar to the stylistic and linguistic range demonstrated in Heloise's exchange

with Abelard. While Dronke notes that Könsgen stops "judiciously short of outright

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[39] Ward and Chiavaroli cite Constant Mews's work on the earlier letters as a basis for their linguistic analysis, while rationalizing the historical and sociological implications of the text in light of the work brought to the discussion by both Jaeger's *Envy of Angels* and Bond's *The Loving Subject*, particularly regarding the movement away from purely classical rhetoric in terms of *amor/amicitia* and the positioning of the individual within the academic culture of the cathedral schools in twelfth century France.

identification" (93), Könsgen acknowledges that the lovers are "like Abelard and Heloise" (Könsgen103). The existence of this exchange raises the possibility that, even if Heloise and Abelard were not the authors of this sequence, Heloise may have taken contemporary women's writings as examples for her own correspondence. This would indicate a much more active engagement with the concurrent literature, and the traditions, than the modeling acknowledged by Levitan and other conservative critics would comfortably assert, and necessitates the allowance of a great deal more agency for Heloise than traditionally allowed.

In contrast to Levitan's insistence on Heloise's performance of earlier typography, Leclercq sees Heloise as adopting a more rebellious position through her letters than do many other scholars. He notes: "[s]he prefers to tell the truth rather than play a role. She does not hide the element of hypocrisy in her existence; she accepts the humiliation" (483). While Heloise does indeed accept the hypocrisy of her situation, as a nun more in love with her husband than with God and as a married woman serving as the abbess of a congregation married to Christ, she also emphasizes the failures on Abelard's part to either fully accept his responsibilities to her or to confess his own rhetorical gamesmanship in his confessional *History*. This is particularly true in her use of narrative form and rhetorical structure in her arguments. It is important to note, particularly in the early letters in which she is demanding her due from Abelard, "Heloise chooses to write *muliebriter*, to write like a woman, and openly engages in rhetorical positioning which limit and identify her as a woman" (Brown, *Muliebriter* 27). Here, then, Heloise constructs herself as a woman familiar with secular life and literature, a worldly woman of some education demanding what is rightfully hers and a degree of

redress for the wrongs done to her. This Heloise is much different from the Heloise of the later letters and the Heloise of her correspondence with Abelard's contemporaries, little of which survives. With Abelard, in addressing her absent husband and lover, Heloise is able to construct a version of herself that is as physically grounded as his description of her demands while still asserting her own gendered identity in the discourse.

Before Abelard's treatise, little is actually known about Heloise's biography. Betty Radice's brief, but pithy account of Heloise's biography provides the major details that are known about her beyond the information provided by Abelard's text. Thought to have been born in 1100 or 1101, Heloise was raised in the convent of Sainte Marie d'Argenteuil near Paris. However, this date is somewhat suspect if the correspondence between Heloise and Peter the Venerable is to be believed. In his letter acknowledging Heloise's correspondence after Abelard's death and his own return from Spain, Peter notes that he remembers hearing of Heloise when he was a younger man:

> My love in fact goes back for many years. I remember I was very young—still too young to be considered a young man, but somewhere near the upper edge of adolescence—when I first began to hear your name, not yet, of course, in connection with your religious life but in connection with your admirable studies. (Levitan 265)

Peter was born between 1092 and 1094, and the time he refers to would be around 1115, a few years before Heloise's affair with Abelard began. Logically, she would be a few years older than Peter was at the time; Levitan estimates that she would have been in her late twenties at the youngest (265), in order for her fame to have been as well established as Peter's letter seems to indicate.[40] This would put her date of birth in or before 1090.

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[40] Peter the Venerable's letter approximates the date of his awareness of Heloise with the beginnings of his own ecclesiastic career as a prior at Vézelay in Burgundy, more than 100 miles from Paris and Argentieul. This would seem to indicate that Heloise's fame as a scholar was, indeed, widespread before Abelard's tutelage and helps to explain the concurrent interest in the scandal caused by their affair and Abelard's

While such ambiguous dates are not uncommon in the period, Heloise's age, if this is correct, does complicate the reading of her later interactions with Abelard and scholarly claims of her youthful innocence in engaging in their affair.

 From the cloister, she moved into the house of her uncle, Fulbert, one of the canons of the cathedral school in Paris, and it was he who arranged for Abelard, one of the most respected rhetoricians of the age, to become her tutor (90-91). It is in this capacity that he was able to seduce her, secretly marry her, and earn the ire of her uncle who ordered his castration. While the focus of Abelard's *History* is clearly on his own misfortunes, he also provides many of the details modern scholars are able to use to reconstruct the historic Heloise from her writings.

The major corpus of Heloise's writings is her letters to Abelard, sparked by his *History* and her sense of being neglected by him. The first letter emphasizes that she would have likely remained quietly in the background if he had not drug her into his own downfall in his text. Abelard's obvious knowledge of his use of Heloise, the projection of virtues and capabilities she never claims for herself in her own letters, is emphasized by her direct response to his assertions of her virtue.

In the first letter, Heloise positions herself as Abelard's equal in many ways, using his own trope of Jerome's Paula against him. She notes of his letter of consolation, speaking of the *Historia*, that despite his own examples and those set by the church fathers he appears to emulate in his text:

> Your oblivion came as no small surprise to me

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subsequent mutilation. This would also seem to indicate that Heloise was not the naive *wunderkind* Abelard depicts her as in his *Historia* or the innocent schoolgirl many scholars tend to portray her as. An older Heloise, as a consenting participant, is much more in keeping with the spirit of her first letter to Abelard and also makes it more likely that she and Abelard are indeed the authors of the contested earlier correspondence.

> When, unpersuaded by any reverence for God, or any love for me,
> or any example
> set by these same Fathers,
> you did not try to console me as I foundered,
> overwhelmed in a sorry day after day—
> never once, neither by a word when we were together
> nor a letter when we were apart—
> and yet you would know
> that you are bound to me by a greater debt,
> obliged to me by the sacraments of marriage (Levitan 54)

While claiming to be surprised by his tactics in the *Historia*, Heloise is much more direct in her confrontation of Abelard's claims than he is in making them. His projection of a divine and pure Heloise is directly refuted by her analysis of her own position.

> I never wanted anything *in you*[41]
> but you alone,
> nothing of what you have
> but you yourself,
> never a marriage, never a dowry,
> never any pleasure, any purpose of my own—
> as you well know—
> but only yours.
> The name of wife may have the advantages
> of sanctity and safety, but to me
> the sweeter name will always be *lover*
> or, if your dignity can bear it,
> *concubine* or *whore*. (55)

Her particular emphasis here, on her own desires or lack thereof, is a recurring theme throughout her correspondence with Abelard. As discussed later in this chapter, she portrays a very different self in her exchanges with Bernard and Peter the Venerable. That she desired nothing "in him" can be read in numerous ways in light of her classical rhetorical training. Literally, it can be read as a sexual metaphor for her desire for pleasure without procreation as well as intellectual penetration, positioning herself in the overly feminine role of passive recipient of Abelard's greatness. Such an interpretation is

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[41] Emphasis in this line is mine, those later in the stanza are in Levian's translation.

validated by her description of herself as lover, concubine or whore, reinforcing the social positions assigned to women in a refutation of the purity Abelard imposes on her. She also picks up on the fact that Abelard attempts to sanitize their relationship in his text, to her benefit but to the detriment of the truth. Such a sexualized reading would be in keeping with Heloise being the feminine half of the exchange documented in *Epistolae duorum amantium*, particularly in their use of sexual innuendo, as well as Leclerq's assertion of an independent Heloise, as the sexual references double as accusatory metaphors for Abelard's past lust and current disabilities. The latter reading refocuses the argument of the passage and frames the letter as a whole as a feminized version of *her* calamities, a direct answer to Abelard's text and an oblique history of the couple which Abelard seems unprepared to fully explore in his text. While some scholars would argue that such a reading is not in keeping with the spirit of the later letters, it is important to note that this letter can be read as either the continuation of earlier exchanges with new impetus or a fresh start to the communication between the two based on Abelard's public disclosure of their history. In either case, the need for rhetorical consistency in dialogue, inherited from the traditions the scholars who would disavow the earlier letters insist on placing the acknowledged correspondence within, would justify such an approach and even necessitate it.

Of particular interest when discussing the scholarly traditions which influence the acknowledged correspondence is the fact that while it would appear that Heloise was capable of directly accessing classical rhetorics, many of the citations she chooses are filtered through the writings of St. Jerome, a practice in keeping with Abelard's heavy reliance on the saint's epistles in his own text (Radice 92). Her arguments are illustrated

by quotes from Theophrastus, Cicero, Seneca and Socrates, not from the original sources

but from Jerome's compilations of the wisdom of antiquity. Her control of language and

rhetoric, her "resolute self control and, equally, her intellectual and practical ability,"

rivals that of Abelard himself (Radice 97). However, Heloise, like Abelard, is not above

the occasional Juvenilian satire. Shame, in its most poignant medieval sense, permeates

the first letter as Heloise recounts her version of events and fully engages with Abelard

on his terms. While she argues that this is not the reconciliation she would have sought,

"in a sense Heloise won her point by forcing Abelard to face up to her problem and

renew contact with her, though not in the way she may have first hoped" (Radice 98).

This direct engagement with the underlying rhetoric of identity and self-authorization, the

basis of Abelard's *Historia*, creates a sense of a Heloise who is Abelard's equal, an equal

who seeks to clarify his claims and to reveal the truth behind his self positioning.

The issue of truth, in both argument and presentation, is central to the climax of the

letter in the paragraph immediately following Heloise's assertions of her own desires.

> Do you imagine
> I debased myself to earn your gratitude
> and to preserve your glorious distinction in the world?
> You were not so entirely oblivious
> when it suited your own purposes in that letter
> to your friend,
> and did not think it beneath your dignity
> to set out at least some of the arguments
> I used when I tried to dissuade you
> from this marriage of ours and its disastrous bed. (56-7)

Reconnecting with the image of Aspasia of Milesus invoked throughout her writings, the

emphasis on known truth establishes Heloise here as independent of Abelard and

suggests that his arguments, those borrowed from her own attempts to persuade him

against his set course, are superior to his actions in his writing. While Heloise does not

overemphasize the acknowledged failures on both sides of their marriage, she does position herself as separate from Abelard and not dependent on him for authorization. Rather, she positions herself as an equal participant in their history and as the victim of his neglect and self-indulgence in his writing. This is emphasized in subsequent paragraphs where Heloise describes her own misfortunes, as they are tied to Abelard's, in terms of "our ancient enemies" (59) and the absence of what is "owed" through Abelard's self-imposed distance. This line of argument culminates in her observation that "I am entirely guilty; as you know, / I am entirely innocent" (59). While appearing oxymoronic, this couplet demonstrates both Heloise's grasp of the rhetoric and theology Abelard seeks to use to his advantage in his history of the events and her own established sense of self.

The specific context in which these lines appear is important in understanding the weight of the argument. Heloise argues that "blame does not reside in the action itself/ but in the disposition of the agent, / and justice does not weigh what is done/ but what is in the heart" (59). The expressed logic demonstrates a profound grasp of the neo-Aristotelian thought prevalent in the academy at the time, and the capacity to engage with the applied logic of the arguments at an extremely proficient level. This issue recurs in the third letter, when Heloise attempts to distance herself from the list of evil women she provides in refutation of Abelard's praise, albeit generically, of women at the end of his response to Heloise's initial salvo. As Levitan notes, Heloise shifts the blame from womankind itself precisely by distancing herself from her own exemplars using Abelard's own argument against him, effectively "she cannot be held morally responsible for Abelard's downfall since she did not consent to it" (78). Consistency is once again at the heart of the correspondence, as is truth, in its dialectical form.

Ineke van 'T Spijker sees the division between the interiorized *intentio* expressed in the letters of Abelard and Heloise as emphasizing the "congruency between outer behavior and inner attitude, a correspondence whose lack in her own life Heloise had expressed" (50). Unlike the interiority and affective, meditative piety advocated by Bernard of Clairvaux, the constant reflection emphasized by Abelard's instructions to Heloise in Letter Eight is more in keeping with the awareness of ambiguities which necessitate self-reflection seen in the writings of the Desert Fathers. The influence of inner experience, informed by careful scrutiny of the interior self, is visible in the awareness of the outside world expressed in Heloise's letters. In Augustinian terms, Heloise's concerns focus on the distinction between pure virtue and its outward manifestations as examined in Book Five of the *Confessions*. The outward effects of piety and the need for corporeal well being and virtue cannot be separated from the nurturing of inner virtue, but the balance between the two is often difficult to perceive or maintain. For Heloise, the need for the "mind's feelings to flow through words" (Letter 6) is indicative of the ways in which the expression and examination of interiority and the construction of the self through faith are conflated with their outward expression. Despite the adoption of Abelard's rule for the nuns under her care, modeled heavily on Augustine's rule, Heloise continues to express concerns about the world beyond her cloister and the effect of appearance and worldliness on her charges.

> The intensity of emotion, the particularity of her descriptions and the force of her analysis are unique. Heloise covers the ground Abelard has traversed, from her point of view, that is, as a person in her own right, not a contingency in Abelard's scheme of personal salvation, and she attributes motive, however obliquely. Her concern for what was, in all its exactitude and passion, is clear and compelling, and it demands that the reader (who, it must be remembered is at least in the first instance Abelard himself) is challenged to deny her account and analysis if he dare. Heloise's ability to recall and embody the characters and motives of the

actors in their drama is the more moving for the superficiality of Abelard's—differently intended—account. One of the arguments, indeed, for the authenticity of the letter is how much better Heloise comes out of them than does Abelard: a judgment extremely unlikely from a forger, given the misogyny of the period. By restoring the human messiness of their life together she defies his attempt to make literature of it, that is, a coherent salvation narrative; at the same time, she uses all the rhetorical skills at her command to increase the pathos of her own description. (Morse 169)

This exactitude is particularly evident in Heloise's discussions of love and action in the letters. Heloise's expositions on the nature of love mirror earlier "monastic discourse" in the emphasis she places on the bonds between Christian men and women (Newman, *Authority* 155). That she would likely have been aware of the rhetorical and cultural norms imposed on earlier Christian women is evident from her writing as well as the manuscript record. Heloise's frequent citations of Jerome, classical authors, and Abelard's own pedagogy demonstrate her familiarity with the traditions through which she sought to construct herself through her letters. That she was also aware of direct models, such as the logical arguments attributed to St. Macrina and the more visceral writings of St. Perpetua, is likely based on the popularity of the tales judging by the number of attested manuscripts including those provided for the education of nuns at the convent of Argenteuil where she was educated as a girl and later served as abbess. While these texts are not directly referenced in her letters, the thematic and cultural connections between Heloise's arguments and the earlier texts suggest familiarity with the traditional lives and a degree of modeling in her own writing based on the typology these texts present. Like St. Gregory's sister, Heloise emphasizes the role of feminine wisdom in her construction of the self and the interconnected nature of men's and women's roles within the church and society. Similarly, the early letters repeatedly appeal to Abelard's

superiority over her, despite her learnedness and the need for male authorization for women in religious life.

Interestingly, it is Abelard's nemesis, Bernard of Clairvaux, who provides a link between the feminine identity Heloise puts forth in her letters, the traditionalist, particularly Cistercian, interpretation of women in the traditions, and the vernacular religious literatures. Particularly interesting in regard to the connections between Heloise's masculinized rhetorics and the larger culture is Bernard's appropriation of traditional motifs of the feminine soul. As Shawn Krahmer notes, within the ecclesiastic traditions the "appropriation of feminine images to the medieval male self is frequently either a conscious play on cultural stereotypes to signal spiritual renunciation or the rejection of worldly values, or reflects a need, whether conscious or unconscious, for the psychological integration of the feminine and masculine in the lives of those confined to a homo-social world" (Krahmer 304). Bernard's sermons on the *Song of Songs* are particularly reflective of this kind of appropriation, as the sermons emphasize the capacity of the feminized soul, either male or female, to transcend the negative-feminine correlation and to achieve a virile relationship with the divine. This is especially evident in the ways in which the heights of perfection in Bernard's corpus are represented "by the bridal soul who is the appropriately affective feminine lover," representing "a healthy mixture of virile rationality, constancy, and strength, and feminine affection, compassion, and vulnerability" (Krahmer 305). Mirroring the sex-change metaphors of earlier hagiography, this reflection on the feminized soul represents awareness in the larger society of the plasticity of gender identities and the possibility of female transcendence of biological limitations. Just as it was possible for women to supersede the limitations of

their biological sex, it is equally possible, and sometimes necessary, for male religious to

relinquish masculine traits in order to attain a higher connection with the divine.

Heloise represents the possibility of the first kind of transformation, from luxuriant,

worldly woman to ascetic, religious feminine. In becoming more overtly gender neutral

in her writings, she indirectly follows Bernard's own advice. Krahmer cites Bernard's

letters to Melisande, Queen of Jerusalem, as an indication that Bernard was willing to

apply the sex-change metaphors to actual women (324). Melisande is urged to act like a

man, "do great things…all in a spirit of wisdom (*consilium*) and strength (*fortitudo*). The

Virgin Sophia and the Virgin Mary are also praised as the 'valiant,' vigorous,' 'virtuous,'

possibly even 'virile'" examples of womanhood who should be emulated by all women

(324) in these letters. Writing as a woman, performing *muliebriter*, does not exclude

Heloise from these masculinized, virile capabilities. Similarly, the perceived feminization

of saints and ascetics, such as St. Alexis in the vernacular version of that saint's *life*,

extends this sense of gender flexibility into the broader vernacular culture and helps to

situate the difficulties of establishing independent identities for women within the period.

