VISION AND REVISION:

THE FEMALE MYSTICS AS WRITERS IN

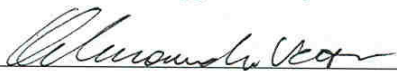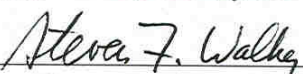LATE MEDIEVAL NORTHERN EUROPE
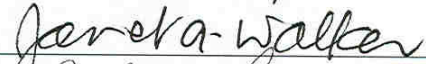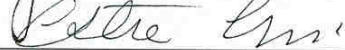
by

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and approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Vision and Revision

The Female Mystics as Writers in Late Medieval Northern Europe

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This study views the female medieval mystics of northern Europe primarily as writers in the period from 1250-1400 CE, concentrating on Hadewijch, a Brabantine beguine, Mechthild of Magdeburg, a German beguine with ties to the Cistercian convent of Helfta, and Julian of Norwich, an English anchoress. The writer questions why females writing within a theological context that discouraged female authorship would choose for their subject matter something which cannot be described. Through analysis of the cultural, theological, and literary context within which the women worked, and the mystic literature they produced, the study finds that authority to write was embedded within the vision itself and uncovered through the writer's active, integrative re-vision and shaping of the liminal experience. The dialogic, social imperative inherent within the mystic situation led those women practicing beguine spirituality to a mixed path of inward and outward action as they sought to continually integrate their visionary insight with their outward reality through writing.

Concentrating on the mystics' attention to form, description, synthesis, and audience, the study identifies limitations of past critical approaches including the

theological, vernacular, liberationist, feminist, and Lacanian. In stressing the mystics'

social rather than alienated nature, the writer calls for a re-vision of our own perspective,

a move from interpreting them using the "poetics of desire" model to one stressing a

"poetics of integration," concentrating less on their affective and more on their effective

piety. The experience of the late medieval mystics is compared to that of a shamanic

balancer and healer, one who voyages and mediates between worlds. The last chapter

proposes a re-interpretation of the mystics based on new definitions of the self as multiple

and networked rather than unitary. It offers insight on the role of the artist using this new

model of the narrative self, borrowing concepts from cognitive science to re-describe the

liminal or shamanic journey.

challenged me to re-examine my assumptions about the reality of virtual and actual worlds, and for providing continual insight on the ways we use writing to integrate and make sense of our lives.

Finally, deep thanks go to the Hostutler and Hamilton families, who never wavered (at least aloud) in their belief that I was working on something worth doing.

This dissertation is dedicated with a grateful heart to Ernest F. Hamilton, Jr and William R. Regan, two men who share in the quest for the music of the spheres, who have given continual encouragement and support, and who have never tried to change my nature.

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Introduction

When I first encountered the writings of the medieval mystics years ago, I began

this study with a simple question: why has so much writing been produced about a topic

considered to be ineffable, inexpressible? If "nothing can be said" of the mystical union

between human and that which is beyond human, as mystics of various religious

traditions spanning centuries have claimed, why have so many pursued this path and

written voluminously about it? As I expanded my search and began to study the works of

the female mystics of northern Europe, my questioning grew deeper. How could the

female mystics have envisioned themselves as writers? Why, given the misogyny of the

ecclesiastical and political power structure of the Middle Ages, the restrictions against

women speaking, and the lack of female literary ancestors, would women inclined to self-

expression choose the inexpressible for their initial foray into authorship? If primarily

writers, why choose mysticism? If primarily mystics, why write? Why choose the *via

contemplativa* and then engage in such a social form of communication as authorship,

writing in most cases with a conscious and obvious sense of audience?

Later, as I reviewed the corpus of critical works on the mystics' writing and

talked to colleagues about the phenomenon of female lay piety coinciding with a societal

rise in narrativity, another question arose: why do so many contemporary critics view the

female mystics as neurotic, hysterical narcissists rather than as emerging writers seeking

to communicate something extraordinary to an audience who wanted to hear about it? In

other words, why do so many literary (as opposed to religious) critics see the mystics as pathological case studies? The following research records my attempts to answer these questions.

There is no simple answer as to why a medieval female would seek out the difficult mystic path and then write about it in the face of ecclesiastical and social adversity, but several lines of inquiry converge at a point inherent in the mystical experience itself. The female mystic writers of late medieval northern England lived during a time in which the creative power of love, the role of the individual, and the efficacy of human endeavor were assuming new meaning. Through their visionary experience and the theological exploration it provoked, they obtained the authority and compulsion to write. They did so despite the official suspicion such literary production would cause. In most cases, they felt that they had no choice but to write in order to fulfill their divinely ordained human purpose in this world. Their effort to record and explain their experience in the visionary world at a time when the self was not the fully individualized construct it is today was compelled by a need beyond journaling for a confessor or writing to make sense of their own minds; instead, they most often wrote to communicate and make sense of their vision to others, and its ultimate impact influenced their world as all effective writing does.

To explore these questions I concentrate on the female mystics of northern Europe, including England (Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe of Lynn), Saxony (Mechtild of Hackeborn, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Gertrude of Helfta) and the Brabantine region (Beatrijs van Tienen, and Hadewijch) during a period ranging from 1200 to approximately 1420 AD. This span takes us from the period of eremitic enclosure and

tight ecclesiastical control of women and men pursuing the mystic path to the period of increased lay piety reflected in the rise (and fall) of the beguinages, the fragmentation of church control over "holy people" and independent mendicants, and an increase in the capacity of the general public to make pilgrimages. One can see in this period a movement from an inward-seeking mysticism symbolized by the enclosed space of the hermitage to a mysticism propelled toward action in the world, reflected in the free movement of the beguines, who are not connected to any established religious order, and the itinerant journeys of pilgrims and mendicants. However, this view is complicated by the institutional church's reaction against the lack of doctrinal control they could exert over the extra-regulars, leading to a return in the popularity of eremitic enclosure, at least in England.[1] The increasing freedom of vernacular piety is also constrained in the thirteenth century by the regularization of many unofficial lay groups into tertiaries of established orders within the ecclesiastical structure. This extra-ordinal regularization helped the church control in part the output of lay piety, and it also helped mystics who were able to stay within the beguinage or enclosure walls avoid the increasing persecution that came with the rise of inquisitional powers and competition from civil groups such as trade guilds in the late fourteenth century. Running through the era is a shifting dynamic between the leaders of the church and its people, as the ecclesiastical and scholastic establishment grappled with the related questions of what to do with women and what to do with the reformative mendicants.

The calling of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and the Second Council of Lyons in 1276, the indexing of works by such socially dissimilar mystics as Marguerite Porete (an independent beguine who was burned at the stake in 1310) and Meister

Eckhart (an established, respected Dominican friar trained in the scholastic tradition, but who faced excommunication before his death in 1328), reflect the growing frustration of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Clementine decree *Ad Nostrum* (1311), which directly forbade women from writing anything theological, was particularly troubling to women whose main subject area was an exploration of dialogue between God and human. The exclusion of women from university study or teaching created a situation in which university-trained male students, the future church, civil, and academic leaders, developed and promulgated their ideas of women in an artificial situation in which they had little contact with them, leading often to suspicion and portrayal of women as more inherently flawed than men. As the university students became the teachers of subsequent generations of influential church leaders, the knot of ecclesiastical control tightened on women who chose an extra-regular religious life outside the convent walls.

The tension between the Latin, logical syllogisms of classically trained doctors of the church and the vernacular, free-flowing expressions of private inspiration was expressed in consistent attempts of the post-Bernardine church authorities to silence mystical expression. Despite the injunctions, hermeneutic writings and thought continued and flourished among a limited audience until they become more socially acceptable with the rise of the Florentine Academy and the humanists in southern Europe in the mid 1400s, and the royally sanctioned publication of popularized versions of mystical writings for a lay audience by Wynken de Worde in northern European in the early 1500s. Within the context of this brief ecclesiastical history, the female mystics played out their lives and began to write.

For historical and contemporary background, I peripherally refer to earlier female mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Christina of Markyate (1096/8-1160), and Elizabeth of Schönau (1129-1165), and the contemporary male mystics Richard of St. Victor (d.1173), Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327), Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing (14th cent.), Richard Rolle (1290-1349), and Walter Hilton (1343-1396). Because of its insight into female piety and inspiration, I also include the *Schwester Katrei* manuscript, once thought to be by Eckhart, but now acknowledged to be by one of his followers, gender unknown. Also important for the study are various anchoritic training and devotional works such as the Ancrene Riwle;, Sawles Ward; Hali Meidenhad; The Abbaye of Saynte Spirite; Middle English versions of the lives of saints such as Juliana and Catherine, who served as models of piety for the female mystics; and Middle English versions of texts in the Dionysian corpus such as Denis Hid Diuinite.

These texts follow various mystical paths, ranging from handbooks on the apophatic, or negative way to God, to the highly detailed, almost documentary expressions of visionary experience recorded by women mystics that are more reminiscent of Dante's imaginings in The Inferno. At one end of the wide spectrum of medieval Christian mystical writings there are neoplatonic philosophies, intellectual and spiritual journeys toward a hidden, nameless divinity about which nothing can be said, and at the other there are extremely graphic accounts of personal physical encounters with the body of Christ.

When broadly viewing the mystical writings in late medieval northern Europe, we can see a few common threads, however. The first is that on the whole, contrary to the

interpretation of many twentieth century critics writing about them, the mystics saw themselves as orthodox children of the church rather than as radicals, and often took great pains to be seen as legitimate by the established hierarchy. In the case of Julian of Norwich (1343-1413), her desire to remain within the limits of accepted doctrine results in a refusal to turn away from contemplating the cross to look up and see God despite the temptation to do so.[2] Since she explains that there would be nothing amiss in raising her sights to what she acknowledges as a higher plane, her desire to remain fixed on the version of redemption given by the church is a surprising admittance that she will ignore the pull towards a wider, more unified knowledge of the divine. Clearly, for Julian, one way to avoid seeing beyond the parameters given her by her society is to focus on the person of Christ rather than on the more amorphous and complicated person of God the Father, who is here portrayed as a tempter. Since the rest of Julian's revelations reflect a thoughtful, instrospective person who seriously wants to record her vision in detail and interpret it accurately, the self-imposed limitation of her perspective is indicative of how much she wants to remain within bounds, a choice she enacts in both her text and with her body.

And despite the vigor with which Mechthild of Magdeburg (1212-1282/1294) castigates morally lax clergy, she spends even more time and energy anxiously trying to prove her own orthodoxy. Only with Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) and Na Prous Boneta (1290-1325) do we see a refusal to acknowledge ecclesiastical authority and a distinction drawn between the True Church (of which they, of course, are members) and the "Little Church," the corrupt Avignon papacy started by the French pope Clement V in 1309 and the huge scholastic machine driven by the universities.

The second common thread in these mystical writings is that, despite the authors' awareness that they are doing something outside the realm of normal human experience, they do not define themselves as abnormal, insane or "hysterical." Most approach the task at hand—a description of the Divine, the path to the Divine, or the loss of connection with the Divine—within a highly structured format, whether it be working within the tightly controlled poetic tradition of the Minnesänger (e.g., Hadewijch's *Strofische Gedichten,* Beatriz' *Seven Manieren van Minne*, and Mechtild of Magdeburg's *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit*), the numerical and exhaustively reasoned capitulation of stages in the process leading to mystical union (Julian, Hilton), highly speculative inquiries into the nature of both God and man, or the use of dialogue reminiscent of both early mystery plays and the dialectical conversations of the scholastic philosophers. Although intentionally didactic, both mystagogic initiatory handbooks and mystographic autobiographies are artistically shaped. Despite or even because of the extra-normal subject matter, the mystics seek to impose order on their subjective experience of vision as they write about it, again with their audience's needs to both comprehend and be guided or affirmed in their own spiritual path in mind.

Even those mystics who may be considered by some to be at the most immature end of the spectrum in their descriptions of the divine union, following the popular religious themes of Jesus as Ideal Spouse or concentrating on physical sensation as an end in itself, reveal themselves in subsequent works such as letters to novices to be sensible, wise, and insightful, perfectly capable of serving as spiritual guides to others. At times our judgment of a perceived immaturity in theological terms could perhaps be a result of reading structured, formalized, and image-dependent poetry as biography or

autobiographical narrative, not symbol-laden art. Work on the mystics' literary

production in the period before the 1980s has mostly been done by religious, not literary

scholars, who have perhaps relied too heavily on comparisons to contemporary theology

rather than assessment of the mystics' work as literature. Descriptions of the mystics by

their contemporaries and later hagiographers stress their difference from ordinary people,

which has heightened their strangeness and reinforced their seeming lack of reason or

logic. However, these descriptions are often motivated by outside conditions such as a

need to protect or accuse the writers, and they serve to obscure the quotidian hard work

and organizing, integrative strategies in which these women and men were engaged as

they led their followers on what they perceived as an important spiritual path.

As John Giles Milhaven explains in his study Hadewijch and Her Sisters, we

know from convent and beguinage records, contemporary accounts, and, in some cases,

trial documents that the female mystics were acknowledged spiritual and sometimes

political advisors.[3] They served as superiors, novice directors, leaders of small

meditative groups of women and men outside the convent or beguinage walls; they were

responsible for the spiritual and oftentimes the physical well-being of those under their

care as well as people in the larger community. Even men and women who pursued the

eremitic path had wide influence as spiritual counselors; lay and religious people sought

audiences through a window or door with the enclosed, or they wrote to the hermits for

advice. Some male hermits such as Richard Rolle regularly came to the hosts' table and

engaged in conversation with curious guests,[4] although that was an option unheard of for

anchoresses. The enclosed males and females also initiated correspondence with

ecclesiastical and political authorities and used their position as spiritual authorities to exert influence on both church and state.

The late medieval mystics lived during a period that accepted the validity and authority of mystical visions and their interpretation, and were part of an institution based not just on scriptural, but also on personal revelation. Hence, the mystics define themselves and are defined by their communities as performing a predominantly social rather than an individual function. Even though they unite in describing the highest levels of mystical experience as incommunicable to others, the goal of their mystic pursuits is not individual self-actualization through union with the divine; rather, their experiences propel them to communicate the stages of mystic initiation or to explain the insights they receive to an audience for a social purpose. Today we would describe their attempts as consciousness-raising—if we define consciousness as primarily consciousness of God and the nature of things. However, among many of the mystics the goal of vision and revision is also this-worldly. In defining their lives as *exemplata* of God's creative love, they had to imitate the divine *exemplar* and "live love" toward creation.

The "otherness" or neurosis (even pathology) that we assign to their mystical visions today would not have been quite as apparent in their own time because they used the symbols of the day to explain what they saw. Yet, as Monica Furlong suggests, it is a mistake to revise history or interpretation to the point that the mystics seem commonplace even within the context of their own time:

> These are not normal ways of living, and mystics are not normal people. If we try too hard either to pretend that they are "like us" or to ignore the fact that their behavior strikes us as very peculiar indeed, it becomes even more difficult to get past the blocks to whatever is good and original and interesting in what they have

to say.[5]

In their own time, however, the physical manifestations of mystic experience, while never normal, are perceived by their communities as a validation of authority and divine sanction—at times, compulsion—to speak. Similar to a shaman (a word I use with some trepidation and much explanation, as covered in Chapter 4), the medieval mystic is a socially acknowledged mediator between this world and the other. In self-identification with Christ, the "author of salvation," and the Virgin Mary, who gives birth to the Word, the mystic performs the mythic function of writer or performance artist, as shaman or intercessor/healer for the community.

This self-definition of the mystics as working within the ecclesiastical system and consciously maintaining a meticulous concern with structure and form is relevant because it serves to mitigate the effort in post-Freudian French criticism by de Beauvoir, Cixous and Clément[6] to connect mysticism and hysteria, portraying the female mystic as able to soar above the limited, male-determined world in an ecstatic, inexpressible, semiotic orgasm of unity with the Other.[7] In the writings of Cixous and Irigaray, the inability of women to express themselves logically or linearly is seen as a subversive attempt to transcend the limits of the male hierarchical power structure reflected in the symbolic world of language itself. These critics explain the overall similarities in the work of male and female medieval mystics by relegating the male mystics to the status of feminized men since they are on the receiving end of divine penetration. One problem with this view is that hysteria, while a useful construct to describe difference, is not the most effective form of social critique or self-definition, two of the mystics' main motivations for pushing the boundaries of female speech within the church and writing. Being

accused of hysteria in medieval society also created problems such as those experienced by Margery Kempe, whose autobiography still remains at the fringe of legitimacy for many scholars of mysticism and female authorship.

While celebrating the subversion of gendered stereotypes and male ways of knowing, Cixous's and Kristeva's formulation of women as deliberately inarticulate reinforces the harmful stereotype of male as reasonable, logical, and expressive, and women as emotional, illogical, and either silent or nonsensical. Certainly many of the visions of mystics such as Hadewijch speak of the indescribable, liminal state of chaos, *abyme*, celebrated by Cixous and Irigaray, but if one sets out to be a writer, she cannot escape the need to translate that liminal experience using the tools and systems of meaning at hand in the name of communication. In Hadewijch's case, this meant writing of her experience in strictly metered poetry, translating the images used by predominantly male troubadour poets to describe her own interior state and model it for her novices. In Mechthild's work, attention to precise numbering and classification of everything she observed demonstrates an attempt to impose order and reason on her vision. Julian took over twenty years to meditate on one vision to be sure she was recording and interpreting it correctly. A close look at each mystic's writing over the course of her lifetime shows that none are in favor of rejecting the male discourse in order to remain voiceless or incomprehensible in the liminal state; indeed, as Aristotelian views on women and matter were inextricably worked into the fabric of scholastic theology through the later 1200s, the main effect on women writers was to create anxiety and defensiveness rather than outright rebellion.

Questions of female authority to speak on spiritual matters became more pronounced as scholasticism flourished during the thirteenth century, leading the later mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg to fight hard against their own misgivings in order to write. Nonetheless, they overcame increasing psychological and social pressure to remain silent because of their conviction that they must speak in words that others will understand, motivated at times by a compulsion so strong it became physiological. Not only that, but the after-effects of their incommunicable experience *en abyme* were always outwardly directed back into the world of signs in which the women lived and worked. Since many of their closest associates and fellow travelers were male, the female mystics in general did not perceive mysticism itself as a limiting or gendered issue; if anything, being acknowledged as a mystic granted increased social and ecclesiastical power they could wield as acknowledged holy people within their communities, power that would probably not be granted to non-visionary females of the time.

If we let the female medieval mystics speak for themselves, they were very aware of their gendered status as women within the church, yet it is hard to find moments when they defined themselves as completely different from or adversarial to men, even men such as John XXII, whom they criticized. Rather, they wrote to change his mind about issues such as the removal of the papacy from Avignon back to Rome, and they prayed for him. Most of the women remained close to male confessors or advisors; often, they wrote in response to encouragement to do so by the men. They often formed close spiritual relationships with male mystics, with whom they felt the collegial kinship of common purpose and vocation. Nor were there significant differences in the way men and women mystics defined their experience of union. Both genders used the vocabulary

of either *Brautmystik* or scholasticism at various times, and both exerted much effort to be as clear as possible in their descriptions and advice. Whether through the influence of the re-engendered power roles in *Brautmystik* or their androgynous experience in the liminal state, even the male mystics built on a long ecclesiastical tradition to speak of Jesus, God, and themselves as maternal figures as well as lovers. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, whether a mystic chose to use the imagery of love mysticism or the heavily glossed and annotated style of scholasticism depended more on the expectations of the audience than on the gender of the writer.

As we move closer to the sixteenth century reformation and counter-reformation of the church, it is true that many of the mystics were among those who advocated the need for a personal experience of the divine, *sine medio*, rather than an experience mediated by the ecclesiastical structure, but that reformative tendency can be seen in both women's and men's writing. In other words, it was not gender-specific, nor were the mystics offering an alternative to the church. In most cases, they did not even declare personal revelation to be primary or superior to the experience available through the church, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The importance of the Eucharist and their dismay at being denied the sacrament at times of tension with the authorities show how important they felt their attachment to the church and its symbols to be; their personal mystical work was ancillary to the primacy of the sacraments and was only available to the few who could accept the discipline necessary for that path.

This exclusivity of mystical experience separates the work of Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Gertrude from the more democratic and controversial theologies of the Lollards, Waldensians, and Free Spirits, who declared the primacy of individual

experience over that available within the tightly controlled fold. Like all hermeneutic

texts, the writings of Hadewijch, Mechthild, and the other beguines were produced for a

very limited audience of like-minded people willing to follow their example. At the later

end of the period with Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, and Walter Hilton, we see a

democratizing and universalizing of the mystic experience and an attempt to fit it into the

"mixed life" of devout lay piety, but these three also went to great pains to dissociate

themselves from the current heresies in their explanations of the contemplative life.

While it is interesting to analyze the female mystics as subversive merely because of their

gender and their place in a male-controlled hierarchical institution, their own writings

show the mystics of both genders struggling to present new ideas while remaining

legitimized by the construct in which they operate.

Rejecting the critical approaches of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray that explain the

female mystics as babbling[8] masochists sublimating their unfulfilled sexual needs, or as

hysterical, anorexic adolescents writing to subvert a male power structure leaves me with

my initial questions only partially answered, and it raises new questions as to how else

we could categorize these women psychologically and as authors. Underlying the

exploration into how the mystics found the authority to write in Chapters 1 and 2 runs a

female casting of Harold Bloom's oedipal anxiety of influence theory, in which

Hadewijch and Mechthild turn away from their current spiritual fathers in favor of role

models from previous generations such as Augustine—or spiritual mothers such as Mary.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I refer back to an earlier psychological construct, the shamanic

figure, to provide a way to understand the biggest barrier to contemporary understanding

of the medieval mystic path, its graphic physicality, which also serves to distract us from seeing the female mystics as emerging writers.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I reject the idea of the infantilized woman jabbering incomprehensibly and play with Erikson's idea of the "moratorium" to describe the visionary experience. More recent theories of identity formation and the flexible, multiple, networked self by Minsky, Bromberg, and Dennett may give us a more acceptable way to understand the female mystics as sane women writers attempting to form a poetics of integration to enable their self-expression. The view of the unitary self as an integrated network of selves, with the artist as mediator positioning her organizing self in the spaces between selves in order to communicate and integrate insights from all the self-states, is presented as a trial balloon. Using sociological and cognitive science perspectives as an antidote to the psychoanalytic approaches of the 1940s-70s provides a way for us to think beyond the sado-masochistic, narcissistic frame of reference that has categorized the mystics as damaged. Reframing the discussion using the networked self model is also a way to bring our study of the liminal, "shamanic" state into a 21st century context. Critiquing the mystics through this lens opens up other questions as to the role of the writer in society and how we determine who is and who is not an artist. While the first half of the study is devoted to how the mystics might have seen themselves in their own artistic, theological, and historical moment, the second half concentrates on how we might re-see them now, calling for a revision of our own vision.

In my view, the female mystics of northern Europe, similar to the male mystics, were primarily theologians and writers trying to work out questions that run throughout Western philosophy and literature, particularly those questions about the status of human

beings in relation to God that gripped late medieval society and eventually led to the humanism of the Renaissance. What is the nature of God? What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Given the nature of God, what is our purpose as human beings? Is there a Gnostic distinction between matter and spirit, and if there is, what is the role of the body in our spiritual lives? What is the purpose of sin?

Do we have free will, or are our lives determined by fate? Is the Incarnation central to Christianity, or is the Christ figure merely the signification of something beyond us toward which we should all strive, a divine *exemplar*? Is this world our home, or have we fallen from a more perfect ideal world into a fragmentary and transitory existence on the material plane? Is the universe solely powered by the love of God or does human endeavor contribute? These were the same kinds of questions being asked by Aquinas and the other Scholastics, and the answers the women developed are in many ways similar to the answers of the university-trained theologians rather than a challenge to them. In both cases, the questions and their answers show a church and people struggling to move from a rather static view of the universe through a world riven by ecclesiastical, environmental, and social disruption to a place of emotional stability, to spiritual and authorial confidence. Of course their writing is gendered, but in most cases it was not limited by or differentiated specifically by their gender.

The main challenges the women mystics offered the church in their times lay in their willingness to write creatively about these subjects despite official disapproval, and the authority with which they asserted that their personal experience and intellectual work was worth sharing with others despite their use of the vernacular and lack of university training. Mechthild of Magdeburg even went so far as to say that her work was worth

sharing precisely because she lacked university training. Running throughout their literary production is a tension between their compulsion to write because of the experiences they had with the fruitfulness of creative, divine love, and the need as writers to serve as instructors, explicators, and translators to those who had not had the same experience. Their work is always didactic even at its most entertaining, so the means by which they put their mystical experiences into the language of everyday life was consciously crafted with an audience in mind. Their work in the vernacular and their use of everyday imagery to explain theological principles ran parallel to the increasing importance of vernacular sermons in Franciscan and Dominican thought. In both cases, official Christianity negotiated a delicate balance between evangelizing the general public, encouraging lay piety, and dealing with the resulting fragmentation and loss of control over doctrine and power structures. This tension in the society itself often caught the female mystics in the cross hairs as they constantly ran the risk of being accused of heresy.

Voluntary enclosure, as Julian chose, was certainly one answer to sidestepping official condemnation, as was the tendency of many beguines, including Mechthild, to retire to official religious houses as they aged. We do not know what happened to Hadewijch when she was forced to leave her beguinage and step down from her leadership position, but her silence itself is telling. Yet it would be a mistake to see the mystics as retiring from society to pursue their individual inner light. The more I read them, the more I see that they were asking these theological questions on behalf of the greater good, not just for their own enlightenment. Their role as instructors and guides to others who depended on them, their sense of responsibility for humankind in general, was

significant and it was part of the compulsion that drove them toward the new "narrativity" that characterized their time. As Evelyn Underhill suggested in her 1925 The Mystics of the Church, "Mysticism only becomes articulate when there is a public which craves for the mystical message."[9] Awareness of their audience and its needs was a major motivation propelling the mystics to become writers, moving outward in spite of their physical withdrawal from the social world.

Nothing happens in a vacuum. Although the linguistic imperative inherent in the long tradition of Christian mysticism was a strong motivator for the women as artists, the social forces surrounding that experience had to open up a space in which the women could write. Jacques LeGoff in The Birth of Purgatory sees the late twelfth century as the opening up of narrative, spatialization, and intermediacy in the society at large;[10] the mystics contributed to this stream and moved within it. They knew their personal experience was valid and worth communicating, that they could locate their philosophical or mystic adventures in spatial imagery, and that their task as writers was to be intermediaries between God and their audience. Their role as intercessors or intermediaries became even more significant with the increasing popularity of a belief in purgatory, as some took on themselves the role of bargainers or sufferers for the relief of others in the next world as part of their imitation of Christ. The concept of purgatory, in conjunction with the fragmentation of the regular feudal system and the established monarchism, and the rise of a freer middle class that demanded vernacular literature, all fed into the increased narrativity of the times in which the mystics wrote. Purgatory, as LeGoff says, "introduced a plot into the story of individual salvation. Most important of all, the plot continued after death."[11] Although he does not mention the role of the

religious female in this new appropriation of the next world by the church, I suggest that praying for souls in purgatory suddenly gave a *raison d'être* for the existence of female religious houses that both regular and extra-regular religious women badly needed to counter rising misogynism spawned by the universities and persecution from inquisitors. It also increased their authority as spiritual workers, especially among civil authorities and the public, and hence gave those who could claim special bargaining relationships with God a certain status even outside their communities.

The significant difference between the work of the female mystics and that of the male mystics seems to come from the social typing of women as more material or fleshly, and therefore more corrupt, than men, which must have made their inquiries into the value of the body more urgent. What makes their writing interesting to me is seeing how the women coped with the situation in which they were writing. Viewed as inherently inferior and radically flawed, denied in most cases the classical training of their fellow male investigators, exhorted not to speak in the public forum, and looked upon with suspicion as inherently dangerous to men and to stable society, the women mystics lacked the literary tradition of their male counterparts and ran an even greater risk than men of being characterized as heretics. Nonetheless, they wrote, like most artists, because the urge to write was compelling.

Although many of the women chose the relative freedom of an extra-regular or enclosed religious life because they were personally inclined to speculation and intellectual curiosity, most became writers in response to their experiences of mystical union itself. While we often think of mysticism as a solitary pursuit for personal experience of or connection with the sacred, the women mystics were compelled to write

because they defined what they are doing and the insights or benefits they received as important for their society. Most of their writing was for the instruction of younger women they are mentoring and providing with spiritual direction. In defining the nature of God and themselves in response to God, they constructed a poetics based on what they learned from that dialogic situation, what they must communicate. The dialectical training they were denied by their exclusion from the universities was replaced by their dialogic experience of the divine. As scholasticism took a firmer hold on Western Christianity, a claim to esoteric knowledge became one way to claim linguistic authority despite a lack of formal training. This was especially true among those for whom the convent, where they might have received some advanced theological training, was not available.

The following chapters explore how three of the female mystics approached some of the main theological questions of the day, and how their answers to these questions propelled them toward a situation in which they had to write to perform their self-defined function in society. Rather than see one type of woman's spirituality as typical for all women's experience, I rely mostly on the writings of Hadewijch, a Brabantine beguine with no identified attachment to an established order; Mechthild of Magdeburg, a German beguine closely connected to the Cistercians; and Julian of Norwich, an English anchoress,[12] in order to look at a range of literary and theological self-expression across cultures, language groups, and spiritual vocations. Each woman asked many of the same questions yet interpreted her experience of God differently; however, the same focus on Love as a universal principle transcended class, education, or language. Differences between the writers reflect their individual personalities and concerns, but one can also

see the increasing influence of and reaction to scholastic and then nominalist thought during the roughly 120 years from the time at which Hadewijch stopped writing and Julian began.