The Cistercian interpretation of the traditions finds itself somewhat at odds with the

vernacular literature even as it becomes more aligned with the culture as a whole. As

Evelyn Vitz observes:

> Bernard's effusions and the loving and lovable saints—the great friars and the
> mystics, for example—are, to a substantial degree, a new phenomenon; they begin
> to emerge along with that new human and literary interest in love which occurs
> from the mid-twelfth century on…We sense in Bernard a contemporary of Tristan
> and Iseut, while Alexis embodies an earlier, sterner ascetic spirituality. (135)

The plastic and inherently humanity-centered interpretation of Bernard and the

developing romance culture seems out of touch with the sterner tone of the vernacular

saint's lives. Yet, both *La Vie de Saint Alexis* and Bernard's *De Diligendo Deo* are in simultaneous circulation within the community, both are available to the intended audience of each text—as are the secular romances and wisdom books—while reflecting very different responses to the same tradition. One explanation for this may be found in a Thomist interpretation of the subject, one in which the glory of god and the desire for god is the ultimate goal of the individual who claims to be a Christian. In this reading, the individual saint, the personal subject of the text and the individual author are positioned as secondary subjects, ancillary to the desire for and love of God. Both Bernard's text and the *Vie* would then be valid examples and provide *exemplum* for the community. This is not merely a matter of literary taste or secular accessibility, as the extant texts of the *Vie* far outnumber those of Bernard's text, but of identification and participation in the community at an individual level. This "structural Christianity," to borrow Vitz's term, is not surprising when examining texts such as Bernard's or Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and Heloise's responses to Abelard as they are texts authored within what is traditionally considered as an enclosed Christian community. The vernacular texts, such as the *Vie* and romances which borrow heavily from the literature of the Church, are somewhat surprising in that they demonstrate similar structural and narrative elements and similar problems in constructing the individual.[42] The concept of the autobiography, the literal construction of the self within the text, must be examined in this context when it is applied to medieval literature. The self is, for authors such as Abelard, Heloise, and mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, the subject of desire and the desiring body which

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[42] Flanigan indicates that the liturgy itself becomes a site of social discourse and identification within the medieval church. Examples such as the *Chanson de Sainte Foy*, which possess both popular and liturgical pedigrees demonstrate that "the boundary between clerical Latin and lay vernacular texts was not so untraversable" as some modern scholarship would suggest (Flanigan 709).

underlies the theology of Bernard, and subsequently the disputations of Aquinas and Scotus, and is drawn directly from both Aristotelian philosophy and the feminine self constructed by the early church.

These conjunctions between the sacred and the secular, and between gender identities and social norms, mirror the trends in the broader literatures, but cannot escape the underlying limitations of the traditions. Feminine hagiography, such as the Middle English *Life of St. Margaret*, present models "of female sanctity that assumes a woman's essential, inescapable corporeality. Because a woman can never escape her body, her achievement of sanctity must be through the body" (Robertson 269). The medieval gender dynamic can be summarized by the observation that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being…for him, she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (de Beauvoir 44). It is as Other, and as a deliberately differentiated Other, that Heloise is at her best and most representative.

One ends toward which this discussion has worked in examining Heloise's constructions of the self in her letters is to refocus modern readings of the text with the broader historical and cultural implications of Heloise's letters in mind. While Ward and Chiavaroli have no reservations describing Heloise as *rara avis* (80), and critics such as Chance illustrate the reliance on, or at least utilization of, classical forms of identification within the letters, Ranft's cautionary analysis of Heloise's position is perhaps the most accurate historically and culturally. Ranft reminds the reader that while Peter the

Venerable claims that Heloise's skills "surpassed every man, so did Hrotsvitha's. Heloise

displayed a deep respect for knowledge and an awareness of the power of the written

word, but her contemporary Queen Matilda did also. Heloise was a very bright light in

the intellectual world, but far from the only one" (45). The most pertinent contribution

made by the analysis of Heloise's letters undertaken here is an examination of *how* she

accomplished what she did in her letters, *how* she was able to construct a distinct self and

a completely unique identity within the constraints of a literate culture dominated by

classical rhetorical conventions and a male-centered concept of identity, and, most

importantly, how supposedly anomalous texts such as hers function in the broader scope

of literature by and for women in the middle ages. The self Heloise constructs in her

letters is unique, particularly in its appropriations and redeployments of classical

rhetorical tropes and elements of the Christian traditions surrounding women. She is able

to use her rhetorical skills to create a voice for herself that is at once orthodox and

heterodox, the voice of the bride of Christ expected of one in her—albeit enforced—

vocation and the voice of the "wild woman" whose physicality is not to be trusted. Yet,

this self is in many ways a composite of dissonant traditions and a textual hybrid.

Heloise, as she presents herself is/is not unique precisely because of the way she

conflates the real and the traditional in her letters. Much like the mystics and visionaries

discussed in the next chapter, Heloise is unique in her execution of her chosen identity

within the text and in her deployment of rhetoric and tradition, and as a model for writers

to come, but she is not *rara avis*, is not the "one-off" her detractors would like to make

her seem, but is rather a sterling representative of larger trends and capabilities

demonstrated by medieval women in putting themselves into the developing literate

culture of the West.

CHAPTER 4

RE-ENVISIONING THE PASSIONS: HILDEGARD VON BINGEN, JULIAN OF

NORWICH, AND MONASTIC WOMEN'S VISIONARY LITERATURE

The concept of identity, as expressed through the dual lenses of experiential mystical visions and expository miraculous texts, challenges the modern scholar in ways which more directly biographical or autobiographical texts do not. While the personas constructed within the texts are often revealed more directly, the emphasis placed on the mystic as the vessel and medium for divine revelations complicates the construction of the self and frequently masks the rhetorical and cultural constructs that are often more visible in biographical texts, including saintly *vitae* and descriptive texts such as Gregory's *On the Soul and Resurrection.* This is due, in part, to the methodology which uncovers the devices for constructing identity within the text itself. As Jacques Le Goff notes, medievalists "scour the sources for 'historical' information, that is, information relevant to the subject matter of traditional history: events, institutions, major personages, and, more recently marking the progress of a sort, *mentalitiés* [mental outlook as expressed in discourse and artifacts]" (3). This parahistorical approach is, in part, what is assayed here in the attempt to recover, unearth, explore and dissect the progress and construction of specific identities, both historical and literary, and to examine the ways in which the prevalent social and cultural attitudes of the time influence the ways in which these personas can be displayed and then used through literature. However, as previously discussed, the identities expressed by individual woman authors must also be understood in the context of the traditions in which they participate.

The more orthodox forms of the mystical tradition, particularly as experienced by women writers, are a logical outgrowth of the monastic culture of the period. The retreat from the world emphasized by the isolation of monasteries and cloisters, and the emphasis placed on the world to come is grounded in the teachings of the Desert Fathers and Scriptural example. The emphasis on the isolation of the monastic life and the desire for contemplation is an outgrowth of the patristic traditions and Scriptural directives. It is important to note that "while monastic culture is grounded in the Latin Bible, it depends upon the writings of the eastern Fathers for expressing its unique rationale. The ninth chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict, for example, counsels monks to read the works of 'the Fathers,' that is, the Fathers of the desert" (Bugge 6). The examples of the Desert Fathers, and the lives they chose to record, grounds the movement in the traditions and provides practitioners with ample models for their own community.

The emphasis placed on early hagiography and hagiographic practice in establishing the mystical tradition is in keeping with Le Goff's definition of antique and medieval hagiography as "a product of popular beliefs and practices as well as the attitude of the Church toward that fundamental but changeable Christian hero, the saint" (4). The emphasis Le Goff places on the malleability and the plastic nature of the genre is particularly useful, as the emphasis in examining the role of these texts in forming later feminine identities in literature is grounded in the hagiographer's contribution to the establishment of a tradition; a tradition that, while maintaining the appearance of homogenous belief, is fluid and ever-changing in its interpretation and application beneath the surface of supposedly immovable fact and tradition. The early hagiographic and doctrinal texts provide the images, the iconography, and the concrete visualized

language which, in the medieval imagination, become thematic, fluid, and mobile within the tradition and within the individual text itself (Le Goff 4).

The adoption and adaptation of specific images within the tradition, as established in the previous chapter, lacks the solidity and solemnity many moderns associate with history or, in its modern sense, truth. From the modernist, rationalist perspective it seems

> easy in the Middle Ages to veer off into dream, madness or mysticism. In Augustine's words: 'the force of love is such that those objects in which the soul long delighted in throughout and to which it has bound itself through its concern, are carried with it even when it turns inward in some fashion in order to think. Having loved those bodies outside itself through the intermediary of the senses, it has mingled them through a kind of long familiarity'. (Le Goff 6)[43]

However, medieval mystics saw themselves as participating in the traditions established by the early patristic texts, fully grounded in the theological hierarchy of the Church, and informed by larger cultural concerns outside the walls of the monastery. While Le Goff's interpretation of the medieval monastery mirrors Stock's definition of microcommunities defined by the text, the construction of the self in mystical texts is not solely defined by monasticism. The ever present limitations of secular culture and religious doctrine redefine the long-standing impetus against the flesh drawn from patristic texts and continually redefine the prohibitions against the body.

> The height of abomination, the worst of the body and of sexuality, was the female body. From Eve to the witch of the late Middle Ages, woman's body was the devil's stomping ground....The inevitable clash between the physiological and the sacred resulted in an effort to deny the existence of biological man: vigils and fasting were conducted in denial of the need for sleep and food. Sin manifested itself in the form of physical deformity and disease…the way to spiritual perfection involved the mortification of the flesh…the saint was never more

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[43] Le Goff is citing Augustine's *Treatise on the Trinity* (X.iv.156-70), in which the use of and the nature of madness and ecstasy in religion images are discussed. These lines, and this issue, are further discussed by P. Kaufmann in "Imaginaire et Imagination," *Encyclopaedia Universalis* 8 (Paris, 1968) and Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, both of whom are cited by Le Goff in reference to this passage from Augustine and in reference to the use of images and imagination as points of both concession and digression in medieval literature.

> saintly than when he (or she) sacrificed his body in martyrdom…Man's body was not so much dust as rot. The way of all flesh was decrepitude and putrefaction. (*Medieval Imagination* 83-4)

The rise of mysticism in the Middle Ages accompanies the development of secular and ecclesiastic cultures that increasingly objectified the sins of the flesh and made them subject to an ever more elaborate system of definitions, taboos, and sanctions. The penetentials of the time reflect the emphasis placed on the corruption of the flesh and the weakness of men. As Le Goff observes,

> they were much taken up with sins of the flesh, reflecting the ideals and fantasies of monkish militants. With its contempt for the world and humiliation of the flesh, the monastic model exerted a tremendous influence on western mores and attitudes. Benedictine discipline, while it eliminated some of the extremes of the eastern desert tradition, perpetuated some of its attitudes and practices in the forest and island monasteries that were the western equivalent of the desert wastes. (Le Goff 99)

The isolation of the individual, the abandonment of the flesh, and the visibility of the divine are directly derived from these traditions and norms. The accretion of these traditions is summed up by Bernard McGinn when he describes the mystical visionary text as "a model of gradually accumulating and interactive layers of tradition" mediated by the monastic ideal of flight from the world and an increasingly secularized literary tradition dependent on vernacular literatures for its form (197). This interdependence between the mystogogic vision cycle and the vernacular traditions is particularly evident in the sheer number of vernacular mystical texts intended for both ecclesiastic and secular use, particularly after 1200, as well as in the form and content of the visions themselves.

> The rich, though never static, equilibrium found in the major twelfth-century mystical traditions, especially those of the Cistercians and Victorines, was based in part on the common learned language of a largely male cultural and religious elite. The picture was to grow more diverse, more striking and flamboyant, at times more extreme, and certainly far more controversial in the world of

vernacular mystical theology that we find beginning in the thirteenth century. (205)

The forms which the mystical texts take change over time as well. The stylistic shift from the visionary compendium—such as Hildegard of Bingen's *Schivas*, Hadewijch of Brabant's texts, or Julian of Norwich's *Showings*—to a personal narrative grounded in the moment—such as the spiritual diaries of Margarite Ebner, Agnes Blannbekin and Beatrice of Nazareth— is further marked by linguistic shifts. McGinn notes a marked rise in the use of prose or poetic interpretation of courtly dialogues and characterizations in mystical texts as the influences of vernacular literatures is more keenly felt, and significantly more extant texts were composed in vernaculars rather than in scholastic Latin (207-8). This shift is due in part to the limitations of Latin, and the language's perceived position as the medium of the intellectual elite, as a means of communicating the universal messages of the visions, as mandated by Dominican and Victorine theology, to all believers.

> Though the learned language of Latin possessed distinct advantages in terms of its weight of sacrality, its scholastic precision, its homogeneity, its cultural universality, and its ability to maintain a link between past and present, Latin suffered from distinct disadvantages as well…never the language of first acquisition, always bound to a male dominated cultural elite, and regulated by inherited models of linguistic propriety that made innovation difficult, though never impossible. (McGinn 208)

The modality possible in vernacular languages allows for a greater range of intertextual expression, particularly for women, while remaining orthodox in its theology.[44] The

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[44] Sara S. Poor addresses this point specifically in "Mechthild von Magdenburg, Gender, and the 'Unlearned Tongue," *JMEMS* 31.2 (Spring 2001): 213-241. Poor argues that there are deliberate differences in content and context between the mystical texts composed in the vernacular and in Latin, and that the ends of vernacular mystical literature was "distinct from scholastic writing" in the period (213). The continued existence of a distinct Latinate mystical tradition alongside the developing vernacular forms of mysticism is in part linked to the need for mendicant orders to care for the unlearned and the semireligious, but is also tied to the audience whom the individual authors saw themselves as addressing through their visions. The emphasis placed on the salvation of the secular and semireligious by the

distinction between *ex officio* teaching, instructing others under ecclesiastical

approbation, and *ex beneficio*, instruction through modeled grace, represents the

distinction between Latin and the vernacular in many women's texts. The personal and

revelatory nature of mystical vision cycles, particularly in the later Middle Ages,

necessitates a reliance on the vernacular to present the appearance of orthodox identity

and discourse that did not impinge on the established doctrines of the Church in ways the

use of Latin, and the appearance of full *ex officio* authorization would. This is only

exacerbated by the development of new mystical tropes and language by authors such as

Richard Rolle, whose use of courtly and literary language elevates the devotional text to

the level of high art, and Meister Eckhart's vernacular sermons which borrow heavily

from courtly literature and mercantile speech.

At the heart of mysticism is the underlying need for a connection with the divine

which informs the monastic flight from the world. The life of contemplation, in its

medieval sense, is epitomized in the search for communion with God.

> Contemplation is the monastic term for netic communion with God. In the later
> Middle Ages…the word signifies a special mental intimacy with God for which
> the ascetical practices of the monk are preparatory. In its highest form it is often
> presumed to be 'mystical,' involving the intuitive perception of truths otherwise
> incommunicable, and is even thought to extend at times to the vision of the
> Godhead. Thus, as presently defined contemplation is primarily a psychological
> process which Fr. Leclerq, for one, is not adverse to calling a kind of *gnosis*.
> (Bugge 41)[45]

The need for the isolation from the world, an increasing recognition of the need for a

sense of *contemptus mundi* drawn from the eremitic traditions, in order for the individual

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Cistercians and Victorines is, in Poor's opinion, closely tied to the generation of vernacular mystical texts,
as well as Latin scholastic tracts, that coexist under their care.

[45] Leclerq, *The Love of Learning* p. 266, refers to this as a "true gnosis" revealing a kind of higher
knowledge which is the complement to and fruition of faith.

to be fully receptive of this tradition is further emphasized in the vernacular manuals for individual contemplation.

Texts such as *Hali Maedenead* and the *Ancrene Riwle* reflect the same emphasis on the sins of the flesh and the need for netic connection with the divine in order to achieve spiritual grace. The underlying theology of *Hali Maedenead* may, according to Bugge, be traced back to the "long and unholy tradition of the vilification of the institution (marriage) which can be traced directly to the encratism in Jerome's *Epistolae* and the *Adversus Jovinianum*, and beyond that to the classical satire of Theophrastus and Juvenal" (88). It is through the avoidance of the sins of the flesh and subsequent reconciliation with Christ that one may be redeemed. Similarly, the *Ancrene Riwle*, speaks of the sinner's reconciliation with Christ:

> ne beo neaver his leof forhoret mid se monie deadliche sunnen, sone se
> ha kimeth to him ayein he maketh hire neowe meiden. For as Seint Austin seith,
> swa muchel is *bitweonen* Godes neoleachunge ant monnes to wummon, thet
> monnes neoleachunge maketh of meiden wif, ant Godd maketh of wif
> meiden. Restituit, inquit Job, in integrum. Gode werkes ant treowe bileave -
> theose twa thinges beoth meithhad i sawle. (VII.130-135)[46]

The emphasis on physical differentiation and the denial of a woman's biological sex as preconditions for her salvation within the text, and the larger tradition, recalls similar motifs in the patristic texts discussed earlier. Given the ambiguous nature of these moves in their traditional forms and in their later reimagining, and the transcendence of the self they make possible, it is not surprising that the mystical becomes one of the major

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[46] This passage translates as: "Though his spouse were polluted with so many deadly sins, as soon as she cometh to him again, he maketh her again a virgin …. " so' great a difference is there between God's communion with the soul, and man's with woman, that man's communion maketh of a maiden a wife, and God maketh of a wife a maiden." " He hath given me again," saith Job, " all that I had before." These two things, good works and true faith, are maidenhood in the soul." The differentiation between the earthly and divine consummation of betrothal and marriage is key here, as the communion with man elevates the woman to the status of wife, simultaneously further invested in the sins of the world and elevated above them with legal and social status in the eyes of the Church even as God's communion effaces these sins as well as the biologically inherent ones brought on by her nature.

avenues for feminine validation within the tradition. This makes "Christian mysticism—a realm in which, historically, women have claimed access to transcendence and in which they have exploited the ambiguities of feminine alterity—a primary site on which the relationship between women as nothing and as excess, between their immanence and their transcendence in relation to male subjectivity, is inscribed" (*Beauvoir* 159).