While the impetus of all their writing was a transcendent and incommunicable union with God motivated and sustained by Love, little space was given to the moment of actual union. Love, or *Minne*, however each defined and reflected upon it, was the moving force of the universe, the ultimate explanation, the reason for human existence and divine behavior. For these writers, the effect of love mysticism created a compulsion to write that transcended the dangers of doing so. For many of the women, mystical union was only experienced once or for a short period of time. The bulk of their writing was either direction to others for leading a godly life and following the mystic path, or speculations as to what the visions meant. After the initial and sometimes unique visionary experience, many spent several years working and reworking the meaning of what they saw or felt. In the process, they wrote as all writers do—to instruct, to communicate, and even to entertain. Their mystical experience did not lead to a rejection of the material world but an embracing of it; the otherworldly experience in the producing a very this-worldly response resulting in a creative burst manifesting itself on the artistic and practical level.

For all the sense of exile the loss of mystic union produced, the message brought back by most mystics was that given to Hadewijch: "One must live as a human."[13] Equating enthusiastic social service to the physical world with the ecstatic, solitary moment of spiritual union, the mystics pursued both the *via contemplativa* and the *via activa* simultaneously. "*Ghef al, want al es dine!*" "Give all, for all is yours!"[14] was the

message Love imparted to Hadewijch at the end of her first vision. This overspilling of motivating energy was enough to mitigate the difficulties they may have faced in their situation as undereducated females writing about suspicious material. As they sought to communicate the incommunicable, the imagery of the visions was conditioned by the imagery and values of their society even while it challenged the status quo. Their interpretation and artistic organization of the visions, their re-vision, and their definition of themselves as writers was at once rooted in their time and place, and transcendently transformative of it.

Chapter One

The Closing Door

Politics, Philosophy, and Parameters in Early Modern Europe

"In order to deal with such a subject, it is not sufficient to be pious;

one must be a scholar." Jean Gerson (1363-1429)[1]

In order to understand the philosophical, theological, and cultural context in which the mystics wrote, it is necessary to trace what led up to their ability to write in their own historical moment. Otherwise, the intense discussion and questioning that take place in their vision states and in their correspondence seem merely theological. However, due to the inter-relatedness of all medieval society with the church controlling education, social mores, and much of the political arena, nothing was merely theological in the 1200s. This was especially so for women working and writing within the church structure.

At the end of the tenth century, northern Europe was emerging from its frontier period with fairly stable institutions despite its political chaos. Christianity had been acknowledged as the dominant religion, and women as well as men were recognized as spiritual leaders by the church and the public. In her essay "Sanctity and Power" Suzanne Wemple writes, "From the 5th-11th centuries, the frontier age of western Europe, women played a vital and expanding role in laying the foundations of our modern society." As the secular power was increasingly controlled by men, "[female] sanctity became a route to authority."[2] Because noblewomen were benefactors of the church who founded many of the religious houses, women were most likely to run them. Double monasteries of men

and women, both ruled by a common abbess, were common. In religious circles, women were respected by ecclesiastical authorities as well as by the lay people of the community for their ability to reconcile political disputes and intercede with God on behalf of their constituents.

In this frontier-building period, ecclesiastical women such as Lioba and Hrosvit were often more educated than men because they had more leisure to read and think, not being as caught up in administrative, military, or political activities. The male clergy often requested holy women to accompany them on Christianizing missions to tribal regions such as Frisia, as Boniface did Lioba, with impressive results.[3] The respect Boniface accorded Lioba as an equal partner in the work was shown in his desire to be buried next to her "so that they who had served God during this lifetime with equal sincerity and zeal should await together the day of resurrection,"[4] truly an expression of non-gendered collegiality.

Among the lay population, as noblewomen were left in charge of estates upon the military campaigns or deaths of their husbands, they found it useful to found religious houses where they and their daughters could take refuge from enforced political marriage, siege, and other exigencies of the ever-changing power structure of Europe. These foundations provided not just safehouses for the nobility, but a means to educate their children and to produce manuscripts. Joan Ferrante uses the double monastery of Fonteverault as an example of such an institution. Founded by Robert d'Abrissel but left in his will to the perpetual supervision of an abbess when he died, Fonteverault was a powerhouse, exerting influence throughout Europe and sending bands of nuns to establish new houses such as the one at Amesbury in 1177. "By the 12th century, many women's

convents had acquired reputations for learning and production of manuscripts."[5] With
the rise of European universities, however, the roles of men and women within the church
started to diverge rapidly, especially in regard to access to education.[6]

Once the political shape of the continent had been somewhat organized, the return
of men from the first four Crusades, threats to the established church structure, and
cyclical economic depression and political unrest led to a crackdown on women's speech
and authority. Corresponding with the rise of male-controlled universities, the Fourth
Lateran Council in 1215 pronounced the final schism between Eastern and Western
Christianity. The Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in southern France in the
1210s heightened the sense of need to separate what was orthodox from what was not,
and the universities were the theoretical battleground for these decisions. The need to
control theology and impose some sense of order on the chaos of the 1200s led to the re-
emphasis on classically trained male theological voices. Double monasteries ruled by
women were closed in favor of a stricter separation of genders and control by men. The
commonly practiced and widely acknowledged "secret" marriages of clergy were banned
and preached against with new fervor as women were perceived as a disruptive, magic-
ridden, and troublesome influence during the period of Gregorian reform.[7]

We can see a marked change in the societal and ecclesiastical attitudes towards
women in the period from 1100-1400. Ironically, during this time Christian-dominated
northern Europe was in a period of economic, intellectual, and cultural expansion in some
ways analogous to the explosion of society during the earlier frontier period that had
encouraged and valued women's participation. New markets were opening that
encouraged travel to the East and crusaders were returning with products, texts, and ideas

from the Arab world. The new emphasis on evangelism and popular piety spurred by the rise of the mendicant orders led to mission trips to convert others to a Christianity undergoing internal reformation. Tertiary orders[8] swelled and people from all strata of society took advantage of greater mobility and security to go on long pilgrimages.

Why then did the trajectory of women, especially religious women, not follow the general pattern? I believe the answer lies in the philosophical changes of the time, not just the socio-economic ones.

The voyage and return of Europeans throughout the world was a continual external and internal challenge to the authority of the church. As always, when Christians came into contact with other religious beliefs, they bewailed the pagan heresies and at the same time were inevitably changed by them. For instance, when the Franciscan Guillaume du Rubrouck was sent to Mongolia by Louis IX of France, he returned in 1255 from a two-year journey with a fascinatingly detailed description of a "demonic" shamanic ritual.[9] Other Franciscans followed the Crusaders to the Holy Land in an attempt to convert Islamic scholars and became influenced by Sufism themselves. The Arabs of Andalusia have been shown to have influenced the troubadours with their *zajal* and love mysticism, and to pervade popular culture with the stories and songs told by the thousands of Islamic female captives held in Europe, influencing primarily the noble classes who employed the Muslim servants and had the leisure for poetry and art. Efforts in Spain to stop the *jongleurs* because of their "orientalizing" influence are well-documented.[10] The connections between Arab and Christian ideas on subjects such as the nature of the world is only now being explored, but certainly, in the field of Love Mysticism, the similarities in thought between Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-73) or Hafiz

(1319-1389) and Eckhart or Jan van Ruysbroec—or Rabi'a (717-801) and the beguines—are too close to be coincidental.[11] This infiltration of Eastern ideas into Western Christianity at the same time as its leaders were enacting the final schism with the Eastern Orthodox church was one unsettling factor that led the church to turn away from the more assimilating, freer stance of the European frontier period and close in on itself to maintain orthodoxy.

The Crusades resulted in another philosophical factor influencing the Church's view of women. Through contact with the Arabs, the rediscovery of Greek texts that had been temporarily lost to the European world with the burning of the library at Alexandria created both a new emphasis on the apophatic ways of knowing God—through describing what God is not rather than what God is—and a re-emphasis on the Manichean view of matter as corrupt. This created a further problem for females, especially, since woman was seen as a "defective man…[whose] finality (unlike man's) was her sexuality, her bodily generative function."[12] The competing strains of Platonic and Aristotelian cosmology inherent in Christianity re-emerged with the rediscovery of Aristotle in the mid-twelfth century through Arabic translations. The need to merge Aristotelian ideas about the primacy of reason as a way of knowing with orthodox Christian beliefs in "unreasonable" dogma such as the virgin birth led to the systemization of theology that ultimately excluded the voices of women as recognized church authorities. In this period, the church's ambivalence toward women was even more pronounced, as the *cura monialium* or pastoral care of nuns and beguines became too great a task for an overburdened institution unable to cope with the stress of constant dispute and unparalleled growth.[13]

For those religious and lay people pursuing a mystical path in the twelth and thirteenth centuries, Augustine was still the foremost authority on relations between the human and divine worlds; however, his authority was challenged by paradoxical ideas emerging from the Islamic world. One was a greater emphasis on a relational God who created the world out of love. This concept was already inherent in the teachings of Augustine, but one which was always overshadowed in his writings by a consciousness of the radical gulf or difference between God and humanity that can only be bridged by Christ. Mystical thought from Plotinus and the Pseudo-Dionysius, popularized by Albertus Magnus in the first half of the thirteenth century, sought to reconcile the concept of God as eternal, outside time, and perfect—hence immovable—with the definite fact of the world's existence. How could a God who is unmoved and unmoveable in time create a new world? What would motivate such an action on God's part?

<center>The Relational Creator God and Mysticism</center>

One answer is to see the world itself as part of God, whose very nature is relational and creative. If God's nature is creative love, then the creation is part of the inner workings within the existence of God, not a separate phenomenon outside of God. The difficulty for those who wished to remain orthodox is that this philosophical solution, although attractive, does not fit with the scriptural theology of Christianity. Its adherents were constantly required to defend themselves against charges of pantheism and to reconcile the notion of creation from eternity with a Biblical account that marks a definite start of the world and individuated acts of creation taking place in a defined period of time.

John Scotus Eriugena, writing along these lines in the 860s, was censured on the grounds of pantheism and finally had to be content with an inelegant compromise of maintaining the infallibility of Scriptures while yet arguing the points of Greek philosophy over Latin theology. Regardless of his inability to adequately synthesize the dialectic between Greece and Rome, his work continued to influence Christian thought; its popularity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is clear in the actions of Pope Honorius III, who burned *De Divisione Naturae* in 1225 as a dangerous book[14]. Eriugena's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to mesh Greek thought with scriptural doctrine were paralleled in the Islamic world by Avicenna, Ibn Sina (980-1037), who in translating Aristotle created a systematic Islamic theology. Since God cannot add anything to his nature, Avicenna reasoned, anything God creates must be of the same nature as God. Synthesizing Plato and Aristotle, Avicenna posited that God "creates" through a series of emanations or intelligences that get farther and farther away from the original source. One could picture this as similar to the way that light dims as it gets farther from the source. It remains light in substance, but not in degree. If God is absolute goodness, that goodness must have something to affect in order to be truly good, so it is diffused and radiated in a necessarily creative process. In the west, Avicenna's thinking was further developed along Christian lines by the school of Chartres, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and the Victorines: William of Champeaux, Hugh (1096-1141), and Richard (c.1127-1173).

As the Victorines worked out the theological meaning of emanational theory in a Christian context, they asked questions similar to the ones Bernard and Aelred posed. Assuming humans were of the same essence as God, greater emphasis on the divine

origins of humankind led to an elevation of created matter instead of a Gnostic opposition between matter and spirit. Medieval thinkers under the influence of Plotinus preferred a sliding scale running from spirit down to matter and back up again, a relational model. The importance of this for the Incarnational theology gaining popularity in twelfth and thirteenth century Europe cannot be understated. In the new system developed and furthered by the thinkers of St. Victor, Chartres, and Clairvaux, relations between humans and God were a continuation of the kinds of relations that occur within the internal workings of the Trinity, and the jump from one world to the next by Christ was not necessarily a leap over the Augustinian gulf from sacred to profane, but a lessening of degree of closeness to the original source.

This seeming reconciliation between matter and spirit was uneasy at best due to the questions that remained. If God is self-contained and unmovable, how can the God-centered universe constantly expand outwards through the limitless love to God? What is the reciprocal movement back toward God that would allow the system to truly be self-contained? If humans on the other end of the scale must "love back" in order to keep the system functioning, complete, and self-contained, how can people send back as much as they get without a balance of power between themselves and God? Does God need people, or are the relational actions of the Trinity sufficient without people at all? If people aren't needed, why are they there? If God is self-contained and all sufficient, why create in the first place?

Traditional answers about the very nature of God being relational lead to more questions about that nature of that relationship. Does desire play a role in the formula of forces within the God model? Whenever questions arose about how to cobble together

the internal contradictions between Plato, Aristotle, the Hebrew and Greek Bible, and Eastern thought, most scholars had to take refuge in Augustine's dictate "c*redo ut intelligam,*" "I believe that I may understand," repeated by Anselm of Canterbury, who adds that human faith involves searching for answers. One lives in *"fides quaerens intellectum,"* "faith seeking understanding."[15] Doctrinally sound belief has to remain the first step and the first priority; one must then use reason and understanding to examine the nature of the universe from the presupposed position of faith.

However, as Bernard McGinn points out in <u>Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics</u>, even the most scholastic of philosophers would have been horrified if the result of systematic theology did not increase love of God.[16] Bernard's "*Credo ut experiar,*" "I believe that I may experience," had brought the human body and experience firmly into the neoplatonic equation, something the Scholastics never rejected, no matter how they may have seemed to minimize experiential knowledge at times. The emphasis on love over fear as a motivation for worship and the placing of worship in a larger divine context of reciprocal God-human action in the Bernardine scheme helped to swell the popular piety movements of the time. Yet the liberating concepts of the divine soul diffused in a physical body and a universe glued together by relational love were threatened as the twelfth century wore on by a second idea imported from the Islamic world to question the inherited mystical tradition stemming from Bernard.

This challenge to the theory of emanative relationship resulting from the European and Byzantine translations of Aristotle from the Arabic,[17] was a paradoxical re-emphasis on the supremacy of spirit over matter, the primacy of reason over experiential or bodily, sensational knowledge. As Europeans re-integrated Aristotle into their already

fraught corpus of theology, the human body was still considered the necessary repository of the soul, but the concept of matter in general was seen as less divine than spirit. More troubling for females was that in the great hierarchy of being, women, especially pre-menopausal women, were seen as more material than men. Of course, these ideas had been theoretically in the ecclesiastical literature for centuries, but practicality and the need to use women in the evangelizing push of Catholicism across Europe had tempered their effect on the daily experience of most devout people. The difference between earlier frontier periods of expansion and the later Middle Ages in attitudes toward women is one of degree of concentration or emphasis rather than a totally new concept of women's inherent materiality. All theologians and philosophers of the church agreed that women were more fleshly and material than men, an assumption that their contemporary female counterparts accepted. The means by which the church applied that knowledge of greater female materialism varied greatly.

Prioritizing love over reason as a means of attaining unity, Bernard used this idea of female materiality to show that the Virgin was able to draw God to her because matter longs for spirit; since this action results in the salvific Incarnation, women's materiality is an instrument in saving the postlapsarian world. In his theory, degrees of goodness or evil are not portioned out on a gendered basis, nor are they strictly assigned to degrees of matter versus spirit. Aquinas (1224-1274), writing to bring Aristotelian ideas into a systematic theology, perceived that even women's souls have a lower capacity for God than male souls due to the differing influences of the female and male bodies. For Aquinas, women are less capable of reason, and in a perfect heaven, all spiritual bodies will be male.[18] The church's categorization of any popular movement as a heresy was

linked in many cases to the group's acceptance of women's speech because of the dangers of female "twisting" of received truth. As these gendered ideas of difference on a continuum of divine participation spread through the universities, thirteenth century women found it harder to maintain an active presence and active voice within the church. Scholasticism tried its hardest to shut women up, in both senses of the word.

The warring strands of Christian thought also created difficulty for the men who followed a mystic path, and even within the same time period Christian thought on the issue of spirit and matter was conflicted. Aelred of Rivaulx (1109-1167), Bernard's younger contemporary and friend, throughout his life as prior encouraged his monks to experience bodily knowing, holding hands and forming friendships with each other for comfort and relief. Yet we find him rehearsing his own death, huddled in a hollowed-out crypt in the stone floor of his cell at the end of his life, weeping in frustration at not being able to transcend the sinfulness of his own body. Bernard, although imposing such reformative discipline on the Cistercians at Clairvaux that it negatively influenced his health, was nevertheless more optimistic about the need for a human body. While Bernard stressed the importance of discipline and a separation from the world, his image of God as creating the universe through a burgeoning, excessive spilling-over of love and desire for relation with man led him toward a greater appreciation for the world and for people as created beings. The body is a necessary component in the soul's *capax Dei,* capacity for God. The body is the instrument by which the soul acts out its essential nature as *imago Dei* through free will. For Bernard and his followers, reuniting through love with the divine essence led to recognizing one's own essential personal creativity, which could only be expressed using the tools and bodies of this world. Unfortunately for

the female writers I study, this glorification of the body as a creative vehicle and container for spirit rather than a distraction to spirit did not last, on an institutional level, much longer than Bernard's canonization. With the rise of systematic theology, women's inherently greater distance from God was defined by their imperfect female bodies.

As the society of late medieval northern Europe expanded, the band of control around the women who wished to speculate and write about theological matters tightened. While even such powerful women as St. Elizabeth of Schoenau and Hildegard of Bingen corresponded about their fears of writing for a male audience in the early 1100s,[19] Bernard's encouragement of women's spirituality and his imprimatur on Hildegard's visions gave women courage to express their insights and ideas. The early 1200s were a period of rich female participation in the church as regulars and as extra-regular *mulieres sanctae,* but the rediscovery of Aristotle did them no favors. While Europe's synthesis of Artistotle with existing natural philosophy and theology in the 1150s may have spawned attempts to redefine and systematize doctrine, to regenerate scientific inquiry, and to lead medieval society gently toward the humanism of the Renaissance, it did not have the same progressive effect on female scholars and writers within the religious tradition.

The impact of Aristotelian theology on women writers can be traced by comparing the writings of Hadewijch of Brabant (1200-1250) with Mechthild of Magdeburg (1212-1282/1294), and finally Julian of Norwich (1343-1413). With few female literary ancestors and the need to break ground in vernacular writing, these women had to sort out the theological questions of the day on their own terms. This was crucial in the development of their own sense of themselves as writers, a need that grows

and becomes more intense as the period progresses. As people who struggle to live out what it means to be created in the image of God, they explore the nature of the creative process by theorizing about the motivations of God's creation, and they use those notions to justify their own authority and confidence as women and writers. Since they do not receive credibility from the institutions by which they must define themselves to remain orthodox, they must establish it on their own. Their answers to the theological questions introduced here ultimately determine the writing choices they make, along with their sense of personal authority.

Hadewijch: A Question of Degree

In her seventeenth letter, Hadewijch writes,

> Earth cannot understand heavenly wisdom. Words enough and Dutch enough can be found for all things on earth, but I do not know any Dutch or any words that answer my purpose. Although I can express everything insofar as this is possible for a human being, no Dutch can be found for all I have said to you, since none exists, so far as I know.[20]

Although she left the most artistically shaped and varied body of literary work among the vernacular women writers of the period, we know very little about the life of Hadewijch. Most of what we do know can be inferred from hints in the writing itself rather than through references of others about her. A v*ita* has never been discovered, but that is perhaps not surprising considering that she generally moved on the ragged edge of orthodoxy. Anyone reading her works cannot help but notice her strong personality and utmost confidence in herself as a religious *examplar*, knight-errant of love, and poet. She writes with the authority of personal experience of union with God and sees almost no need to hide behind conventional rhetoric or humility *topoi* of the time to express herself.

In Hadewijch's dialogue with the audience of her letters, recorded visions, and

poetry, she seems to write mostly to a female audience of those in her circle of beguines. She makes few references to specific men in her writing, and in contrast to many of the other mystics, she never apologizes for being a woman working in a male field. She occasionally regrets not being able to explain some aspects of mystical union to her audience, but the excuse she usually gives is that it would take too long and require an enormous book to describe it,[21] or, as we see in the quotation starting this section, there is simply not Dutch enough for what she would have to say. Notice, however, that she claims the authority to describe anything on earth without difficulty. In most cases, the only problem she acknowledges is in being human, not female.

Although we know from other clues in her writing that she was trained in rhetoric, she rarely uses the humility formulas[22] common among devotional writers; in the *Brieven*, she employs the humility topos twice: once in Letter 12, addressed to Gilbertus, superior of a men's monastery, and again in Letter 22. We do not know the audience of Letter 22, which is by far the longest letter of the set, but it is based on the Latin hymn *Alpha et Omega, magne Deus* and takes the form of a heavily referenced sermon or treatise, with glosses of scripture verses and allusions to Augustine and Richard of St. Victor. There is no direct address to the audience or personal reference from speaker to hearer. Like Letter 12, which refers to Jacob's ladder, it specifically treats the stages of mystical union. Because of the heavily referenced nature of both Letters 12 and 22, I surmise that they were written for a male, or at least mixed, audience, and for that reason, she uses the style such an audience would expect. Still, despite her awareness that she's not just writing for women mystics in these *brieven*, she does not mention or apologize for her female status; instead, she claims humility as a human being for writing about

such an unfathomable topic.[23] Letters 12 and 22 are also *brieven* in which she is not just

writing advice, but trespassing into the male territory of theology; this is perhaps the

reason why she overtly uses the modesty conventions as well as a more theological style

in these places.

However, even in these two instances when Hadewijch uses the conventional

topos, she frames it with audacious statements as if she cannot resist claiming authority

even when hemmed in by religious and literary tradition. In Letter 12, directed to

Gilbertus, she writes:

> May God be God for you, and may you be love for him! May he grant you to
> experience Love's work in all things that belong to Love. Therefore I begin with
> the veritable humility where his loveress began, and with which she drew him into
> herself. So must anyone always do if he wishes to draw God into himself and to
> possess him fruitively in love. He must remain unassuming in all things and
> unconquered by any kind of service, always equally valiant in the storm, equally
> fierce in the assault, and equally intrepid in the encounter. Although you ask me
> to write to you about this, you yourself know well what one must do for the sake
> of perfection in God's sight.[24]

From the first line Hadewijch claims knowledge and experience and wishes the same for

Gilbertus. She continues with a reference to Bernard's idea that with true or veritable

humility, *gherechte oetmoedicheit,* the Virgin Mary was able to draw God to herself

through the longing of matter for spirit. However, rather than adopting the traditional

female passivity Bernard associated with Mary, Hadewijch translates *gherechte*

oetmoedicheit into a series of active adjectives: *onuerwonnen* (unconquered), *sterc*

(strong), *vlietich* (fierce), *nydich* (intrepid). Humility for her is not a passive surrender of

the soul into divine essence, but something to be proved and experienced through a life of

devotion and fidelity without reward. As she explains later in the letter, after

courageously living a life totally focused on Love, the soul can demand union with God.

This is not so much an apology as a call to arms to seize *volmaectheit* (perfection) in union with God.

In Letter 22, she again begins with a statement of supreme confidence in her subject matter and follows her nod to modesty with another claim to authority:

> He who wishes to understand and know what God is in his name and in his Essence must belong completely to God—yes, so completely that God is all to him and he is free from himself. For charity does not seek her own, and Love applies herself only to herself. Therefore let a man lose himself if he wishes to find God and to know what God is in himself. "He who knows little can say little," so says wise Augustine. This is my case, God knows. I believe and hope greatly in God, but my knowledge of him is small; I can guess only a little of the riddle of God; for men cannot interpret him with human notions. But one who was touched in his soul by God could interpret something of him for those who understood this with their soul.[25]

Here Hadewijch starts by making a forceful statement about what is necessary in order to understand God, quoting Plato and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. To belie her next statement that "He who knows little can say little," she follows quickly with "*Mer*" ("But"), and 390 packed lines describing the paradoxical nature of God and what the soul sees in union with him. While she prefaces her description by saying that "*mijn weten van god es cleine, een cleyne gheraetsel maghic van hem gheraden,*" ("my knowledge of God is small, and I can only guess a little of the riddle of God"), she knows what she knows because she believes she has received the touch of God on her soul. She calls her audience to recognize her authority to speak through their own claims to having been touched by God. The implication, of course, is that if her audience does not understand her, it is their experience that may be lacking, not hers. In her argument to be listened to as one who knows what she knows, she is explicit and unequivocal in her portrayal of the processes by which humans and God come together and in her confidence to speak on such a topic.

Gender is generally seen as a social construct, and one way to explain an experience beyond the social norm is to transcend socially prescribed roles. Just as more widely known male mystics such as St. John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard Rolle, or even John Donne flip the gendered script and try on a female persona when describing union with God, Hadewijch subverts her socially engendered being when in contact with the divine. Because of Hadewijch's formulation of divine love as *Minne*, courtly love, she most frequently adopts a male persona herself in relation to the Great Lady. This is most apparent in her *Strofische Gedichten, (*Poems in Stanzas*)*, in which she plays the role of a knight-errant in service to Lady Love. However, in the *Mengeldichten*, (Poems in Couplets), in most cases she does not write from an overtly gendered point of view at all, remaining an abstract persona wounded or complaining of separation from the Beloved. For this reason, the male mystics, notably Jan van Ruusbroec (1290-1381), found it easy to adapt her writing and use her ideas within their own circles. Because of her ability to articulate her interpretation of theological concepts in recognizably good poetry and recount her visions in a plot-driven rather than Scholastic fashion, she is a hard woman to silence, ignore, or explain away. For the male confessors working with the beguines, she would have been hard to explain or justify to their superiors, and no doubt she was not the submissive example of a holy person, especially a holy female, that they wanted to promulgate by means of a *vita*. How did she get this way?

Here is what we do know with some degree of surety. She lived in the first half of the thirteenth century in the area of Flanders and Brabant and shows evidence of having been educated in a manner that reflects high social status. She writes in

Brabantine Dutch peppered with Latin and French and makes educated comments reflecting knowledge of the liberal arts of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* throughout her letters, visions, and poetry. Her familiarity with the themes, symbols, and postures, and structure of troubadour lyrics is obvious. She uses the courtly love traditions of seeing love as a game and a battle, emphasizing the essential nature of true love as unfulfilled due to the higher status of the Lady and the need to stoke continuous desire—desire being the human side of the sacred-profane balancing act of love. She uses other troubadour poetic conventions and rhyming patterns with facility.

From internal evidence of her letters and recorded visions, we know that she had spiritual inclinations to devote herself to God as early as ten years old (*Brief 10*), and that as a younger woman she lived in a regulated house of beguines where she experienced her first visions of Christ in the Eucharist, a manner typical of beguine spirituality (V*isioen 1*). As a young person she had one notably transformative vision of bodily union with Christ (*Visioen 7, Brief 11*), but quickly outgrew the normative type of emotional, sensational mystical experience. As a residual effect of that experience and her other visions, she transformed her life into a cosmic battle with and for Love. She became the house leader of a group of younger beguines she considered to have mystical proclivities, and the bulk of her work was to train them. She seems to have read everything she could find in the way of theology and was most influenced by the work of the Chartres school and the Victorines, so she had good access to Latin theological works even though she did not have the library resources of a traditional religious order available to her.

As an influence on her own work, she honors Augustine as a precursor on the mystical path and claims allegiance to him, albeit suffering the typical anxiety of someone revering yet supplanting a former hero. He is the old eagle; she is the new eagle whose feathers renew his when both are swallowed by the phoenix of unity (V*isioen 11*). Although she wants to ground her own work in a sure theological base, she at the same time needs to stay true to her own vision, which points her in a different direction. In fact, her theology veers so far from his at times that it seems likely that the love she felt for Augustine would have been motivated more through modeling his self-conscious analysis and openness about describing the inner workings of his soul in the *Confessions* than through reading his theological works, although she shows familiarity with and quotes from his complete writings.

Augustine is not the only source from which she is anxious to separate herself. Whether through anxiety of influence, a psychological need to feel that all her knowledge was of divine origin, or a sense that she must maintain her counter-culture status among her local community of mystics, she distances herself from other thinkers who would lend her ecclesiastical authority. This may explain why she disclaims much knowledge of Bernard even though his thinking pervades her work. In her "*Lijst der Volmaakten*" (List of the Perfect), she includes Bernard along with historical figures and local Perfects, but comments, "About him I know little."[26] References to Bernard, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and William of St. Thierry are all present in the language she chooses to describe relations with God, yet she rarely mentions these writers by name.

Through her *Lijst* we know that she was aware of the main players in mystical thought of the day, including some of those seen as unorthodox by the church. She avows

supernatural as well as physical correspondence with other mystics working at the same time and was part of a strong movement of lay piety and mysticism sweeping the Low Countries and Saxony. Ulrike Wiethaus speculates that in excluding from the list or minimizing the influence of those contemporary mystics who impacted her thinking the most, Hadewijch consciously tries to establish herself as hearkening back to the beginnings of Christian thought:

> Hadewijch's lineage then, is projected backwards to the almost mythical foundations of the early formation period of Christianity, and with a large temporal leap, fastened in the nooks and crannies of a contemporary "culture from below" of locally renowned saintly people that existed at the margins of the high ecclesiastical culture to which Hildegard and Bernard belonged.[27]

Obviously, to stay recognized as orthodox enough to keep her post as group leader in the beguinage (and her life) she needed to justify the doctrinal correctness and spiritual heritage of her writings. To remain a recognized, contemporary spiritual leader in her own fringe circles, she also had to claim some amount of distance from the traditional doctrinal paradigms of the church.