It is the relation to male subjectivity and the masculine elements of the tradition which most directly inform the form and content of women's mystical texts and the ways in which they are able to construct their literary identities. The relatively large number of women writing mystical texts in the period is not surprising based on the earlier models for constructing feminine identity within the traditions, as demonstrated in the preceding chapters, and the increased opportunities for religious life in the Middle Ages. Focusing specifically on religious women, Garber notes that within their works,

> a remarkable diversity of exemplary female figures offers a spectrum of imitable models to their monastic audiences. Thus, it becomes evident that the women were actively involved both in the creation of the unified persona they revealed to the outside world, and in the creation and transformation of the variety of life paths that the women represent within their literary works. (Garber 1)

Part of the establishment of a unified personality for religious women involved the construction of a universal literary identity, the construction of the ideal womanly self through their texts and the dissemination of that identity within their community.

The issue of dissemination is the most readily addressed. Despite the fact that few of the manuscripts survive, records exist of the active circulation of women's texts primarily between nunneries including a Dominican chronicle which notes that the works of Christine Ebner and Margaretha Ebner were "found written in many places" (Garber 3). The texts which do survive intact, rather than as compilations or excerpted in the work of

male authors and editors, are largely accidental. Gerber notes that in the case of German women writers, it is the treaty of Lunéville (1801) which secularized the monasteries in the border area, and it is only after the closure of the religious houses and the sale of their contents that many of the extant texts came to light and were classified as women's writing and specifically as mystical texts (Garber 3-4). The marginalization of these manuscripts within the larger archive, the attention paid to concurrent male authors and the concepts their texts embody, is, in a Foucaultian sense, a meaningful silence. Many of these texts were known and referenced within the female communities, known to women and incorporated into their discourse as they attempted to construct their own versions of the idealized feminine identity, even if they were relatively unknown within the larger community of the Church at the time. While the fragmentary and often marginalized texts authored by the Ebners and other religious women provide tantalizing clues as to how these women saw themselves both within their own communities and as participating in larger cultural and social arenas, the clearest examples of the construction of mystical identities for women can be found in the texts which were in some way authorized and validated by male authorities and therefore more widely disseminated and culturally incorporated.

Hildegard of Bingen's life is unusually well documented, as are the male endorsements of her theological self-positioning. Born as the last of ten children, Hildegard was consigned to Jutta of Sponheim's hermitage in 1106 at the age of eight. As Newman notes, "as a handmaid and companion to the recluse, Hildegard was also her pupil: She learned to read the Latin Bible, particularly the Psalms, and to chant the monastic Office. In time, other women joined Jutta and Hildegard, and the hermitage

became a nunnery professing the Benedictine Rule" (*Introduction* 11). This insight into Hildegard's early life and training is unusual, particularly when compared to the sketchy biographies available for women such as Heloise, as discussed in the last chapter, and Julian of Norwich, discussed below. Beyond the early training, little is specifically recorded about Hildegard's life or visions until after her election as abbess after Jutta's death in 1136. It is not until 1141, however, that Hildegard is actively called to record the visions she had witnessed and suffered from since childhood and scrupulously records in the *Declaration* in advance of her *Scivias*.

Patricia Ranft notes that Hildegard's introduction to *Scivias* is often overlooked as a model for identity construction in medieval women's literature "because of her insistence on visions as the source of her knowledge" (54). While the use of visions as a means of accessing wisdom and transcending the physicality of women's identity has been discussed, here and elsewhere, Hildegard's use of the trope appears to run counter to the tradition in the degree to which it serves to mitigate her own agency in the text. While this is necessary to emphasize the intention of the text, it also limits her to a purely feminine construction of identity. If Hildegard had been male, or had written as a man rather than acknowledge her gender's supposed limitations, Barbra Newman suggests that "her *Scivias* would undoubtedly have been considered *one of the most important early medieval summas*" (*Introduction* 23).[47] The autobiographical *Declaration* which prefaces Hildegard's *Scivias* emphasizes the miraculous nature of her revelations, while limiting her within the feminine tradition as a vehicle for received wisdom.

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[47] Emphasis mine. Newman's analysis is based on the reception of similarly themed texts with clear male provenance, including St. Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, in which she sees the foundation of a new monastic mysticism which would be available to a community outside of the traditional cloistered orders.

And behold! In the forty-third year of my earthly course, as I was gazing with great fear and trembling attention at a heavenly vision, I saw a great splendor in which resounded a voice from Heaven, saying to me, "O fragile human, ashes of ashes and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear. But since you are timid in speaking, and simple in expounding, and untaught in writing, speak and write these things not by a human mouth, and not by the understanding of human intervention, and not by the requirements of human composition, but as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God. Explain these things in such a way that the hearer, receiving the words of his instructor, may expound them in those words, according to that will, vision and instruction." (*Declaration* 59)

Newman sees the scrupulous dating of the *Declaration*, including details such as Hildegard's exact age at the time of the revelation, the names of her superiors such as the reigning emperor, the archbishop of Mainz and the abbot of St. Disibod, and the method of God's revelation to her as representative of her familiarity with the conventions established by "the Hebrew prophets and continued by the seer John of Patimos" (*Introduction* 12). This temporal and historical locatedness creates within the text a Hildegard keenly aware of the traditions and specifically located as a religious woman within an established community to whom she is responsible.

The indirect emphasis on her gender in this passage, particularly on the earthy fallibilities most commonly associated with women, and the direct emphasis on her shortcomings as a vessel for divine revelation position Hildegard within the orthodox framework of her monastic culture and ecclesiastic community. In order to compensate for her mortal, feminine, deficiencies, it is necessary for her to be "miraculously stricken" (60) by the divine will in order for her to become a suitable vehicle for the subsequent revelations. Direct references to her status and gender come through the voice from Heaven, not directly through Hildegard herself, within the text. Her gender and social

position are established through refutation and subjugation in this context, marking her as submissive to both her male amanuensis and the divine.

> I have laid her low on the earth, that she might not set herself up in arrogance of mind….I have withdrawn her from impudent boldness, and she feels fear and is timid in her works. For she suffers in her inmost being and in the veins of her flesh; she is distressed in mind and sense…And she did not seek to exalt herself above herself but with many sighs bowed to him[48] whom she found in the ascent of humility and the intention of good will. (60)

The effect of these factors is the construction of a Hildegard within the text who was "keenly aware of history and her own historical moment" (*Introduction* 12). Positioning herself as mystical vessel and woman requiring the assistance of a male monastic to accomplish the divine will, Hildegard avails herself of the expected rhetorical position of orthodox religious women in the period. The success of her construct is witnessed by the 1148 validation of her work by Pope Eugenius III and St. Bernard, which provided the final seal of legitimacy for her theology (12-13).

The example set by her *Scivias* carries throughout her extant corpus. In all of her texts, "her autobiographical prefaces and endings tend to focus as much on the seer's disabilities (her femaleness, poor health and lack of education) as they do on her revelations" (*Introduction* 17). As form of autobiography—also as identification and normalization—these introductions are laden with sacrificial themes and feminine suffering, positioning the author as a weak and fallible woman who cannot help but obey the will of God. Hildegard's self-positioning in the biographical introductions stands in stark contrast to modern appropriations of the same texts.

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[48] The referent for the pronoun "him" is vague in this context. Earlier references indicate that this may signal her submission to the interpretation and recording of her visions by the monk Volmar of Disibodenberg, as Hart interprets the passage, but may also refer to the divine voice itself and its commandment of humility from her in exchange for her service as a vessel for revelation.

Modern stereotypes of Hildegard, portraying her as "the feminist, the liberationist, the 'creation-centered mystic,' the holistic health practitioner, and the prophet of ecological justice" can be supported through her texts, but must also be recognized as projections of interpretations and subjective positioning just as surely as the medieval stereotypes decried by the same scholars who attempt to put Hildegard's work within their own ideological boundaries (Newman 47). These, and other, interpretations of Hildegard's constructed self within her texts are complicated by the reinvention of Hildegard by the Renaissance, including Andreas Osiander's Protestant appropriation of her. In attempting to claim Hildegard's thought as progressive and outside the norm for Catholic religious women, even those with a less extensive temporal distance from her work imposed many of the same misnomers used by modern critics. Rather than isolating and 'reclaiming' Hildegard for women's issues and the modern community, it is necessary to place her more fully in both dialogue with the conventions of her time and her self-imposed limitations within the text.

It is important to recognize that the emphasis which Hildegard places on her own physical maladies and shortcomings is a deliberate social and cultural positioning which emphasizes her biological gender even as she works to efface more overt references to her sex. Fr. Leclercq suggests that the emphasis placed on physical malady and near death experiences in medieval mystical texts has a Scriptural basis, taking St. Paul's observation that "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9) to its full and logical conclusion as it relates to women's writings (*Preface* 6). The physical and spiritual weakness of women, as commonly described by medieval medical and theological thought, makes them the logical vehicle for the explication of Paul's analogy

of physical and spiritual depression as the medium for spiritual perfection. While this mimics the physical infirmity Gregory applies to Macrina to expedite his dialogue in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Hildegard's use of the trope positions her as a living woman within the Church and her divinely given maladies as a spur to her writing. She does not, according to her own text, write *Schivas* of her own volition, but rather in response to divine dictum granted her during a period of physical and psychological decline. While Julian of Norwich engages a similar trope, as do many of the more affective mystics, Hildegard's use of it both defines the limits of her physical, gendered identity within the text and authorizes her visions as being divinely given, and therefore male within the theology of the time.

The limitations Hildegard imposes on herself in the construction of her identity through her writings in turn limit the ways in which she can be read through the text. As Emilie Zum Brunn notes, Hildegard's official outlook on the structure of the church and her theology is regimented and orthodox, providing a foil to the universal character of her visions and defining the "Hildegard" visible in her texts within the context of her ecclesiastical position and community. Specifically, Brunn notes that

> in spite of the universal character of her visions, Hildegard did not go beyond the feudal conceptions of her age. For she defended a hierarchical theory of conventual life, seen as a reflection of the cosmic order, as opposed to a more evangelical experience. This attitude is clearly seen in her answer to the questions put to her by the Prioress of Echternach, Canoness Tengswich (Tengswidis). In fact, the latter asks the Abbess why she accepted exclusively the daughters of the noble and rich in her community, whereas Christ had chosen the poor as Apostles, and Peter and Paul both reminded us that God is no respecter of Persons. (6)

In her reply to Tenswidis, Hildegard insists that the world is composed of hierarchical states willed by God, an order which under no circumstances should be overthrown. She takes as her first example the angelic hierarchy and then adds a more concrete image,

asking: does one put oxen, sheep, asses, and goats into the same enclosure? The argument she offers is that mingling young noblewomen and commoners in the same convent would encourage pride in the former and revolt in the latter. By practicing humility among their own equals, these young women have greater potential to accomplish the divine will (6).

This professed belief in the divine providence of the individual's estate is further reflected in the seemingly misogynistic arguments Hildegard puts forth about the role of women, including her own charges, in the medieval religious community. The defined roles of men and women within the Church are, for Hildegard, moral and Scriptural imperatives that must be obeyed by all. The introduction to the *Scivias* incorporates all of these elements concisely when Hildegard describes the divine imperative that she record her visions, effectively isolating her corporeal and intellective self from the text beyond serving as its vessel and interpreter.

However, beneath the passive surface of this self-description of her position and the origin of the text lie layers of intertextuality which indicate a much more active interaction with the traditions than is first visible. This is particularly true of her explanation of her ability to comprehend the text as it is revealed without assistance. Warmed by the "fiery light" of the divine, kindled "as the sun warms anything its rays touch" (59), Hildegard immediately

> knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospels and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and New Testaments, though I did not have the interpretation of the words of their texts of the division of the syllables or knowledge of cases or tenses. (59)

Dronke notes that Hildegard's ability to interpret the text without outside glosses or assistance is reminiscent of Augustine's ability to read Aristotle's *Ten Categories* without

help, even suggesting that Hildegard's structure may be based on Augustine's text.[49] The

gift of heteroglossia, traditionally a miraculous gift bestowed upon saints and the apostles

through the Holy Spirit, marks Hildegard's experiences as miraculous and provides a

logical explanation for her subsequent interpretations of her visions without violating the

ex officio prohibitions or disturbing Hildegard's construction of herself within the text.

Yet, the masculinized voice Hildegard adopts is routinely disturbed throughout her

text by reminders of her biological gender and the position of women within the church.

This is particularly evident in her discussions of appropriate gender roles as reinforced by

her visions, emphasized by the use of the divine voice as the vehicle for her revelations.

In the second book of the *Scivias*, Hildegard records:

> A woman conceives a child not by herself but through a man, just as the earth is
> plowed, not by itself but by a farmer. Therefore just as the earth cannot plow
> itself, a woman must not be a priest and do the work of consecrating the Body and
> Blood of my Son; although she can sing the praise of her Creator, just as the earth
> can receive rain to water its fruits. (*Scivias* 2.6.76)

Thompson sees this passage as remarkable not for its traditional doctrine on the

priesthood, but rather for the "complex of symbolic relations in which it is embedded"

(351). The interrelatedness of the symbology actively participates in the traditions in

which Hildegard saw herself, evoking traditional images of the Church as both field and

plowman while grounding both in her own feminine perspective. Yet, in keeping with the

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[49] Ranft agrees with Dronke's assessment, adding that the insistence on divine insight and capability here puts forth a very different persona than is visible in Hildegard's writings on medicine and science, for which she can claim no visionary basis (55). The personality and identity presented here are then composed in response to the traditions and through active, intertextual participation in them, rather than as passive component needed for the completion of the text. The active distinction between Hildegard's visionary works and her more scholarly, in the modern sense, medical and scientific texts indicates an acute awareness of her social and historiographic position and lends itself to a deliberate misreading on the part of the reader. When examined in light of other attributable works, Hildegard's "self" operates simultaneously inside and outside of the text.

impulses in her culture toward the maternity of God,[50] the language emphasizes the

feminine without direct recourse to the author's gender. This remove serves both to

efface Hildegard's own gender within the text, in spite of her careful construction of a

gendered identity in the *Declaration*, and simultaneously to affirm her privileged,

visionary status as a female vehicle for divine revelation.

One of the most direct reminders of her own gender present throughout her corpus is

her insistence on the validity of her exclusion from *ex officio* teaching and the priesthood.

The priesthood, for Hildegard, remains an exclusively male calling. Thompson notes that

this thinking carries throughout her corpus as "unlike contemporary male writers, such as

Bernard of Clairvaux, she never attributes feminine traits or images to Jesus. This

masculine imagery contrasts with the feminine symbols and attributes that she uses or

implies when speaking of God generally" (360-61). The masculinity of Christ in

Hildegard's text is derived from the masculine elements of the Deity, which is

exemplified in the first vision of the *Liber Vitae Meritorum*, in which she says, "the man

of such great height that he reaches from the top of the clouds of heaven to the bottom of

the abyss designates God. And God is rightly called a man (*vir*) because all strength (*vis*)

and all things that live (*vivunt*) come through him" (1.10.32). Christ, as the incarnation of

God's word, must therefore represent the power and authority, the masculine attributes,

she attributes to God. This duality is paralleled in the *Schivas* when Hildegard mirrors the

"male's role physical role in conception (in which he pours forth the blood and semen,

not yet alive and informed, into the woman) with the words of the priest in the Eucharist.

Neither act gives live in itself…it is the Spirit of God that gives life; the man the angel of

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[50] Thompson traces the Biblical maternal imagery in such cases to Ps 109:3, especially in the Vulgate version. The womb of God image is particularly important in Hildegard's understanding of God's maternity in light of Tridentine theology, in which the Father is all.

the Annunciation, and the priest merely minster at this event, and are almost bystanders"
(Thompson 363).

Thompson's commentary here summarizes the argument of *Scivias* 2.6.43 in which
Hildegard concludes with the proclamation "See, [Christ's] flesh and blood are
consecrated on the altar in the sacrament, which exists not for the glory of the priest, but
for that of my Only Begotten Son." Hildegard's orthodoxy in this vision is, interestingly,
validated by her positioning of herself as merely the female vessel for received wisdom in
the introduction to the text and the emphasis she places throughout on the need for
appropriate women's participation in supporting and disseminating the doctrine of the
Church. Drawing on Pauline imagery, she suggests earlier in the *Scivias* that the
priesthood, which is as distinct from Christ as the woman is from the husband who is her
head, exists to adorn the church with its ministry as "with a garment" (2.3.3). The
division of roles within the church and the expression of devotion, and of vision, in which
Hildegard engages here is well within the hierarchical constraints of the medieval church
she appears to be at once validating and challenging. While speaking as the vessel for
God's (male) wisdom, acting in the role of a prophet, Hildegard is both male and female
within her own theological structure and the interpretive and declarative personas she
uses to create herself fulfill many of the same functions as the cross dressing motifs used
in earlier hagiographic texts. As prophetic voice, and through frequent reminders of the
author's biological sex, Hildegard both affirms the theological interpretations of affective
theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and the traditional, conservative identities
allowed for women within the church. The effacement of Hildegard's sex through the use
of abstract voice and passivity on her part creates an alterity: she is simultaneously inside

and outside the very structures on which her vision comments. Unlike the erasure of the whole advocated by later mystics, such as Marguerite Porete and Angela of Foligno, it is enough for Hildegard to unsex herself within the tenets of the Church and to position herself as authoritative voice modeled on and through similar voices in the hagiographic traditions and her own interpretation of the voice of God within the Church.

The effective elimination of her biological sex, and the wholesale adoption of masculine tropes in the construction of herself within the text, are techniques adopted by later mystics as well. Julian of Norwich represents the continuation of the masculinized, authorized forms of mysticism begun by Hildegard and her contemporaries while also incorporating a later medieval dependence on the secular community as an audience for their texts and as a source for stylistic and contextual support for their textual construction of individual identity.

Lynn Staley places Julian's Short Text in a decidedly Butlerian context, emphasizing the connection between interlocutiary action and writing in constructing her literary persona (117). The degree of agency and action Staley places on Julian's literary construction is further validated in the Long Text, particularly in the reorganization and elaboration of Revelation 1, which connects the text with both Julian's "widening sense of audience or her growing sense of her own powers as a writer" and the models of feminine identity possible in mystical texts provided by Hildegard and the earlier, canonical visionary texts authored by women (117).

Stylistically, both texts emphasize the participatory elements Julian sees as necessary to ground her experience both in women's experiential visions and in relationship to male authors such as Richard Rolle. The tone of the work is carefully balanced to both

emphasize and efface her own gender in that "she does not instruct; she recounts, but with the intent of allowing us to participate with her in the experience" (Staley 122). This dialectical balancing act is reminiscent of Hildegard's emphasis on her own biological locatedness and the physical effects she suffered if she did not write, but Julian's emphasis, particularly in the Long Text, reflects a more problematic relationship between the female visionary mystic, the community, and the Church itself. The emphasis on accounts of witnessed revelation maintains the orthodoxy of the text, avoiding the Pauline injunction against women teaching theology, and serves to reinforce Julian's presence in the text; however, the concurrent cultural emphasis placed on "auctoritee"— as witnessed by Chaucer's explication through the Wife of Bath—and its connection to identity complicate the ways in which Julian can effectively write herself and dissenting views into her *Showings*. Unlike Chaucer's Alisoun, who directly claims her position as disseminator of her tale and her right as exegete to further position herself and her story through its telling, Julian must maintain her position as being simultaneously within and excluded from the ecumenical community as she constructs herself and her experiences through her texts.

The regulations imposed on anchorites as part of the religious and secular community are well documented, as are the social functions of anchorites within the medieval community.[51] Staley emphasizes the connection between the anchorite and the town or parish, noting the need for anchorites to find and maintain "a form of patronage" in which

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[51] Ann K. Warren provides an interesting insight into the social and religious functions of anchorites in late medieval society, as does Dronke's evaluation of Julian in relation to other mystical writers of the period. Newman's introduction to the *Showings*, both Long and Short Text, emphasizes the cultural location of the author herself and the texts in relation to male authors of the period. It is important to note that Julian's texts lack the overt endorsements of the Church that Hildegard's *Scivias* received, making her social and religious position much more vulnerable than they would have been otherwise.

the "town or the parish effectively served as the patron" (131). This interdependence

between the anchorite and the community contributes to the need for Julian to find a

balance between the affective and the intellectual, to avoid accusations of Lollardy as a

"preaching woman" and to join as fully as possible in the ongoing debates over

devotional experience and individual understanding of the divine. These tensions directly

influence the way in which Julian is able to compose herself within each version of her

text, particularly by effacing her gender more fully in the Long Text. Staley and Aers

describe Julian's situation as one in which

> [H]er method of presentation, as well as her translation of the figures of Latin
> rhetoric and her deployment of themes and motifs drawn from the traditions of
> monastic devotional prose, combine for a striking (and subtle) affirmation of
> subjectivity. Julian...applies the (male) tools of intellective authority to the
> (female) matter of experience and in doing so avoids the rhetorical traps laid by
> contemporary devotional writers….Julian demonstrates the fundamental
> inadequacy of categorizing knowledge in terms of binary oppositions. (139)

In the Long Text, Julian creates a version of herself capable of occupying multiple

subject positions at once. Like Hildegard, Perpetua and Heloise, her recourse to male

concepts of the self and rhetorical identity simultaneously erase her gender—rendering

her in a fundamental way male within the text—and locate her experiences as unique and

bodily, reinforcing the underlying womanhood of the author. This is particularly evident

in the differences between the stylistic deployment of the self in first chapter of the Short

Text and the mirroring chapter of the Long Text.

Prior to her writing, little is known about Julian aside from the few biographical

details she chooses to include in her texts. The latest mention of a bequest to help support

the anchoress comes in 1416, and the mention of her in Margery Kempe's *Book* provides

outside support for her reputation and supplements the sketchy biography Julian herself

provides. There is, however, significant revision to the identities she presents in the Short

Text and the Long Text, reflecting the stylistic evolution of the author's identity over

time. The opening chapter of the short text emphasizes Julian's devotion and reflects a

specifically located sense of self.

> Here is a vision shown by the goodness of God to a devout woman, and her name
> is Julian, who is a recluse at Norwich and still alive, A.D. 1413, in which vision
> are very many words of comfort, greatly moving for all those who desire to be
> Christ's lovers. I desired three graces by the gift of God. The first was to have
> recollection of Christ's Passion. The second was a bodily sickness, and the third
> was to have, of God's gift, three wounds. As to the first, it came into my mind
> with devotion; it seemed to me that I had great feeling for the Passion of Christ,
> but still I desired to have more by the grace of God. I thought that I wished that I
> had been at that time with Mary Magdalene and with the others who were Christ's
> lovers, so that I might have seen with my own eyes our Lord's Passion which he
> suffered for me, so that I might have suffered with him as others did who loved
> him, even though I believed firmly in all Christ's pains, as Holy Church *shows
> and teaches*, and as paintings of the Crucifixion represent, which are made by
> God's grace, according to Holy Church's teaching, to resemble Christ's passion,
> *so far as human understanding can attain*. But despite all my true faith I desired a
> bodily sight, through which I might have more knowledge of our Lord and
> Saviour's bodily pains, and of the compassion of our Lady and of all his true
> lovers who were living at that time and saw his pains. (125-26)[52]

The emphasis placed on Julian's devotion and orthodoxy are similar to Hildegard's

claims in her *Declaration*, but are rhetorically removed from her predecessor's work as

well. The emphasis placed by Julian on her desire for truth and on the optical nature of

her desires is more reminiscent of the *simplicitas* of Perpetua's visions than of

Hildegard's polished Latin. Also, being written in the vernacular differentiates Julian's

text. Beyond the surface stylistics the use of vernacular English imposes on her text, the

cultural distinction between Julian's vernacular text and Hildegard's use of an

amanuensis to translate her visions into scholastic Latin must be examined as well.

Writing outside of the proscriptive, Latinate forms allows Julian a degree of rhetorical

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[52] Original emphasis.

freedom otherwise unavailable to her. While she does protest that she has no knowledge of Latin, and therefore must write in the vernacular, the unstated decision not to use an amanuensis to translate her visions into the official language of the Church also suggests an awareness of the restrictions of the Latinate form and a deliberate construction of identity within the text.

The refinements made to the Long Text, completed a decade after the initial revelations were recorded in the Short Text, furthers this interpretation. The first chapter of the Long Text is an addition which outlines the structure of the text as a whole. The sophistication of individual revelations stands in sharp contrast to the simple opening of the Short Text. However, the significant divergences between the personal revelations of the second chapter and similar material presented in the first chapter of the Short Text are more telling of the sophistication with which Julian revised her text in light of the reception of the original version.

> This revelation was made to a simple, unlettered creature, living in this mortal flesh, the year of our Lord one thousand, three hundred and seventy-three, on the thirteenth day of May; and before this the creature had desired three graces by the gift of God. The first was the recollection of the Passion. The second was bodily sickness. The third was to have, of God's gift, three wounds. As to the first, it seemed to me that I had some feeling for the Passion of Christ, but still I desired to have more by the grace of God. I thought that with the others who were Christ's lovers, so that I might have seen with my own eyes the Passion which our Lord suffered for me, so that I might have suffered with him as others did who lived him. Therefore I desired a bodily sight, in which I might have more knowledge of our Saviour's bodily pains, and of the compassion of our Lady and all of his true lovers who were living at that time and saw his pains, for I would have been one of them and have suffered with them. I never desired any other sight of God or revelation, until my soul would be separated from the body, for I believed that I should be saved by the mercy of God. This was my intention, because I wished afterwards, because of that revelation, to have truer recollection of Christ's passion. (177-78)

Two noticeable rhetorical shifts occur between the Short Text and the Long Text. The first is the absence of direct references to the teachings of the Church which form the primary points of access to revelation in the Short Text. The emphasis in the Long Text shifts from the received doctrines of the church and instead focuses on the direct revelation and visitation of God's grace upon Julian. The second is the markedly more sophisticated approach with which she approaches her revelations and herself within the text. The sentences are streamlined, the syntax and word choice reflect and mirror the styles of male affective authors. The expressive piety of the Short Text is eliminated, replaced by concise sentences mirroring the language and tone of Richard Rolle and other male authors of the period. The refinement of the text, particularly in the adoption of masculinized language, necessitates contextual changes which further isolate the author from her gender even as they make the text more directly universal.

Part of the sophistication demonstrated by the Long Text stems from the elimination of all direct references to both the author's gender and the gender of the witnesses to the Passion with whom she seeks to identify. The feminine icon of Mary Magdalene is erased, replaced with a collective designation of "them" when referring to Christ's lovers. This neutering of the authorial voice is reinforced by the references to Julian as "this creature" and ungendered pronouns such as "I". While these changes serve to emphasize the universality of the text within the community Julian seeks to address, they also serve to call attention to the position of the author herself and underscore the acknowledgements which she makes of her own biological gender. This rhetorical move is much more in keeping with the stylistic sophistication of Hildegard and the continental

mystics, but Julian's choice to write in English further underscores her specific

locatedness within the community and within the Church itself.

These readings of the self, and the rhetorical scrutiny placed on specific images and

experiences locate Julian's voice as being "as immediate as Rolle's and as objective as

Hilton" (Staley 141). Such a specific locatedness within both popular devotional

literature and the larger traditions of the Church allows Julian a degree of latitude in her

presentation of herself as well as the appearance of homogeny within the religious culture

of the time. She is able to bridge the gap between affective and objective piety by

grounding her experience and revelations in the body, and to efface the body in favor of

more intellective approaches to the content of the revelations themselves. Similar to

Hildegard's "unwomaning" of herself after the introduction to the *Schivas*, Julian's

erasure of her biological gender in favor of a constructed self reflects a keen awareness of

the limitations of a purely feminine identity within the community and the suspicions

aroused by women's interpretations of theological doctrine. Even as she appropriates

male rhetorical tropes in order to more fully engage in the dialogue, Julian must remain

grounded in the received wisdom she reveals in the texts, and remind the readers of the

imperatives to relate the visions which led her to write in the first place. Yet, by

exercising control over her voice and gender, Julian is able to maintain the illusion that

her texts are completely orthodox within the women's literary tradition in which she

begins. The appearance of monolithic orthodoxy, rather than the factual exegesis of it,

marks her texts as unique within the time and allows Julian access to higher orders of

discourse than were allowed to other women writers of the time. She is able to transcend

the traditions of both the authorial self and the constructed self, operating as parallel

selves within each of her texts. Julian's effacement of her gender is informed by her

maternal portrayal of God. The notion of a nurturing God, as explicated by Bynum, has

numerous sources and parallels within the tradition, but it is the precision "with which

she applies this symbolism to the Trinitarian interrelationships" that makes Julian's texts

unique (*Preface* 9).[53]

    Aers and Staley suggest that there is a deliberate avoidance of the physical and optic

expectations of medieval mysticism, particularly the bodily vision and knowledge of

Christ's suffering, in the Short Text. In particular, Julian's account of her vision of the

trinity derails the physicality expected in a feminine vision cycle.

> And in the same shewing sodeinly the trinitie fulfilled my hart most of ioy, and so
> I vnderstode it shall be in heauen without end to all that joy shall come ther. For
> the trinitie is god, god is the trinitie. The trinitie is our maker, the trinitie is our
> keper, the trinitie is our everlasting louer, the trinitie is our endless ioy and our
> bleisse, by our Lord Jesu Christ, and in our Lord Jesu Christ. And this was
> shewed in the first sight and in all, for wher Jhesu appireth the blessed trinitie is
> understand, as to my sight. And I sayd: Benedicte Dominus. (4/294-96)

Aers and Staley suggest that this passage blocks off the familiar images of the suffering

body of Christ and turns the expectations into theological reflections on the Trinity

(*Powers* 82). Such frustrations of the expected physicality lead the text toward a level of

ratiocinative and abstract language that resists the expected physicality of a woman's

vision and experience and masculinizes the voice for the reader. Linguistically, Julian's

vision stages a remove that is as masculine as the authorial voice in á Kempis's

Reflections or the *Cloud of Unknowing*, effectively effacing the gender of the author

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[53] Leclerq cites St. Augustine, St. Anselm, St. Mechtild, and the author of the *Ancrene Riwle* as possible
sources for Julian's maternal imagery of God (9). Additionally, he sees Scriptural references such as Is.
66.13 ("Like a son comforted by his mother, will I comfort you") and Mt. 23.37 ("Jerusalem! How often
have I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood") as providing direct connections to
Julian's theological positioning within her texts. See Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* for a fuller explication of
the citation from Matthew in the context of Julian's larger theological issues.

without first acknowledging their biological womanhood. The erasure of Julian's

biological sex continues to make itself evident throughout both the Long Text and the

Short Text, with only minor reversions to gendered, experiential language that ground the

text as her personal experiences, and therefore still within the purview of orthodox

women's experience.

The seemingly schismic concept of gender and identity, particularly for women

writing within the mystical traditions, has as much to do with female constructions of the

self within their texts as with the content of their visions and their intentions in revealing

their revelations. Staley and Aers state that regarding the issues of gender and intention it

is

> important to acknowledge is that *they draw attention to themselves*. In making
> them do this, Julian shows that her aim is not to evoke Christ's pain on Calvary,
> not to induce the affective responses we might have expected in a conventional
> meditation on the Crucifixion, and not to move us to any affective imitation of a
> suffering, tortured body as an 'imitation of Christ' we should want to follow. On
> the contrary, the reader is placed in a rather detached, speculative relationship to
> images which have been designed to emphasize their constructedness, their
> rhetorical composition. Attention is thus directed away from the particularities of
> the Crucifixion and its familiar meditational elaborations even as it is directed
> toward house eaves after an abundant rain and to the pattern, and texture of
> herrings' scales. (*Powers* 86)

Julian's images then both affirm the individual psychology of the author, emphasizing the

interconnectedness of the seemingly digressive descriptions within the text to the main

concepts of her received visions, and distance her writing from the thematic meditations

on the subject with which she would have been familiar. The images are obviously

rhetorical constructions drawn from scholastic theology and translated into her own, less

formal, style. The repositioning of the images through abstraction and avoidance serves

to further distance her own gender identity from the themes and content of her work,

neutering the feminine body with which she prefaces her visions and the voice used throughout. In this, she participates in the antithesis of Heloise's *muliebriter* in many ways, choosing to write as neither a man nor a woman but attempting to position the narrative identity of her text as somewhere between the gender poles. Particularly in light of the revisions which she inserts into the Long Text, the ways in which Julian acknowledges her sex and simultaneously distance herself from her own physicality serves to both "privatize—and to some extent to neutralize—the Short Text" (*Powers* 114). The intimacy and immediacy communicated by the Long Text, despite the elevation of the images and language Julian's revisions impose, serve to make the Long Text more immediately relevant to the reader while facilitating a dialogue between the womanly, therefore earthly, vessel for the revelations and the divine, masculine revelations themselves. Like Hildegard, and to a lesser degree the more deliberately affective mystics discussed in the following chapter, Julian's text remains grounded in the body through reminders of the author's sex even as it seeks to distance itself from the author's womanhood by the use of didactic examples and revealed exegesis.

While Julian's orthodoxy is reinforced by the reflective nature of her theological speculation, similar tropes engaged by more affective women's mystical texts problematize the relationship between the individual, the traditions, and the hierarchy of the Church. While there are substantial cultural differences between the audiences addressed by women's texts within the mystic traditions, the reception of the individual presented through the text, and the assumptions of orthodoxy or heresy to which they are subjected, largely depend on their ability to maintain the appearance of orthodoxy and to receive outside validation even as the texts affirm the gender of the author and position

themselves as women's mystical texts. The danger for women who engage in affective

forms of mystical piety arises, in part, from inconsistent displays of their feminine

identity within their texts, such as in the case of Marguerite Porete, or the

overcompensation for affectivity and feminine identity, such as demonstrated by Margery

Kempe's *Book*. These, and other issues, remain constant threats to the construction of

women's independent identities within their texts throughout the period, as will be

discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

"TEXTS WITHOUT BODIES, CHURCHES WITHOUT WINDOWS"[54]: ANCHORETISM AND AFFECTIVE PIETY IN MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The quote from Karma Lochrie's *Chaucer and the Medieval Imagination* included in the title of this chapter provides a particularly appropriate metaphor for the examination of physical experience in women's medieval mystical texts. While Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich used physical maladies as a spur and justification for their writings, physical mortification and the establishment of a rigorous interpretation of *imitatio Christi* are central to the writings and theology of many mystical women. The creation of individual identities becomes a performative function in these texts, as they create themselves through their bodies and description of their actions rather than through intellective experience. Pain and penitence becomes central to the concept of the individual and their mystical experiences, even while their textual selves remain grounded in the more universal concepts of the mystical experience as an identity discussed in the preceding chapter.