We can also see from the *Lijst* that Hadewijch, despite her supreme confidence in the truth of which she speaks, is concerned about establishing her own authority for herself, and for both a canonical and counter-culture audience.[28] We have already seen through her *Brieven* that she claims the authority of intellectually processed mystical experience, which she calls "*verlichte redene*" or "enlightened reason." In her *Visioenen*, she claims authority and recognition by her audience of her ability to speak with some measure of credibility by repeating the words of guides, angels, and even God himself— inflated words praising her for her fidelity and trustworthiness. One can imagine Hadewijch narrating her visions, repeating the angel's words in *Visioen 1* that grant her

the right to speak: "Oh, powerful and strong one, you have conquered the powerful and strong God, from the origin of his Being, which was without beginning; and with him you shall wield power over eternity in eternity. Read, and understand!"[29] The theological cosmology she inherits from Eruigena allows her to make such seemingly outrageous claims. If the soul is part of the nature of God, it has been so from eternity and will continue throughout eternity. In order for the closed, self-contained system to function in a way that allows God movement while remaining intact, there must be an internal movement back towards God from creation. Desire counters and draws the outpouring love of God if it is strong enough, and ultimately, all of creation is at least part of the Godhead.

To the three claims to authority already covered—similarity to both ancient antecedents and contemporary colleagues, praise from God and other "higher beings," and the use of her own enlightened reason—I would add Hadewijch's insistence on the need for *fierheit*, good or noble pride, as well as humility in the life of a mystic. In her syncretic world view, each dialectic quality must have its simultaneous opposite, and humility must be counterbalanced by pride, or rather a fierce self-respect for the *imago Dei* in the soul and consciousness of the integrity of one's actions. Throughout her writing she lays claim to loving God more than anyone else ever did, and this occasions the praise and recognition of her worthiness to experience union by the inhabitants of the sacred world she enters through vision, as seen above. The concept, though rare in religious writing, is sometimes found in troubadour lyrics such as Bernard de Ventadorn's "*Non es meravelha s'eu chan.*"[30] *Fierheit* shows itself not as egotism, but absolute security in the knowledge that what God has shown one is legitimate and true.

To claim a false humility about one's unworthiness would be to deny the transformative experience of God.

In *Brief 15*, Hadewijch's extended allegory of the spiritual path as a pilgrimage is enlivened by her original sixth and seventh points that

> When you climb a mountain, you must bend far forward; that is, you must give thanks in all the pains that come to you on account of Love… When you descend the mountain, you must walk erect, that is, although you must at times come down to the level of supplying your needs and feeling the exigencies of your body, you must nevertheless keep your desires lifted up to God.[31]

The allegory is typical of both her use of and inversion of Plato's doctrine of emanations, as in the case of the upside down tree she must climb in *Visioen 1*.[32] While she recognizes the essential links between the soul and Love, she cannot picture a simple ascent into union.

Using the troubadour formula of the abject lover in service of *Minne*, she explains the paradoxical nature of lowering oneself to get higher; focusing on the relative greatness of *Minne* in comparison to one's self causes the lover to suffer in a sense of unworthiness. Coming down from the heights of experience, though, the body must stand tall as the focus rests on things above; one can almost feel the straightening of the spine as the body descends but the soul remains with God. Humility at this stage would cause the lover to pitch headlong down the hill into a concentration on the material world and distracting self-consciousness. Hadewijch's skill as an instructor in the mystic path comes through as she uses such a familiar bodily image to describe what *fierheit* looks and feels like in practice, to typify the rhythmic patterns and postures of the soul's ascent and descent.

A reader of her work cannot help but notice the fierceness with which she devotes

herself to training her charges, a passion rivaled only by her pursuit of Love. Indeed, it is

hard to tell which impulse is the higher motivation for her writing, since her beguines

were her main audience and they needed to understand what she had experienced herself

as a knight of love. The ferocity of her concern for her students makes her eventual

dismissal from the beguinage seems cruel, but somewhat predictable. Despite her ability

to inspire and entertain as she wrote, she could not have been easy to live with because of

her single-mindedness and focus on pushing always higher, always deeper. There is no

record of her having been arrested, executed, or taken charge of by another religious

group, and we do not know how or when she died. She simply disappears once her own

writing stops. Her writings were privately circulated and greatly influenced the thought

and writing of van Ruusbroec when he was an assistant parish priest in the area. Her

words can be found in his Spiritual Espousals and other writings, and are continued in a

line of influence that included Johann Tauler and ultimately, Gerard Groote and the

Devotio Moderna movement of the late 1300s.

As a woman writer interested in exploring the relations between human and

divine nature, she lived and worked at an opportune time, riding the crest of the beguine

movement before the beguines became too much of a problem for the church to handle.

She would have most likely been an adolescent in 1216 when Jacques de Vitry wrote his

life of Marie d'Oignies and pressured Honorius III to permit beguines to organize and

live together in sanctioned groups under the protection and guidance of more established

religious orders. Although she knew that she wandered in dangerous territory and was

aware of the execution of her "perfect" colleague Aleydis in 1236 on charges of heresy,

she would have felt somewhat protected by the sense that she had theological precursors

who were seen as legitimate by the church. Bernard had been canonized in 1174, roughly 25 years before she was born, and his Sermons on the Canticles, from which she borrows so heavily, were the most widely read and commented on piece of spiritual work circulating among the ordered and lay religious people of the time. His brand of relational love mysticism was at its height in the time she wrote, although it was soon to be supplanted in favor of the Scholastic elevation of reason over revelation. Although Aristotle had been rediscovered, his thinking had not yet been perfectly integrated into the systematic theology that broke onto the scene of northern Europe with the work of Aquinas around the time of her death (ca. 1250).

<div style="text-align:center">Mechthild: The Struggle for Orthodoxy</div>

By her own account, Mechthild of Magdeburg began writing the first sections of her seven-book compendium, *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit* (The Flowing Light of the Godhead), around the time that we last hear from Hadewijch, in the decade between 1240 and 1250. Like Hadewijch and most of the other beguines prior to the fourteenth century, she came from a noble family and was educated in the courtly love traditions of the *Minnesänger*. According to Frances Beer, she first applied for admission to a convent at age twenty-three but was rejected because, in a fever of apostolic poverty, she refused to bring her parents to pay the dowry and maintenance fees. At some point soon after her refusal to pay for convent entrance, she entered a beguinage on her own.[33]

Similar to many of the beguines who left behind a written account of their lives, she claimed to have first received a mystical experience, or the "special greeting of the Holy Spirit," at the age of twelve. Unlike most, she recounts that she experienced this favor on a daily basis well into her forties when she was commanded to write down her

revelations by her Dominican confessor, Heinrich. If she is indeed reporting accurately, the amount of spiritual "greeting" that these experiences must have entailed is extraordinary. To describe this union with God, she uses the physicality typical of affective piety, sometimes graphic and sensual in the extreme, to the dismay of her contemporary translators. However, aside from the oft-quoted account of being mounted by God and becoming a screaming, fully awakened bride (I:44),[34] following good troubadour tradition she coyly spends relatively little time describing the consummation of love (here, union with God) in her writing. Mechthild prefers offhand allusions to what she knows or even teasing references to what cannot be described, as no one knows what happens behind closed doors. For most of the work, she recounts dreams, visions, musings, confessions, prayers, poems, and prophecies, along with extended allegories and dialogues between the soul and *Minne*, the soul and the senses, the soul and Christ. The work is part spiritual journal, treatise, narrative, drama, and lyric rather than an organic whole. While we have some evidence that Mechthild was involved in editing and ordering the first five books, she did not attempt to separate them generically into letters, poems, and visions as did Hadewijch.

Mechthild's original audience must have been the beguines with whom she lived from the age of twenty-three until she took up residence in the convent of Helfta in her seventies, although her acknowledged first audience was her Dominican confessor, Heinrich of Halle. While preparing the entire book for publication, she wrote a short new introduction to Book I in which she records God's imprimatur on the text. God names it *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit* himself and offers it his sanction and protection. Her new goal for the collected works was to write to "*allen geistlichen lúten,*" all holy

people, especially the leaders of Christendom, both the bad and the good. The book in its complete form can therefore be seen as a final salvo in her battle to reform the church into a place that accepts lay piety as well as clerical scholarship, in which first century apostolic poverty is valued over the accumulation of riches and power.

In contrast to Hadewijch's work, Mechthild's was quickly translated from Middle Low German into Latin after her death and was disseminated by the Dominicans at Halle. This was no doubt due to her close relationship with her confessor and editor, who died before her move to the Cistercian convent at Helfta. The fact that Mechthild wrote the seventh and last book at Helfta shortly before she died also gave her an audience and a point of influence at the center of learning for European women at the time. Another translation into Middle High German was made of her complete vernacular version, and this spread throughout German-speaking Europe in the tangled grapevine of those pursuing or sympathetic to the mystic path: secular priests, Dominicans, Franciscans, beguines and beghards, even Benedictines.[35] Despite her somewhat ambiguous status as a beguine, Mechthild's social background and close ties to respected Dominicans and the Helfta nuns should have provided the reassurance she needed to write with confidence. We also know that she had some status within the ecclesiastical structure, as a brother was accepted into the Dominicans based on her good reputation.[36] However, her work is undercut with anxiety in a way that Hadewijch's is not, largely due to her situation in Magdeburg and the tensions experienced by the beguine community there.

Magdeburg at the time was one of the largest cities in Europe, a member of the Hanseatic League with a strong mercantile network stretching from the Low Countries to Russia to the Mediterranean. As a member of the upper class enriched by this trade,

Mechthild was following in the footsteps of many in her circle in espousing voluntary poverty and giving up a privileged existence. In 1935, Herbert Grundmann in his *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* made the case that the beguines and beghards of thirteenth-century northern Europe were no lower in society than the majority of Franciscans and others who enlisted in the cause of apostolic poverty in southern Europe. Grundmann's claim was in opposition to the notion that the ranks of extra-regular religious were filled with those whose birth disqualified them for monastic orders,[37] but it has been reinforced by Robert Lerner's 1972 study The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages.[38] We can see strong evidence in *Das Fliessende Licht* of Mechthild's preoccupation with rank. Her inherited sense of status and hierarchical priority often bleeds through into her spiritual writing, as an inborn surety of knowing what is noble or proper in society is transmogrified into an assumption of higher and lower status in the spiritual world. In this way her writing is more reminiscent of her German predecessor Hildegard's than of Hadewijch's.[39]

Yet just as obvious as her attention to entitlement and rank is her extreme anxiety about her role as a woman writing about spiritual things, something that did not overtly concern Hadewijch. A key difference between Mechthild and Hadewijch, despite their shared theological cosmology, is immediately apparent when one looks at the way they characterize themselves in their texts. Hadewijch rarely concerns herself with gender, taking on variously gendered roles in her visions and her letters, preferring to concentrate on herself as a human. Mechthild does not just apologize for being female, she repeatedly exploits her engendered *bosheit* (lowness) for rhetorical purposes in a way that Hadewijch does not. Using the same source, Bernard's Canticles, on the power of female

materiality, the two female mystics interpret the meaning of that for themselves quite differently. For Hadewijch, that female power is inextricably tied to her *capax dei,* her capacity for God, something that potentially makes the female nature the most powerful thing in the universe. For Mechthild, female materiality, while setting the preconditions for union through the workings of desire, remains a problem and is directly tied to sin.

In her need to prove herself to God and expiate her carnality, she develops ambitious programs to prove her worth. She will willingly go to hell if God would be praised (I:5); in a subversion of the Dionysian scale of perfection, as her soul sinks *lower* than her body she will take up residence under Lucifer's tail (V:4). While Hadewijch sees herself as a male figure, a troubadour, a knight errant in service of *Minne*, in Mechthild's visions she sees herself as a lame dog, a little orphan girl, "*unselig phfûl*," a stinking cesspool. Like Hadewijch, she uses the language of courtly romance to describe the relations of God and human as mediated by *Minne*, but in her version she is not the knight-errant but "*die kleine dirne*," little serving maid, awed by the company of "*der hohe fürste*," the mighty sovereign.

Mechthild claims to see nothing but utter worthlessness when she views her true self after the litany of self-examination with which she precedes prayer (VI:1),[40] yet paradoxically she also feels capable of pursuing superhuman tasks that God has not yet required of any other mortal. For example, in Book III: 10, she so identifies with Christ that she takes the "loving soul" (presumably herself) through the entire Apostles Creed, being crucified, dead, and buried, descending into hell and rising again to console the disciples and Mary on Easter morning. What, one may ask, is left for Christ to do? In what Amy Hollywood calls "the narcissism of humility,"[41] as Mechthild regularly

volunteers for extreme tasks in the spirit world, she is simultaneously both debasing and elevating herself.

Mechthild's extremes of humility and self-aggrandizement have no doubt fed into the blanket statements of the post-Freudian feminist critics characterizing all beguine spirituality as puerile, self-denegrating and masochistic, yet her rhetorical equation of female gender with weakness or excessive sinfulness is not typical of earlier medieval female mystics. Mystics prior to the mid 1200s were more likely to follow Hadewijch's example and use a human/divine dichotomy rather than a male/female one, as Caroline Walker Bynum discusses in Holy Feast, Holy Fast.[42] Mechthild's concentration on her own danger in Magdeburg is tied to her sense of being as a female trespassing on male turf and is reflected in her conscious use of language in other ways besides the insults she heaps upon herself. It also reflects a heightened consciousness of sin and an awareness of her need for self-examination in a culture adopting the idea of purgatory.

As Le Goff recognized, even the most extreme penance was only good enough to keep one from going to hell; it could not mitigate the need for purgation after death. Mechthild is more aware of purgatory as a physical reality that might impact herself than Hadewijch appears to be, and this awareness is perhaps one reason why they differ so much in tone despite sharing a similar view of the universe and its creation through love. Hadewijch barely mentions purgatory and refers to praying for the souls of others to be a form of second-guessing God, whereas Mechthild takes on the challenge of releasing as many souls as possible through her expiatory prayer and intercession. However, even though she adopts the role of spiritual hero and recounts the experiences of several souls she visits in the realm of purgation, her concentration on and vivid depictions of

purgatory make Mechthild more aware of her own need for purgation than Hadewijch seems to be.

A comparison of their explanations of why at times they cannot write is a case in point. When faced with narrating the incommunicable experiences of their mystical union, Hadewijch attributes her own inability to communicate what she has seen to the inadequacies of the Dutch language, whereas Mechthild is more likely to retreat into the rhetorical posture of sinfulness. In Book I: 2, for example, she cannot describe the union of the soul with God because "*es ist ze notlich, ich engetar, wan ich bin ein vil súndig moensche*" (ll.18-19). ("It is too difficult because I am a vile, sinful human.") Both would agree that it is *notlich*, difficult, to describe something outside the semiotic realm, but for Mechthild it is difficult precisely because she is sinful. While sin for Hadewijch is anything that leads to distraction from God and is therefore not worth concentrating on, Mechthild is preoccupied by the role of Lucifer and sin as antagonistic to the soul's desire for union, and by her own role in combating them.[43] The need for physical and emotional expiation consumes her, a concern that deepens as she ages and approaches death.[44]

Perhaps because of her greater concentration on rank and stages of spiritual purity, in Mechthild's writing we also see a more structured architecture of the spiritual world; there are more levels to go through, more stages to reach union, more shucking off of the material, and, ironically, more crowns on the heads of the blessed in heaven to signify greater holiness. Despite the highly descriptive pictoral and dramatic nature of Hadewijch's visions, Mechthild's seem more grounded in space and time because her descriptions correlate with the concerns of 13th century Germany. The placement of souls

after death correlates with the value of their spirituality on earth in a transactional, almost mercantile way. "Why are you here on this level and not higher?" is one of the first questions she asks the departed she sees in vision, or "Why were you allowed to come to this rank?" "Why do you have this number of crowns?" These matters would also concern her audience, young beguines looking for a way to "place" themselves in a world where they were not allotted a firm situation, and in the face of ecclesiastical examiners looking for heresy.

Mechthild's concern with exact numbers of crowns, levels, penances, necessary actions or thoughts may reflect her need to define and pinpoint the spiritual path in an uncertain world. Her descriptions of what she sees in vision often become good "teaching moments" for her charges. Mary Carruthers suggests in her chapter "Remember Heaven" that the steps, stairs, and levels of medieval vision may be a mnemonic device helping the mystic remember what had happened in the liminal state, as well as a memory aid for the mystic's students, leading them from fear to joy.[45] Some of Mechthild's language choices are certainly the result of years of maintaining a defensive posture in regard to her own position and perhaps in regard to the place of her beguinage in society; some reflect her need to "fix" a spiritual path. Some might even see her obsession with rank as reflecting an anxiety about place due to her family's knightly rather than lordly status, or her mercantile associations from being located in the trade city of Magdeburg. However, the anxiety about defining place may just be an attempt to impose some sort of structure on her chaotic world and her besieged beguinage.

No matter what the motivation, Mechthild's concentration on physical details of rank and value distinguishes her work from Hadewijch's and is more similar to the

ranking systems of Dante thirty years hence. It may be noted that Dante himself was the victim of civil and ecclesiastical persecution, and perhaps his own preoccupation with place partly came from the forced estrangement of exile. All told, while Mechthild and Hadewijch on the surface speak the same language of beguine spirituality and affective piety, the differences between them are too great to explain away as the result of two different geographical locations or two different personalities. Much had happened in the more than forty year span between the end of Hadewijch's career and the end of Mechthild's, not the least of which was the move against heresy and toward systematic theology and university-based learning following the work of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. While Mechthild inherits the same theological assumptions as Hadewijch, her translation of them into her own circumstances reflects the increasing tension of the late thirteenth century and her sense of precariousness in the ecclesiastical system.

In considering the social and philosophical context of Mechthild's writing, we can see the instability of her situation. During the second half of Mechthild's long life, roughly the whole of her writing career, the Beguine movement experienced ever-increasing pressure from both the institutional church and from society in the German speaking lands, which did not embrace the beguines with the same tolerance as the Low Countries had. The influence of Bernard had dissipated in the years following his canonization, and the papal protection beguines had tentatively enjoyed in the early 1200s was waning. In Saxony, specifically at Magdeburg, synods were called to warn beguines against disobedience against parish priests. At Trier (1277) and Eichstatt (1284), the strong message to beguines, tertiaries, and other non-ordained religious

people was to beware of following false doctrine, a clear sign that popular movements like the Free Spirit were seen as threatening and dangerous. [46]

Behind the layers of rules and restrictions imposed on beguines was a church struggling to handle an impossible situation. The 1215 Fourth Lateran Council had prohibited the formation of any new religious orders, which left many unaffiliated groups of women at a loss. As Grundmann shows, the Premonstratensians had withdrawn their support for any women's houses before the turn of the century, and by 1220 the Cistercians refused to accept any more women's houses into the order.[47] That meant that a group of women could follow the Cistercian rule, but the order itself would in no way support or provide priestly functions for them. This was the situation at the premiere women's convent at Helfta, where the nuns were recognized as Cistercians yet the house was disconnected from the order, their oversight being taken care of by the Dominicans.

The Dominicans had been responsible for inspiring many of the upper class women who joined secondary or tertiary orders to leave their wealth and take up lives of apostolic poverty. However, the order fought continually to relinquish responsibility for maintaining women's houses, claiming with good reason that oversight of the women took them away from their vocation as preachers. Nonetheless, as Grundmann shows, well-connected women in various houses were able to gain special favors from the church to force the Dominicans to accept them, a situation that did not always guarantee a good relationship between pastor and flock. In most cases a group of women would voluntarily form a beguinage and then petition for admission to the order. As the number of Dominican women's houses shows, the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 meant little in the way of practically slowing down the popularity of women's

organizations. In 1277 there were 40 accepted Dominican women's houses in Germany, 70 in 1297, and 141 in 1303, a growth rate of more than 300% in 26 years. For every house that was able to pull favor and gain admission, there were several less fortunately connected beguinages remaining outside and unaffiliated, but still needing pastoral care.

To illustrate what a burden the *cura monialium*, or pastoral care of religious women, had become, in the province of Teutonia alone there were 65 official Dominican women's houses compared to 46-48 men's houses, and many of the women's houses were voluntarily supporting five times the number of women their funding would bear.[48] There is no substantiated record of the number of unrecognized beguinages, but contemporaries listed the number of "good" German beguines (those who lived enclosed in beguinages rather than wandering as unregulated mendicants) at 200,000 in 1317.[49] The sheer number of women who needed confession, guidance, counsel, and the celebration of mass was out of control. To make matters worse, the fervent inhabitants of the women's houses in the age of incarnational theology demanded ever more frequent confession and communion from the overburdened priests supervising them.

The various decrees of synods and councils (Magdeburg and Mainz in 1261, Trier in 1277, Eichstatt in 1284, and Clementine's *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* of 1311) ordering beguines to obey their parish priests must be seen in the context of the church's attempt to appease the established men's orders. Because they could not handle the number of regular and extra-regular religious women within the monastic structure, the church ruled several times that "beguines, like other parishoners, must obey their priests."[50] However, parish priests were also overburdened and reluctant to take on a supervisory role for extra-regular women such as beguines, while the women much

preferred better-trained and regulated Dominican supervisors. In Mechthild's case, she

considered the canon at Magdeburg to be corrupt and spiritually bereft, while she had a

close relationship with her Dominican confessor Heinrich. Of course, the well-supported

and well-connected houses were less likely to be caught up in these disputes; of more

concern were the women's groups without proper sponsorship or support. The result of a

long-running battle over supervision often resulted in little or lax supervision, as women

necessarily took on the roles of confessor, preacher, and spiritual director themselves.

Because the church could not possibly expend the resources or manpower to regulate

their orthodoxy sufficiently, this laid the women open to charges of heresy and made

their use of vernacular spiritual texts all the more suspicious.

The conditions for heresy were ripe, as women without theological training or the

ability to read and converse in the language of the church took on roles of leadership—to

the point of translating and commenting on scripture. As Ernest McDonnell shows, the

line between preaching and "oral instruction" was tenuous.[51] The teachings of a Beatriz

of Nazareth or Hadewijch that may have flown under the radar with a smaller audience in

less suspicious times and less fragmented circumstances were open to examination and

question during Mechthild's tenure as director of a beguinage. Despite prohibitions

against their leadership, the situation demanded that women take on supervisory roles in

some form themselves, often with the tacit support of overburdened clergy. Nonetheless,

from the 1240s on, especially in Germany, church administrators undertook a campaign

to root out heterodoxy, inspiring the work of Albertus Magnus and his student Aquinas,

whose *Summa contra gentiles* sought to refute the claims of popular heresy.

In a situation that was impossible to regulate, the greatest need of the church in the German-speaking lands was to clarify the limits of orthodoxy and meet the burgeoning needs of women. Clement's 1311 decree *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* relates of the beguines that "Some, as if induced by insanity, discuss and preach on the Trinity and divine essence and introduce concerning articles of faith and the sacraments opinions which contradict Catholicism."[52] Despite escalating penalties and burnings, this struggle of the church to control female speech would ultimately fail as long as mendicant tertiary orders for women were allowed to exist. The church's stand against teaching by women using vernacular literature grew so rigid that shortly after Mechthild's death several beguinages were closed; propertyless women who had been recluses for fifty years or more were put out into the world and forced to remove their habits.[53] As a beguine and a spiritual counselor to others, Mechthild would have been acutely aware of the need to examine herself daily and stay within the bounds of orthodoxy, not just on her own account, but for the sake of the other women who lived in her house. It is no wonder that her claim to incredible and unmatched spiritual virtuosity could not allay the underlying anxiety about her own authority and stature that is reflected in every aspect of her writing.

Julian: Circumscribing the Means of Grace

In comparing Julian of Norwich (1343-1416) to other European female mystics of the Middle Ages, Monica Furlong states: "Of all these women, Julian is the most theologically minded, the most daring, perhaps the least concerned with the problem of being a woman."[54] Whether or not one can agree with her partly depends on which version of Julian's <u>Book of Showings</u> is being analyzed. Certainly she is daring; she is an

enclosed anchoress ignoring the rules of the <u>Ancrene Wisse</u> (the handbook for anchoritic

behavior) on women's speech and teaching. She consciously minimizes the affective

piety recommended by male spiritual directors for women as an immature stage on the

spiritual ascent. In effect, she is looking beyond the inherited esoteric tradition of

Brautmystik to write in a general tone of security in regard to the love, friendliness, and

"homelynesse," between God and all "evyn cristens." Her Short Text of the <u>Showings</u>

describes a set of revelations experienced during a severe illness at age thirty which she

continued to meditate upon for the rest of her writing career, if not her life. The

culmination of several years of thought was another edition of the <u>Showings</u>, the Long

Text. According to most scholars, at some point after her initial experience of revelation,

Julian became an anchoress.

As an enclosed female, she would have been expected to read several books

intended to provide spiritual direction *in absentia* so as to minimize contact with the

outside world: most importantly, the <u>Ancrene Wisse</u>, but also other Middle English

handbooks written by men for enclosed women such as <u>Hali Meidenhad</u>, <u>Sawles Ward</u>,

<u>The Abbaye of Saynte Spirite</u>, and lives of martyred female saints like <u>Juliana</u>, <u>Margaret</u>,

and <u>Katherine</u>. All of these works stress the inherent, disruptive tendency of women to

talk and cause dissension; speech and the body were to be overcome in daily meditation,

prayer, and silent contemplation. Reading this devotional literature, it is immediately

striking how similar to Mechthild's psychological situation was to that offered as the

spiritual goal of enclosed women in England.

Julian's book, however, does not overtly reflect the paranoia against women's

speech in which Julian herself would have been grounded. Rather than see herself as a

spiritual hero or a loathsome clot like previous female mystics, Julian uses her personal

experience only as a catalyst to discuss theology as applied to everyone, not just the

enclosed, the deeply religious, or the female. Ignoring the spiritual manuals for

anchoresses enjoining them to despise the human body as a vile and contemptible

obstacle to union with God, she glories in its intricate workings to the point of using the

simplicity of our excremental functions as an example of God's willingness to take care

of our basest needs through love (L:6).[55] She comes very close to proposing a doctrine of

universal salvation and claims that sin is "behoovely" because it leads us to contrition,

preparing the soul for union with God. She is also not afraid to ask God what she needs to

know. Julian is the epistemological researcher of the vision state as well as one who has

experienced it herself.

However, as a visionary, Julian also circumscribes and limits her own vision to a

soteriology that is Christocentric while still Trinitarian.[56] Although she follows the

continental mystic tradition of Hadewijch and Mechthild in seeing the human element as

part of the Trinity and in recognizing the likeness in nature between the soul and God,

she does not accept everything that comes to her in vision as appropriate for her. In a

limitation of her own insight in order to stay within the bounds of orthodoxy, she refuses

to "look up and see" God while in crisis, keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the crucifix

before her. In effect, she gives us the literary and spiritual equivalent of her physical

enclosure by consciously setting her own boundaries during a liminal experience; these

limits are dictated by her understanding of what it means to be faithful to church

teaching.[57]

We can see a growth in her thinking from the moment of original vision recorded in the Short Text to the more intellectualized, generalized version in the Long Text of her Showings. Despite this growth, it is also clear that although she is aware of a perhaps greater knowledge, she distrusts any revelation that takes her past the sacrifice of Christ as indicative of the whole workings of the Trinity. In this way, she reflects a rising reaction against mystic union and vision, a movement toward a reliance on empirical observation associated with nominalism. This discretion becomes more necessary as her life progresses and Archbishop Arundel's drive to root out Lollardism leads to more severe consequences for heresy. Despite increasing restrictions from outside and within, she writes the Long Text with a confidence, originality, and poise surprising for one who had been subjected to a life of sustained meditation on the vernacular handbooks for anchoritic women.

Like Mechthild, Julian also lived and worked in dangerous times. England in the late fourteenth century was fragmented and roiling with discontent on all levels of society. The plague had swept through Norwich in 1349 when she would have been six years old, only to reappear in 1361 and 1369. Through Julian's entire life France and England were engaged in the bloody Hundred Years' War, England itself was torn by strife between Yorkists and Lancastrians, and each side sought the support of the Catholic church. The church was likewise rent by the schism between Avignon and Rome, leading to the intermittent excommunication, torture, imprisonment, and murder of political and religious leaders alike. East Anglia and Norwich, in particular, were viewed as an area of increasing rebellion both politically and ecclesiastically. Wat Tyler's Peasants Rebellion,

with its ensuing executions, occurred in 1381 when Julian was 38, eight years after her initial "showings."

In 1356 and 1357, the Bishop of Norwich ordered a series of sermons by Adam of Easton on the subject of true doctrine in order to contradict the Franciscans, whose local convent had been established as one of the order's *studia generalia* by Benedict XII.[58] This would have made the city a rich environment for the discussion of current spiritual ideas, and the philosophical underpinnings of Aquinas's *summae* were already starting to fragment in Julian's time due to the battle between nominalism and realism at Oxford.[59] Norwich, as a member of the Hanseatic League, had a brisk trade with northern Europe and was therefore more susceptible than most other English cities to influence by continental ideas about lay piety, apostolic poverty, and vernacular spirituality. In the midst of the Peasants' Revolt, Wyclif began a Middle English translation of the Bible from Latin and published a tract called "Servants and Lords." Although the title is interestingly close to the topic of Julian's most mysterious, "hidden" vision of the Lord and Servant dialogue, the subjects are quite different. It is clear from the Book of Showings that one of Julian's primary concerns is to distinguish her thought from that of the Wycliffites, or Lollards. The many violent fragmentations and disputes rending the fabric of church and state in Julian's life, the transitory nature of existence evidenced by the recurring plague and massive economic collapse, the increasing popularity and persecution of the Lollards leading to their executions by hanging and "burning in chains"—all of these factors would have been significant influences on Julian's desire for orthodoxy.[60]

Norwich had at least eight anchorites in residence at any time during the period from 1420 to 1470, [61] as well as one of the only beguinages in England by 1427. Whether or not Julian had anything to do with an incipient but unrecorded beguinage prior to her death is complete speculation and rather unlikely, although some have tried to show that she might have been a beguine.[62] Although there have been hermits in Christianity since the Desert Fathers of the early church, anchorism as an institutionalized, publicly sanctioned manner of life was a particularly English phenomenon in the late medieval period. While a traditional hermit of either sex might voluntarily retreat into a deserted place for meditation, penance, or devotion and then decide to engage in society once more, an anchorite went through an elaborate ceremony of enclosure similar to that of a cloistered nun before being sealed in a small cell, sometimes as constrictive as twelve square feet, never to leave.

This did not mean complete isolation. Paradoxically, many anchorages were attached to cathedrals or parish churches and were thus located in the busiest parts of towns. There were three small windows: one looking out on the altar or tabernacle so that the enclosed could watch the priest celebrating mass, one covered with an opaque but translucent covering to let in light, and one for the benefit of a servant to deliver food and remove waste. This window also provided opportunity for visitors to stand and ask the anchorite for guidance, advice, and spiritual direction. While the sensory deprivation of such confinement was not total, it was intense; choosing to bury oneself alive until death was not done blithely. If we knew when and perhaps why Julian had made this decision, interpreting the nuances of her text would be somewhat easier.

Was she enclosed before writing the Short Text of the <u>Showings</u> and were the restrictions on visitors relaxed due to her illness, allowing the priest, a child, and her mother to enter?[63] Certainly she shows knowledge of anchoritic spiritual works and themes even in the Short Text. Had she been leaning toward a spiritual life and was therefore conversant with the themes of vernacular piety, choosing enclosure immediately after the showings so as to have the time and space to process her experience, or was enclosure an attempt to gain the protection of the church after having written the Short Text and having faced ecclesiastical questioning about her writing? Unless other evidence is found about her life, we can only guess based on slight textual biographical details. As a woman who had experienced a life-changing revelatory event, who needed the time and space to process it, becoming an anchoress would have been the best solution. Given the situation in which she lived, the lack of extra-regular houses for women, and the difficulty in gaining entrance to a convent for someone outside the well-connected nobility, voluntary enclosure would have been one of her only means of gaining access to theological works as well as the time to study them and compose in relative safety. Outside of a convent, nowhere else could a woman of her background been able to devote twenty years to scholarship. Her need to understand what had occurred, as well as her awareness of the theological disputes going on around her and her sensitivity to the seriousness of the charges of heresy might have propelled her to a life of bodily deprivation yet mental freedom within the strictly controlled boundary of orthodoxy.

The most likely explanation of the chronology of the texts with Julian's life is that of Nicholas Watson, who surmises that the initial fifteen showings happened as reported

on May 13, 1373, when Julian was 30 and a half years old, as she lay deathly ill in her mother's house. Because of Julian's defensiveness about the veneration of images in her description of staring at the crucifix while *in extremis*, Watson suggests that the Short Text was written in the mid 1380s, not immediately after the 1373 vision.[64] That would leave a shorter amount of time between the completion of the Short Text and the polished, longer, more theological Long Text, than that allotted by previous scholars such as Colledge and Walsh, editors of the critical edition.

In noticing the differences in approach between English mystics like Julian and Walter Hilton and their continental sources or colleagues to the soul's potential union with God, scholars have often attributed their "discretion" and "caution" about the veracity of sensual visions to an insular, less emotional English temperament in comparison to continental emotionalism. However, that is insufficient when we see that English anchoritic and vernacular devotional literature in the century preceding Julian and Hilton contains all the graphic images, heroic goals, and extreme devotional practices found in the beguine spirituality of Hadewijch and Mechthild. The Ancrene Wisse (1228), Hali Meidenhad, and the "Wooing Group," (Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd, On Ureisun of ure Louerde, Ureisun of God Almihti, Lofsong of ure Louerde, Lofsong of ure Lefdi)[65] are full of images of Christ the soul's lover, the ultimate spouse. For example, Þhe Wohunge begins,

Jesu swete iesu . Mi druð . mi der-	Jesus sweet Jesus. My dear. My dar-
ling . mi drihtin . mi healend	ling. My Lord. My Savior
mi huniter . mi haliwei . Swet	my honey-drop. My balm. Sweeter
ter is munengunge of þe þen	is the memory of you than
mildeu o muðe . Hwa ne mei	honey in the mouth. Who cannot
luue þi luueli leor? Hwat her	love your lovely face? What heart
te is swa hard þ ne mei to mel	is so hard that it cannot melt
te iþe munegunge of þe?	In the memory of you?

Ah haw na mej luue þe luueli- *che iesu?* [66]	Ah, who cannot love you, love- ly Jesus? [67]

The <u>Wohunge</u> continues with a list of Christ's courtly attributes and his superiority to any earthly spouse; he's wealthier, kinder, more considerate, and much more self-sacrificing than a typical medieval husband, and he has more to offer. Instead of a life of constant work, pregnancy, and death of children, the anchorite gives birth painlessly to spiritual children who never die.[68] Since the women have already chosen a virginal life of enclosure, the writers want them to embrace the choice wholeheartedly without regret.[69] Yet the comfort and freedom from mundane toils and cares that marriage to Christ brings is not the presiding tenor of the works. In most of the literature, while the anchoress is enjoined to view Christ as a lover, she is taught to see herself in the same bipolar fashion we witnessed in Mechthild's writing.

Images of wounds, illness, putrefaction, and death run through the meditations, showing the general vileness of the human body. Graphic passages encourage the women to subdue pride by meditating on their own corruption:

> In the body is filth and weakness. Does there not come out of a vessel whatever is in it? From your flesh's vessel does there come the smell of aromas or sweet balm? ….Your flesh—what fruit does it bear in all its orifices? Amid the nobility of your face, which is the fairest part, between the taste of your mouth and the smell of your nose, do you not carry as it were two privy-holes? Are you not come from foul slime? Are you not a vessel of filth? (<u>Ancrene Wisse</u>, IV: Temptations) [70]

Passages such as this are typical of any eremitic work, not just those written for women, and they follow the distrust of the flesh that characterizes all neoplatonic spirituality.

Along with this typical theme of the corruption of matter, however, is added a list of activities that women in particular should abhor, especially speech. "If you badly need

to say anything, you may say it just before and after Matins if you have to" (<u>Ancrene</u>

<u>Wisse </u>I: Devotions).[71] Anchoritic regulation is clear that speech of all kinds is to be

discouraged, but preaching or advising men spiritually is especially forbidden

> But to your women you may say what you want, in a few words. If any good man
> has come from far off, listen to his speech and answer his questions with a few
> words…A woman grinds grit when she chatters: her two jaws are the two
> grinding stones, her tongue is the clapper…Do not preach to anyone. Let no man
> ask you counsel or talk to you; advise only women. (<u>Ancrene Wisse</u> II: The
> Outer Senses)[72]

Whereas the earlier female mystics followed the Bernardine tradition of worshipping

Mary as almost another deity, after the influence of the Scholastics on theology, Mary's

greatest attribute in anchoritic literature is that she keeps her mouth shut. "Our precious

St. Mary, who ought to be an example for all women, was of so few words that nowhere

in Holy Writ do we find that she spoke, except for four times" (<u>Ancrene Wisse</u> II: The

Outer Senses).[73] The message transmitted by their academic, religious, and professional

culture to the anchoritic women who had voluntarily walled themselves up is clear: the

female nature is not to be trusted, even by women themselves.

In contrast, Hadewijch had described Mary as the most powerful figure in the

universe; according to Mechthild she was perhaps even present before the creation of the

world and was an active, decision-making player in the redemption process. In Julian's

fourteenth-century England, Mary is held up as model because of her silence. When

women do speak, it usually leads to disruption in the form of emotion complicating

reason. In the allegory of the self as a household in <u>Sawles Warde (ca. 1220)</u>, the husband

of the house is Wit, the reasoning faculty, the untoward wife is Will, while the servants

are the five senses who constantly need to be reined in by Wit rather than Will, who

would let them run wild.[74] While we can take some comfort in that the male authors saw

both Wit and Will as present in the female as well as male self, the underlying

assumption of the corruptive female nature due to the actions of Eve is still the overriding

message of <u>Sawles Warde</u>.[75]

At the same time, following the continental models of narcissistic humility such

as that we have seen in Mechthild's writing, anchoritic women were given a series of

saints' lives that specifically encouraged them to model heroic women like Katherine,

Margaret, and Juliana: exemplary women who resisted in superhuman fashion the

assaults of evil emperors upon their virginity. Women were also instructed in the

mendicant tradition to meditate daily upon the Passion of Christ, often with the aid of

crucifixes or painted images, identifying so closely with him that they became involved

in the expiatory suffering themselves. The literature dwells on extra-scriptural accounts

of the torn and bleeding body in specific detail in order to encourage deeper compassion

and a deeper sense of guilt. Christ's sufferings are directly equated with the sufferings of

the anchoress. Mary's womb is narrow like an anchorage, the anchoress must picture

herself on the cross with Christ, or on the cross next to Christ, or as throwing herself

between his outstretched arms as a means of murdering her flesh with the ultimate goal of

spiritual union. As in the <u>Ureisun</u>, "Through this low embracing, one might come to the

high; he who wishes to embrace you there…he must have embraced you here…Let no

man expect to climb with ease to the stars."[76] Watson notes that despite the emanative

overtones of the *Brautmystik* themes, ultimately the handbooks "envisage the spiritual life

not as an ascent but as ascesis,"[77] one that rests on "a simultaneous awareness of unity

and disunity between the anchoress and God."[78] The emanative mysticism flowing from

the Bernardine tradition, while maintaining the language of the Canticles, had reverted to images concentrating on the wide Augustinian gulf between God and humankind.

Whether or not Julian had enclosed herself before writing the Short Text, it is evident from her recounting of prayers preceding the moment of vision that she was familiar with at least some of the anchoritic literature. She knew what was expected of a devout woman: to minimize herself and her body as much as possible, to stay within strict boundaries both physically and mentally, and to be quiet. That she wrote at all and that her writings continue to shape spiritual practice within the church seven hundred years later is extraordinary. That she writes with such authority and confidence is amazing.

The Trajectory of Women's Authority and Theology from 1200-1350

In looking at the effect of systematic theology on women's literary authority in the 150 years between Hadewijch and Julian, we can see a fluctuating tide of confidence and anxiety. Alexandra Barratt codifies the dilemma our writers faced in her introduction to Women's Writing in Middle English:

> For the written text both carried and created "authority" and it was a tacit assumption that "authority," and therefore authorship, were incompatible with femininity. It is probably this attitude—an attitude with which medieval women tacitly collaborated—that is responsible both for the lack of educational opportunities and for the relative paucity of women's texts.[79]

Striking in the work of all the female mystics is that they refused to collaborate in the tacit assumptions of their culture, while at the same time it is clear they were being unavoidably shaped by them. In the literary devices they employed to prove their authority to their audiences, and to themselves, they both reinforce and reject the social stigmatization of female speech. The question of where these voluntarily bounded women

found the confidence to push past the boundaries that they themselves chose ultimately

goes back to how they address the theological and philosophical questions of their time,

the most important being the nature of God and the human soul.

Hadewijch, writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, worked at a time

when Bernard's thinking on the possibilities of mystic union and the power of the Virgin

Mary still dominated the church. Because of her firm belief that her soul contained the

same essence as the nature of God, her task was to remain true to that essence through

extraordinary focus. She wrote with authority because God created with authority. By

defining herself as someone created in *imago Dei*, she could adopt any gender in her

writing and not feel constrained by her female nature; in fact, her femaleness served as a

necessary element in the reciprocal relations between God and the created world. "What

use is it for me to force my nature?"[80] she exclaimed, in affirming equality of essence.

Mechthild, writing in the second half of the 1200s, had a harder battle to maintain

her equilibrium as a female writer. The crusades against Albigensians and Waldensians

and the church's paranoia about the antinomianism of the Brethren of the Free Spirit led

to a suspicion of any work dealing with the nature of creation, grace, and the essence of

soul. The rising power of all-male universities claimed the sole right to pronounce on

matters of philosophy. The entrenchment of systematic theology, with its adherence to

Aristotelian prioritization of reason over emotion and its characterization of woman as

imperfect man, made her ability to speak a matter of defense as well as offense. The

gradual acceptance of purgatory as a physical place controlled by the church in this life

and the next strengthened the beliefs in crafty devils who potentially exercised power

over every aspect of human conduct. While the concept of purgatory gave spiritual

women an intercessory function within the church that they desperately needed (praying for souls to be released from purgation), it also caused them to question the veracity of their own visions as possible temptations to sin. The freedom Hadewijch could claim was not accessible to Mechthild, who vacillated between surety of her kinship to God, her belovedness and spiritual power, and fear that she had jeopardized it unintentionally through transgression. Despite the support of her confessor, she wrote with an awareness of a hypercritical audience at all times. Nonetheless, she too uses her essential nature to justify her pull toward union with God with words that echo Hadewijch's: "How, then, am I to resist my nature?" (I: 44, l. 72)[81]

By the time of Julian, Aquinas's *summae* that had called into question the nature of women's spirituality while reinforcing a neoplatonic worldview were already in question. She inherited a world in which suspicion of women was even more intense, but in which Ockham's claims of individual empirical observation were starting to gain more credence than the realism of both Aristotle and Aquinas. Despite her clear faith before the experience of the showings, she wanted—she needed—to see in order to know. Within the physical and mental boundaries she had set for herself she was able to maintain firmly once again humankind's essential similarity to God, regaining some of Hadewijch's confidence. "And I saw no difference between our nature and God's, but, as it were, all God."[82] For Julian the act of meditation to which she had been called as an anchoress, like all the created world and sin itself, fell away before the object of contemplation: love as the sustaining force of the universe. Finding that still point of security where the soul rests in God gave her the authority to write, despite her anchoritic training, with absolute confidence that "all will be well" in a universe filled with joy.

To answer Mechthild's heightened awareness of the power of sin to block union of the soul with God, Julian reverts back to the stance of Hadewijch, for whom sin had negligible influence as long as the soul was focused on *Minne*. If Mechthild, like Margery Kempe, had appeared at her window, Julian might have counseled her thusly:

> The reason we are oppressed by our pains is because of our ignorance of love…
> And it is this ignorance that most hinders God's lovers, for when they begin to
> hate sin and to amend themselves according to the laws of Holy Church, still there
> persists a fear which moves them to look at themselves and their sins committed
> in the past. And they take this fear for humility, but it is a reprehensible blindness
> and weakness,… For love makes power and wisdom very humble to us…."
> (S:24)[83]

Although Mechthild would have cringed at the accusation that she was not enough aware of love, Julian has a point in showing that fear of sin becomes a sin itself in its distraction from the overpowering, flowing love of God. Focusing on the positive forces of creation rather than the negative consequences could have only helped her to write with authority as well as to ignore the overwhelming negativity of her time associated with being female and speaking out.

Ultimately, despite the varied ways the women mystics claimed the authority to write in the age of Scholasticism, one of the main factors allowing all three to continue was their subject matter, the nature of their visions. What they had seen as they puzzled out the mysteries of life in comparing their revelations to the inherited doctrine shaping their lives compelled them to share their vision. A closer look at how each woman imagined the created world and humanity's place within it in both vision and revision reveals how important this question of where we stand in the universe was to them all. In a bizarre sidenote to our discussion, the *doctor angelicus* himself, Thomas Aquinas, had to abandon his writing career after an experience of mystic union late in life, leaving the

Summma Theologiae unfinished. In the face of his own vision, all he had written, he told

his friends, was "mere straw."[84]

Chapter Two

Three Creation Stories

Defining the Nature of God and Humankind

Although the female mystics, especially those following a specifically beguine spirituality, were energized by Bernard's theory of creative, emanative love as the ultimate force in the universe, because of their situation as women wanting to create themselves, they had to solve another problem before developing the full confidence to write. Looking at how the beguines and later Julian the anchoress framed the story of divine creation is one of the most interesting aspects of studying them. Later female writers would fight battles in order to be taken seriously, but few had to risk their lives to do so, and none had to re-explain the universe as a precondition to considering herself a writer. Believing the creation story as told by Bernard was one step toward envisioning themselves as creative; putting themselves into that story allowed them to become creators themselves.

Hadewijch's Theology

Because she was aware of her position on the fringes of institutional thinking and her debatable status as a woman scholar of theology, the motivation for Hadewijch to work out an acceptable and accepting theological system was truly a life or death undertaking. Writing the earliest of the female mystics in this study, she is the most neoplatonic in her thinking. Her thought comes closest to that of Eruigena, whose _De Devisione Naturae_ was burned in 1225 as pantheistic. Plato's doctrine of emanations informs Hadewijch's work and smoothes the gulf between man and God so stressed by her avowed theological father, Augustine. Instead of following Augustine and

emphasizing the consequences of sin and fallen nature as the primary human condition, she sees equality of essence between God and humankind. She views creation as part of the relational nature of God, yet preserves the orthodox need to make a distinction by mentioning the difference in degree of this essential nature between the divine and the human. She sometimes refers to sinners, by whom she means lay people unassociated with any form of religious life, but in contrast to Mechthild and Julian, she rarely mentions sin—and never in connection with herself as a "Perfect." Sin for her, rather than being something for which one must do penance or atone, is anything that distracts the focus from Love or God. Her concept of sin is not so much tied to the body as to anything that interferes with our purpose to love and praise God. She can claim unity with God because of her assurance that the essential nature of humanity is the image of God and ultimate freedom.[1]

She also explores the idea of opposition or polarity between the perfection of God and the materiality of humans in the reciprocal movement she describes between heaven and earth. This echoes and magnifies Bernard's idea that matter longs for and draws spirit to it, while spirit necessarily flows outward through love toward matter. Hadewijch stresses the similarity between human and divine nature as necessary to her intellectual ability to sort out the world in a sensible manner due to her Platonic belief that "like recognizes like."[2] Emanations of divinity in the person enable the soul to recognize God and participate in the workings of God. Because she sees *Minne*, the Principle of Love, as the motivating and cohesive force of the universe, her spiritual world is dynamic rather than fixed, and supercharged, at that. Dams "overburst" with overflowing love, streams flood down from mountains, God outpours, and bodies are almost wrenched apart by the

force of desire or the inability to contain the outpouring of God's love. Love for Hadewijch is volcanic and cinematic in its effects. Human desire in its strength can move even God himself.

We are fortunate to have both Hadewijch's letters and visions as well as her poetry because it is in the prose works that she articulates her theology, leaving the poetry free to reflect her ideas without being weighed down by an explanation of them. She establishes her credentials in her letters and visions to leave herself free to write poetry without overt didacticism; as a result, she is the most polished and artistic poet of the mystics. There is internal evidence that Hadewijch herself was responsible for the order of the _Strofische Gedichten_ herself before their dissemination,[3] and I suggest that she also ordered her _Brieven_, for Letter 1 presents the necessary theological justification for her poetic work, starting with the name of God and her image of God as love clarifying and infusing all of creation.

> Since God has manifested by his virtues that radiant love which was uncomprehended, whereby he illuminated all the virtues in the radiance of his love, may he illuminate you and enlighten you by the pure radiance with which he shines resplendent for himself and for all his friends and those he most dearly loves!

> The greatest radiance anyone can have on earth is truth in works of justice performed in imitation of the Son, and to practice the truth with regard to all that exists, for the glory of the noble love that God is. Oh, what great radiance it is that we may let God act with his radiance! For in it Love works—for himself and for all creatures, each one according to its rights—whatever his goodness may promise to give it, in justice and in radiance.[4]

Hart's translation of "_claerheit_" as "radiance" obscures the overpowering repetition of various forms of clearness or clarity: visual, intellectual, and spiritual. We have "_die clare mine,_" "_verclaerde,_" " _claerheit,_" "_verclaren metter claerre claerheit_" and so on, each repetition building on itself and spilling over in Hadewijch's attempt to present an

image of God as all-overflowing knowledge, all-clarity, all-light outpouring and shining over creation.

In that creation, however, we humans cannot just sit and passively soak up the radiance of God. According to Hadewijch, our task is to reflect the light back through works of justice, or righteousness, in imitation of Christ. In that action we then open the way for more Love, more light, more clarity, perception, and order infused throughout the world. The work lays claim to Love, given according to the degree of the creature, "*elken na sijn recht"* ("each according to his right"). Through preparation we become reflectors of the light; without preparation on our part we do not. Nonetheless, in each creature there will always be some degree of recognition, what Eckhart would later call *die seelenvünkelîn, die götterfünklein*, the little spark of God in the soul.[5] Perception is only the first step, though; we must mirror the light.

The work on our part, because it occurs instinctively through the same creative love that engulfs the universe, does not seem like work at all. As Bernard wrote, "where there is love, there is no labor, but a taste [of wisdom, of God]."[6] Bernard's linking of *sapor* (taste) with *sapientia* (wisdom) is a connection Hadewijch explores and amplifies throughout her work, although she rarely acknowledges Bernard as an influence.[7] Since we are part of the nature of God, humans move within the rhythmic flowing back and forth of Love, and, indeed, are responsible for motivating and sometimes directing the stream. For Hadewijch, the constant spilling over and outflowing from God and the minute backflow from humans becomes a physics problem. In order to solve the physical and theological conundrum of how a human being could possibly match or balance the overwhelming outpouring of love emanating from God throughout the universe so as to

make it a self-contained system, Hadewijch offers the soul as an abyss that draws God down to humans as a reciprocal force. We ascend to union and then in union we plummet into the abyss, a creative, liminal, indescribable state that prefigures what the soul will experience perpetually after death. While in the act of union, through *Minne*, "We become the Trinity" (*Brief* 22). Because they are part of the relational nature of the Godhead in the Trinity, humans have their own Trinitarian pattern parallel to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in will, work, and strength, all of which play an active role in the justice she speaks of in *Brief 1* above.

As can be seen through her use of the concepts of conquering and being conquered, ascent and descent, mountaintop and abyss, she uses polarities to attain or describe the mystical state, and these either flow rhythmically *in regiratio*[8] or they happen simultaneously in the act of union. As part of the dialectic rhythm of opposites in her work, Hadewijch departs from both the troubadours and from the mainstream of medieval theology in at least one way: her ordering of the bodily senses. The neoplatonic school and the courtly love tradition prioritized sight as the sense closest to reason and therefore the most pure means of accessing the divine nature,[9] and this emphasis on sight as the highest, most spiritual sense follows from Greek thought through to the Renaissance via Aristotle, who agreed with Plato on this point. The European hermeneutic tradition from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance agreed that sight was the sense through which the soul could attain unity with God. The most base of the senses were those more associated with matter or the body: taste and touch, which require physical contact.

In her writings, Hadewijch rarely talks about seeing God, but often describes being touched by God and touching God, or tasting God. Her readings of the Victorines may have influenced her emphasis on Divine Touch, or this may just be one more inversion in her work of the approach to contemplative union she inherited from the Christian tradition. She could also be following Bernard's statement that one who loves does not work, but tastes wisdom. The rising fervor for the Eucharist during the period in which she wrote would also account for her knowledge of God through taste. In her use of both of the tactile senses as opposed to the more ethereal sight, Hadewijch again echoes Bernard in showing that the body is not just a temporary and transitory receptacle for soul, but a necessary means of the highest knowing and experiencing of God.

In one other way Hadewijch uses a pairing of opposites to describe the ebb and flow of reciprocal creation; that is in her explanation of the role of *ontrouwe*, unfaith, in preparing one for experience of divine union. Faith is necessary as part of the intense, total concentration of the soul on *Minne* in spite of a lack of union, but unfaith is equally powerful. Faith could lead to passivity and a tendency to wait for union until after death; unfaith torments and enrages the soul in fits of desire and despair over the lack of union. It flays the soul to keep it raw, open, and vulnerable, and it acts as a catalyst to all action toward the Beloved, similar to the troubadour ideal of courtly love as necessarily unfulfilled. Clinging faithfully to a state of *ontrouwe* creates a catalyst for art, as well, since desire is always more interesting than its fulfillment. An analysis of stanzaic poem 22 shows how Hadewijch was able to merge mystical theology with the *Minne* tradition, while putting her own stamp on the genre.

Of Hadewijch's 45 stanzaic poems, Poem 22 is unique in tone and imagery. [See Appendix 1, p. 227-231 for the full Dutch text and English translation by Mother Columba Hart.] It is one of only two (the other being 29, the Mary poem) that do not start with the traditional troubadour reference to the season of the year, birds, trees, sap, weather, or other natural imagery.[10] Each stanza follows a strict meter of four 5-syllable lines followed by two 4- syllable lines, ending with another 5- syllable line, and a fairly regular rhyming pattern of 10 aaaabba stanzas with a 3- line cca tornada, with a few close or half rhymes and only one repeated rhyme between stanzas. Hadewijch's combination of a tightly controlled structure that holds in overpowering emotions of distress, abandonment, surety (*fierheit*), and self-confidence puts her in league with the best of troubadour poets and shows that she is anything but "babbling" or rebelling against the semiotic constraints of her language.

Poem 22 is situated in the exact center of the collected stanzaic poems, a place of significance for Hadewijch, who follows the typical medieval structure for specularity and order by putting her most important messages in the middle of a collection. If indeed she was responsible for ordering her own manuscript, the number 22 must have had some significance to her, since Letter 22 on the four paradoxes of God is also an important synthesis of her theology, authorial confidence, and personal identity. In today's parlance, we would call Poem 22 a manifesto or mission statement for Hadewijch in terms of what she should both be and do—something we rarely expect to hear from a medieval woman.

The poem opens in stanza 1 with an intensity that springs from her refusal to use conventional natural imagery to mirror or contrast with her emotional state. By starting

right in with a description of her distress (*mine noet*), she gives the impression of an overburdened soul who must speak for herself, as if she were saying, "Forget the birds and conventional seasonal references for now; this is important." Rather than starting with God, as in Letter 1, she starts with herself and her own subjective experience of life. Stanza 1 shows us that she feels under attack by others—not necessarily men, as in Hart's translation, but rather the gender-neutral *lieden* (people), who are trying to distract her from a focus on *Minne*, the glue that binds God and humankind. She is hopelessly aware of her own inability to explain her psychological state to others, who would not understand her. We see her alienation from others but also her inability to give up her true identity in order to blend in with the people around her. The interior couplet gives emphasis to the kernel of her thinking; since she and the world do not fit well together, she makes the choice to stay true to herself: "*Dus moetic pleghen dat ic ben.*" ("Therefore I must live out what I am.") Her essential identity is the only thing worth holding onto, a seemingly radical statement of pre-Renaissance individuality and subjectivity.

Who is she? What is she? She answers directly; she is "*Dat minne bracht hevet in minen sen.*" ("What Love counsels in my spirit.") Her confidence in the reality and rectitude of her experience of *Minne* allow her to say "*Ic ben indien*," ("I am in this.") The second stanza reinforces her conviction that she must remain true to who she is, and in reading Hadewijch it is important to remember that by "who she is" she means that unfallen part of her soul that enables her to recognize and connect with God, the *imago Dei* of Bernard. She calls this "*edelheit miere sinne*" (l. 10), "my soul's nobility." In Stanza 7, lines 43-44 she shows the distinction between the noble part of her soul and her subjective self, which she must relinquish at *Minne*'s command in order to gain

knowledge of *Minne*, which is knowledge of God. "*Mi niet en can vercrighen / int bekinnen, ic en moet mi selven ontbliven.*" ("I cannot gain knowledge of *Minne* unless I live without my self.") This is classic Hadewijch: she affirms with unshakable confidence her essential self, but remains orthodox enough to know that she must die to self in the classical Christian model. Her identity is the part of herself that connects to God, her divinity. Anything else in the subjective realm weighs her down.

Therefore she can gladly and submissively surrender her "self" to gain her true self, the source of her power. In stanza 2 she proclaims that by gladly giving herself to *Minne*, she conquers. In a traditional troubadour poem, the lover, by maintaining fidelity to love, would be conquering the doubts and distractions of those who would dissuade him from fidelity, the tormenters. In this poem, although Hadewijch starts with a complaint that people are cruel to her because they don't understand, she quickly drops any mention of human enemies to focus on the real battle between herself and *Minne*—a hunt, a chase in which she tries to define and capture the nature of *Minne* in order to submit herself to it and gain access to God. As we saw in the discussion of her theology, the essential godlike soul can conquer God and draw the unmovable God to itself as like draws like, as desire draws divine energy.