In the wake of the fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which mandated annual confession for all Christians, a subtle shift develops in the emphasis the Church itself placed on the body and the acknowledgement of sins. Foucault notes that after the fourth Lateran Council and significant Gregorian reforms, medieval theology "tended to make flesh into the root of all evil, shifting the most important moment of transgression from the act itself

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[54] Lochrie, *Chaucer and the Medieval Imagination* p. xx.

to the stirrings—so difficult to perceive and formulate—of desire" (*History I* 19-20). The stirrings of desire and the need to confess the sins which arise from the stirrings of the flesh, not merely the actions those stirrings drive the individual toward, are closely bound to the medieval concepts of contrition and penance. At the heart of the Lateran directive for confession lays the need for shame on the part of the penitent in order for sins to be absolved. This requires a full recitation and examination of one's self and one's sins, the construction of Foucault's "confessing animal," and the validation of the confessed self by the confessor.

> We have become a singularly confessing society.…One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves, one confesses to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things that would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses—or is forced to confess. (*History I* 59)

It is a short remove from the confession and acknowledgement of one's sins to the public declaration and interpretation of those sins in written texts and actions, as the production of a self within the context of a "public, collective narrative" creates a version of the author which has immediate exchange value in Christian culture and disseminates the confession to a larger audience (Castelli 70), particularly when the confession is substituted for the individual who is confessing, making the woman's embodiment in the text the medium of exchange and the site of recognition.

Lochrie's interpretation of Foucault's theory provides a point of access to understand the degree of mortification and self-exposure engaged in by later medieval mystics, particularly women, for whom the confessions of the texts and the confessions of the flesh became essentially interchangeable. She notes that "confession, therefore, is intimately linked to the theory of the flesh, with its illicit desires, thoughts, dreams,

sensual stirrings, and its access to the soul. As a discourse, confession mirrored that 'most

secret of forms' of evil, the flesh" (*Covert* 21). Lochrie concedes that the seal of

confession is paradoxical in the medieval context, as the physical confession occurred "in

public in the open church" (*Covert* 29).[55] While this was not a universal practice, Mary

Mansfield argues that the Continental forms of open, if private, confession have a lasting

impact on the ways in which women are able to conceive of their own sinfulness and the

expression of the body (28). The public nature of medieval confession in some

circumstances, despite the need for secrecy, places the individual's sins on display as

public spectacle and makes penance a part of public, rather than private, life.

   The acknowledgement of sin is central to the construction of a recognizable self by

these mystic women. Dreyer notes that "Catherine of Siena constantly refers to herself as

a sinner, and Teresa of Ávila includes acknowledgement of sinfulness as a central

element of self-knowledge—along with being a creature made in the image and likeness

of God" (163). The modernity and reflexiveness of this trope is central to the

understanding of the groundedness in the self experienced by both women. As women,

and as mortal beings, they are grounded in the sinfulness of the human condition by post-

Lapsarian reality. However, the recognition of the sinful state of man, far from excluding

one from the grace of God or marking them as irredeemable, is rather an

acknowledgement of one's self-awareness and the desire to rise above the sins of the

flesh. As Dreyer suggests, the acknowledgement of one's creaturehood is itself

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[55] The presence of a shriving pew or shriving cloth in late medieval England to reinforce the structure of
confession and to grant a measure of privacy would have still rendered confession an essentially public act
prior to the introduction of the confessional box by Carlo Borromeo, cardinal and archbishop of Milan, in
1565. Mary Mansfield argues in *The Humiliation of Sinners* that even after the advent of shriving
apparatuses, women's confessions continued to be performed in public for their safety, effectively
guaranteeing that confession remained a public act of self-analysis and penitence throughout the period.

polysemic, representing both an acknowledgement of one's position in the universe and the potential for independent being.

> Among the many meanings medieval mystics assigned to sin and creaturehood, one is that they are simply facts of existence, a truthful assessment of the human condition in light of their perception of God's goodness and beauty. Additionally, in the context of the Christian conviction that the world is the fruit of a loving Creator, to acknowledge that one is a creature not only reflects an appropriate humility, but endows the believer with an identity that is at once privileged and blessed—the polar opposite of self-hate. (Dreyer 159)

In this context, the author's acknowledgement of her creaturehood in the writings of Margery Kempe, Catherine of Siena, or Angela of Foligno becomes empowering and allows them to position themselves within the two primary limitations of transcendent feminine identity in the literature of the period: creaturehood and the flesh.

Margery Kempe's appeal to her creaturehood is well known. Almost every chapter of her text begins with a reference to her own creaturehood, a condition which leads to her surname appearing in the text only once—toward the end of the second book of the text—and Margery herself never using her own given name. Despite her self-avowed creaturehood, Margery is still granted access to the divine, but becomes increasingly eccentric in her interactions with the mundane world as a result. On the subject of Margery's *Book*, Sarah Beckwith claims that if

> medieval Christianity was so instrumental in the construction and relegation of woman to the place of 'Other' (a construction seen clearly in the traditional polarization of Eve and Mary as impure flesh and pure soul), it was also the endeavor of the mystical aspect of Christianity to articulate the 'Otherness' of God himself. Female mysticism in the late Middle Ages, which has recently been described by one feminist theorist as the 'only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in such a public way' (Irigaray, 1974, p. 238) is therefore an area in which the intermingling of God, the 'Other' and woman is completely overdetermined. Female mysticism is doubly colonized as a focus for the projection of Otherness because both God and woman are seen as the place of a mystified and unrepresentable (but nevertheless constantly represented) otherness. (*Mystical* 34-5)

Beckwith's double colonization of female mysticism presents an interesting quandary between the overdetermined position of women—the representations and expectations which they are expected to fulfill and which should define them within the established hierarchy—and the unrepresentable nature of "not male" discourse. This is the crux of women's participation in the primarily male hagiographic and mystical traditions, as a means of accessing the expectations and limitations by which women are able to define themselves in context. Particularly in later medieval mysticism, Lochrie suggests that the self-authorization demonstrated by Margery Kempe and other mystics is a form of Butlerian interlocution derived from the divine impetus to performativitiy (*Margery* 106). Weeping, fits, and cries punctuate Margery's interactions with others and her visions of the divine, performing her concept of mystical self and broadcasting her status to those around her, while her speech is made perfectly understandable to the select few who can validate her experiences—even those who cannot initially read the written testimony they are given (Kempe 28) or do not understand her spoken English (127).

By her own admission, Margery is atypical in both her religious life and in the way in which she came to her mystical calling. The daughter of a well-connected family in Lynn, her marriage and motherhood are marked by a number of economic ventures—all of which fail—and a marked interest in the secular life that is absent from the *vitae* of most female mystics. While it was not unusual for widows to become mystics in the later Middle Ages, as was the case for Angela of Foligno and Bridget of Sweden, Margery's negotiation of a chaste marriage while she pursued her mystical leanings represents a departure from the norm. While there are examples of women who negotiated chaste

marriages in order to adopt a chaste life, many of the journeys recorded in her book seem

specifically chosen to validate her unusual position.

> Margery was in Rome during the canonization hearing for Bridget. She visited the room where Bridget died and talked with her former maidservant in order to find out more about her life. While Bridget did not become a mystic until after her husband's death, she provided a model of an ordinary wife who had sought a life of greater devotion to God. In Assisi, Margery traveled the path where Angela of Foligno (another widow turned mystic) had begun her holy life of crying, and her last pilgrimage was to Danzig, where Dorothea of Montau had lived. Like Margery, Dorothea had married, had many children, experienced a spiritual calling, negotiated a chaste marriage, and become a pilgrim. (McAvoy 74)

The connection between Margery and Dorothea of Montau is particularly interesting in

light of Dorothea's abortive canonization, which was abandoned in 1404—although she

was eventually canonized in 1975—and the parallels between their lives and texts.

Dorothea's story undergoes a transformation similar to that of Margery's, as her

statements and visions are recorded by her confessor, Johannes of Marienwerder. While

the role of Dorothea's amanuensis is different from that of Margery's scribes, Johannes is

much more present in Dorothea's text than either of the scribes in Margery's *Book*; each

represents the male authorization and interpretation of the woman's text and the tacit

approval of the established hierarchy of their visions and lives. The differences between

their texts are equally glaring, however, particularly in terms of structure and function.

   While Dorothea's visions are structured in accordance with traditional hagiography

and older generations of mystics, particularly the revelations of Hildegard, Margery's

Book in "accordance with its twofold intention of glorifying God and Margery recasts its

heroine's life after the approved model of the saint's vita" (Weissman 208). The structure

of the text foregoes many of the details required by older hagiographic forms, as

Margery's account begins with her madness and torment after childbirth. This structure

effectively elides the childhood of the subject and the formation of the "old" Margery by

privileging the version of her that participates in and develops out of her encounter with

the divine. While similar structures are used in both Heloise's letters and the mystical

writings of Hildegard and Julian discussed in the previous chapter, none of those texts are

as clearly based in hagiography as Margery's *Book* seems to be.

As is the case with many of the earliest models for this type of women's biography in

the tradition, Margery's *Book* begins its narration in the middle of her life, with minimal

attention paid to the events which led to her revelations. Margery's mystical visions begin

only after childbirth and are initially spurred by her inability to provide what she sees as

a full confession, indirectly acknowledging one sin she has never confessed, even while

her inability to divulge this offense is partially the failure of her confessor.

> And when she came to the point of saying that thing which she had so long
> concealed, her confessor was a little too hasty and began sharply to reprove her
> before she had fully said what she meant…And soon after, because of the dread
> she had of damnation on the one hand, and his sharp reproving of her on the other,
> this creature went out of her mind as was *amazingly disturbed and tormented* with
> spirits for half a year, eight weeks and odd days. (MK 41)[56]

The specificity of the time Margery spends in madness is unusual in mystical texts.

Teresa of Ávila says of her own breakdown in her youth that it persisted "for some time"

(84), while the more conservative Julian and Hildegard say only that their afflictions

persisted until they were feared to be near death.

Margery's torments are similarly specific, displaying a full range of demonic

invasions and temptations drawn from earlier hagiographic models.

> And in this time she saw, as she thought, devils opening their mouths all alight
> with burning flames of fire, as if they would have swallowed her in, sometimes
> pawing at her, sometimes threatening her….And also the devils called out to her
> with great threats, and bade her that she forsake her Christian faith and belief, and

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[56] Emphasis mine.

> deny her God…And she did. She slandered her husband, her friends, and her own self. She spoke many sharp and reproving words; she recognized no virtue nor goodness; she desired all wickedness; just as the spirits tempted her to say and do, and she said and did…and also she pitilessly tore the skin on her body near her heart with her nails, for she had no other implement, and she would have done something worse, except that she was tied up and forcibly restrained both day and night so that she could not do as she wanted. (MK 41-2)

Unlike those visited upon her contemporaries or her predecessors, Margery's torments do not limit themselves to a specific model, but rather encompass the spectrum of the behaviors and visions drawn from the texts with which she would have been familiar. She is tempted and commanded by demons, whose demands are drawn from earlier hagiography and Scriptural models. Her submission to the demons, doing what they "tempted her to say and do" sets her apart from the patristic models of women, such as Mary of Egypt and Thecla, who were able to resist demonic intrusion and temptation, and Margery's complete submission to their demands establishes a pattern of her complete subjugation to outside force throughout the text. The reader is left with a sense of the excess with which each experience in the text is treated. There is seldom a singular or normative experience, but a plurality of simultaneous experiences and expressions which compete for the reader's attention. The notable exceptions to this trend are the visionary exchanges with the divine and the reinforcement of divine edicts by ecclesiastic authorities.

That Margery is granted access to many of the figures she describes in her *Book* indicates her proficiency in working within the established order in order to achieve her ends. She is particularly careful in her descriptions of authorities to include as much information as needed to insure that there was no confusion on the part of the reader regarding who else was present during these exchanges. These earthly interactions are

overshadowed by her supernatural revelations, which are far more orthodox than they first appear. Sarah Beckwith claims that Margery's mysticism is, in itself, not as destabilizing to her narrative as critics have suggested.

> To posit mysticism then as a natural source of resistance to orthodoxy is dangerously a-historical, both because of the function of mysticism varies with the social and historical conditions in which it is produced and reproduced and because, over and above this, the very quality of mysticism which can empower its by-passing of official structure, its immediacy, its numinousness, its ineffability—in other words, a conception of it in terms of a direct or supralinguistic encounter of God with the disembodied human soul—removes both God and the human soul from history. Mysticism has been taken at its Word and the dominant assumption about the discourse of mysticism seems to be imbued with the transcendental trajectory that was mysticism's goal. (*Mystical* 41)

Hope Weissman summarizes the ecclesiastic interrogations which Margery undergoes as those of "a secular woman of the common estate" who is "being summoned to justify her very nature before the church whose ideology continues to dominate her world" (202). Yet, for Margery, this serves as a means of justifying the identity created within her text. Each of the trials and interrogations she is subjected to by male interlocutors builds upon the persona she has generated in the first few chapters of her *Book* and provides an opportunity for expanding on the tropes which she has already established as the limits of her Butlerian, illocutionary identity. Margery's excess is also the source of tension within her narrative. Just as Angela's excesses draw the ire of her confessor, Margery's copious weeping earns the disproval of the monks at Canterbury, her fellow pilgrims en route to Jerusalem, and her own bishop in England. This too is part of the spectacle Margery seeks to make of herself throughout the text, the visible construction of her piety and the confession of her experiences as they occur. Each detail must, therefore, be included for the reader so that they may see the extremes of her experience, recognize the import she

places of the disproval of her fellows, and accept her suffering as legitimate and worthwhile. The Margery created in the text is a creature of extremes whose abundant spiritual and secular tribulations lend the text the tone of a proto-martyrology that argues for the acceptance of her experience, and therefore the identity she seeks to construct, as exemplary. She does not accept creaturehood in the sense that Angela of Foligno and Teresa of Ávila do through their texts, but rather actively seeks to engage it and place it on display for the reader.

Margery's paroxysms and public displays of penitential identity serve to underscore the understanding of community which her text seems to posit. It is not enough that she experience both divine rapture and divinely-given suffering, she must demonstrate both for the reader and allow them to experience the sensations through her voice. They must see her, her experience and her trials, in order to validate her own sense of constructed self by witnessing her internal expression of divine love. Her exposure of her sins and the creation of a fleshy body within the text, even while the body itself is validated by interpreting her "behavior in terms of the familiar devotional triad—Contrition, Compassion, and Passion" (Weissman 209), becomes the goal of the text. While Weissman sees Margery's hysteric outpourings and weeping as a sign that, in Margery's mind, she has performed an effective penance and has purified herself of her former sins so that she might directly associate her suffering with that of the persecuted Christ (210), particularly at the sites of his Passion, Margery's own transcendence of the body she constructs is not enough. She must abase the confessed body through weeping, suffering, fits and torments in order to express her acceptance of Christ's suffering on her behalf.

The transcendence of the flesh through its abasement in imitation of Christ's suffering becomes a focus of women's writing as a source of both orthodoxy and tension. *Imitatio Christi* functions, according to Lochrie, as a "password" or a "principle of travel" (*Margery* 66) in that the display of *imitatio Christi* or its invocation provides both an entrance into the text for mystical excess and the exit for its release through the individual. In a Derridean sense, the mystical rapture is a form of rupture that "cannot remain, then, in the discourse, but passes on elsewhere. It seeks the rupture and the instability at the edge of all language" (66). The mystical experience must be channeled through the individual and their unique experiences in order for it to enter into language. The mystical cannot, in this case, simply be recounted but needs to be performed and problematized within the text due to both its inherent instability and simultaneous groundedness in the moment the mystic recounts.

For women, this public display of penance and open acknowledgement of contrition is particularly important in recognizing the dominant features of late medieval mysticism. The literary confessions, through autobiographical writings and their *vitae*, and their physical confessions as demanded by the traditions associated with the *imitatio Christi* stem from similar traditions and form a unified persona constructed as much through their recorded suffering as it is through their literary skill. In light of the revival of "historic ideals of life" (Huizinga 5) in the later Middle Ages, the evolution of the self and the expression of a religious identity can be viewed as a kind of paradox in which the subject displays "on the one hand, a greater awareness of the self and individuality, and, on the other, a greater capacity to conform to historical models of life" (*Uses* 96).[57]

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[57] Klaniczay cites numerous examples of other scholars who have approached this paradox in their work, including Benton's and Bynum's texts discussed elsewhere in this essay. The value of the paradox

Underlying the literary model of public confession is Augustine's *Confessions*, the model for all subsequent religious autobiography. However, Eugene Vance observes that Augustine's *Confession* does not constitute a modern autobiography, though it does share features with that genre, but is understood as a dialectic between the converted, redeemed, self and the unredeemed self-as-other which focuses on "a life of sins, now past" (2). The dialectic between the new self and the sinful other is grounded in confession in its medieval and classical meaning. Confession, in this context, is not merely an accounting of committed sins, but rather implies both praise[58] and "the profession of faith in a spirit of sacrifice, as is the case of a martyr before a tribunal" (Vance 3). This is particularly obvious in Augustine's renunciation of the world in the fourth book of the *Confessions* in his claim, "Wretched *was* I, and wretched *is* the very soul that is bound fast by friendship for mortal things" (Iv.vi.II).[59] The was/is dichotomy established here and elsewhere by Augustine is itself drawn from the New Testament and the writings of the Desert Fathers, but codified by medieval reliance on Augustine as the supreme arbiter of the self and as a model for self-construction. The lives and legends of aspirant saints are often "written with the manifest aim of proving their conformity to one or another of the historical models of male or female sainthood" (*Uses* 96). The gender of the aspirant and the model are often irrelevant in the appropriation of the historical model, as female aspirants' lives often take male *vitae* as exemplars and male aspirants

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hypothesis, as posited here, lies in the realization of cultural influences and historic precedent on the approved methods of constructing a self within the text that is at once unique and simultaneously recognizable as belonging within the orthodox traditions.