But to conquer *Minne*, she must catch it first, and the rest of the poem flirts between complaint, frustration, and desire, building in intensity as *Minne* antagonizes her in order to draw her closer. Stanza 3 provides one explanation as to why Hadewijch prioritizes touch and taste over sight when talking about the senses' ability to reach and describe the divine nature of *Minne*. In lines 16-19, exasperated over trying to define or put a limit around *Minne* so that her senses can handle it, she writes, "*En heeft forme,*

sake noch figure; / Doch eest inden smake also creatuere; / Hets materie miere bliscape / Daer ic in alre tijt na hake…." I translate this as "It has no form, no figure; it can only be tasted as part of the created world; it is the material manifestation of my joy, which I long for in every time of the year." Something without shape can, indeed, not be seen, a complaint echoed in stanza 5, where Hadewijch makes a parallel between catching a glimpse of love in flight and Moses being able to see God in the desert only as he is walking away. Catching a glimpse of the departing God is echoed in the New Testament, when the resurrected Christ is also only recognized by the travelers to Emmaus once he has disappeared.[11] *Minne* is actual, substantial, material, yet cannot be seen—the perfectly elusive quarry for a lover's hunt.

In stanzas 4 and 5 Hadewijch uses the common mystical trope of the desert to describe her emotional state: wandering, being lost, unfulfilled, and unappeased, a nod to the eremetic path of the Eastern Desert Fathers and to the Israelites in the desert of Sinai searching for God and the promised land. Because *Minne* has made her stray "*in ene wilde woestine*" (a wild wasteland), she is consigned to spending the rest of her days in pursuit of the unattainable. The central desert experience of this poem may be another reason why she foregoes the traditional seasonal imagery she customarily uses to start her stanzaic poems. The desert is at once a help to the mystic and a challenge. It marks a lack of physical distractions or false comforts to the soul, enabling one to concentrate fully on the search for God/*Minne*; it also delineates an uncivilized, unbounded, liminal space in which the mystic can transcend quotidian existence. Although almost all the visionary imagery used by continental mystics was manifest in their actual physical landscape, that of the desert was not. It remains an intellectual construct bequeathed to them by the

eremitic tradition to signify a place outside the norm, a place devoid of any security one might experience in the company of others or of physical comforts available to anyone in a human settlement.

The desert, however, is the only place in which one can hunt and capture *Minne*. Lines 33-34 read "She only shows herself in flight: People follow her but she stays unseen." ("*Si toent hare als in een vlien: / Men volghet hare ende si blijft onghesien.*") By fleeing, *Minne* entices the soul to the chase in unending adventure, stoking desire by remaining unattainable, exercising the heart continually rather than rewarding it with satisfaction. Desire leads the questing soul into unfamiliar, inhospitable territory.

Stanza 6 serves as the center of the poem (if one includes the tornada as a shortened eleventh stanza), and as usual Hadewijch encloses the hidden secret of her poem in the middle: "Now I take delight in my nature, / that gives me love and new flight / that I will never more be sufficed." ("*Nu nemic in natueren delijt, / Dat mi gheeft mine ende nuwen vlijt; / Dies ic in niede nemmermeer en sade.*") (ll. 40-42). In the state of perpetual seeking and desire, she defines her natural self, her perfect, essential self, as the necessary counterpart to the outpouring love of God; she paradoxically takes joy and delight in the state of being withheld in this lifetime from ultimate joy. This is who she is, yet this state of confident, vocational, harrowing longing is not easy to obtain or maintain.

As she pursues *Minne* in flight, she too is able to fly or ascend. As we have seen in Stanza 7, this flight is not effortless and it involves giving up everything that had once given life meaning: "It pains me that I can not get knowledge of love unless I live without my self." ("*Mi swaert dat ic mi niet en can vercrighen / Int bekinnen, ic en moet mi*

selven ontbliven.") (ll. 43-44). This is the ultimate key: no matter what else she does, having her heart riven by desire, becoming powerless through love's power (*cracht*), she must relinquish herself totally to the game. Again, the interior couplet gives the main message: "I shall yet know what draws me / and awakens me so unmercifully…" ("*Ic sal noch weten wat mi trect. / Ende dicke so onsachte wect*…") (ll. 47-48). Despite the elusiveness of *Minne*, Hadewijch claims knowledge and victory in the hunt at the end. Through the slings and arrows of love, she will be brought to knowledge.

Up until this point the poem has vacillated between familiar Courtly Love polarities of flight and chase, conquering and being conquered, union and alienation, validation and relinquishment of self, living with and living without.[12] In the last three stanzas, Hadewijch ends with one more opposition, that of *trouwe* (faithfulness in the Beloved, faithful dedication of the lover, trust, troth) and *ontrouwe* (unfaith, distrust, jealousy, despair over the conduct of the Beloved). Typical troubadour lyrics complain of a lack of trust in the intentions or motivations of the Beloved, and Hadewijch uses the traditional pattern for her own purposes. In the *regiratio*, or endless reciprocity, of God flowing out and flowing back, and human ascent or descent into desire, simple faith must be balanced by its opposite, which Hart translates as "unfaith." This *ontrouwe* cuts both ways: *Minne* may be guilty of it, leading the soul on a perpetual wild goose chase through the deserts of desire and fiery longing, and Hadewijch is certainly guilty of it every time she sinks from living with *hogher trouwen*, high or noble fidelity.

All complaints about the cruelty of love aside, Hadewijch admits in Stanza 10 that she is fighting a losing battle with *Minne,* against whose overwhelming force she is unable to plead or make a case. Her experience of love is not unique to her, but

equivalent to that of anyone "whose heart Love's power has stolen" ("*die der Minnen cracht sijn herte stal*"). In working through the pain and isolation of stanza 1 and finding a cosmic justification for it, she is able to reaffirm her integral sense of self while realizing a commonality with others on the same path. She ends with a rhetorical question: "What does it help me to try and force my nature into something it isn't?" ("*Was hulpet ic mine nature dwinghe*?") The obvious answer is that she can't, as the tornada emphasizes: "My nature shall live with / what it is, and overcome what belongs to it, / no matter how people constrain its path." ("*Want mine nature sal al bliven / Dat si es dat hare vercrighen. / Al maken die menschen haren wech so inghe*.") (ll. 71-73). The outward forces with which she started the complaint in Stanza 1 are now minimized in the face of her own integral nature, conquering and conquered by *Minne*.

By placing herself within a reciprocal cosmology that reconciles her knowledge of science with the neoplatonic tradition, Bernard's definition of Love as emanative, and her own interpretation of scripture, Hadewijch gains the confidence to define who she is and claim authority to be a creator herself. She, in her human nature, can be the polar opposite of divine nature while yet containing a piece of divinity that recognizes and draws its likeness to itself. Her very need in the abyss of desire can draw forth the overflowing creative power of God to fill her, and this power must flow out of her again so that she can continue to draw more power. As she redirects the stream back at God and outwardly toward the rest of the world, she acts as an active and creative conduit allowing the flow to continue. In her view, the human part of the equation is necessary to the workings of the universe, and she is a necessary part of humanity's striving toward union with the divine. At this stage, despite her sometimes outrageous language or claims

about herself as a knight-errant of love, she does not seem to need a self differentiated from all other selves; in fact, she emphasizes that the knowledge she receives is open to all who follow the same path. Hadewijch just needs to know her creative place in the grand scheme of things.

Mechthild's Creative Authority

> Then he gave me a command that often makes me ashamed and causes me to weep because my utter unworthiness is obvious to my eyes; that is, he commanded me, a frail woman, to write this book out of God's heart and mouth. And so this book has come lovingly from God and does not have its origins in human thought.[13]

After the heights of Hadewijch's poetic self-definition, Mechthild's distancing of herself from textual authority in Book IV, section 2 of The Flowing Light of the Godhead is almost a shock, but it must be read within the sociological and philosophical context of her time. In it Mechthild backs away from the role of writer in two ways: by putting the responsibility for the act of writing on her confessor, who "commanded" that she write despite being a frail and unworthy woman, and by making.the content of what she writes the responsibility of God. The words she enscribes come "from God's heart and mouth," "lovingly from God they come" (ll. 133-4).[14] The words come straight from God through *Minne*, not through "*mensclichen sinnen*," human thought; in other words, she is not the originator. Despite this attempt to authenticate her writing as spiritually valid, Mechthild reports that she is so overwhelmed at the audacity of what she is doing that she weeps continuously through the several-year writing process, very aware of her own "*grossú unwirdekeit.*" great unworthiness. Just in case someone is able to penetrate the double screen of defenses she has erected, she wants to be sure that they know how aware she is of her own *bosheit*, lowness. She shares the same theological heritage as

Hadewijch through Bernard's and the Victorines' writings on the emanative, creative power of God. Although she refers to this model frequently and titles her book <u>The Flowing Light of the Godhead</u>, Mechthild has a more difficult time positioning herself in the universal energy flows at a time and in a place when women's voices were even more proscribed than they had been for Hadewijch.

One may ask why the humility topos and the tropological image of the scribe are being used here at the beginning of Book IV rather than in Book I, where they would most likely occur. One answer may be simply that *Das Fliessende Licht* was written over a long period. The different books were composed at different stages of her career, and the various modesty strategies perhaps reflect the differing levels of tension with authorities at the time of their composition. Beer suggests that the first six books of *Das Fliessende Licht* were organized after their composition by subject matter rather than chronology;[15] however, the sense of interruption caused by repeated humility topoi and protection prayers would surely have been smoothed over if the book had been drastically reorganized after its composition.

Each book starts with some explanation of its creation, as if it were a single document, and most books end with a conclusion sending it out into the world and a prayer for protection. Mechthild in Book VI prays to be allowed to stop writing, something that was obviously denied her, again protecting herself from criticism by putting the sole responsibility on God, whose anxious and frustrated servant she is. The only addition after the completion of the whole work that we can be sure of is the short introduction to Book I, in which she has God providing imprimatur and title for the whole book. Since this section directly repeats some of the wording of Book VI, the Book I

introduction only could have been written after Book VI, and possibly even after Book

VII.[16] Therefore, the initial tone of militant confidence in Book I is somewhat misleading

in its chronology, since it is then undercut by the anxious modesty formulas that follow,

reflecting an earlier attitude.

We do not know how much of _Das Fliessende Licht_ had already been written

when Mechthild, in her forties, received the command of her confessor to write, but we

can assume that she began writing for the general public around the midpoint of the

thirteenth century.[17] Regardless, the tone of Book I and the beginning of Book II is

certainly freer and less inhibited than in the rest of the text. These two books contain

most of the long, troubadouresque descriptions of love between the soul and God. Books

I and II may be works she had already written only for fellow beguines, which were then

subsequently shared with Heinrich as evidence of God's revelation. There is perhaps a

gap in time between the end of Book II's composition and the beginning of work on

Book III, as the third book opens with another justification for herself as a writer. Or,

Books I and II may have been revised as she put together the collected works at the end

of her career.

After a long description of union and vision of the ranks of the heavenly kingdom,

she muses in an audience aside that

> Some people might be surprised how I, a sinful person, can undertake to write
> such a description. I tell you in utter truth: If seven years ago, God had not offered
> support to my heart with special favor, I would still be silent and would never
> have written this. Now, because of God's goodness, no harm has come to me
> from it. This is because of the obvious lowness I reflect... [18]

In this case she is using the same humility formula as Hadewijch: only through God's

grace and favor can a mere mortal of any gender (_mensche_, not the female _wibe_) know

and write about such unearthly things. Yet she is aware of the danger from outside critics and attributes her lack of harm to God's goodness and her obvious *bosheit*. Whether this lowness in her mind comes from being female or just human in comparison to God is debatable, as she refers insultingly to herself throughout the book in order to circumvent criticism or charges of egotism. Obviously, though, the lowness she employs is a consciously chosen stance to deflect possible charges of daring to preach and may not comprehensively reflect her true sense of self. As we have seen, Mechthild also saw herself as a spiritual hero and uses that claim to authority at least as often as the humility formulas. It is disconcerting, however, to see two such opposing tactics used simultaneously, and it follows from Amy Hollywood's idea of narcissistic humility.

One thing to keep in mind is that despite her gendered images, Mechthild is not employing these strategies strictly as a female writer. Sebastian Coxon has studied narrative presence in Germany during a period roughly comparable to Mechthild's lifespan, 1220-1290. He characterizes the period as a turning point between shifting definitions of textual authority. "…literacy and orality were relative and not absolute values in this period….The question is: what happens to the presentation of authorship in texts that are situated in this way on the boundary with orality?"[19] The writers of vernacular heroic epics that Mechthild knew well had to invent ways of presenting their material—mostly taken from oral sagas—with claims of literary authority. Mechthild may have been familiar with the work of Konrad von Würzburg, whose lyric poetry and eulogy of the Virgin Mary uses similar strategies of humility and self-assurance, along with the surety of support given by powerful patronage. Coxon writes that "Tension between self-negation (in favor of some kind of higher authority) and artistic self-

assertion is a crucial aspect of Konrad's presentation of authorship."[20] We can say, then, that this bipolarity between self-negation and a claim to powerful sanction is typical of the period and not just a female mode of composition or a personal foible.

In comparing Mechthild's swings between annihilation of self as author and reportage of divine praise for herself as author with Konrad's strategies, there is a difference. In most cases, Konrad's commissions to write come from civil authorities, and he positions himself as merely complying with their wishes. Mechthild, in the absence of civil sanction, must claim authority from God; the ecclesiastical command of her confessor is not enough to assuage her feelings of inadequacy. That she goes for the extreme end of what she needs is typical of her way of coping with both her literary and her life situation. By the time of Book IV's composition, she is even more explicit in minimizing her role as writer, putting into practice the *bosheit* she mentions in Book III with her abnegation of all responsibility save that of a scribe.

I suggest that Book IV may have been written after the synod of Magdeburg in 1261, or perhaps the Council of Lyon in 1274, which dissolved all orders without papal approval. These rulings would have directly impacted Mechthild's house of beguines and specifically attacked her right to write about spiritual matters. However, even in her lowest moments, she cannot deny the sense that God has chosen her over others as his scribe. Caroline Walker Bynum suggests a plausible explanation for how someone can be so unworthy and yet seek to expiate the world at the same time: "Mechthild embraces femaleness as a sign of her freedom from power. And exactly this freedom makes her a channel through which God acts. God, who has not given her masculine or clerical authority, has chosen her to write."[21] Implicit in Mechthild's celebration of female

bosheit or lowness is her distrust of masculine power as degraded and harmful, whether wielded by a bishop, cleric, or potentate.

Her distrust and perhaps secret envy of male education as practiced by the Scholastic philosophers and newly-minted clerics is clear. Despite the minor nobility of her family, Mechthild does not have the theological education that Hadewijch somehow gained for herself. While she has a general knowledge of Bernard's sermons on the Canticles, currents of thought in German mysticism, and prophecies from Joachim of Flora,[22] there is no sense that she had the opportunity to study church doctrine on her own before or while writing. Her lack of education plagues her and leads to a definite but understandable anti-education bias running through her work; this translates into a repeated comparison of the wise fools to the foolish wise as a means of claiming authenticity and authority.

In this she foreshadows the anti-clerical bias informing later more heterodox mystical works like *Schwester Katrei*, *Meester Eggaert en de onbekende leek*, and *Le Miroir des simples âmes,* in which the uneducated, unsophisticated learner ends up instructing the more educated spiritual director or confessor. For most of her life, jibes at her highly educated critics were part of her critique of the fragmented, morally lax, and sometimes antagonistic ecclesiastical structure. She becomes more uncomfortable about the topic of education in Book VII, written when she is forced to retire in extreme old age to the hotbed of learning for European women, the convent of Helfta. Here, where she is surrounded by and physically dependent on nuns who read theology voraciously and are conversant in Latin text and commentary, she has a more difficult time maintaining her anti-learning stance.[23]   Throughout the book, though, Mechthild makes a virtue of

necessity in claiming her lack of theological referents as a sign of God's authentic

individual revelation to her, rather than seeking authority through direct reference to

sources.

The first subtle mention of Mechthild as a specifically female writer comes at the

end of Book II when she compares herself as author with a "*geleret geistlich man*"

("learned, spiritual man") (II:26, l. 18) and worries that because of her gender the Lord

will receive no honor through her book. She writes, "I was warned against writing this

book. People said: If one did not watch out, it could be burned" (II:26, ll. 2-3).[24] She

prays about her sadness that her Lover will not receive honor, in answer to which God

holds the book in his right hand and says

> My dear One, do not be overly troubled. No one can burn the truth. For someone
> to take this book out of my hand, He must be mightier than I. The book is
> threefold and portrays me alone. The parchment that encloses it indicates my
> pure, white just humanity that for your sake suffered death. The words
> symbolize my marvelous Godhead. It flows continuously into your soul from my
> divine mouth. The sound of the words is my living spirit and through it achieves
> genuine truth. Now, examine all these words—How admirably do they proclaim
> my personal secrets! So have no doubts about yourself! (ll. 9-17)[25]

Of course, we have only Mechthild's word that God did this, but imagine the power this

highly visual scene would have had on her own mind and her audience. God himself says

her words are truth; someone seeking to burn it must physically grapple with God and

take it out of his hand in a graphic, Luciferian show of transgression and hubris.

In the next line the physicality of the image becomes even stronger. God is not

just holding the book; God is the book, which physically becomes an embodiment of the

Trinity. The parchment is Christ, the bodily form of God, the words are God for the

audience, and the sound of the words is the Holy Spirit providing comfort and guidance

to the human world. In Book V, she records Christ's words that "Truly, in this book is

placed my heart's blood written" (V:34, ll.43-44);[26] the flowing ink becomes Christ's

blood as Mechthild's text is transubstantiated in an almost Eucharistic fashion. Anyone

burning the book will therefore be as guilty as one who disrespects the body and blood of

Christ in the host. In the specular and reciprocal inscription of texts, God writes the

words on Mechthild's heart, which she then inscribes in the book,[27] which becomes the

body of God for her audience. In this way, Mechthild as author is physically a text

herself, like the persons of the Trinity, participating in the expiatory and exemplary

function of Christ for the world, using her physical body as a means of salvation.[28]

Whereas earlier mystics had used the image of a vessel receiving God's love or words,

Mechthild and her fellow mystics in the latter part of the century become not just mirrors

but texts themselves. These are strong statements from herself and from God, but did she

believe them, or were they merely a rhetorical device anticipating and circumventing

negative critical reaction from her audience?

      As the narrative continues, instead of feeling reassured and comforted, she

continues to question God about her status, and the scene becomes an obvious stage set

for her to voice her own opinions about the role of women writing in the vernacular as

opposed to university-trained Scholastics. God answers her doubts with a rather

mercantile analogy:

> Daughter, many a wise man because of negligence on a big highway, has lost his
> precious gold with which he was hoping to go to a famous school. Someone is
> going to find it. By nature I have acted accordingly many a day. Wherever I
> bestowed special favors, I always sought out the lowest, most insignificant, and
> most unknown place for them. The highest mountains on earth cannot receive the
> revelations of my favors because the course of my Holy Spirit flows by nature
> downhill. One finds many a professor learned in scripture who actually is a fool in
> my eyes. And I'll tell you something else: It is a great honor for me with regard to
> them, and it very much strengthens Holy Christianity that the unlearned mouth,
> aided by my Holy Spirit, teaches the learned tongue. (II, 26: ll. 24-33) [29]

This unsubtle dig at the Scholastics shows that Mechthild is not simply recording a vision straight from God's mouth to her heart but is acutely aware of her status within the church and her need to justify her authorship. It also reflects the growing dissatisfaction with certain members of the clergy that helped motivate many to enroll in extra-regular religious life. Looking beneath the surface, the passage also lays bare Mechthild's assumption that the *túres golt* (precious gold) was indeed the property of the wise man (scholar) to begin with and was only lost through his own lack of attention. Once the gold is lying on the road, somebody has to find it, ("*das můs ieman vinden"),* and one would be negligent herself not to pick it up. Notice that the gold is designated for educational purposes; the scholar was going to use it to go to a famous school ("*da er mitte ze hoher schůle moehte varen*"). This gratuitous addition to the basic analogy shows Mechthild establishing her authority through comparing herself favorably to the extremely learned, who are yet fools.

God himself makes the point explicitly and didactically: "One finds many a professor learned in scripture who is actually a fool in my eyes." ("*Man vindet manigen wisen meister an der schrift, der an im selber vor minen ŏgen ein tore ist.")* Using the old emanational idea of God's outpouring love and grace seeking out the deepest places, Mechthild explains that since the Holy Spirit flows downhill, it strengthens the church by having the unlearned mouth, aided by the Holy Spirit, teach the learned tongue ("*das der ungelerte munt die gerlerte zungen von minem heligen geiste leret.") (*ll. 32-33). A later critic of Scholastic learning, Marguerite Porete, took this sense of nobility or *edelheit* in annihilation to another level; she takes on the persona of an exemplar of salvation precisely because of her lowness.[30]

Mystic practice through the ages in every religion has prioritized esoteric knowledge over what is commonly perceived as accepted wisdom in a culture, but with Mechthild we see the beguines capitalizing on the difference between unlearned and learned in God's eyes in order to shore up their position within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Such sentiments are found in the Bible, with Christ the child confounding the wise men at the temple and a little child leading the world into universal peace.[31] Since Christianity began as a counter-culture movement against the highly educated superstructure of the Hebrews, this theme has its roots deep in the New Testament, so the beguines did have a theological position from which to argue. Mechthild's repeated comparison of the wise fools triumphing over the foolish wise, however, reveals not just her anticlerical bias, but also her own insecurity as someone who did not know the Latin of the church and was therefore shut out of theological studies. Her repeated use of this trope would have strengthened her beguine audience in their own sense of both self-worth and communal worth, given their defensive need to allay ecclesiastical suspicion about their inability to read and discourse in Latin. According to God, speaking through scripture and through his scribe Mechthild, having the unlearned teach the learned is not only acceptable, but beneficial to the church as a whole. In addition to their role as intercessors for those undergoing purgation, then, Mechthild sees the capacity of beguines to teach the more highly educated as another worth-affirming vocation.

Because of the church's drive to combat heresy in the German-speaking regions and the risks she undertakes as a female vernacular writer, Mechthild also establishes her credentials by seeking to distance herself from known heretics and from popular heretical positions, an endeavor that runs throughout the last half of the book especially. Julian will

repeat this strategy a century later in her own writings; with both writers it seems the motivation is a matter of self-preservation as well as personal commitment to orthodoxy. The most important questions to answer correctly when facing an inquisitor in the late 1200s were these: What is the relationship between God and the soul? Was soul existent as a part of God from the beginning of time, or was soul created along with humankind at a later date? Does some unfallen part of the soul relate to the divine due to essential similarity of substance [nature], as Plato said, or simply through the workings of God's grace? The properly nuanced correct answer (one prioritizing grace over essential similarity of nature) to these complicated questions could mean life or death for the interrogated. The same challenge facing Hadewijch, who had seen some of her beguine colleagues burned, was even more pressing for Mechthild, given her placement in Magdeburg, seat of several inquisitorial courts. Like Hadewijch, she had to determine her own precise answers to the question of the nature of the human soul in order to continue writing.

In Book VI, 31, Mechthild records a debate with her confessor Heinrich about this controversial topic of the soul's essence, a scene in which we can see the learner becoming the teacher in practice. Heinrich has questioned her about a previous statement on the nature versus grace debate; defending herself against heresy meant explaining her view of creation and giving her interpretation of the emanative, creative overspilling of love envisioned by Bernard. Rather than backing down in the face of Heinrich's inquiry, Mechthild is able to accommodate both the church's position and her own: "I said in one passage in this book that the Godhead is my Father by nature.[32] You do not understand this, and say: 'Everything that God has done with us is completely a matter of grace and

not of nature.' You are right, but I am right, too."[33] As with Hadewijch, the only way to

answer this question ultimately goes back to explaining the origins of the universe, and

Mechthild gives us her version of the creation theory in order to explain how she and her

confessor can both be right about the choice between grace and nature.

The only way to maintain her ideas adequately in the face of official doctrine is to

posit a self-enclosed, infinitely spherical God encompassing everything, never changing,

containing all things in its nature from the beginning. Creation occurs at the point at

which the inner lives become aware of themselves as manifest and distinct beings.

Because all creatures share a similar image and are only manifested with individuation at

the moment of creation, the sphere remains eternal and unchanging in essence:

> Where was God before he created anything? He was in himself and all things
> were as present and as manifest to him as they are today. What form did our Lord
> God have then? Exactly like a sphere, and all things were enclosed within God
> with no lock and no door. The lowest part of the sphere is a bottomless foundation
> beneath all abysses. The highest part of the sphere is a top above which there is
> nothing. The circumference of the sphere is an immeasurable circle. At this point
> God had not yet become Creator. But when he created all things, did the sphere
> open? No, it has remained whole and it shall remain whole forever. When God
> became creator, all creatures became manifest in themselves: human beings in
> order to love God, to enjoy and know him, and to remain obedient; birds and
> animals to live according to their nature; inanimate creatures to remain firmly
> placed in their being. Now listen to this: Whatever we know is absolutely nothing
> unless we love God properly in all things, just as he himself created all things in
> properly measured love and offered and taught us love, as well."[34]

In defining the universe by this image, Mechthild can retain a sense of her own likeness

to God. The secret place of the soul that remains Godlike despite the fall can indeed

claim identity with God in essence from nature. However, Heinrich is also right that

without God's grace, the created beings would never have become aware of themselves

and been made manifest. It is striking that Mechthild sees consciousness of distinctions as

one of the necessary qualities of all created life at the same time as she claims essential

similarity of all things with the divine, in some part. Grace leads to identity; identity and separation from unity are simultaneous.

Although this theory is explained most fully in Book VI, Mechthild's cosmology was worked out long before and includes a feminine principle of creation as well. Book I chapter 22 contains a long dialogue with Mary about her role in the heavenly sphere. Whether or not Mary, the female archetype of love, redemption, nurture, and salvation, was created as a separate entity or existed within the creative rapture (*jubilus*) of the Trinity is unclear, but the language seems to imply that Mary was indeed cognizant of events before her individuation. Mary speaks in Mechthild's vision:

> When our Father's *jubilus* was saddened by Adam's fall, so that he had to become angry, The Eternal Wisdom of the almighty Godhead intercepted the anger together with me. The Father chose me for his bride—that he might have something to love; for his darling bride, the noble soul, was dead….I suckled the prophets and sages, even before I was born. (ll. 43-46, 52-53) [35]

Mary must have existed before Adam's fall as a valuable player on the Trinitarian team even though she was not the immediate beneficiary of the *jubilus*, or creative love impulse. In a complicated scenario, the Soul (that unfallen part of human nature, Eckhart's *seelenvünkelîn*) becomes distinct from the God nature yet remains within the sphere at the moment of creation, when it becomes aware of itself as the recipient of love. Adam's fall extinguishes Soul, but Mary, who seems to have already been in existence, steps in to mitigate the anger and become the partner of each member of the Trinity in its work to redeem and reclaim Soul.

Mechthild's explanation of how the created soul can be held within the nature of God and yet be created at the same time through the use of a sphere works to show how both she and Heinrich can be correct. However, her positioning of Mary as an undefined,

pre-existent being integrally connected to the divine work of creation and redemption before her own birth is theologically problematic, even at the allegorical level. Perhaps her recognition that her cosmology is not entirely unified or explainable contributes to the anxiety she feels throughout her life as she constantly has to re-explain, justify, apologize, and re-place herself as someone with the right to create. Her definition of Mary as the recipient and conduit of creative love, a nurturer whose swollen breasts feed the world as well as God, gives her audience a female figure on which to model their own lives as beguines, receiving and translating the love of God horizontally to those around them. Their role as active members in the process of creation and redemption is underscored by the last device Mechthild uses to establish her spiritual and creative authority as she relates her victories in harrowing purgatory in Das Fliessende Licht.

In the thirty-year span between Hadewijch's writing and her own, the concept of purgatory as a post-death place of purification had become more entrenched in the European psyche with the circulation of Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* and Jacques de Vitry's biography of Marie d'Oignies. Jacques LeGoff dates the spatialization of purgatory as occurring some time between 1170 and 1200,[36] but the concept did not become deeply embedded in the imagination of vernacular culture until the next century. Through listening to the *exempla* of Dominican and Franciscan sermons, lay people and the extra-religious began to develop graphic images of a place where the soul could be made perfect enough to experience knowledge of God in heaven.[37] Especially in Books V-VII, Mechthild is able to claim both spiritual and temporal authority in her role as an intercessor and bargainer for the souls of others. This claim gathers frequency as her

reputation for intercession grows in Magdeburg and as the role of purgatory becomes more firmly affixed in the popular imagination.

In contrast, although Hadewijch is aware of purgatory and makes passing reference to praying for the souls of others, ultimately she sees such prayer as a distraction to helping the living in the *vita active,* and as a hindrance to concentrating on *Minne* in the *vita contemplativa.* The physical nature of purgatory is still not firmly fixed in her mind; in Letter 22 she describes it as a state of mind rather than a place. The heart burning in unattained desire is in a purgatory on earth (l. 183), as is the soul living in a land of holy anger, frustrated by denial of union (l. 237). Purgatory is not necessarily a place of physical punishment or burning, and it does not include a host of demon-tormentors whose chief object is to make one suffer. Rather, it is a deep and holy means of getting to God. Ultimately, for Hadewijch, interceding for the dead shows that the soul is not fully mature in spiritual knowledge or it would see with God's eyes and justice, not human compassion.[38] Bargaining with God on behalf of others about whose life situation she has no deep knowledge, she runs the risk of devolving into *superbia*, claiming to know better than God's justice. This view would also be held by one of Mechthild's young writing protegées, Gertrude of Helfta, who in The Herald of Divine Love refuses to pray for friends and relatives for that reason; Gertrude later has a vision in which Christ acknowledges that he is never angry with her because she does not question his justice.[39]

Mechthild, although she inherits the same neoplatonic tradition as Hadewijch, sees the situation differently. She shares Hadewijch's belief that everything that lives partakes of God in some part and that God is present everywhere, even under Lucifer's

tail; however, her attitude toward the need to expiate sin is less quietistic. Like Julian, she

worries about how God can be righteous and merciful at the same time (III: 22), and like

Julian, she hints at the possibility of eventual salvation for everyone, even those in hell

(IV:25). Beer remarks that Mechthild is devastated by her visionary experience of hell,[40]

which is no doubt true. However, just as she reinforces the church's power as she

criticizes it, Mechthild is helping to forge the gruesome tradition of hell and purgatory

description in the way she paints her ghastly pictures while recording her visions.

Rhetorically and vocationally, no matter how anxious the thought of future punishment

makes her, it is in her best interest to make purgatory look and feel as horrible as possible

so that she and her struggling beguine community gain an officially recognized task of

helping to release souls from torment. By actively redeeming others, they are following

in the creative and redemptive example of Mary as well as Christ.

Because of her increased emphasis on the role of perfected humans as co-

expiators with Christ and his mother, she considers her intercessory role to be one more

method of *imitatio Christi*. In praying for the souls of those who had been her critics in

their earthly life, she can demonstrate her Christlike forgiveness while artistically and

ironically placing them in a place of intense suffering in the meantime—a delightful

approach used by Dante a generation later. Rather than considering herself to be a Lucifer

second-guessing God, she challenges and defeats Lucifer's desire to keep souls from God

through intercessory tears and prayers. Just as in her visions the number of crowns on the

heads of the deceased in glory signifies their holiness on earth, the number of souls one

can claim to have released from suffering becomes a sign of God's reward and approval

for one's life conduct and spiritual activity. After gaining the freedom to rise for 1,000

souls in Book II, section 8, she claims in III: 15 to have released 70,000 souls at one time

due to her fervor, a truly record-setting performance in the annals of spiritual warfare.

Service to the community and divine approbation are here combined to signify spiritual

maturity as well as the power and efficacy of her speech.[41].

   Mechthild's book is a collection of one woman's thoughts about her spiritual life

over the span of several decades, a study in contrasts, as a random selection of passages

shows. The motivating impulse for the book's creation could have been the need to

communicate the nobility of spiritual entitlement, or it could have been a true compassion

for others. Mechthild could have been abandoning herself to a transcendent message from

God, or she could have been clinging to a deep-seated, personal anxiety that called for the

more mundane self-defense. She writes acerbically about the moral laxness of the church

yet struggles to be considered orthodox by the system she criticizes. With her inherited

background of continental mysticism, she maintains that those in an elevated state of

spiritual perfection cannot be tempted to sin mortally, yet she cannot stop confessing and

examining herself. She firmly believes that a God of extravagant mercy permeates the

universe and has called her through grace to special favors, yet she spends an inordinate

amount of time trying to compensate for her inadequacy. She claims allegiance to the

salvific power of Christ to redeem the world, but she cannot stop trying to help him

herself, even to the point of climbing up on the cross with him. No matter how hard she

tries to live confidently in her theological beliefs about the nature of God and humankind,

her experiences as a German beguine in the second half of the thirteenth century never let

her reach a still point of faith and stay there without fear, as she so desires to do. These

tensions determine the strategies she uses to claim authority for herself as a writer. Even

her own interpretation of Mary's fundamental role in the created universe cannot resolve the insecurity she feels, anxiety which, while energizing and motivating her work, perhaps keeps her from giving her book the formal structure the other mystic writers are able to impose upon their own creations.

<div align="center">Julian: Shifting Perspectives on the Creation</div>

In chapter 1 of <u>The Book of Showings</u>, Julian offers us the background of her visionary experience; she presents herself as someone who yearns for a deeper spiritual experience than "true faith," the basic salvation offered by adherence to Catholic doctrine and reception of the sacraments. Julian here can be compared to her English contemporary Walter Hilton, who in <u>The Scale of Perfection</u> distinguishes between the everyday sacramental faith of those in the active life and the higher path of those who choose the contemplative life. Hilton counsels most secular people to try a "mixed life," blending some contemplative and meditative techniques with their daily life of family and business. Julian at the beginning of her text seems to be indicating that she was pursuing such a mixed path: not as an avowed religious, but as one intensely interested in spirituality.

At the time of vision, she had obviously been pursuing this mixed path for some time. She starts the narrative by mentioning her previous desire for three graces or favors from God: a recollection of the Passion so intense that she seemed an eyewitness, with the goal that she would then suffer with Christ; an illness leading to a near death experience so that she could heroically ward off devils and overcome every kind of pain and suffering; and—in imitation of a sermon she heard about the death of St. Cecilia—

three wounds: contrition, compassion, and longing of the will for God. In this we can see the influence of both the popular *exemplar* sermons and the vernacular devotional literature, and a continuation of the continental focus of the pious laity on affective spirituality mixed with personal heroism. But there is something more. In contrast to the thirteenth century beguine stance of almost Promethean struggle with suffering, Julian knows pragmatically that the first two graces are out of the realm of common human experience, so she asks for them conditionally upon God's will. The third she classifies as a basic human need and asks for unconditionally.

Julian gives the impression that the prayer for three graces had been made so long ago that she had almost forgotten about it when she was indeed ill enough at age 30 for the priest to be called to give her the last rites. She experiences a creeping paralysis and then, when the crucifix is set before her she experiences fifteen revelations, or showings, which recall her earlier prayer to mind. Assuming that she is dying, she again prays to suffer with Christ. At that point the figure on the cross begins to bleed in great quantities, and she feels that she has received all she needs to know about the love of God. This, she explains, was a physical, bodily sight, but simultaneously she has a spiritual vision that reinforces the sense that the universe is created, sustained, and powered by love and goodness.[42]

> And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought, "What can it be?" And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through love of God." (S: 4)[43]

In the hazelnut-sized created world she sees three "*partyes*": God made it, God loves it,

and God keeps it. She also sees three "*nou₃ttes*," naughts or nothings.[44]

> 1. contemplatives can despise as nothing all creation, so as to have the love of the uncreated God,
>
> 2. those in the active life pursue nothing because the created universe is negligible, and
>
> 3. God wishes to be known.

"No soul has rest until it has despised as nothing all which is created. When the soul becomes nothing for love, so as to have him who is all that is good, then it is able to receive spiritual rest" (S: 4).[45] The dichotomy between frantic activity for no legitimate purpose and rest must have been appealing to her readers. The path of detachment from all that is created also hearkens back to the apophatic *via negativa* of the writings of Meister Eckhart and the English texts <u>Deonise Hid Diunite</u> and <u>The Cloud of Unknowing</u>. One must be *noughtid*, made nothing, in order to activate the spark of God in the soul and achieve *unio mystica*.

Up to this point in the text Julian employs the authority of the storyteller, but once she begins to extrapolate on the content of her visions she changes from raconteur to explicator and must explain herself. In contrast to Hadewijch and Mechthild, who claimed that God chose them especially because of their heroic love for him as channels for his love to the world through their writing, Julian is quick to discount any spiritual heroism on her part. She shows that she's just an ordinary person: she prays for grace and then forgets about her prayer. When it occurs at crucial times like these, the opening description of her vision and the start of her life's work, Julian's humilty and discounting of her own consciousness seems an internalization of Jacques de Vitry's minimalizing

portrayal of Marie d'Oignies, a means of lessening any threat presented by a woman

theologian. Upon regaining some measure of consciousness and speech, she laughs and

assumes that she has been raving in her vision of the bleeding head of Christ. In Chapter

6 she again goes to great lengths to explain how normal she is:

> For truly it was not revealed to me because God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace. For I am sure that there are very many who never had revelations and visions, but only the common teaching of the Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself, I am nothing at all; but in general I am in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians. For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved….And thus will I love, and thus do I love, and thus I am safe—I write as the representative of my fellow Christians…[46]

Julian makes an interesting move in using her personal experience of vision as the basis

for a theological interpretation of the universe, but then retreating behind a screen of

universal applicability. She seems more aware of the dangers of *hubris* than Hadewijch,

Mechthild, or her other female mystic ancestors in the beguine tradition. She is also more

aware that many have the potential to walk as she does, a sense of common human

vocation that strengthens in the period between her Short and Long Texts.

That her motivation for disclaiming personal authority is based on her reading of

the anchoritic literature is clear from the statements that follow:

> But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail. But I know very well that what I am saying I have received by the revelation of him who is the sovereign teacher. But it is truly love which moves me to tell it to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christian to prosper. ….But because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God, when I saw at the same time that it is his will that it be known? You will see this clearly in what follows, if it be well and truly accepted. Then will you soon forget me who am a wretch, and do this, so that I am no hindrance to you, and you will contemplate Jesus, who is every man's teacher. (S:6)[47]

Treating herself as a scribe who is only writing down what God wants to be known is a common tactic of medieval writers and is one of the typical humility tropes of her time; Julian uses it as Mechthild did. She experiences a showing, God inscribes his ideas on her *gastelye*, spiritual eye, and she inscribes them in a book.[48]

This humility formula partially cloaks some of Julian's own responsibility for transcribing her vision, but not for the vision itself. While it is true that she experienced it while almost comatose, she had prepared herself for it through years of spiritual reading and thought, and while it had been some time in the past, she did pray for it to occur. Yet Julian is at pains to dissociate herself from the spiritual heroism or exclusivity of sight claimed by earlier mystics. In reading her text, we are to forget about her personality as much as possible and concentrate on God, in the same way that an anchorite must trample on the sensual body to move higher toward spirit. If we follow her instructions, the method she gives us for reading her text becomes a spiritual journey for the reader. What she describes is the focus, rather than her role as visionary guide. Although, as shown in Chapter 1, she was surrounded by literature and messages that told her to efface herself as much as possible because female speech was dangerous, she did not seem to feel the desperate personal need to overemphasize her right to an authorial stance that is demonstrated by Hadewijch and Mechthild. It is difficult to quantify or calculate the reasons for her difference in tone, but they are pronounced. The fact that she writes a century or more after they did does not mean that women's authority was a given in the 1340s. It could be that her vision of the created world as so tiny as to be almost negligible in contrast to the love of God gives her the perspective to write regardless of the consequences to her personally.

She says she is a wretch and we believe that she accepts that categorization of herself; however, she cannot deny the strength of her own convictions that God wants the message that he gives her to be known. Because she does not hear him (and therefore report that she hears him) saying, "Go, my chosen daughter, and write to a sinful world," she sounds less grandiose than her continental precursors, but the conviction that what she knows must be related for the good of the world remains.[49] Her motivation as a creator is love, just as God's is, and this makes her feel safe from prosecution or accusation. Still, she knows she must prove her orthodoxy by some means other than personal conviction. To prove her own good faith effort to be a true daughter of the church, she must show that she rejects impulses that would lead her into heterodoxy.

She does this in a few ways. One is to offer several statements throughout both the Short and Long Texts similar to "in everything I believe as Holy Church teaches," disavowing anything in her vision that made her question official doctrine.[50] These statements belie the fact that she does go beyond accepted doctrine in a few points such as her Lord and Servant analogy in the Long Text. In both the Short and Long Texts she distances herself from the Lollards by statements on the usefulness of images as an aid to contemplative prayer.[51] Lastly, she reveals her orthodoxy to us when she is tempted to look away from the crucifix and refuses to do so through fear of false revelation.[52] Again she couches her decision in the vocabulary of safety. In S:10 and L: 19, she writes:

> At this time I wanted to look to the side of the cross, but I did not dare, for I knew well that whilst I looked at the cross I was secure and safe. Therefore I would not agree to put my soul in danger, for apart from the cross there was no safety, but only the horror of devils. Then there came a suggestion, seemingly friendly, to my reason. It was said to me: Look up to heaven to his Father. Then I saw clearly by the faith which I felt that there was nothing between the cross and heaven which could have grieved me, and that I must either look up or else answer. I answered, and said, "No, I cannot, for you are my heaven. I said this

because I did not want to look up, for I would rather have remained in that pain until Judgment Day than have come to heaven any other way than by him.[53]

When the voice tells her to look above Jesus to the Father, she fears that demons are speaking, but then realizes that nothing could grieve her in the looking to heaven. Interestingly, she implies that there may be other ways to God, as well she might after such a comprehensive vision as that of the hazelnut, but that she is consciously limiting her vision to that offered by Christ rather than exploring any further. By constraining herself in this manner she presents to us and her potential critics someone who is willing to stay within the boundaries offered to her and to all people by the church. By recognizing Christ's expiatory act as the symbol appropriate for humankind of the creative and salvific love of God, she sees all she needs to know. She at once widens the possibilities of union and then firmly closes the door.

Upon several years' reflection and meditation on the meaning of her showings,[54] Julian adopts a more confident authorial tone in the longer text. We can see that she was already moving beyond some aspects of affective piety at the time that she wrote the Short Text, for instance, in quickly learning that it is not as enlightening as she thought to somatically experience Christ's suffering. She also realizes that her desire to fight demons through a near-death experience was perhaps motivated by the naivete of youth and health. In the Long Text she consciously reduces the number of references to lay sermons and increases the references to Scripture and spiritual classics by continental writers such as William of St.Thierry. Personal pronouns tend to become plural[55] as she continues to universalize her interpretations of the visions as germane to the entire world, not just herself. Johnson suggests that the presence of a table of contents signifies her awareness of a wider audience, who might see the book as a useful spiritual guide.[56]

As part of that universalization, she omits any reference to herself as a weak woman, becoming a person or a creature in the Long Text.[57] Her work shows more polish; at some point between composition of the two texts she must have studied rhetoric. She also must have had the support of male clergy in providing her texts and guidance; despite her proximity to the circulating library of the Austin Friars across the street, she would have been unable to gain those documents on her own as a woman, especially an anchoress unable to leave her hold.[58] Yet characteristically she never mentions a confessor or spiritual guide save Jesus; to do so would have called up images of herself as a woman under a man's guidance rather than someone writing as an *evyn cristen*, a fellow Christian. Issues such as rank or gender, even within the framework of the church, seem incongruous to her given her view of the created world in the palm of her hand.

There are other ways that Julian firmly establishes her authority as a writer, especially in the Long Text. Given her reading matter and her daily meditations as an anchoress, what she does *not* include in her explications of the showings is as significant as what she does include. Although Christ is portrayed as full of *courtesye*, she does not view him as a hero of courtly romance, or *her* lover in particular. She does not reach a point of ecstasy during union with Christ, at which time language breaks down, nor is there a reciprocal flow of desire expressed in traumatic detail. Despite the influence of <u>The Ancrene Wisse</u>, she is not a hero warding off demons with her crucifix or physically trampling them under her feet. By choosing subjects and methods for herself outside the normative choices for her station but in not emphasizing her own role as spiritual hero, she evinces confidence in her ability to write simply according to her own experience.

Her decision to include new material in the Long Text extends to her version of spiritual progress available to all. For a writer, nothingness is not a subject conducive to creative description, and her work is balanced between the benefits of nothingness and somethingness in the relations between God and human. For the three "nothings" that she recognizes in her view of the created world as a hazelnut, she also sees three "somethings," and rather than follow Mechthild and Eckhart's concentration on *das niht,* she sums up her experience firmly in the realm of the here and now, *das iht*. Even if the created world is insignificant in the face of God's power, she describes it as "great, generous, beautiful, and good" (L.8). She is a precise observer of physical detail, gaining her personal experience of God's love through careful notice of the drops of blood about the size of a herring scale or the progressive dryness of Jesus's skin on the cross. Her meticulous descriptions of the physical suffering of Christ show that his body for her is the means to attain unity with God, regardless of whether the soul is pre-existent or created. Because of the scale of her observation, the theological questions almost do not matter.

Through her long meditation on the meaning of her vision, she does get what she asked for in her immature prayer: a bridge between the platonic realism of being united in God's love and the more nominalistic observation of it as the motivating creative force. The vision connecting God and human is given with an immediacy that satisfies her quest for surety, a confidence that grows upon contemplation.[59] In this she demonstrates the influence of Ockham and the nominalists on the theology of her day, which was already calling into question the claims of Scholasticism. Her need to find a place of security in a world tearing itself apart at every level of authority lends credence to her quest and

deepens the meaning of Christ's question to her in Chapter 22 of the Long Text: "Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you?....If you are satisfied, then I am satisfied." [60] Love, in the long run, is the only thing that matters. Because of the perspective given by her vision of creation in seeing the world as a hazelnut permeated and upheld by sustaining love, she can balance the oughts of the spiritual journey against the noughts, creating a mixed path of affirming and negating available to any Christian of any gender, not just those who are especially called to a life of contemplation.

As all three mystics sought to claim the creative nature of God for themselves, they tapped into the theological arguments underlying the systems in which they existed in such a way as to justify their right to express themselves through story, poetry, and philosophy. Their visions of their world, its creation and sustenance, and the history of human interaction with God are reflected in the confidence with which they were able to express their ideas to their audience. The social and theological changes occurring within the church between the early thirteenth century of Hadewijch and the increasingly paranoid and reactionary fourteenth century of Julian clearly impact these writers and their work in a way that transcends differences of inherent personality type, level of inspiration, or literary ability. Although in reading their works we can recognize the strong personality of Hadewijch wrestling with *Minne*, the determined yet anxious Mechthild writing despite her own fear, and the calm deliberation of Julian's attention to observation and natural description, we can also see how they are shaped by the worlds they inhabit, and how they in turn shape those worlds.

Chapter Three

Social Mysticism: Incarnational Theology and the

Importance of the Body as a Living Text

Inherent in Western mysticism is a concentration on language and image. Christianity in general, following the precedent established by Judaism, has always stressed the creative and transformative power of the Logos. The world was created through the voice of God, and "in the beginning was the Word." The following passage, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,"[1] is one statement that separates Christianity and Judaism. Although the Hebrew Bible represents God as constantly in dialogue with his people, and throughout Jewish mysticism there is a sense that someone is always listening, always hearing, always ready to respond, the Incarnation—or bodily presence of God in the world—became the most important aspect of faith for Medieval and Renaissance Christianity. Perhaps because of the softening of the spirit/matter dualism of early Christianity, or because of the new post-Bernardine perspective of the physical world as created out of love, in this era we see increasing emphasis on the body of Christ and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

As the late medieval period progressed and the body of Christ became the focal point of worship, a gradual acceptance of the physical body of the worshipper as necessary and beneficial for worship can be traced. The increased concentration on the Incarnation of Christ served two purposes: it brought God down to humanity as a man with a human body, and it opened up the possibility that there could be some connection between human and divine in the body itself, in effect elevating human nature. Understanding the significance the mystics drew from the idea of the Word as a bridge

mediating between intention and demonstration, faith and works, is key to unlocking how the mystic situation propelled them toward authority.

In the first two chapters I have presented how late medieval spirituality might have inherently held the keys to woman's authorship by looking at the writings of female mystics within the context of their northern European society. In doing so I have not sufficiently discussed the main factor putting the mystics at a distance from our own world: their conflation of reality and image, signified and sign, using their own bodies as texts. Unless we can understand their willingness to cause harm to themselves in order to act out their message, we cannot clear them of the charges of narcissism, masochism, or hysteria. The act of writing for the mystics is only part of a total approach to living out the life they felt called to with integrity. Shaping the visionary path and insights gained thereon is an intellectualization, an extension of a wholistic set of actions employed to claim, gain, and use a voice to affect the world. For this they had the precedent of their own religion. After all, the necessity of "incorporating" intentions is a primary tenet and holy mystery of Christianity. Without the need for the incarnation in order to physically demonstrate the intentions of God toward humanity, the person of Christ would have little purpose. The acting out of the mystagogic or mystographic text upon their own bodies is, however, one cause of their having been labeled as narcissists.

To modern eyes, Mechthild's role as a follower of Christ in helping to expiate the sins of the world does seem narcissistic, as Simone de Beauvoir claimed.[2] Why does the exalted sovereign need the help of the scullery maid? Freudians and post-Freudians would agree with this diagnosis, and de Beauvoir's analysis has imprinted her view of the mystics as damaged, delusional masochist so strongly that it is hard for the modern reader

to shake. However, Mechthild and her colleagues saw their focus as being on others rather than on themselves. Of the souls in purgatory, Mechthild exclaims, "To them I must give my heart's blood to drink" (V:4).[3] Today we could level the charge and ask, "Why is your particular heart's blood so efficacious?" No matter how emptying of self the mystics strove to be, with our modern view we could still see them as dancing about the god of self. One way out of this cycle is to redirect the discussion from narcissism, a concept with which the mystics would not have been familiar, to *superbia*, which was a prime medieval concern.

Narcissism as we define it today is not a concept about which late medieval people worried overmuch; in fact, it is difficult to find a term in common use in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries that mirrors what we mean by it. Although one could argue that hyper-consciousness of self lies behind each of the Seven Deadly Sins (lust, envy, gluttony, avarice, anger, sloth, and pride), only pride—*superbia*—approximates anything close to the concept of narcissism in modern psychology. To their own way of thinking, the female mystics were in the clear as long as they could show their motivations and physical actions were directed outward toward God or others rather than inward toward themselves. Their vulnerability to the charge of not knowing their place as women made the need to show they were not acting pridefully or stepping outside their human bounds even more important. If one takes a position of deep humility— Hadewijch's *diepe oetmoedicheit* or Mechthild's *sinkende diemuetekeit*—and diverts all energies into an outpouring of love to others, one can be absolved of the charge of *superbia*, no matter how hyperinflated or histrionic one's role becomes in doing so.

Ironically, in seeking to follow and imitate either Christ or the Bernardine Creator God, the model of beguine and anchoritic spirituality came close to leading its practioners into a state of *superbia*, not narcissism. No matter how much a mystic relinquished the self to be subsumed into a larger being and greater cause, the actions resulting from this abandonment show the mystics trying to respond to virtual and sometimes real situations with what they perceived to be a god-mind. In order to keep one's place[4] and avoid the deadly sin of *superbia*, the mystic had to continually return to the body, the human realm, and focus imitation on Christ the man rather than Christ the divine. The dialogue between virtual and actual, human and divine, caused mystics in the age of incarnational theology to act out this conversation with their bodies as the text. Indeed, Mechthild's desire to pour out her heart's blood refers not just to an overwhelming sense of empathy and need to succor those in purgatory, but to her text itself, which is characterized as being poured from God's heart and mouth for the healing of the world, and also as God's body.

The distancing and even distaste we may feel for this brand of affective piety or physical spirituality today stems from its concentration on the body as text. Moving from an oral culture to a written culture, the female mystics used their bodies as well as their written corpus to present their message, to demonstrate their humility, and communicate their outwardly driven energies. The act of writing was integral to sharinging their vision to an audience in a way they would readily understand; in their work they modeled social codes that seem foreign today. In their time, starvation, self-wounding, and various humiliations—rather than being uncontrolled symptoms of neurosis—were consciously employed as bodily signs of spiritual authority and authenticity. The male and female mystics alike used a recognizable bodily text to communicate a spiritual and social

message. Translating the visionary state to physical form through manipulation of the body maximized their chances of being understood by the lay as well as ecclesiastical audience as they cycled between being writers and performance artists.

For the mystic writers, defining the relationship between image and reality was an inherent part of defining what it meant to be an author in the age of incarnational theology. A greater emphasis on image-based spirituality can be seen throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, just the time at which most of the vernacular female writers began to emerge. This conjunction cannot be a coincidence. Religious images of Christ and the saints were objects of devotion seen as signifiers of the true humanity of the divine; they were also used as teaching tools for the illiterate. Indeed, as Carroll Hilles has shown, "In late medieval England willingness to venerate images was a particularly important means of distinguishing the orthodox from the dissident."[5] Wycliff and the Lollards interpreted the image as only symbolic, whereas the orthodox Catholics saw the true divinity as contained in the symbol. The increased activity in buying and selling indulgences and relics (often images of the saints, replicas of Veronica's veil, or representations of Christ's death) during pilgrimage was part of the growing medieval need to have a personal physical connection to the Divine through these spiritual souvenirs. In many cases, the images ceased to be mere symbols and were seen as having healing or magical properties of their own. Positioning themselves on the "right" side of the debate about the nature of images distinguished the mystics from others suspected of heretical leanings.

The shift in emphasis toward image as actuality happened so rapidly during the later medieval period and was so sweeping in nature that already by the end of the

fourteenth century, the time of Chaucer's <u>Canterbury Tales</u>, we see the onset of ironic

distance and commentary on the gross marketing of religious charms. For the faithful

like Margery Kempe who deeply desired to share in mystical communion with God, the

pursuit of indulgences, pilgrim's badges, and replicas of religious relics were a physical

means of obtaining access to the sacred. Although she is and was sometimes trivialized

as a souvenir-collecting spiritual tourist rather than a bone fide mystic, Margery

exemplifies the late fourteenth-century obsession with artifacts to stand for or take the

place of "actual" spiritual connection.[6] She also used her own body to act out her spiritual

state, sobbing loudly and continuously to the point of making a public nuisance of

herself, withholding sex from her husband, and viewing herself as a living document

walking across Europe on her pilgrimages. Karma Lochrie considers the use of female

bodies such as Margery's as walking texts to be a way of claiming and flaunting power in

the face of male domination. "By occupying and exploiting her position as flesh, the

woman writer has recourse to a power derived from the taboo which defines her and

which she breaks with her speech."[7] The characterization of affective or vernacular piety

as a female reaction to the controlling male voice obscures the fact that the idea of body

as text was not a prototypical female invention, however.

Franciscan and Dominican devotional techniques of imagistic meditation on the

passion of Christ were part of the larger emphasis on image and body—palpable, tangible

symbols of the divine in this world rather than in an indefinite and indescribable

philosophical space. Meditations on the body of Christ and devotions based on images of

Christ took the mystical experience out of the realm of the incommunicable and brought

it down to earth. At least in the pre-mystical stages (pre-trance), all mystics could

describe in great detail what they were seeing in vision because it was so very tangible and sensory. Sharp attention to nuances of detail in the mystic writings show they were not merely stimulating themselves to the point of hysteria and non-verbal "babbling," but were instead striving to be keen observers and recorders of what they saw. Hadewijch's notion of *regiratio* presents one way of cycling through stages of body and soul, but the historical Christian dilemma of how to think about the body remained, only partially reconciled by focus on the figure of Christ integrating god and man. Especially for the females who recorded their visions, concentration on the body of Christ was an important aspect in self-definition since women were considered more carnal than men. Caroline Walker Bynum and others have done extensive work on medieval definitions of the female body and have shown how religious women responded with an intense devotion to the body of Christ. Bynum records a tri-part relationship of starving, feeding others, and eating Christ.[8]

Trying to recapture the mindset of the medieval holy women about the body is difficult in an age in which many philosophers, psychologists, and medical researchers, along with a large number of lay materialists, question the existence of soul at all. While Aquinas and the scholastics struggled to balance the notion that soul and body were created at the moment of conception with their belief in the neoplatonic priorization of soul over body, for the female mystics the problem of the body was even more fraught. For educated men and aspiring women, that body, and in particular the feminine body, was seen as an impediment to the medieval aspirant's true spiritual nature. Traditionally Christianity had encouraged asceticism, but with the rise of the Franciscans and

Dominicans, using the body as a means of communicating God's love to an audience also became a focus.

The ascetic branch of Christianity stemming from the Desert Fathers interpreted our material bodies as standing in the way of our ability to comprehend or be united with the spiritual realm in neoplatonic progression toward the nonhuman ideal. This soul/body split passed into Christian doctrine mainly through Augustine's conception of the impassable gulf between the natures of man and God, bridged only by Christ. In pre-Reformation Christianity, starving the body or mortifying the flesh through self-wounding or other deprivation was seen as a typical way to increase spirituality on an individual level. Modern critics working within a "vernacular theology" framework interpret the encouragement of women's asceticism as a means of control in service of the ecclesiastical administration. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff writes that "Women were bodies [men characterized by mind or spirit] and bodies were dangerous—dangerous to men and therefore dangerous to society as a whole. The physical austerities undergone by women mystics, and that young women often imposed on themselves, underscored society's need to control and purify the female body."[9] In reading the works of the scholastics and anchoritic literature, we have already seen that for Continental and especially English women, the message for anchoresses was to make one's physical self as invisible as possible.

Therefore, it is somewhat surprising to uncover the extent to which lay religious women in this period contributed to the growing entrepreneurship, commercialization, education, medical practice, and social welfare projects of the age. That these women were often the same ones who overtly carved, starved, or otherwise marred their bodies in

an attempt to transcend them is difficult to explain as long as we see them through a modern lens. Recognizing the social codes that gave authority and credence to those who consciously deprived the body helps to counter the distancing and disturbing reactions we may feel toward the mystics' graphic actions on their own flesh. A close study of the situation reveals that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these acts were often committed deliberately for a purpose, not half-consciously out of desperation. Although it may not be immediately apparent given our squeamishness about the physical, acting out the social codes was often a power move giving one the authority to speak about spiritual things. In the early Modern period, consciously depriving the body served as a sign to the community (and the universe) that a woman or a man was seeking a deeper level of spiritual connection with God and hence was more trustworthy and capable of wise speech than others.