[58] Vance traces this sense of confession to Matthew 11:25, "I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, since you have hidden these things from the wise…" (3). Similar language is used by Augustine in his *Confessions*, as well as in the Nicean Creed and other public confessions of faith, many of which remain part of the Catholic liturgy today.

[59] Emphasis mine.

often acquire feminine aspects, it is the continuity in form and typology, the appearance and appropriation of orthodoxy and authorization, that is of the utmost importance.

In both Latin and the vernacular, "literary activity in medieval Christianity thus simultaneously inscribed degrees of difference (religious, geographic, gendered, sexual) within the cultural system, but reinforced sameness (to be one in Christ) at the system's boundaries against a posited Other" (Wiethaus 212). As discussed in the preceding chapters, the appropriation of masculine language and imagery by women in the construction of their literary lives lends them credibility within the traditions while allowing the authors to remain recognizably Other. As Wiethaus notes, "Margery Kempe's autobiography represents the usurpation of masculinized space; the enclosed anchoress Julian of Norwich's sophisticated theology the usurpation of masculinized modes of thought. It is also important to bear in mind that both 'female' and 'male' types, despite their differences, remained fundamentally aligned to the same centers of religious and secular authority" (216). Particularly in light of the increasing speed with which texts could be disseminated and marked increases in literacy throughout Europe, the alignment of these gendered types becomes increasingly important in the later Middle Ages.

The degree to which a woman's text succeeded in establishing her identity and constructing a heterodox representation of her within the traditions remained dependent on her ability to both internalize the male tropes through her texts and to receive male authorization and legitimatization. This is not a binary, but rather a spectrum within which the female author places herself. Amy Hollywood's readings of Teresa of Ávila, through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir, as both "masculine and still dependent on male authorization and legitimation" (*Beauvoir* 167) is complicated by the ways in which

Teresa's success "is overdetermined and undetermined," as this self positioning

complicates itself and "cannot explain how and why Teresa is able to attain this

'masculinity' and recognition" (167). Beauvoir's, and Hollywood's, difficulty in locating

Teresa's masculinity and recognition lies in the fact that these elements of her writings

are inseparable from the identity which she constructs, or is constructed for her, in her

autobiography and through male authorization of the text. While some of these elements

are, in part, imposed on her by male editors and her amanuensis, as has been suggested

by Hollywood and others in examining the role of the scribe in positioning women's texts

historically, the major elements of Teresa's "masculinization" are tied to her development

of a life which reflects a specific understanding of the concept of *imitatio Christi*.

The liminality of Christ as both a masculine and feminine figure, particularly during

the Passion and afterward, has been amply discussed elsewhere by Bynum and others.

The duality inherent in the concept of a nurturing, suffering Christ is particularly relevant

to this discussion in that the identities constructed within the lives of medieval mystical

women allow us to

> see how the dominant model of Christ's humanity encourages quite specific
> forms of imitation. They seem characterized by the freely chosen infliction of
> bodily pain, miraculously sustained by God so that the holy person can go on and
> on performing such activities, reiterations that themselves confirm and sacrilize
> the model that informs them. (*Powers* 24)

The forms of bodily mortification and abjection engaged in by ecstatics engaging in

imitatio Christi often take Bynum's analysis of "Christ's agony on the cross" (*HF* 211-

12) as a material and consumptive vision to extremes. Aers reiterates the orthodoxy and

authorization of extreme measures of personal debasement, such as Angela of Foligno's

exultation when the scabs of lepers became stuck in her throat and the self-mortification

of Catherine of Genoa, and the verbosity with which the ecstasy of such experiences was

often recounted by these women. Catherine of Siena's observation to her biographer,

Raymond of Caputa, that she had never tasted "any food or drink sweeter or more

exquisite" than the pus from the putrefying breast of a dying woman (*HF* 171-2, *Powers*

33) is an acknowledgement of both the abhorrence of the flesh illustrated by these

behaviors and the physical union with God's "humanity" through their own suffering and

mortification. Aers takes this analysis a step further, noting that these seemingly self-

destructive behaviors represent "the combination of model and imitation that *empowered*

the subordinate, that *subverted* the logic and religion of a patriarchal and profoundly

misogynistic culture" (*Powers* 34).[60] There is, however, a direct connection between such

seemingly self-destructive forms of experiential piety and the ascetic traditions. The

visceralization of the experience and the affectation of suffering to participate in Christ's

humanity are neither more extreme nor more revelatory of the individual than similar

experiences outlined in the early patristic *lives*. The renunciation of earthly food and

drink, of all that which would be beneficial to the body, figures prominently in the lives

of Mary of Egypt, Pelagia, Thaïs, and to a lesser degree Macrina and Paula, as discussed

above. The connection between affective experience of religion and the oral/aural

experiences of late medieval women such as Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Genoa, and

Catherine of Siena is also reminiscent of the ways in which Paula participated in the

passions by kissing, possibly consuming, the earth at Golgotha and licking the stones in

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[60] Aers acknowledges a debit to Bynum's "empowerment" thesis, but also questions the direct relationship between these behaviors and the power dynamics of late medieval religious society (*Powers* 34). This line of argument is particularly relevant to Bynum's claims of clerical encouragement of such behavior, in light of the obvious uses for such experiential piety in the face of heresies and Cathar dualism. The emphasis on the body in both lines of argument is valid and beneficial here, but must be positioned in light of the larger traditions in which individual women see themselves as participating through their experiences. Aers and Staley partially address this issue (*Powers* 35-39), but further exploration of the topic is needed to formulate a fully convincing argument for either case.

Christ's tomb. In her analysis of Catherine of Siena's text, McAvoy suggests that this

renunciation and consumption is in many ways a logical extension of the bodies which

these women are attempting to construct in their texts as vehicles for their theologies.

McAvoy notes that

> Whether true story or legend, the account serves as an example of the lengths to
> which Catherine was willing to go to live out the obedience of Christ. It also
> parallels the three stages of obedience, which Catherine describes as the three
> steps of the bridge of Christ. At his feet one is stripped of the sin of disobedience,
> at the heart of Christ one is dressed in love, and at the mouth of Christ one finds
> the peace of perfect obedience (D. 26).In service to Andrea, Catherine takes the
> mouth as her bridge. (McAvoy 106)

The literal internalization of perfect obedience, the consumption of the theological image,

makes the concept real and physically present in Catherine's text and in those of Angela

of Foligno, Margery Kempe, and others. They are able to provide a means of literally

ingesting the theological imagery of their experiences and manifesting it for their readers

in their own flesh.

These accounts do not develop in a vacuum and do not represent a static form of

participation in the literary traditions or the pursuit of *imitatio Christi*. Rather, individual

texts and the degree of mortification engaged in by each of these women "had a

performative function in faith communities that is an integral part of their meaning. They

were not private communications between silent individuals, but contributions to a lively,

personally and liturgically engaged community who shared similar hungers for

transcendent meaning" (Dreyer 157). The performance of the self through the text and the

simultaneous performance of faith complicate the relationship between woman and body,

as the experiences recorded by these women cannot be attributed to a passive, physical

Other but rather create a self within the text that is actively seeking abjection as a means

of connecting with the divine. These women position themselves in their writing as "*both* victims of social and ecclesial forms of patriarchy, and, at the same time, agents of resistance, women who spoke, wrote, and acted to confront oppression" (Dreyer 158).

The most commonly documented events within women's mystical texts, those considered to most authorize them to transcend the limitations of their gender, were those which physically marked her and reaffirmed her feminine identity. Among these, "inedia, stigmata, bleeding, illness; the rigidity associated with ecstatic trances; or miracles of bodily change or divine abilities of distinction or knowing associated with the reception of the Eucharist" were both the most common forms of authorizing experience and the most physically located to the female saint and mystic (Gerber 16). This physicality also serves to limit the number of acceptable paths for interpretation of the revelations within the scope of medieval Catholic orthodoxy: the attainment of a specific set of virtues, the pattern of *imitatio Christi*, the concept of perfect union with the divine (*unio mystica)*, and the imitation of specific images found within the gospels, the available hagiographic materials, or the widely circulated Acts of the Apostles (Garber 16). This literal interpretation of the pains of martyrs and the mortification of the flesh in pursuit of spiritual perfection is further reinforced by a close correlation between medieval medical philosophy and the theological traditions associated with women.

To a point, later medieval mystics relied on many of the same conceptual arguments as the earlier generations of women writers. Heloise provides one example of this in her argument for the use of wine by her nuns as a means of fortifying themselves without risking drunkenness in the fifth letter.

As Macrobius writes in Book 7 of the *Saturnalia:*

> Aristotle says that old men are often drunk, but women very rarely….The Female body is extremely moist—witness the lightness and clarity of a woman's skin and, especially, the regular purgation of her excess humors…The female body designed as it is for frequent purgation, is pierced with several holes, so that channels and passageways are open for the humors to drain out.
> So allowances made for us in food and drink are more appropriate…as we require less food and are protected by the constitution of our bodies. (*Heloise* 113)

The conceptualization of women as warm, moist and porous, as opposed to the dry continence of men, is directly connected to the emphasis placed on bodily fluids in the lives of medieval mystical women. Among the most recognizable of these is the emphasis placed on lacramesis, the connection between supernaturally given tears, and occasionally tears of blood, and the righteousness of the woman's mystical experience. The physicality of experiences like lacramesis serves to ground the woman's experience in the flesh in ways which Julian and Hildegard's more abstract visionary experiences cannot. As Gerber notes,

> unlike visions, the ambiguous nature of supernaturally-visited tears made them especially suspect as indicators of grace: both could be interpreted as physical punishment for sin, or as grace in the form of suffering in imitation of Christ's passion. For example, Adelheid Langmann had many detractors among the nuns at Engelthal, who interpreted her copious tears as punishment for unconfessed sins: only later was her uncontrollable weeping recognized and interpreted as a divine grace. Among the sister-books, several other nuns appear who weep, and among English mystics, Margery Kempe is famous for her roaring and weeping. Like Langmann, Kempe's tears also received affirmative and disapproving interpretations, depending upon the witnesses' opinion of Kempe's character. (23)

The importance of the diverse interpretations of these physical signs is twofold. First, the emphasis on the *expression* of physical suffering in imitation of the Passion, the literal expression of tears and the outward signs of inner torment the tears represent to the onlooker, serves to reinforce the corporeality of woman and the inescapability of the flesh within the tradition. The woman as author must inscribe the suffering of her faith on her

own flesh for the reader to be able to witness her piety. Secondly, the emphasis Gerber places on the affirmation or disapproval of divinely given weeping, the need for the witness to either affirm or deny the sanctity of both the subject and the writer, creates a rhetoric of interpretation and authorization within the text. The woman, the mystic, and the author have already been judged and compartmentalized for the reader, and it becomes the reader's task to either accept or deny the interpretations which have been provided. The syllogistic form of the argument as it applies to women's visionary literature: that the woman is divinely inspired or genuine *if* and only if the interpretation is affirmed by someone other than the woman, reflects an awareness on the part of the author of classical forms of argument and an understanding of the underlying psychologies inherent in the historiographic tradition and women's biographies and autobiographies as discrete genres. These personifications are entirely dependent on the traditions—local, Catholic, and textual—in their form and function. These women demonstrate direct access to the traditions and their cultural positions in their deployment of traditional forms in order to insert themselves into the discourse where they would otherwise be forced to remain silent.

The power exercised by these women in the construction of their literary selves is grounded on the renewed emphasis in the late medieval Church on the humanity of Christ. As women, and as far as they are "associated with the body, they are able to align themselves with the humanity of Christ through which the redemption of human nature is affected. In this way, women's reputed ties to the body become the source of their salvation; the spirituality of late medieval women is bodily, both in its language and its practice" (*Suffering* 87). This is particularly true of women writing from within tertiary

orders, such as the Beguines and the Mantillates, whose spiritual focus lay in the common people and not within the strictures of the cloister. The connection between the body, as both public and private, and the spirit as experienced rather than as an abstract theological construct often makes these women's texts the site of tensions between the established traditions and the lived religious experiences of the community. Amy Hollywood's claim that "Beguine texts can be seen as a direct protest of the form of spirituality described and prescribed as feminine in the hagiographic traditions" (*Suffering* 88) somewhat oversimplifies the connection between the vernacular identities and experiences of these women and their participation in the larger traditions, but the range of physical experiences documented by Beguines and other tertiaries through their mystical experiences does indicate a level of apprehension regarding the traditions in which these women seek to participate through their writing.

Working forward from Bynum's oft cited argument that the use of bodily language and metaphors by women in their mystical texts "makes comprehensible male hagiographers' transposition of internal evidence onto women's bodies," Hollywood proposes that the distinction between internal and external suffering was of supreme importance in medieval biographical and autobiographical practice in that it carried with it gender implications and emphasized the gap between hagiographical and mystical discourses in ways that are culturally and temporally specific (*Suffering* 91). One of the clearest examples of this trend is found in the writings focusing on the teachings of Angela of Foligno and her particular interpretations of the model ascetic life.

Angela was likely born around 1248, seems to have married around 1270 and bore her husband several sons. Her entire family seems to have died prior to 1288, coinciding

with her spiritual calling in 1285 and her entry into the Third Order of Saint Francis in Rome in 1291.[61] Alain Boureau emphasizes the fact that Angela's own texts minimize the role of her life before her conversion. Boureau notes that in the three hundred pages "copied in Angela's name, the reader doesn't know who she was: there is no mention of events, dates, or places, except a pilgrimage to Rome and a few journeys to the neighboring city of Assisi" (186). This isolation from her pre-conversion life in her text is unusual in a number of ways, the most notable of these being the lack of societal referents available for the author to ground her text. While this is not a clear impediment to her construction of a sense of self within her texts, as both Julian of Norwich and Heloise minimize the impact of their lives prior to the text on the composition and construction of self within their narratives, it is unusual among her contemporaries. As was the case in the writings of earlier religious women, the text is recorded and authorized by a male amanuensis, which serves to further isolate Angela from her social milieu.

The title of her *Memoria* is itself imposed by Brother Arnaldo, Angela's scribe. The role which Brother Arnaldo plays in the composition of the text has been the subject of debate, as Angela herself was likely illiterate, though it is clear from his own comments within the text that he has simplified to structure of a number of points of her theology in order to make it more orthodox and understandable. The *Memoria* is itself effectively two separate texts, the first briefly recounts the first twenty steps of Angela's way of penance and comprises the first chapter of the *Memoria*, with Brother Arnaldo devoting the remaining chapters to the final ten steps of her plan. The emphasis placed on individual

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[61] Boreau provides a concise history of Angela (186), which differs only slightly from those provided by Le Goff and Petroff. The essential facts of Angela's pre-religious life agree in all the biographical sketches, while the interpretations of them differ substantially among the scholars.

steps, particularly those which involve self-mortification or the renunciation of worldly goods, are at once orthodox and disturbing. While the first seven steps follow the proscribed order of confession, penance, and self-awareness, the subsequent steps become progressively more difficult to categorize within the tradition in which Angela sought to participate.

The eighth and ninth steps of Angela's plan for perfect humility are particularly relevant to this discussion because of the physical groundedness of Angela's actions and the deliberate spectacle she engages in to display her piety publicly. Angela's eighth step, including her "greater perception of the way the Son of God had died for our sins" (126), is particularly problematic because of its physicality.

> Nonetheless, this perception of the meaning of the cross set me so afire that, standing near the cross, I stripped myself of all my clothing and offered my whole self to him. Although very fearful, I promised him then to maintain perpetual chastity and not to offend him again with any of my bodily members, accusing each one of these one by one. I prayed that he himself keep me faithful to this promise, namely, to observe chastity with all the members of my body and all my senses. On the one hand, I feared to make this promise, but on the other hand, the fire of which I spoke drew it out of me, and I could not do otherwise. (126)

Angela's removal of her clothing, "reenacting Christ's humiliation and nudity at the crucifixion," also parallels to "that of St. Francis before the bishop in Assisi" (*Mystic's* 37). The emphasis on the visual in Angela's abnegation of the body and the self reflects a deep awareness of the createdness of the self within the text. The details she provides in her account of the incident reinforces the fact that her narrative would have been viable without this additional account of her humility and connection to the divine, but reinforces the connection between the constructed self and the negated body in her text.

The metaphor of renunciation is apparent in the ninth step as well, in which Angela takes the metaphor of naked acceptance to its literal conclusion within the traditions.