Because receiving the Eucharist in Christian thought obtains one spiritual grace through the physical action of eating the body of Christ, this central sacrament was given even greater focus as a devotional practice by Incarnational Theology and was closely tied to beguine spirituality. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) emphasized the need for all the faithful to receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist once a year at minimum. Augustine's definition of sacrament as "the visible form of an invisible grace"[10] was reinforced by the idea that the Eucharist and baptism are more than symbols; they are "communicating signs" channeling or serving as conduits for the reality of the signified. In practical terms, the image *becomes* the reality in this world of signs.

When connected to the ritual of the mass, the sacrament is a "visible word," a combination of signifier and signified. Bynum describes how the emphasis on the

incarnate nature of the host created ambivalence about receiving the sacrament in the medieval religious communities: an intense hunger for and yet fear of communion with the Divine. The adoration of the body itself led to a change in liturgy, with the elevation of the host during the mass and institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264, and the regularization of elaborate monstrance rituals and processionals in the fourteenth century.[11]

The Feast of Corpus Christi was the creation of one female mystic, Juliana of Cornillon (d. 1258), who had a vision in 1208 of a full moon with one dark spot, the ecclesiastical calendar without the Feast of Holy Sacrament. After twenty years of meditation upon this vision and a study of the works of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), she pushed the authorities to institute a liturgical innovation. Through her prompting, the feast was instituted by the bishop of Liège, and after his death Juliana helped to write the office of the mass that was eventually used during Corpus Christi.[12] Here, as in many other cases, the compulsion to put into practice what one experienced in the individual vision state propelled Juliana toward action in the outer world that ultimately impacted the whole system. Whatever minimalization of women's initiative the scholastics may have hoped for with their enforcement of strict rules of enclosure and banishment of women's speech, the inward turning almost always led to outward action that changed the institution seeking to maintain the status quo.

Regular communion and adoration of the host coupled with meditation on the physical body of Christ led the medieval religious to a heady combination of awe, guilt, longing, and hunger for connection with God. Convents and beguinages often had difficulty retaining a regularly attending priest to perform the sacrament for them for

various reasons, including the rapid expansion of women's communities. The desire for daily communion intensified the difficulties of finding ways to minister to the enclosed and tertiary women. Mystics such as Christine of Stommeln "saw participation in the Eucharist as the perpetual commemoration of her marriage to the heavenly Bridegroom,"[13] piling symbol upon symbol.

The lack of priests to celebrate daily mass at all convents and beguinages—coupled with the desire for daily communion that became so pronounced in some women as to verge on frenzy—created an impossible situation. Women's public "performance" of ecstatic trance upon reception of the Eucharist was so troubling to the priests that church officials began to recommend the virtues of voluntary abstinence. Citing the equivalence of "spiritual communion," or inner meditation, to actual physical reception, the church hoped to quiet the voracious longing for communion and ecstasy among religious women. This replacement of actual with virtual contributed to the already strengthening thirteenth century sense that the image could be as efficacious as actual reality, a theme that emerged in the mystic writing and that presented a complicated situation for both the church as institution and for the mystics themselves. The church found itself inadvertently encouraging a move toward individual revelation rather than corporate worship. As the female writers sought to integrate their mystic experience of virtual sufficiency with their need for the physical act of receiving the host, they struggled to present their experience as non-threatening to an already defensive church. Institutionalizing and ritualizing Juliana of Cornillon's virtual experience into a sanctioned feast was one attempt to accommodate as well as control.

We can see in Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302) a study in the contrasting emotions of insufficiency, hunger, and awe regarding the Eucharist and also an internalization of the church's call for spiritual communion in Chapter 38 of *The Herald of Divine Love*.

> Her great devotion to the body of Christ made her desire to receive it frequently. Once, when she had been preparing herself more fervently than usual for several days beforehand, during the night before the Sunday she felt her strength failing and saw that she would not be able to go to communion. As was her wont, she consulted the Lord about what she could best do to please him. The Lord replied to her gently: "Just the spouse who has eaten his fill of various dishes prefers to rest for a while quietly in the nuptial chamber with his bride rather than to sit beside her at table, so it will please me more that you should abstain from communion this time, through prudence, rather than receiving." She said: "And how, my most loving Lord, can you really say that now you have eaten your fill?" He replied: "Each one of the restraints you have placed upon your words and all your senses, and also the good desires, prayers, and intentions to which you have applied yourself in preparing for the reception of my most precious body and blood are for me like various most exquisite dishes served to me, with which I am well satisfied. [14]

Gertrude's consciousness of the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist, her feelings of inadequacy despite days of preparation, and Christ's reassurance that it may be more pleasing to him if she abstains rather than receives all show how deeply significant the liturgy of the sacrament had become by the end of the thirteenth century. The efficacy of Gertrude's own physical actions of preparation and emotional intentions receive sanction and acknowledgement by Christ, who is "fed" by them in a reciprocal act of virtual eating.

The physical act of reception is displaced, first by Gertrude's intention and desire, and secondly by her inner meditation on the Eucharist she voluntarily relinquishes. Later, as she watches other nuns receiving the host from Christ himself, "offering the saving host with his own adorable hand,"[15] she questions which of them will receive the greater good for body and soul. Christ answers,

"Is one who is adorned with precious stones and jewelry considered wealthier than one who possesses a great hidden treasure of fine gold?" By these words he gave her to understand that although those who communicated sacramentally would undoubtedly receive a greater abundance of grace for both body and soul as a consequence, according to the belief of the church, yet one who, purely out of the virtues of obedience and prudence and for the glory of God, abstained from sacramental communion, but communicated spiritually, aflame with desire and love of God, would deserve of his divine goodness the blessing which she then received, followed by much more efficacious fruits in God's sight, in a manner which is, however, hidden from human understanding.[16]

In this vision, the body of Christ as imagined by Gertrude and the spiritual and physical actions of preparation performed by Gertrude as imagined by Christ both become internalized by the other in a dialectic process of vision and nurturance.

Although Gertrude was careful to emphasize the greater grace of physical reception, "according to the belief of the church," she was at the same time given higher knowledge that spiritual communion in the right circumstances could lead to "much more efficacious fruits in God's sight." In tentative language such as this the mystic subtly offered an alternative view based on her own experience, but she did not overemphasize the issue and she did not proclaim a new doctrine. In her recounting of the visionary experience, the manner in which she would be blessed was "hidden from human understanding" and therefore not a matter of theological debate. As a result of internalizing and divinizing the new ecclesiastical recommendations against frequent communion for women by putting them in Christ's mouth, Gertrude in her writing pushed against the boundaries of official doctrine with her expectation of "more efficacious fruits."

Gertrude's story exemplifies all that the twenty-first century critic may find difficult or distancing about late medieval spirituality. The intense physical preparation for receiving the host or communing on a spiritual level with the divine is the aspect of

medieval piety most at odds with current thinking, leading many to characterize the mystics as neurotic anorexics, self-destructive victims of a male-based power structure, sexually repressed, desperate women who sought relief in mystical sublimation. At worst, the late medieval female mystics are seen as hysterical masochists spurred to greater suffering by the religiously sanctioned pseudo-pornography of saint's lives and mystagogic handbooks written by men trained to abhor the female body.

For many scholars, exploring de Beauvoir's original analysis of female mystic behavior in light of more recently found women's writing or interesting new modern parallels offers more of the same characterization. Cristina Mazzoni, for example, in Saint Hysteria investigates the psychological diagnosis of hysteria as repressed religious mysticism, building on centuries of commentary on Teresa of Avila.[17] Other critics such as Luce Irigaray[18] and Hélène Cixous[19] embrace the medieval mystics as irrational rebels who subvert the logos-oriented male structures encasing them through reveling in the sheer, pre-verbal madness of their ecstasies. Indeed, the rigor to which the medieval religious subjected themselves through fasting, deprivation, and physical penance today seems a bizarre and unnecessary inheritance of their neoplatonic distrust of the material world, and opens the possibility that Christian medieval mysticism was simply a culturally-derived product of an irrational, inhumane system.

A close reading of the medieval mystics, however, does not show the women and men to be consciously seeking mystical union in order to escape or subvert the status quo, even though that may have been a subconscious motivation for them. If anything, according to their own lights they were trying to embody the doctrines they were given and heal their times, not wallow in self-indulgent, unconscious babble. They emerge

from their visions as performers and writers who sought to communicate what they found

on their spiritual travels to an audience through their physical bodies and writings. Since

their visions often highlight the contrast between virtual and actual,[20] in order to integrate

the two on the physical scale, they became both writers and social reformers. That was

the result, however, not the impetus, of their vocation as mystics in most cases. We still

need to decide if their task made sense given their historical and theological context.

Claiming Spiritual and Authorial Validation Through Body Image and Fasting

Neurosis in any society should be determined in comparison to that society's

definition of normal. Within the context of their own time with its emphasis on the

possibility of the physical object, *imago*, as able to perform spiritual functions, the

mystics were operating in a society that saw the possibility of vision as legitimate and

valid; according to Aquinas, body and soul are simultaneously created and physical

reality can be of one substance with the spiritual. While in some individual cases there

may have been a link between anorexia and adolescent neurosis, in most cases the food

deprivation of the mystics could also be explained as a byproduct of both their vows of

poverty and cultural definitions of sanctity. They were following the codes and cultural

assumptions of their society and were not considered abnormal in their tendency to fast

for spiritual purposes. To be a truly spiritual religious person, according to late medieval

norms, was to be someone unhampered by the need for physical sustenance.

As we see in Chaucer's work and the *fabliaux* tales, a well-fed religious person

can immediately be identified as a hypocrite. In the General Prologue of The Canterbury

<u>Tales,</u> the nun can be pegged immediately by the audience when one quarter of her

description is taken up by a blow-by-blow account of her table manners (ll. 127-141). Of

the monk, Chaucer writes,

> His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
> And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.
> He was a lord ful fat and in good point;
> His eyen sepe, and rollynge in his heed,
> That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
> His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.
> Now certainly he was a fair prelaat;
> He was nat pale as a forpyned goost.
> A fat swan loved he best of any roost. (ll. 198-206)[21]

That we can almost see the grease dripping from the monk's face and hands is a good

indication of the effort he put into his spiritual condition. Jean de Meung castigates the

"sleek" beguines who put on a long face for the prince (patron) but are daughters of

luxury.[22] Examples abound in medieval satire of people who were universally recognized

as spiritually inauthentic due to their girth. The problem was not just gluttony, but a

perceived slackness in penitence.

In reading through the medieval <u>*Libri Poenitentiales*</u>, one can see that fasting in

particular was the institutionally recognized penance of choice for sins ranging from

taking a bath with one's wife (three days of bread and water)[23] to parricide (two years of

fasting, no meat for the rest of one's life, with no alcohol on alternating days).[24] For

instance, in the <u>*Poenitentiale Romanum*</u>, Halitgar Bishop of Cambrai (ca. 830) writes, "If

any cleric commits perjury, he shall do penance for seven years, three of these on bread

and water…If compelled by necessity, anyone unknowingly commits perjury, he shall do

penance for three years, one year on bread and water."[25] Fasting was also built in to the

liturgical calendar as a requirement for everyone, and so is feasting. Ironically, Burchard

of Worms prescribes a twenty day fast of bread and water as penance for fasting on the

Lord's day, which is always a feast day.[26]

The point of emphasis is that these fasts were part of the liturgical year, were not

gender-specific, and were prescribed for everyone from bishop to peasant. In most cases,

the higher the ecclesiastical rank, the longer the fast or the more lashes one received—the

deeper the penance was expected to be. Bynum and other more recent critics have

concentrated on fasting as a product of specifically female victimization by the patristic

power structure who saw women's bodies as an impediment to salvation, yet also the

women's subversive identification (and therefore elevation) of their bodies with the body

of Christ. This perspective explains the prolonged fasts of women penitents as a means of

controlling their bodies in a society that allotted no personal control to women, of

speaking out in a society that would not let them be heard.

Nathalie Fraise in her 2000 book, _L'Anorexie mentale et le jeûne mystique du_

moyen âge: faim, foi et pouvoir, discusses the similarity between the medieval holy

women and anorexic women of the present who use their bodies to speak for them when

their society denies them words: _"Entre rébellion et obéissance, la privation alimentaire_

apparaît comme un moyen essentiellement féminin de dire par le corps ce qui ne peut

être exprimé par des mots: les désirs d'indépendance, d'expression de soi et de contrôle

sur sa vie."[27] Martha Greene Eads in her analysis of Doris Bett's Sharp Teeth of Love

draws the same conclusion: "in the famine ravaged late Middle Ages, thin was definitely

not 'in'"--the assumption being that since the female mystics were not fasting to meet

standards of beauty, they must have been resisting the messages they were given by

starving themselves.[28] For these critics, in the Middle Ages, as today, anorexia was an attempt to gain personal control over one's life.

One problem with this explanation of the role of fasting is that the medieval fast was not an essentially feminine *modus operandi*. This "subversive" interpretation does not recognize that both men and women voluntarily fasted and were commanded to fast by the church authorities, and that by fasting they were fulfilling institutional and cultural codes of spirituality rather than speaking against them. Not eating does send a clear message to the community, but that message is not necessarily one of rebellion and personal reaction against authority. More often than not, fasting was a personal choice connected to and agreeing with the definition of holiness given by spiritual authority and the culture at large.

On the level of sign, whether or not a holy person ate enough for bodily sustenance was therefore an identifier of their level of sanctity. Fasting may seem today as if it were a typically female activity because male biographers of medieval holy women often highlighted their attitude toward eating in order to prove that the women were truly worthy of institutional trust and lay veneration. However, male mystics like Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Richard Rolle (1290-1349), and Heinrich Suso (1295-1366) were also identified by their ability to abstain from eating or to exist on less than the normal quantity of food for extended periods. The penitent fasts for males indicated in the _Libri Poenitentiales_ were much more severe than for women, and religious people of both genders were held to a standard of gauntness by popular culture.

Whereas the general populace had no control over the amount of fasting allotted to them by the priest in the confessional, those who chose freely to limit food intake on

their own, or exist only on the Eucharist for extended periods of time, did so as a sign to the community and to God that they were cutting ties with the body in preparation for spiritual enlightenment. The voluntary fast became a public sign of one's readiness to become a visionary and a seal of authority on the veracity of one's vision. The inability to tolerate food also separated the mystic from the experience of ordinary individuals; inability to eat much was therefore another signifier of potential holiness and was used as such by hagiographers of both genders. In his epilogue to Rudolph M. Bell's 1985 <u>Holy Anorexia</u>, William N. Davis recognizes the embeddedness of hunger codes within the European culture in his realization that holy anorexia became unfashionable once the cultural signifiers of holiness changed for women:

> …as the definition of holiness was altered, so eventually was the incidence of holy anorexia. When, finally, female saints came to be recognized in terms of their capacity to do good works, the phenomenon of holy anorexia largely disappeared. Self-starvation lost its appeal for Catholic women when it became irrelevant as a means to gain the highly valued state of holiness.[29]

Implicit in Davis's epilogue is the presentation of northern European women as wielders of rather than victims of the symbols of power.

An example of how the twelfth century medieval male writers used the cultural codes of hunger to identify female mystics and to promulgate the codes themselves can be seen in the story of the beguine Christina of St. Trond, also known as Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224). Thomas de Cantimpré, her biographer, highlights her separateness from the mundane world with descriptions that seem apocryphal and unrealistic. Christina, also called Mirabilis, was orphaned and as a young shepherdess received visitations from Christ. Due to her extreme efforts of contemplation on these visions, she died but was miraculously restored to life during her funeral mass. During her death

experience she visited hell and experienced the underworld; when she returned to her body she explained that she could no longer tolerate the company of human beings. For the rest of her life she vacillated between trying to escape human contact by fleeing into forests and deserted places, roosting like a bird in trees and on the top of steeples. The local people and her sisters assumed she was demon-possessed and bound her with chains; however, like Paul and Silas she was rescued by the hand of God from her prison.

> One night, with the help of God, her chains and fetters fell off and she escaped and fled into remote desert forests and there lived in trees as though she were a bird. Even when she needed food—for despite the extreme sensitivity of her body, she could not live without food—and was tortured by a most terrible hunger, she did not at all wish to return home but she remained alone with God in the secret deserts. She therefore uttered a prayer to the Lord and humbly begged that he gaze on her anguish with the eyes of His mercy. Without delay, turning her eyes to herself, she saw that her dry virginal breasts were dripping sweet milk against all the laws of nature. Wondrous thing! Unheard of in all the centuries since the incomparable Mother of God! Using the dripping liquid as food, she was nourished for nine weeks with the virginal milk from her own breasts.[30]

According to de Cantimpré, after a long life of roaming the woods, having visions, and periodically advising various politicians, Christina touched down in the town of St. Trond. There she took on half the purgatorial obligations for Count Louis of Looz, who confessed his sins to her before he died. She then died herself once again and was revived, and finally passed to her eternal reward in a third and final death at the monastery of St. Catherine's.

Her life as recorded by de Cantimpré became an inspiration for anchorites, beguines, and aspiring religious of both sexes due to her holiness and lack of materiality. Despite the human need for food, Christina through special favor was granted the ability to sustain herself rather than having to encounter other human beings—including priests who might administer the sacrament to her. As in the case of Gertrude, we can see the

sine medio mystical experience of God directly, without actual partaking of the Eucharist through the offices of the priest. Yet the craving for the sacramental presence of Christ served to bring Christina back to the human fold rhythmically through her life. During another imprisonment she publicly lactated a nutritious and healing oil, proof to her family and the community that she was not insane, but holy. Her body functioned as her claim to authority and sanctity within her social network; the verification of her holiness by the flowing oils and unguents from her body enabled her to act as advisor and mediator for Count Louis as well as to counsel the young nuns at St. Catherine's before she finally died for the last time.

Although de Cantimpré's version of Christina's life is often dismissed as completely unrealistic hagiography meant to shame lax male clergy into caring more about their own lack of holiness, at the time his record was supposedly verified by eyewitness accounts of other beguines, the nuns of St. Anne's in St. Trond, and Jacques de Vitry, a priest who wrote biographies of other beguines with intense devotion to the Eucharist. De Vitry, a rather conservative priest, became the spokesperson for the emerging beguine movement centered around Liège. His lives of Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213) and of Lutgard of Aywieres (1182/3-1246) also presented the women using the recognizable spirituality codes of their world.

In de Vitry's portrayal, holy women are so consumed by guilt and inadequacy that they are often unable to consume food; they spend much of the day lamenting their physical bodies and at times do physical damage to themselves. Like Christina Mirabilis, the beguines of de Vitry's *vitae* go into trance and seem impervious to hot and cold, moving spasmodically in dances of ecstasy when released from seizure.

> They had no other infirmity, save that their souls were melted with desire of Him, and sweetly resting with the Lord, as they were comforted in spirit they were weakened in body…The cheeks of one were seen to waste away, while her soul was melted with the greatness of love. Another's flow of tears had made visible furrows down her face. Others were drawn with such intoxication of spirit that in sacred silence they would remain quiet a whole day, with no sense of feeling for things about them, so that they could not be roused by clamour or feel a blow.[31]

One message seems clear from the description of the mystics by their contemporary male biographers: insensate, incommunicative, consumptive women may be odd, but they do not cause trouble. Their biographers' characterization of the female mystics as harmlesss creates a problem then for mystics who use the body as text in order to claim power, to signify holiness and the authority to speak. While this form of bodily textuality may have worked for the immediate audience witnessing their form of art, it may have been misinterpreted by the audience of the *vitae*. Over this diminishing from of hagiography the mystics had little control.

In addition to providing an exemplary form of holiness to aspiring *sanctae mulieres* and disengaged male religious, de Vitry may have had another purpose in presenting the women as so very disconnected from what one would consider normal behavior. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff in <u>Medieval Women's Visionary Literature</u> explains that de Vitry realized the revolutionary implications of beguine spirituality; he therefore cast Marie and Lutgard in the traditional role of incorporeal holy woman to shield them from close ecclesiastical scrutiny.[32] By making the stories seem so out of the realm of possibility, both de Vitry and de Cantimpré could have been protecting the holy women they knew and admired. The exaggerated image we are given of a young girl acting out her religious community's horror of materiality upon her own body is a graphic and telling example.

In Book 1, Chapter 22, de Vitry reports of Marie d'Oignies that

> Having once tasted the spirit, she held as nothing all sensual delights until one day she remembered the time when she had been gravely ill and had been forced, from necessity, to eat meat and drink a little wine for a short time. From the horror she felt at her previous carnal pleasure, she began to afflict herself and she found no rest in spirit until, by means of extraordinary bodily chastisements, she had made up for all the pleasures she had experienced in the past. In vehemence of spirit, almost as if she were inebriated, she began to loathe her body when she compared it to the sweetness of the Paschal Lamb and, with a knife, in error cut out a large piece of her flesh which, from embarrassment, she buried in the earth. Inflamed as she was, however, by the intense fire of love, she did not feel the pain of her wound and, in ecstasy of mind, she saw one of the seraphim standing close by her.[33]

Several things are striking about this description of Marie's actions. The first is her paradoxical feelings about her own body. On the one hand, de Vitry emphasizes that she is completely impervious to her physical self. She only eats when she is so debilitated by illness that others can force her to eat and drink "a little wine," but only for "a short period of time"; she then hacks off sizeable pieces of her own flesh without feeling pain. On the other hand, she is so preoccupied with and horrified by her own materiality that she must undergo "extraordinary bodily chastisements" to alleviate her guilt at being forced to eat. Her biographer must have been aware that even though he was drawing on the familiar spiritual trope of a dissociated saintly woman, Marie's actions go far beyond any recommended penitential discipline.

He tried to soften the image by making Marie seem blameless of her own actions; she acts "almost as if she were inebriated." Even though she has gotten hold of a knife somehow, she "in error" cuts out a piece of her own body, and then is so embarrassed that she buries it. Rather than an image of model holiness, Marie is shown as someone who could not even do penance correctly; after this scene she confessed her actions to her priest and presumably then went into another cycle of self-loathing and guilt. Although

de Vitry may have been trying to protect the beguines by making them seem unintentional, harmless, and recognizable, he and de Cantimpré have both given us a picture of damaged, neurotic women that has kept many Western theologians and literary critics from paying attention to the nature of their visionary experience.

The *vitae* of actual mystics as given to us by male authors as well as the descriptions of female holiness and model saints in devotional literature for anchorites such as the The Life of St. Macrina and the *Ancrene Riwle*—both written by male ecclesiastics for enclosed women—do paint a picture of medieval women mystics undergoing such bodily chastisement as to lead to physical harm and death, actions that would by today's standards be considered neurotic and self-destructive. Christina, for instance, in addition to going without food and human contact for weeks at a time, supposedly threw herself into burning ovens, icy rivers, under mill wheels, and consistently emerged never the worse for the wear. As Jacques de Vitry's qualifications about Marie's intentionality toward harming her body show, though, the extent to which holiness requiring the neglect and destruction of the body was questionable even at the time such books were written.

Concentrating on how the male biographers defined the female mystics gives us a one-sided and misleading picture of how they saw themselves and their role in society. It is hard to imagine the antic performances of Christina or Marie as described by their biographers as having a social function at all; they seem totally self-absorbed and almost unconscious of their own behavior—indeed, narcissistic. On the surface, they do not use social referents in determining their actions, to the extent that they are conscious enough to determine their actions at all. However, within their social context, their actions were

a way of legitimizing their claim to authority, a way used increasingly throughout the late

thirteenth century and beyond by women and men lacking social or ecclesiastical power

themselves. This is different than creating a sense of personal control in reaction to social

pressure as seen in today's anorexics. Although an attempt to gain control from a hostile

society may have been a subtle motivation, the main impetus seems to be communicating

a message of power to others, using the codes of hunger to claim status and speech rights.

Amy Hollywood comments that the few preserved works of women

hagiographers use the same codes:

> The body marked by harsh asceticism and paramystical phenomena increasingly becomes the visible sign by which sanctity can be demonstrated and read. The degree to which such legitimizing strategies are internalized by late medieval women can be gauged both by the repetition of such tropes within female-authored hagiography and by their incorporation within female-authored mystical writings.[34]

Hollywood's interpretation stresses the deliberate adoption of ascetic behaviors as a

means of publically proclaiming one's status: mysticism as performance art in which the

body is manipulated and controlled in order to convey the mystical experience to an

audience. The body becomes the stage or living text upon which salvation is worked out

through mystical experience of the incarnation and passion of Christ.[35]

Emphasizing the public nature of the performance should in no way discount the

personal intention of the mystic; the primary goal would not have been status or attention

to the individual, but using the body as a text in order to communicate important ideas.

As Mary Suydam explains,

> It is crucial to understand that 'performance' (including visions) in a sacred context does not mean an artificial or secondary event enacted for the entertainment of a passive audience. Rather, ritual performances are acts intended to transform both performer and audience."[36]

If that is so, the more dramatic the event, the greater the chance for audience transformation to occur. A voice must be heard to be recognized or listened to; claiming and using authority was the means to an end, not the end itself in most cases. We could therefore interpret the elaborate and cringe-inducing acts of self-immolation as another form of writing upon one's own body—writing with the same intention to detail and audience as scratching the words onto animal hide.

Critiquing the Mystics Today

The stories of Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies highlight several issues about the mystics that keep us at an intellectual remove from them and perhaps prevent us from seeing them as artists. Although they were legitimatized as holy women in their own time, their names are largely forgotten in contrast to their more famous biographers and the "rational" ecclesiastical theologians. Their attitudes towards fasting and injuring themselves are not the only alienating characteristics, although without the social definitions of holiness active in their time, they do seem neurotic now. Evidence of holy status considered valid by their audience is not assessed as legitimate today in academic circles. Another distancing factor between our time and theirs is the great pains their biographers take to minimize any sense that they personally influenced those around them in a positive way. The cloaking devices used to cover up their influence or re-interpret them as harmless are still effective, centuries later. Reading between the lines, however, we can see clear impact of the mystic women on their society and recognize the connection between their actions and their message.

For instance, de Cantimpré writes that Christina's own family members considered her crazy and out of control. She had to be bound and caged in order to keep her from flying off to the top of the nearest steeple or tree. Her impulsive and self-destructive actions make her seem more feral or avian than human. The healing and nourishing oil flowing from her breasts may have convinced her family that she was holy, but it does not convince the modern reader.[37] Marie "accidentally" injured herself and hid the fact from everyone but her confessor. Her sister beguines did not even find out about the extent of her cutting and slicing until her death when they could see evidence of what she had done to herself in her short life. Recent studies showing a link between anorexia and slicing in adolescents make Marie seem more like a teenager in need of intervention than a young woman pursuing high spiritual goals and influence. Yet we know from other sources that Christina exerted influence on the behavior of politicians in her area and was sought after for her counsel and intercession. Marie's teachings impacted not just the other members of her beguinage, but also her confessor and those in his circle of influence.

Margot H. King in "The Desert Mothers Revisited" looks at the same group of beguines in the diocese of Liège and realizes that another social code granting them spiritual authority can be seen in their desire to be left alone and escape social situations. We have already seen self-isolation in the lives of Christina and Marie; in her *vita*, Juliana of Cornillon is also portrayed as shunning visitors as a child and adult, always looking for a corner in which to hide.[38] We get the message: these people are naturally self-effacing, "natural" anchorites even without overt pressure to enclose themselves. It is easy to overlook the fact that Juliana audaciously helped to write the mass setting for the

feast of Corpus Christi when so much attention is paid to her inability to tolerate other people around her. Concentrating on the overt messages about these women by their biographers can still make the *vitae* function as the cloaking devices they may have been intended to be, whether the goal was to minimize the women's influence in order to stifle or to protect them from suspicious authorities.

Iconography of the period and later has increased our sense that the women were damaged, misguided, ineffectual, and engaged in solitary pursuit of incommunicable personal union with no connection to larger social concerns. Bernini's statue of St. Teresa in Ecstasy is a case in point. As was true at the time of her vision, St. Teresa in Bernini's depiction is an obviously older woman, which is somehow more poignant than if she were the age of the young Marie d'Oignies. She is lying vulnerably on her back with her bare foot just barely extended, eyes closed, hands relaxed but palms upwards in a gesture of total submission to something unworldly. Poised above her is a smirking cherub who knowingly moves to strike her genitals with his fiery wand while reaching for her breast.[39] Images like Bernini's statue—coupled with the links psychologists have made between suppressed sexuality, sublimation, and religious fervor or hysteria—fix the medieval women mystics in a frame for us today that ignores the actual effectiveness of their lives and teachings.

To see how the mystics considered themselves as writers and performers of sacred narrative, we need to look around or through the most apparent, yet most distancing elements of their practice as it has come down to us. For all of the mystics who lived long enough to reach a certain level of maturity, preparation for, or experience of, the act of union was not the most important factor in their lives. However, in thinking of St

Teresa we don't see her marching and singing through Spain into her old age, founding her Discalced Carmelite houses and caring for an ever-expanding community of women, advising politicians and ecclesiastical authorities. Thanks to Bernini, we forever see a somewhat pathetic middle-aged woman at the mercy of a sinister looking boy-figure in a fleeting moment of abandon.