> I was instructed, illumined, and shown the way of the cross in the following manner: I was inspired with the thought that if I wanted to go to the cross, I would need to strip myself in order to be lighter and go naked to it. This would entail forgiving all who had offended me, stripping myself of everything worldly, of all attachments to men and women, of my friends and relatives, and everyone else, and, likewise, of my possessions and even my very self. Then I would be free to give my heart to Christ from whom I had received so many graces, and to walk along the thorny path, that is, the path of tribulations. (126)

Morrison sees this visual display, and the "theatrical display of emotion" Arnaldo describes her as experiencing in the Basilica of St. Francis, as an "acting out' of her personal experience of Christ" for the benefit of others (*Mystic's* 38). The public display of piety for the edification of those around her is grounded in the masculine traditions; St. Francis's disrobing before the bishop as a display of humility is the clearest analogue and the one most likely familiar to Angela, and functions as a representation of the internalization of the trope of the naked, bleeding Christ of the Passion.

Another example of literal, theatrical interpretations of the traditions in Angela's text focuses on her inability to enter the Church of the Virgin of Portiuncula. She is allowed to enter the church, but is immediately paralyzed with rapture.

> The next morning, when I was about to enter the church of the glorious Virgin of the Portiuncula in order to receive the Indulgence, I was holding the hand of a certain woman who wished to help me. The moment I placed my foot over the threshold of the church, I was suddenly enraptured with such an impact that my body just stood there and did not move, and I let go of the woman who was going ahead of me to help me. (284)

The connection between Angela's inability to enter the church and Pelagia's account of a similar incident is unmistakable. The primary difference between the two is the nature of the barrier that prevents each woman from freely entering the church. Pelagia's account attributes her inability to a divine prohibition due to her sinful state, while Angela's paralysis is the result of divinely inspired rapture. Unlike her predecessor, Angela is

allowed to enter the church before her progress is halted and her rapture, in her eyes, is a reward for her active engagement with her own improvement. The image of the woman unable to enter, or move through, the church is a clear physical display of their positions in the spectrum of feminine virtue and, in both cases, the arbiter is the Virgin herself. Angela is, therefore, more worthy of the church than the as-yet unredeemed Pelagia, but Angela's paralysis functions as a reminder of her incomplete redemption from her previous secular life.

The display of *imitatio Christi* as a spectacle of the self is only one aspect of the internalization of the tradition in which Angela engages. One of the more unusual events recounted in her biography involves the consumption of filth as a means of attaining perfection. Unlike St. Francis's sharing a meal with lepers as a self-imposed penance for his aversion to them, Angela and her companion actively seek to engage with lepers outside Foligno as a means of self-improvement.

> We washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper's sores was stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion. I really did not want to spit it out but simply to detach it from my throat. (163)

It is important to note that the event with the lepers, and Angela's scatological communion, occurs on Maundy Thursday, the traditional day of confession and penance. Angela's actions, therefore, parallel the Lateran Council's requirement for confession and the acceptance of the Sacraments at least once a year. The consumption of filth is by no means unique to Angela's text, but rather represents a specifically feminine appropriation of the established traditions which serves to reinforce the bodily internalization of

imitatio Christi. The renunciation, and destruction, of the physical self is tied to abjection. Molly Morrison suggests that, in a Kristevan context, Angela's willingness to ingest the filth associated with the body is a form of deliberate self-abjection.

> Filth is the 'abject.' It is often repulsive not so much because of the lack of cleanliness or health because it 'disturbs identity, system order.' It does not 'respect borders, positions, rules' (4).[62] Following Kristeva's argument…the morally and physically corrupt leper disturbs the order of medieval society and as such is expelled….Angela humiliates and pollutes herself by associating with them. Her choice to do so illustrates her belief that self-loathing leads to the soul's exaltation. (*Ingesting* 206)

Catherine of Siena's ingestion of filth shares its motivation with Angela's encounter with the lepers. This scatological approach to abjection is not limited to purely medieval mystics, but rather continues to evolve over time until it becomes an affective trope in its own right. While Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena ingest filth as a form of penance or to purify themselves, later female mystics such as St. Maria Maddelena de' Pazzi appropriate the Bonaventurian description of Christ as physician and engage in scatological practices solely for the health and benefit of others (S*trange* 135).[63] The sense of sacrifice and abnegation of the self remains consistent throughout these accounts, but the motivation for such actions contrasts with male examples of similar behavior, such as St. Francis's meal with the leper, which is typically portrayed as a feminization or transcendence of the male identity. The physicality of the abasement of these women is, in itself, a logical extension of the maryrological spectacle inherent in the received, collective Christian memory tradition they seek to access. Despite frequent polemics against public spectacle, the foundational texts with which these women would

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[62] Morrison is citing Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Tr. Leon S. Roudiez. NY: Columbia UP, 1982.

[63] Morrison cites the *Sacramental Remedy*, in which St. Bonaventure describes Jesus as the 'remedy' of sin: "He ought to restore and heal the ailing human race in a manner suitable to the one ailing, the sickness, the occasion of his becoming sick and the cure of the sickness itself" (135).

be most familiar make frequent use of the notion of spectacle as a means of reinforcing Christian identity.[64] The ingestion of filth, the literal corruption of the flesh as a means of purifying the soul, is not an exclusively feminine trope. However, the degree to which these women engage in these practices, and the zeal with which they are described, further isolates their texts from those of their male contemporaries. St. Francis does not relish his meal with the leper, but accepts it as appropriate penance. St. Jerome does not exult in his own misfortunes in his letters—although others writing about his life make him do so—but he accepts and describes the physical misfortunes which have befallen him. The male and female interpretations of voluntary abasement of the body are clearly separated, even as they attempt to achieve similar ends.

The ingestion of filth or other physical indicator of active pursuit of perfection, and the zeal with which these practices are displayed, is often accompanied by suspicion when these events are recounted in women's texts. Demonic possession, malfeasance, and madness are charges frequently leveled at mystical women and their writings. Even the most revered mystics could be suspect if their texts or their miracles violated or threatened the traditions in uncomfortable or unexpected ways.

The canonization of Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) included a deposition which "declared that she had associated with heretics, and that the miraculous transformation of Clare's heart—the signs of the Passion were found to be sculpted out of the heart's inner flesh—was an act of 'malfice'" (Caciola 277). The disputation of women's sanctity in the

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[64] Castelli notes the almost reflexive recourse in early texts to Scriptural sources such as 1 Corinthians 4:9: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to human beings" (117). Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian and others resituate the spectacle of Christian sacrifice and martyrology as pleasing to God and possessing the power to transform the viewers and readers (Castelli 124, *HF* 217, et. al.). This is especially true of Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*.

period, usually tied to the extremities of their ascetic indulgences and self-avowed

mysticism, placed their accounts in particularly complicated lights. Caciola notes that

despite Raymond of Capua's championing of her cause, she was often accused of

consorting with demons, being possessed by an "indwelling demon" herself, and

repeatedly examined by prelates because of the rampant rumors which surrounded her

(277).

The rumors of possession and the potential threat of being accused of "false piety"

directly influence the work of several mystics. In her *Memoria*, Angela directly accuses

herself of possession and invites friars who witness her ecstatic moments to help her.

> I saw myself as the house of the Devil, and as an instrument and an adherent of
> demons…I turned to those friars who are called my sons, and said to them, "I do
> not want you to believe in me anymore. Do you not see that I am a demoniac?
> Can you not see that, if there were no evil in the whole world, I would fill up the
> whole world with the abundance of my evil?" (*Memoria* 115)

While Caciola sees this as a necessary declamation of Angela's humility, and as a logical

inclusion in the *vita* of an aspiring saint (278), Angela's need to decry her evil nature

even as she deliberately moves toward sanctity reflects the dominant concept of women

as sinful creatures. That women were more prone to accusations of possession and

deliberate malfeasance is secondary to their position as women, and as the site and source

of potential disturbance within the established order and they must, therefore, remain as

Other so that the established order can be maintained.

The connection between mystical speech, demonic possession, and the ingestion of

filth is grounded in women's connections to the body in the period. Abjection, in all its

forms, serves to further ground the text in the author's sinful state and biological

condition. As Lochrie notes,

> Mystic speech is always located in (or straying into) abjection. It always transgresses and blasphemes because it speaks of divine mysteries through polluted lips. It also transgresses in its association with the excesses of the flesh. The same overflow of desire which leads to sin is inseparable from the excess which becomes 'completely submersed into (divine) speech in order to become beauty and love,' according to Kristeva. (*Margery* 71)[65]

The submersion of the self in favor of divinely inspired excess becomes a commonplace in the writings of later medieval mystics, both male and female. What marks these texts as uniquely feminine is the degree to which they not only mirror male traditions for mystic speech and action but the degree to which the language and action must be amplified. It is not enough for Angela to consume the water used to bathe the leper's wounds, she must exult in it. Similarly, it is not enough for Margery Kempe to tremble at the sight of the Eucharist, her whole body must become involved in the display of her piety and she must give voice to the passions it arouses in her. The danger in such amplifications of the physical in order to compensate for their sex is the potential for alienation from the very traditions they seek to take part in. While the extreme nature of Angela's participation in the traditions, as well as Margery Kempe's or even Catherine of Siena's, seems excessive and out of place to a modern reader, their texts survive in part due to the recognizable underlying orthodoxy of their thought. This orthodoxy is reinforced by the presence of male scribes and official endorsement within the texts, normalizing voices which are able to attest to the sanctity and validity of their actions and beliefs and to overwrite the seemingly foreign elements of their narratives with a veneer of orthodoxy.

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[65] Lochrie is citing Kristeva's *Tales of Love*, p. 124, regarding the collocation of sin and the sublime in mystic speech and personal abjection. Kristeva emphasizes the problematic relationship between the corporeal individual and the mystical experience, particularly in relation to medieval views on sin and the corruption and corruptibility of the flesh.

There is, however, another school of thought visible in the writings of medieval mystical women that becomes threatening to the established order because it lacks the authorization or approval of male authority. One example is the controversy surrounding Marguerite Porete and her *Mirror of Simple Souls Destroyed*. The text itself is at once remarkably orthodox and problematic, a situation which is reflective of its author and her extreme obscurity in her own time.

Prior to her direct involvement with the authorities at Valenciennes and Paris, there is little historical evidence of Marguerite's life. Kent Emery Jr. summarizes what is known of the author's life this way:

> She lived in Hainaut at the beginning of the fourteenth century; her book was proscribed and burned publically by the Bishop of Cambrai, Guy of Colmieu, probably at Valenciennes (before 1306); She made no concessions, but rather added seventeen chapters to her book, sought its approval from another bishop, John of Châlons-sur-Marne, and continued to circulate it; she was tried by the Inquisition at Paris, condemned, handed over to secular authority and burned at the stake (1 June 1310). Eyewitnesses record that she faced her death with composure, as her doctrine requires. The Parisian inquisitor, William Humbert, O.P., ordered that all copies of the *Mirror* be confiscated and destroyed. (ix)

That the order to confiscate and destroy all copies of the text was incompletely carried out is attested by the surviving manuscripts, as well as fragments of the text recorded elsewhere. Little is known of her attachment to any order or tertiary society, and, as Lichtmann notes, this independence is directly tied to the tensions displayed in her trial and condemnation.

> Her lack of protection by an established religious order, a confessor, or other form of institutional sanction gave Marguerite no buffering against the inquisitorial regime. She had no Jacques de Vitry, no Francis of Assisi, no Ubertino da Casale. With Marguerite we therefore have the chance to observe head-to-head combat between a noncredentialed, nonacademic mystic and the scholastic theologians at Paris. (Lichtmann 66)

Unlike previous generations of mystics, her contemporaries, or those who would follow a century later, Marguerite lacks the explicit authorization of a male member of the established order to validate her work and assuage fears about its orthodoxy. The theology reflected in Marguerite's *Mirror* is remarkable for its differences from other feminine mystical texts, both before and after it, and the relative orthodoxy of the text as a whole.

Marguerite rejects the "forms of spirituality associated with women both in the hagiographical traditions and in certain aspects of the thirteenth-century female-authored mystical traditions" (*Suffering* 93). While the *Mirror for Simple Souls* does reflect the thoughts of earlier Beguine authors, such as Hadeqijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg, and mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen who attempt to relate both the dialectic between God's presence and nothingness and the feminine experience of religious exaltation, her logical remove from the physical in placing her text in the form of a romanticized dialogue and emphasizing the psychological and emotional experience of distance and obliteration removes the emphasis on bodily suffering and rapture and replaces it with a purely spiritual form of these experiences not normally accessible to women writers.

> Marguerite's mystical theology does not resemble the sheer materiality and groundedness in female experiences of body of other women mystics such as Catherine of Siena or Angela of Foligno. Marguerite's mysticism is not particularly affective, ecstatic, or visionary, and perhaps the real threat of her treatise was that it did not remain in the exclamatory, lyrical, and emotional realm of language assigned to women, but passed over to an indicative, teaching and literally 'speculative' mysticism. Although her apophatic mysticism does not at first resemble the physicality of devotion to the humanity of Jesus or the Eucharistic and ascetic piety of many women mystics, nonetheless her mystical theology is deeply gendered. (Lichtmann 74)

The gendered foundation of her text complicates the matter. Beyond straying into what was traditionally considered a purely masculine form of mysticism, Marguerite structures

her text in a way that is more reminiscent of masculine *summae* than with the writings by

or about earlier generations of religious women. The cosmological progression she

invokes resembles Arian and Cathar texts which had already been deemed heretical,

particularly in light of the dualism and independence from the authorized hierarchies of

the Church which they display. While similar accusations were made regarding

Aquinas's forays into the more contemplative extremes of medieval theology,

Marguerite's text strays into heresy in its extremity and its unapologetic approach to the

subject.

The transition between the sixth and seventh stations of Marguerite's seven tiered

cosmology is particularly striking in the silence with which it is greeted in the text.

Michael Sells describes it as "all that can be evoked…eternity is perceived as a flash,

both timeless and in time, both permanent and evanescent" (121). This phraseology,

perhaps inspired by Marguerite's own descriptors of eternality, mirrors Thomist doctrine

(SCG III.ii.26-28) and neo-Origenistic beliefs on the nature of the soul, but approaches it

from a personal standpoint which is both dualist and individual. In this, the isolation and

destruction of the soul, its atemporal reunion with the godhead and its ability to rejoice in

the nearness (or distance) from the divine, is well within the bounds of medieval

orthodoxy. That this discussion is put forth under a woman's name, without the benefit of

a male *acutor* or *interlocutor* is the primary source of the charge of heresy. Marguerite

does not perform as a woman; she rejects performing as *muliebriter* in her writing and

instead approaches what she sees as the truth as directly as possible.

However, Marguerite's identity, particularly her gendered identity, is consistently

foregrounded within her text. This is particularly true in her adoption of vernacular

romantic images as the vehicle for her explanations of the divine will and the nature of

the godhead itself. Grounded in the ecumenical literary tradition, the concept of *mystique*

courtoise is meant to distinguish traditional forms of spiritual writing that drew on the

lush imagery of the Song of Songs to characterize divine love, as Christian mystics had

done ever since Origen, from a newer literary/religious mode that self-consciously

inflected this tradition with the vernacular language of *fin amour*, adapted from secular

lyrics and romances (*Mirror* 105). Her rejection of the body, what can be initially read as

Foucault's assertion that "to know oneself was paradoxically the way to self

renunciation," becomes recognizable as a condition that is reinforced communally as the

dominant morality of sacrifice, "a morality of asceticism, insisting that the self is that

which one can reject" (*Technology* 22). Her advocacy of self-destruction in order to

achieve enlightenment extends this renunciation of the self to its logical conclusion and

simultaneously assures her censure in her unapologetic assumption of what can be read as

a male identity position within her society. For

> Marguerite Porette[sic]…the soul can become 'the all' that is God by emptying
> herself of all createdness and hence of all being. Porette's use of the mirror image
> would *seem*, then, still to be inscribed within a masculine discourse that reduces
> all alterity to the same. Yet, if the self becomes nothing in order to reflect the
> divine, God him/herself is also nothing within Porette's text. The mirror image,
> then, is both central to masculine discourse and a source of its subversion.
> (*Beauvoir* 169-70)

This subversion of male discourse is the crux of her tensions with the authorities.

However, the male response to this usurpation of male authority was itself problematic.

> Unlike the three theological authorities Marguerite consulted who had approved
> the book as a whole, the twenty-one theologians summoned by the inquisitor
> responded to articles extracted out of context of the book itself, which was never
> even named throughout the process. Although they recorded only the first and
> fifteenth articles in the documents of the inquisition, the theologians concluded

unanimously that "it contained errors and heresies worthy of being eliminated" (Lichtmann 67).[66]

While Margery, Angela, and Catherine sought to insert themselves into the primarily male discursive forms by adopting the dominant logic and symbolism of their communities, Marguerite's rejection of these norms in favor of the more intellective approach to her spirituality crossed the line between mysticism and heresy in the eyes of the tribunal. The destruction of the self as a means of accessing the divine is inherent and understated in the mystical writings of the other women considered here, but the direct advocacy of such a course is directly relevant to Marguerite's censure. Her decision to ignore the edict to retract her book is secondary to the theological concerns.

Male authors, including Abelard, were able to survive censure and continue to circulate their texts or, like St. Francis, allowed to continue preaching despite the displeasure of bishops and papal legates. A number of women writers were likewise spared the spectacle of public execution for heresy, based on their willingness to submit to a degree of censure and to abide by the decisions of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Even those who ignored such edicts were seldom executed for their transgressions, but cloistered or otherwise silenced. It is the combination of her male theology and her unrepentant pursuit of disseminating her identity and her text which lead to Marguerite's execution.

The modes of feminine identity—the negative identifications associated with the flesh and womanhood—are themselves transitory in the period and closely aligned with specific historic and cultural values defined by their immediate community. This

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[66] Lichtmann notes that the complete proceedings of Marguerite's inquisition have been published in Fredericq's *Corpus Documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitis Neerlandicae* (1899) and in part in Verdeyen's summary "Le Proceés d'inquisition". The original transcripts of the inquisition are preserved in the National Archives in Paris.

condition, however, undergoes a sudden and powerful transformation in the face of external geographic and social pressures on the eve of the Reformation. The transition to a more positive interpretation of a universal, Catholic paradigm of feminine identity, the redemption of women as models for appropriate behavior within the church itself, is a logical conclusion for the movement from masculine discourse and orthodoxy through mysticism and individuation to the extremes of physical and spiritual identification associated with late medieval affective piety. While many of the established tropes were maintained during this transition, it is their specific deployment in defense of the Church which must be addressed.

CHAPTER 6

READING THE MEDIEVAL WOMAN'S BODY

The physical inscription of the woman's contact with the divine, such as the inscription of the signs of the passion on Clare of Montefalco's heart, or individual accounts of the literal internalization of Christian doctrine and symbolism, such as Angela of Foligno's communion with the lepers, present the reader with extremes of literal interpretation which are often difficult to position within the traditions and isolate the subject from their community. There are, however, authors who are able to reconcile the physicality of their experience with the perceived norms of their community and bridge the gap between the ecstasy of divine revelation and the experiences of the actual readers for whom the texts were intended. Perhaps the best example of this is provided by Teresa of Ávila's presentation of herself, and the balance that is achieved between the interiority of mystical experience and the external construction of a unique literary self.

When examining the construction of the individual in medieval women's literature, the case of Teresa of Ávila is problematic. In her autobiography, Teresa positions herself within the medieval framework of abjection as a form of traditional feminine identity even as her later biographers and supporters reappropriate her texts for post-Reformation purposes and redefine her role in late medieval and early modern Spain. These contextual repositionings, which represent a substantial shift in the representation of women within the church and illustrate the need for new models of womanhood to answer Reformation criticisms, which must then coincide with a renewed emphasis on the iconic nature of feminine saints within the church.

Teresa of Ávila's autobiography presents the modern reader many of the hallmarks of medieval women's identity discussed in the preceding chapters. One of the most telling examples of this occurs relatively early in the text when Teresa describes her decision at a young age to take the veil and renounce her privileged life outside the strictures of religious life.

> I would read the Epistles of Saint Jerome, which gave me such courage that I resolved to speak to my father of my resolve, which was almost like taking the habit. For I set such store by my word that I should never, I believe, on any account have turned back, once I had announced my intention. (*Life* 32)

Much as Thecla is convinced by Paul's orations that her path is that of a Christian, Teresa is bolstered by Jerome's epistles to those who preceded her into cenobitic life in service of the church. Throughout her autobiography, Teresa's references to earlier *lives* and histories of the Church ground her in the medieval tradition and establish her as a religious woman in the same traditions as Hildegard and Julian. The reflexive recourse to male authored texts and approved theologies serve, as they did for earlier generations of women writers, as the basis for the communal memory and identity which Teresa is able to directly access through her writing.

In addition to her demonstrated awareness of the traditions and motifs, Teresa's text also illustrates an awareness of more socially current theologies of the body which serve to align her with the late medieval mystics, as discussed in the preceding chapter. What sets Teresa's use of illness and the depreciation of the body apart from earlier writers—such as Hildegard and Julian—who use illness as a means of explaining their access to the divine, and from her Italian contemporaries—including Clare of Montefalco and Catherine of Siena—is the use of purely human emotion Teresa allows herself. Teresa candidly states that

there was then a nun in the house who was afflicted with a most serious and painful disease..she very soon died of this. Now I saw that all the sisters were frightened by her disease, but for my part I only envied her her patience, and prayed God to send me any sickness He pleased provided He sent me as much patience with it. I do not think I was afraid of any affliction, for so set was I on gaining my eternal good that I was resolved to gain it in any way whatever…Well, His majesty heard my prayer, and within two years I too was ill, though my illness was quite unlike that nun's. (*Life* 39)

Teresa's desires are deliberately made visible throughout her text. Her desire for the veil in her youth, her desire for a divinely granted illness, and her desire to "be like a man" (55) in the eyes of the world are openly tinged with envy, which remains largely unstated in the other lives considered here. A clear connection exists in Teresa's writing between the visual and what is desired. While the optics of desire are by no means unique to her text, the openness with which she employs them coincides with a shift in the visual rhetoric of the Church as a whole and her community in particular.

Kathleen Rowe notes that the period in which Teresa's text first appears coincides with a renewed interest within the church with the iconography of sainthood. This is due in part to the need for cohesion in the representation of individual saints throughout the Catholic world in the face of expanding empires and conflicts with Protestant reformers. The unification and further codification of iconography is also grounded in an understanding that, once fixed, "each saint's iconography remains generally static and monolithic, in part because of the Church's interest in 'fixing' each saint with a set of easily-recognizable symbols, such as Lucy holding her eyes, Catherine and her wheel, or Francis with his stigmata" (575). The specific iconography of the saint is intended to speak to both their most salient qualities and to distinguish them from other saints in ways that the often interchangeable elements of a saint's *vita* cannot. Rowe sees this static iconography as contributing to the perceived homogeny of the Church over time, as

the iconography becomes more entrenched and more fully incorporated into individual traditions, which is problematic in light of the fact that the "dialogue between society and the saint is never finished" (576). It is in the light of this dialogic construction of the saint's role that the cult of St. Teresa of Ávila becomes important to the constructions of identity which have been considered here.

The development of Teresa's cult is relevant to the discussion undertaken here on several levels. Teresa's *Life* participates in the medieval autobiography much more fully than it does in the modern sense of the genre, the emphasis on suffering and latent medieval concepts of gendered identity align it much more closely with Heloise's conceptualization of the self than later concepts of the individual. This alignment with the older traditions provides valuable insight into the retroactive construction of a homogenous literary front after the Reformation and significant shifts in the Church's interpretation of itself in the wake of schisms and reform. The speed with which Teresa was elevated to the co-patronage of Spain, more rapid than even Perpetua's elevation a millennia before, is also valuable.

Following her death in 1582, Teresa's cult lobbied successfully for her beatification (1614), canonization (1622), and her final elevation to co-patronage of the nation (1627) within forty years of her death. Such a rapid rise through the ecumenical process was also marked by "intense movement and rapid cult formation," which provides a glimpse of "the process of saintly construction in action" (Rowe 577) that is impossible to ascertain when examining earlier texts. The need by her biographers, Juan de Ribera and Luis de León respectively, to justify her writings and her mystical experiences beyond Teresa's own records speaks to the need for extreme orthodoxy in positioning her as a Counter-

Reformation saint. While her biographers engage in similar rhetorical moves to earlier

generations of hagiographers whose intention it was to assure their subject's

canonization, it is the positioning within Teresa's autobiography that is most immediately

relevant.

Examined in the light of the Protestant Reformation, Teresa's autobiography is a

wholly Catholic text. Her position of privilege in the thriving Catholic culture of Spain

explains this in part, yet a number of texts by Catholic women in the period display clear

awareness of Protestant attitudes toward women despite the fact that

> a number of modern feminist accounts of the Reformation adhere to the
> conviction that Reformed Christianity was no different from medieval
> Catholicism in as much as it still regarded female nature as inferior and needing to
> be controlled. It is claimed that women were only empowered to speak in so far as
> they either moved in exclusively female settings or became honorary men. (Vance
> 89)

The points of similarity between Reformed and Catholic views, particularly as they

applied to women include the appropriation of hagiographic materials and ideologies for

specific ends. Vance notes that the appropriation of Catholic saints, particularly the

martyrs, by Protestant chroniclers is well established before the push for Teresa's

canonization. Vance finds it noteworthy that in his 1571 history of the early church

Ludwig Rabe includes the lives of Perpetua and Felicitas in a way that is substantially

different from their portraits in the *Gilte Legende* (90). The absence of human love and

the emphasis on service to the divine in the Reformed appropriations of the text is

mirrored by post-Reformation Catholic writers as well.

It has also been noted that the emphasis in Rabe's account of Perpetua and Felicitas is

"very similar" to the version of the *lives* that appears in Cesare Baronius's Vatican

approved editions in the 1580s (Vance 92). The shifting emphasis in the Catholic texts

emphasizes the recognition of a need within the church to answer the codification of the

individual's relationship with the divine operating within the sixteenth and seventeenth

century Christian community, both Protestant and Catholic. As Martin Henry observes,

"[I]n both the Catholic and Protestant worlds, enormous resistance was called forth by

mysticism, even though it must also be said that in the case of Catholicism, official

approval was eventually given to the great Spanish Carmelite mystics" (90) including

Teresa and her compatriot John of the Cross. The tension between the Catholic and

Protestant interpretations of the mystical traditions stems from the Reformed view of

extant mystical texts as being "subjective, self-indulgent, and almost oblivious to the

Cross of Jesus Christ. In this context, one sometimes hears variations of the cynical

remark about mysticism as 'beginning in mist (myst-), centering in a vision (-i-), and

ending in schism (-cism)'" (90). These tensions are grounded in real and relevant tensions

between the established Catholic Church and Reformed communities.

> To take some specific cases, the Catholic Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for instance, was extremely alarmed at illuminist tendencies among the alumbrados in Spain, and at the spread of 'Quietism' in France...The fear aroused in men like Bossuet (Bishop of Meaux) by such movements was that they could have amoral consequences for society, and, more pertinently, lead to a bypassing of established Church structures and authority in the fleshing out of the human relationship to God. Catholic fear of mysticism was, in short, institutionally motivated: if God could be reached privately, so to speak, without recourse to the sacraments or religious services and practices approved and organized by the Church, that would obviously in the long run threaten to make the Church redundant. (Henry 46-7)

Yet, this view of mysticism in general, and the recording of mystical experiences in

particular, speaks directly to the need for mystic saints which affirm both the structure of

the Catholic church and define the role of the individual in mediating the experience of

the divine. The roles of the saint as model, mediator and intercessor, roles which lie at the

heart of both the traditional *vitae* and women's texts considered here, become a means of answering the challenges to the Church posed by the individual emphasis in Reformed theology. Saints are not the norm, they are set apart even within the communities from which they come, and the models which they provide, the iconic nature of their existence, becomes a point of emphasis in the period. This is especially true of mystical texts, as the mystical experience lends credence to the author's "extraordinary ability to approach the divine, meet the sacred and not be blinded by its light. The fact that the mystic demonstrates him or herself to be an expert in handling the holy makes him or her a charismatic figure intrinsically apt for healing or becoming a thaumaturge" (Bartocci 559).

However, the individual texts and the cults of the saints and the blessed remain grounded in community ideals and expectations. The impetus behind the speed with which Teresa's cult is able to pursue her canonization is, in part the renewed emphasis in both the Counterreformation Church and the Protestant doctrines about women and theorization about their inferior natures inherited from earlier theologians. There is, however, a tonal shift in these portraits, as the emphasis is less on the medieval interpretations of women's positions in the church and society and more on the ways in which the Holy Spirit can elevate women's sensibilities and grant them agency which is only possible "because they are women, mothers, daughters and sisters, and women using their spirit-created strength and courage" to define their religious allegiances and in support of male companions (Vance 92). These characteristics are important in terms of post-Reformation saints such as Teresa as they ground the mystical experience in communal expectations and further define the ways in which these individuals are set

apart from the norm while remaining connected to the common experience of the divine

and providing models for others to follow.

This modeling remains grounded in the established traditions and the need for

continuity established in earlier chapters. Often, this is accomplished by the incorporation

of traditional motifs and ideologies, including the erasure of sexual and social distinctions

in service to the divine. To this end, Teresa of Avila's advice to her sisters to "be brave

like men" does not imply "a psychological antipathy to her own sex, making her a sexist"

(Dreyer 160). Rather, she is encouraging her community to rid themselves of ideologies

and gender norms—in which Dreyer includes timidity, acquiescence, and the love of

comfort—which create barriers between themselves and Christ and between each other.

Dreyer's assessment of Teresa's advice reflects the understanding that the poet and

mystic access the images and social normative to which they have access to convey their

meaning more by wonder and tension than by direct argument.

There are, however, social changes which must be accounted for when attempting to

interpret later women's writings through the lens of the established canon of the Church.

Cazelles's analysis of the late medieval restrictions on feminine wealth is directly

relevant to Teresa's recourse to the convent and the impetus behind her cult's

promulgation.

> In the High Middle Ages the extension of feudalism and the trend toward more
> restrictive inheritance customs increasingly deprived women of the ability to
> accumulate, and consequently to dispose of, personal wealth. Their ability to
> subsidize large-scale charitable systems through monastic institutions was
> curtailed, signaling the growing powerlessness of women in the twelfth and
> thirteenth centuries. The life of Saint Elisabeth of Hungary serves as a paradigm
> for the evolution from the old to the new style of giving: practiced, voluntary
> poverty. (10-11)

The new style of giving is particularly important in Teresa's autobiography, as she emphasizes the comforts and securities she gives up in order to pursue her religious life. Personal sacrifice and voluntary renunciation of worldly comforts, motifs which appear in the earliest texts considered here, come to the fore as valid models for service and self-identification in Teresa's text. Cazelles's claim that this is an evolution in the "style of giving" is not a universal motif in the period, and as such must be tempered with the recognition of the larger traditions of the Church and the use of similar motifs throughout the corpus. Teresa's renunciation of worldly wealth and privilege in service to her divine calling is not a new concept, as Thecla, Perpetua and others actively demonstrate this concept, but what is important is the level of engagement and activity on Teresa's part, aspects of which are captured in her autobiography, that her advocates can use to promote her as a model of Catholic womanhood.

Teresa's autobiography represents both the culmination of a millennium of women's writings in the church and an active shift in the application of the traditional motifs in light of a groundswell change in the theological landscape of Europe. While Teresa appears to be actively participating in the established traditions and defining her identity within the text through the use of motifs established by earlier generations of Catholic women writers, the ends to which her cult and the church itself reposition her text in light of the larger social issues of the day mark a shift from the antique and medieval interpretations of these motifs and a modernization of the text itself. Teresa's *Life* both reinforces the homogeny of women's writings within the tradition and complicates it, positioning her as both icon and iconic woman. The identity she constructs within her text becomes secondary to the cultural use of the text itself, and she is redefined by her

promulgators and the reader as something beyond the original scope of the text. Similar claims could be made about any of the women considered here, Mary of Egypt's evolution from *psaltira* to harlot, Perpetua's redefined visions and masculinization, Heloise's rhetorical limitations, and even Catherine of Siena's abasement of the body are both cultural limitations of identity and the basis for the individual's construction of a sense of self within the community and the text.

Women's writings, both those by women and the texts composed about women, are communally determined, socially specific, and individually defined throughout the period considered here. While specific uses of cultural norms and images might differ through time, the one constant remains the desire and ability for these women to define themselves through their texts by both maintaining and challenging the communal norms of their times. As demonstrated here, the medieval conceptualizations of womanhood, particularly in the literary identities which women are allowed to adopt within their work, remain closely aligned with the paradigms established by the earliest patristic texts.

The underlying questions of identity and identification, constructed by an individual author or the collective community impacted by a given text, that have guided this investigation remain as central to reading later medieval women's lives as they were for the earliest texts. The questions surrounding the medieval interpretation of self, of communal and individual belonging, and what it means for these women to participate in the culture of their times remain significant for all of the texts considered and underscore the locatedness of the individual within her community, both cultural and Christian, as well as her biological locatedness within individual texts. This locational binary reinforces Stock's assessment of textual communities and nuances it. The community

these women seek to participate in through their writings goes beyond the immediate "microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script" (*Listening* 23), but rather becomes a microcosm of the larger literate Christian community whose collective memory and identity become the foundation for the identities women writers are able to access through their writing.

Reading the texts differently, as sites of power-knowledge and cultural discourse, demonstrates the ways in which these women were "fully integrated into the network of associations that connected the producers and consumers" of literature (Bruckner 870). The personas displayed in these texts are not pure fabrications, as the identities created by these authors reflects their actual lived experiences and beliefs, albeit in forms limited by the social, cultural, and political constraints of the specific, localized community in which they lived. These communities are, in turn, defined by the superstructure of Christian, Western identities which are themselves organized "within a framework of meaning that drew upon broader meta-narratives about temporality, suffering and sacrifice, and identity" (Castelli 25). The layering of plural identities and historiography within individual texts changes the way in which modern readers must engage with the lives individual authors put forth, with the illocution of self in each text, and makes it necessary to examine the theatricality and conventions which often obscure the subtle uses of history and memory to create the author's persona through her text.

As noted earlier, it is within this communal context that the individual author is able to define herself and establish a unique identity within a given text. The construction of identity, throughout the texts considered here, remains a matter of negotiation between the perceived and enforced cultural norms and also the literary tradition in which they

saw themselves as participating. Each author must defining themselves through and against the collective cultural memory they are allowed recourse to, while in in many cases never finding themselves fully accepted as part of the secular world or as part of the hierarchy of the church. In constructing themselves, all of these women balance between the orthodox and the heretical, between the illocutionary performance of themselves and the oblivion of self abasement. At the end of their texts, the reader, both medieval and modern, is presented with a text that is written as much through the active participation of the individual within their culture as it is an account of the author themselves. The texts considered here are not only written through the actions of individual women, do not merely focus on the history and memory of the author *per se*, but are in many ways written through and on the bodies of the individual in ways that make them visible, tangible, and real for the audience.

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