One other factor has kept us from being able to approach the mystics as well as we might, and that is current Western paradigms of spirituality. We tend to see spiritual experience, if we believe in it at all, as something intensely individual and nobody's business but our own. Corporate spirituality is often tolerated as long as it remains in the realm of a cerebral discussion of ethics or meeting of like-minded people, but too much sensationalism is viewed as suspicious, a means for charismatic leaders to gain power, influence, and other favors. We accept organized religion only so far as it is perceived as a "civilizing" or charitable influence. In contrast, we do like the idea of a personal epiphany, self-actualization that remains unseen and largely undiscussed except in private circles, and we are accustomed to using journaling as a means of thinking and problem-solving. The personal, autobiographical nature of medieval women's writings can lead us to see their quests as similar to our own, especially the beguine poetry that uses all of the tropes and symbols of *Minne*, another subjective experience.

Because they give us so much detail about their interior lives, we may be tempted to think of their quests as strictly individual, but that is ignoring the largely social context of medieval spirituality. The female mystics discuss themselves and their reactions, not necessarily as important in their own right, but as personal *exempla* to aid the spiritual guidance of their students, as mystagogic images. Of course, the more we notice the

artistry and detail of their work, the more we appreciate the individual writer's concerns and choice of style; looking back, we can see their writing as part of a larger social shift toward an elevation of individual experience and as one step toward humanism. Often, though, we focus most on what attracts us (the carrot of actual divine union) and what repels us (the stick of their self-destructive means of attaining such union).

Focusing just on the carrot or the stick, we may miss the mystic herself or himself as fulfilling a defined role in medieval society. Although the indescribable moment of union is sometimes referred to in a mystic's writing in order to encourage younger beguines or novitiates to follow the spiritual path, and bitter complaints over having been abandoned by a divine lover inform beguine poetry, the actual mystical experience of these women is fleeting, sometimes never repeated after the initial "contact." Ecstasy itself is not emphasized as the goal, and wishing to suffer with Christ (or in place of Christ) is viewed as infantile, naïve, and prideful by mystics who claim to write from a more mature perspective, such as Julian of Norwich.

In light of the several distancing factors that discourage us from seeing these women as artists—their self-destructive behaviors, the commentary on them by contemporary biographers, their portrayal by subsequent generations who re-interpreted them through their own artistic lenses, our current paradigms of spirituality and individuality that seem far removed from theirs—the task of being able to engage in re-vision of them is difficult. There is a way, however, to shed some light on what these medieval men and women were doing if we look outside, or perhaps behind, our own cultural paradigms to a more distant model. What the mystic writers were doing, and consciously saw themselves as doing, looks more intentional—and social—if we view it

in terms of a commonly accepted, archetypal religious pattern in non-Christian societies,

that of the shaman.

Chapter Four

One Way In: Mystic Writer as Shaman

Looking at the theological questions the mystics were exploring, considering the depth of their thought, and taking into account their systemic impact on the church, it is hard to categorize them as merely hysterical, out of control women at the mercy of a destructive cultural imperative, or as self-hating neurotics who must damage themselves in order to ease their guilt, or as babbling sensationalists relishing their incomprehensibility as a means of challenging and subverting male logic. In most religions, the link between mysticism, fasting, self-wounding, and illness is long established and fulfills several social functions; it can be an identifier of holiness, an initiatory rite, a personal identification of status, a means of communicating between one semiotic realm and another. It seems productive to me to see them as working out their own sense of equilibrium with the sacred world by fulfilling a mythic role similar to that of a shaman for their society.

Like shamanic figures, the medieval mystic writers seek balance for their world, not just for themselves; they carry messages between worlds, they commune with spiritual guides, they mentor and train the next generation of visionaries. The vast bulk of their work is mystagogic, written as instructional and spiritual handbooks to a defined and known audience. No matter how subjective we deem their trance ecstasies, their recording of that experience is much more than wholly self-referential *ars gratia artis*.

In order to make this comparison, however, we first need to ask whether or not shamanism can be applied in an urban context. Whereas fifteen years ago one could with some confidence use the term "shamanism" to refer to any activity resembling Mircea Eliade's classic definition, anthropologists using more recent fieldwork have now called his work into question.[1] According to Eliade's 1964 <u>Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy</u>, shamanism is a constellation of activities found across the pre-agrarian spectrum of human society, primarily among hunter-gatherer groups such as indigenous peoples of Scandinavia, Siberia, Alaska, Northern Japan and the Korean peninsula, North and South America, Africa, and South Pacific Islands. In Europe, evidence of shamanic practice has been recorded in the cave art of Southwest France and Spain. Although some differences can be noticed between cultures,[2] broad patterns of similarity exist in how a shaman reaches the ecstatic state, what he or she sees there, and how the shaman functions in the community. Although fulfilling an important social role, a shaman is not indispensible for the religious life of the community and often performs an ancillary function outside the institutionalized spiritual system.[3] The salient feature of the shaman is his or her ability to travel between the spirit world, the underworld, and the human, middle world in order to restore balance to a community and bring healing to an individual. Far from being someone on a path to personally fulfilling "experience of God," a traditional shaman braves the dangers of other planes in order to maintain equilibrium in this world for the good of the community.

Significant events of shamanic preparation include a "call," either through heredity or a personal crisis, usually severe illness that precipitates an initial experience of contact with other realms. Initiation follows a specific pattern: fasting, self-

wounding—often slicing oneself with knives, intense concentration combined with rhythm and music through drumming and chanting to induce a trance state in which the ecstatic assumes rigidity or a death-state, frenetic dancing, seizure-like motions, or imitation of birds and other animals. While in trance, the shaman has a rather gory death-experience, often being dismembered and eaten by spirits, and is then reconstructed and allowed to continue with the help of spirit guides, often eagles or other animals. Gender confusion, while part of the free creativity of the chaotic liminal state, is sometimes resolved through a *hieros gamos*, divine marriage, as part of the reconstruction of the shaman.

After the descent into dismemberment and chaos, the shaman ascends by climbing or flying up a tree or ladder that connects the three planes of existence. After conversing and even bartering with spirits, the shaman can return to the human world and share knowledge or healing with the rest of the community. The shaman must undergo this death-initiation in order to access the other worlds and can then act or speak with authority and power upon return. Often, the shaman cannot recover from his or her own precipitating illness until the initiation cycle is complete and shamanic practice is begun. On a personal level, the descent into a world of chaos, individual dissolution and resolution, and the ascent back into the structured human world mirror the rite of passage work explored by anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner.[4] The bringing of order out of chaos is the gift of the shaman to his or her out-of-balance world.[5]

Several aspects of the typical medieval visionary experience seem parallel to Eliade's description of the shaman, so why not use this term to put the European medieval mystics into a broader continuum of human religious experience? It is

tempting. The shaman complex fits neatly into the hero archetype as expressed by Jung

and popularized by Joseph Campbell, and the word shaman has now filtered into popular

spiritual and psychological parlance. Anyone claiming to have experienced a trance-like

vision state, from Black Elk to Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill W., has been

described as a shaman.[6] In peer-reviewed religious studies journals, the shamanic journey

has become another metaphor for any spiritual pilgrimage.[7] Scientists and scholars—

anyone on a quest for knowledge—have been considered shamans.[8] Bands of neo-

shamans have arisen under the tutelage of Michael Harner seeking a counter-culture

reality based on essential, "uncivilized" experience.[9] Several working anthropologists,

religious scholars, and archaeologists join Harner in balancing their careers with

neoshamanic practice on the side[10], and sociologist Robert Wallis posits that these

modern day shamans are no less authentic than their Siberian "ancestors."[11] One of the

most popular new *anime* cartoons, Shaman King, has further muddied the waters for

upcoming generations, as a true shaman was rarely the ruling head of any society.

At the heart of the anthropological debate is the need to see shamanism in its

original context, if that is possible at this point. Kehoe and others object to Eliade's Us-

Them duality. For example, according to Eliade, shamanism cannot be practiced in the

urban West; in fact, "shamanic traditions have been 'put in their place' by … civilizations

of the urban and agrarian type."[12] Kehoe writes, "Ecstasies written up by saints and

prophets of the major world religions are slighted in Eliade's book. The implication is

that citizens of the major nations are less likely to experience that peak religiosity

firsthand."[13] Eliade's embedded cultural primitivism lent itself well to the alternative

culture movements of the 1960s and led to three of the four factions at odds in shaman

studies now: those sharing a view that shamanism is part of an Indo-Germanic *Ur-kultur* that migrated northward before coming south once again. Opposing these groups are field anthropologists who condemn Eliade for his lack of fieldwork, his German Romantic politics, and his theological assumptions about an eternally-manifesting sacred world.[14] The term "shaman" in "non-practicing" anthropological circles is viewed as hopelessly corrupted, of no value for anthropology outside of an extremely limited, location-specific application to a particular people in a particular time. Schnurbein has suggested that the term is of limited significance even in religious discussion, something that would cause consternation in modern circles, especially those of feminist theologians.

In medieval studies, outside of the debate about whether Loki and Odin are shamanic characters in the Icelandic sagas, direct transmission from pre-literate Arctic hunters and gatherers to Europeans on the cusp of the Renaissance remains an issue hard to resolve. Angela Marie Hibbard in her study of links between "classic" shamanism and the Vita of Christina of St. Trond assumes that elements of earlier European tribal culture were still present in the late twelfth century, encoded in the lives and practice of earlier saints[15]. Sarah Lynn Higley sees transmission of *seiðr* practices from the Norse sagas to the Welsh Mabinogian,[16] and Margot H. King compares Christina Mirabilis's actions to those of the Irish Wildman, the *gelta.*[17] Christopher Fee and David Leeming trace the whole of northern European history to the back and forth of conquest and reconquest of Celt and Norse tradition, blended with Roman and Christian symbology from the 600s on. The Norse world tree, *yggdrasill*, is conflated with the Anglo-Saxon victory tree and the Christian cross, Odin with Christ.[18] Trying to untangle centuries of oral tradition and

accreted rural practice is impossible, especially since as Ramsey MacMullen has demonstrated yet again in his 1997 <u>Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries</u>, history is written and interpreted by the conquerors.[19]

In my own studies of the *Libri Poenitentiales*, I find it striking that the writers of several medieval handbooks prescribe penance for such shamanic practices as communing with spirits, flying, shape-shifting, chanting and dancing in large groups, and knot-tying to determine the future. Even believing in the ability of another to change into the shape of a wolf or any animal, regardless of attempts to practice these behaviors, calls for ten days of penance.[20] Since people generally do not make rules against practices that they do not believe exist in any form, even in the imagination, it is tempting to see these magical practices as holdovers from a longstanding, deeply ingrained shamanic tradition surviving in the folklore and agrarian practice of northern Europe. However, these practices could also be the remnants of a very different tradition, worship of the Great Mother, as Gimbutas and others would assert.[21]

Eliade's work on shamanism has been so influential and his ideas so cross-disciplinary and pervasive that even those who accuse him of fascism find it difficult not to use his shamanic trajectories.[22] This raises interesting questions for current scholars who would use the shamanic pattern as a model for religious narrative or psychological interpretation. If Eliade's work is illegitimate or based on inauthentic scholarship, does that invalidate the work of others who use similar terminology or study the same phenomenon? Is the Turners' equally influential work on liminality and ritual, based on actual fieldwork yet also undoubtedly influenced by Eliade's interpretive constructs, therefore unusable? What then happens to the critical interpretation of performance,

body, and metaphor? After listening carefully to all voices in this conversation, I would suggest that we can cautiously use some of Eliade's ideas where they overlap with the work of independent anthropologists doing actual fieldwork, and where they draw on the body of religious practice recorded in literature and theology for centuries before his 1964 book.

It is somewhat reassuring to realize that Eliade did not invent the idea of shamanism or the religious practice of initiating ecstatic trance for divination or healing. He drew on work done on the Orphic myth and other Dionysian sources for some of his thinking, and one cannot escape the incidence of a broad cross-cultural "shamanic" pattern in most fertility-based religious studies, even before Eliade. Insofar as he is merely synthesizing a general trajectory of one kind of mystical experience, he can be useful so long as the pattern is verified by other scholars with first-hand experience and observation, unless the perspective of these scholars is obviously derived from Eliade himself.[23] One of the most controversial aspects of his work has little impact on my study of the medieval mystics: his assumption of an eternally self-revealing divine penetrating the human world. Since I am concerned with what the mystics believed about themselves and not about the unverifiable truth of their visions, I would only comment that Eliade and the medieval mystics share a belief in the existence of a sacred realm separated from, yet accessible to, the human world. Whether that world actually exists is beside the point. In fact, Eliade's ideas about the eternally manifesting sacred sound rather Bernardine[24] and may perhaps have come from Bernard if it were possible to trace them through the tangled matrices of cultural transmission.

His other assumption, that true shamanism is essentially pre-literate, barbaric, and therefore unavailable to the urban West, smacks of what Kehoe calls "embedded racism" and should be set aside. Even discounting Eliade's primitivistic view of the uncivilized shaman as more authentically in touch with the spirit world than a seeker in literate, agrarian or urban society would be, use of the term "shaman" remains problematic. Rather than not giving the field anthropologists their due, I should differentiate between true Siberian or Saami shamanism and what the northern European mystics were practicing. This requires another word besides "shaman," yet recognizably related to it: perhaps "shamanic complex," a pseudo-shamanism, or "shamanoid behavior patterns."

Drawing on both Clifford Geertz's and Levi-Strauss's view of the integrative power of myth, Halifax describes this shamanic complex in socio-psychological terms:

> The psyche that is emotionally saturated organizes itself by means of mythological conceptions that form an explanatory system which gives significance and direction to human suffering. The seemingly irrational is found to be ordered through the paradoxical. The socially unacceptable becomes the stuff of sacred social drama. The extraordinary dangers that are encountered in the psychophysiological adventures of the shaman become at first bearable, and then ultimately heroic.[25]

The advantage of viewing the medieval mystics as practitioners of a shamanic psychic pattern is that it recognizes the organizing power of what they were trying to do on a social level, rather than seeing them as totally at the mercy of unconscious desires or damaging internalized social codes about women's sinfulness. Also, it more accurately reflects the organizing and authoritative actions they performed as a result of their visions in order to communicate them to the public. Rather than remaining the victim of a psyche saturated by conflicting messages and a tenuous position in her own world, the mystic

writer can be transformed into a hero through the acceptance of the shamanic role of balancing or mediating between worlds.

The issue of cultural transmission of an archaic rite to young, urban, literate women in thirteenth-century northern Europe remains. However, at bottom we do not need to find instances of direct cultural transmission of shamanic psychic structures in whatever folk practices or beliefs may have existed. The quest for direct links is intriguing but not really necessary, as the mystics were involved in intense concentration on Christ's incarnation, dismembering Passion, death, resurrection, and return with a gift of salvation for the world. Incarnational theology, meditation on the images of Christ's Passion, the injunctions by church authorities to discipline the body by fasting or flagellation, repeated daily rituals of communal singing and chanting—all would have contributed toward inducing a state similar to the ecstatic trances recorded by "traditional" shamans, and did.

The communal ritual of reciting the Hours and singing mass initiated a majority of the mystic experiences recorded by the European women as they re-enacted the shamanic conflation of eater and eaten, hunter and hunted in the act of eucharistic consumption. In his article "Gregorian Chant and the Power of Emptiness," Calvin Stapert explores the integral relationship of chant and worship; chant is "the musical embodiment of a spiritual principle that Peter Kreeft calls 'the power of emptiness.'"[26] An expression that is unadorned and monotone, chant embodies the pulling of all disparate pieces into union as part of its very nature. It subdues individuality and subsumes the chanter into a collective experience that transcends time and place. The repetition and rhythm allow one to sink into the experience and forget whatever may

distract from the act of worship, requiring of its adepts a minimal consciousness in order to participate. As part of the daily prayers, chant was one of the prime catalysts for the visionary state for both beguine and nun. Even Julian in her anchorage would have heard the singing of collective prayers from the cathedral and could have participated, although we know she had perhaps only one more vision after her initial illness-induced seeing.

Following the chanting of psalms, the mystics eat the Eucharistic gift (*charis,* or favor, grace) of God, reciprocally offering themselves to God as a gift. Union ensues, and this amalgam of multi-layered symbol and culturally-laden symbology is surely enough to produce the "emotionally saturated psyche" Halifax sees as precipitating the shamanic state for those anticipating and desiring this experience. In a sense, the shamanic pattern is given to the mystics through the liturgy and they are enjoined to imitate it; their intense concentration on the Passion becomes the training ground for their own shamanoid visions. The need for direct transmission from prehistoric times to the late Middle Ages is obviated because the shamanic pattern in the life of Christ is the basis of the Christian tradition and built into the ritual of the church at its deepest level.

Transcribing the Pattern

Just as in archetypal initiation rites, wounding or illness signifies an opening or receptivity to the liminal or spirit world, so for the medieval female mystics, the onset of visionary experience was often preceded by a period of physical or emotional ill health. Mystics from Hildegard to Julian considered their "wounding" through illness to be the catalyst for their mystical experience, and those mystics without obvious physical wounds, such as Hadewijch, recounted emotional ones—the wounds of Love. The

signifier of illness was also recognized by their communities as a legitimization or

validation of the ensuing trance or ecstasy. The body of the mystic in identification with

the body of Christ was directly compared to a text in some cases, accompanied by

physical sensation that God is writing upon the heart, as in the case of Marguerite d'Oingt

(d. 1310).

> [Her visions]…were all written in her heart in such a way that she could not think about anything else….She thought that if she were to put these things in writing, as Our Lord had sent them to her in her heart, her heart would be more relieved for it. She began to write everything that is in this book…and as soon as she put a word in the book, it left her heart.[27]

As in the case of actual shamans interviewed by anthropologists, relief from the illness

only comes when the shaman undergoes initiation, accepts the role, and begins to practice

in the community.[28] For the medieval mystics, the sense of relief from woundedness,

fullness, or oppression in their hearts and minds could only come through the act of

writing, singing, or speaking about their experiences of union—in other words, through

performing their experiences for an audience. The bodies of some deceased mystics were

autopsied by their own request so that their communities could see the images of divine

love stamped on the heart within. As we have seen in the writings of Mechthild, the body

of Christ was considered a text upon which is written the salvation of the world, with

analogy drawn between blood and ink, and the body of the mystic at times was a physical

mirror of the suffering Christ. The eating of Christ roughly parallels the eating of the

hunted in shamanism, and the wounding of the mystic's body can be seen as comparable

to the actual slicing and virtual dismemberment experienced by the shaman.

However, while the female mystics were wounded as precursor to mystic

initiation and as a result of it (following the Courtly Love tradition of being wounded by

love), healing came not from the *unio mystica*, as might be expected. The experience of union remained confusing yet important, and an almost antagonizing pressure to express the mystic state built until it was released in the act of writing or communicating their experiences after the union was past. Only in communicating the mystic moment was chaos organized and communicated to the audience in order to transform both writer/speaker and reader/hearer. The mystic thus fulfilled the mythic function of artist as shaman, artist as wounded healer for her audience. We can see the inward-outward tension of mystical experience again; even though the experience of union takes place within the body of the mystic, it is followed by a pressure or compulsion to communicate that experience to the outward world. The effect of those communications should be to redeem or transform the world into a more balanced, better place—a transmutation of the eremitic impulse that refuses to settle for what is less than God.

While on the surface there are obvious parallels between a hagiographical narrative like de Vitry's <u>Vita</u> of Christina Mirabilis and the prototypical shamanic experience of death and rebirth, flying, and communication with the spirit world in order to restore lost balance to the human world, the real test as to whether or not we can use a shamanic pattern comes when we look at the actual visionary writings of the female medieval mystics, which contain their definition of their own function in society. Without falling into Eliade's prioritization of primitive experience as more authentic than civilized mystic experience, it does seem clear that a certain tension is created between the psychic structures of the shamanic pattern and the Christian theology of urban medieval Europe.

Authentic shamanism, as developed in Paleolithic times, involved propitiating the spirit world for human transgression. Halifax quotes an Iglulik Eskimo in conversation with explorer Knud Rasmussen:

> The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures that we have to kill and eat, all those that we have to strike down and destroy to make clothes for ourselves, have souls, souls that do not perish with the body and which must therefore be pacified lest they should revenge themselves on us for taking away their bodies.[29]

In most shamanic narratives, the middle world, or human plane of existence, is not a fallen world, but a world in which good and evil co-exist in a reciprocal manner. The role of the shaman is to restore equilibrium when the balance tips too far in one direction or the other between opposites: health or illness, peace or war, feast or famine, young or old, male or female. If people use the bodies of others without giving sufficient thanks for that privilege, the unbodied souls will seek revenge—but the humans are not evil for needing food and clothing, and the souls of dead animals are not evil for wanting a gift of thanks. The three worlds (upper world of spirits, middle world of human and animal, underworld of the dead) remain distinct in perpetuity regardless of the shaman's actions, and while the shaman can travel between the three worlds, the idea of bringing the worlds together permanently is not expressed.

In the Christian tradition, Augustine came closest to expressing a shamanistic idea of distinct worlds—the sacred and the profane, soul and body, once connected, are separated by human sin and this gulf can only be bridged by Christ who partakes of both natures, human and divine. Early Christian mysticism resolved this duality by saying no to the body in the apophatic way of relinquishing all that is not God. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the Bernardine model so important for medieval mystic thought, God

creates the world out of unbounded love because God is love and cannot be contained. Saying no to all that is not God apophatically becomes more difficult in the Christian tradition after Bernard since all creation is sustained by overwhelming, relational love and all creation contains a tiny piece of that love. Even after the Fall that creates the chasm between humans and God, Love remains in the human and is personified in Christ. Love as a pathway to Love and relation/union with the sacred world joins the divine spark within each fallen human with the divine nature of God.

We could see the person of Christ as the ultimate shaman, the balancer who propitiates the spirit world by being wounded and dying himself in order to restore the equilibrium of the fallen, or tipped, world, but what does a mystic do in the face of all that Love? For an author on the shamanic path herself seeking equilibrium between the spirit and matter in a poetics of integration, how can the human reciprocate in the face of overwhelming Love that creates, sustains, and redeems the world? Balance, reciprocity, and mutuality seem out of the question, yet this goal is precisely what motivates the mystics. Seeing how the female medieval mystics work out the question of Love within the shamanic pattern can tell us much about how they saw themselves and their role as women, Christians, spiritual teachers, and writers.

<center>The Balancing Act</center>

In many cases Hadewijch uses the language of psychic shamanic journeying in order to teach her beguines about the mystical path and its possibilities, with a curious blending of Christian, *trobairitz* and mythic images. In contrast to the apophatic mysticism of the Pseudo-Dionysius, she emphasizes the importance of the body and

sensation in the experience of union, and in doing so, she speaks out against centuries of mystical teaching that tried to eliminate or de-emphasize the body. Her descriptions use all of the senses, including the little used sense of taste. The reciprocal eating and being eaten, satisfying and being satisfied, of the Eater and Eaten in the Eucharist and in experience of vision is repeated throughout her poetry, using many of the same images as the shaman describes in the dismembering and intermingling of the Hunter/Hunted and Eater/Eaten in the mythic journey.

In other visions we see more typically shamanic images of spirit guides (angels, eagles, messengers), the ascent and descent of mountains, the climbing of trees as a means of initiation and learning. In Vision 1, for example, Hadewijch recounts a "seeing" that occurs after she receives the Eucharist, which was brought to her in her room because she could not control herself in public. Although at the time she desired to be one with God, as a more experienced mystic looking back to record the vision she qualifies herself as young and immature in her expectations: "For this I was still too childish and too little grown up."[30] She is an initiate, in other words, still learning. After receiving the host, the Lord draws her away from the sensory and she finds herself in a space of perfect virtue.[31] After being directed by an angel to several allegorical trees (the tree of discernment, of human nature, of the perfect will, of wisdom), she is offered a chalice full of blood and told to drink.

In the usual *Minne* paradigm, at the center of the garden would be a rose, usually typifying Mary, Love, the spotless Rose. In Hadewijch's garden, as in the garden of Eden, stands another tree. Having drunk from the chalice, she can approach the tree in the center of the space of perfect virtue:

> Then the Angel led me farther, into the center of the space where we were walking. There stood a tree with its roots upward and its summit downward. This tree had many branches. Of the lowest branches, which formed the summit, the first is faith, and the second hope, by which persons begin. The Angel said to me again: "O mistress, you climb this tree from the beginning to the end, all the way to the profound roots of the incomprehensible God! Understand that this is the way of beginners and of those who persevere to perfection!" And I understood that it was the tree of the knowledge of God, which one begins with faith and ends with love. [32]

The tree, of course, is a symbol with many levels of meaning and interpretation in most religious traditions. For the shaman, climbing a tree or notched pole is often part of the rite of passage as the initiate first bridges earth and the spirit realm.[33] In Norse mythology the World Tree, *yggdrasil*, connects the underworld of the dead, the middle world of humans, and sky world of the spirits. Eating from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the center of Eden was forbidden to keep Adam and Eve from becoming like God, a sin expiated by the shaman's death on the Tree of the Cross. Christ climbing the cross (assuming its pain and death voluntarily) as a means to bring humanity back to a prelapsarian state of innocence before God was well known and often used in Christian mysticism as a way of bridging the Augustinian gulf between spirit and matter, as in The Dream of the Rood:

<div align="center">

Then I saw the King
of all mankind
In brave mood hasting
to mount upon me
......
Then the young Warrior,
God the All-Wielder,
Put off his raiment,
steadfast and strong;
With lordly mood
in the sight of many
He mounted the Cross
to redeem mankind.
(ll. 34-35, 39-42)[34]

</div>

However, as a symbol of connection between spirit and matter, ignorance or enlightenment, the tree in the center of the garden is used differently by Hadewijch. To climb the tree is necessary for her initiation; it is the beginning step to her perfection. However, unlike the typical shaman, she must start at the upside-down top and climb to the deep roots of the unknowable, ungraspable God. This striking image in her initiatory vision tells her what she needs to know: in order to reach God, she must not transcend, but go deeper, inverting the typical neoplatonic ascent.

Using the intellectual and archetypal construct of the tree of knowledge in the center of the garden and the physical womb deep within the center of her body, as a writer she often buries a central theme in the center of her manuscript, a specular device common at the time. Looking at the center we can find her working out the major problems she faces as a writer, teacher, and traveler of the mystic path. In the *Visioenen*, vision 7 contains the most graphic detail about stages in the union of divinity and humanity; number 29 of the *Strofische Gedichten* is the embedded poem to Mary, archetype of the womblike and fertile abyss of desire and transformation.

In her Seventh Vision, Hadewijch opens with an experience typical for a beguine mystic in thirteenth-century Brabant:

> On a certain Pentecost Sunday I had a vision at dawn. Matins were being sung in the church, and I was present. My heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire, and as often occurred with me, such madness and fear beset my mind that it seemed to me that if I did not content my Beloved, and my Beloved did not fulfill my desire, dying I must go mad, and going mad I must die. [35]

She continues, "On that day my mind was beset so fearfully and so painfully by desirous love that all my separate limbs threatened to break, and all my separate veins were in travail."

We can see in this explicit narrative some common themes of beguine mysticism: the vision occurs in public during a community service (singing the Matins in a small beguine chapel, in full view of any congregation present),[36] it is significant enough that the mystic remembers the date and time of day, it is preceded by intense bodily and mental disorganization that simulates the madness and dismemberment of the chaotic yet creative liminal stage, and the mystic situation is an anticipated and somewhat regular occurrence. Victor Turner described the initiatory stages of the liminal journey as a

> profound statelessness, a process marked by transition, whereby all the components of prior experience and knowledge are dismantled and reassembled. According to his interpretation: "*Communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edge of structure, in marginality…and its importance derives precisely from its ambiguous state."[37]

A unique feature of beguine mysticism is that it so often happens in public rather than private, in contrast to the apophatic mysticism of St. John of the Cross, for instance, who would crawl into a confined, private space in order to bring about union through sensory deprivation. More often than not for the beguines, the public participation in liturgy, rhythmic singing of the psalter, and communal worship would create enough of an otherworldly break with the quotidian to bring on a liminal state, dissociation from the actual manifesting as mental disorganization accompanies by physical dislocation and rending.

Hadewijch deliberately chooses her words to build the tension in her listening or reading audience and help them feel her experiences with her. At first, her whole body is

shaking, inside and out, with eager desire—"*van begherten*." She knows something might happen and awaits it with a mixture of exasperation, hope, and erotic tension. The pressure of her desire builds quickly and in the next sentence her emotion changes from desire with a sensual connotation to "*verwoeddeleke*," the frenzy, longing, madness associated with the poetic inspiration, rage, the drinking of mead, and healing in the Norse mythic cycles.[38] Following the beguine spiritual way, what starts as longing for the image and physicality of Christ in the Eucharist turns into a psychic journey that leads her deeper into the possibilities of mystic union. The language she uses to describe her physical sensations mimics the language of Psalm 22, also quoted by Christ on the cross: "My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?...I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart also in the midst of my body is even like melted wax" (v. 1, 14). By identifying directly with Christ in his bodily passion and sense of abandonment by God and then using that as an analogy for her own sense of longing and dismemberment, she prefigures the blending of natures that follows and the necessary dissolution of the individual person.

Hadewijch explains the motivation for her desire as an inexpressible longing to experience the ultimate reciprocity of mutual satisfaction, despite the obvious inequality of the situation. She wants to be strong enough to give pleasure back to God.

> I desired that his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with my humanity, and that mine then should hold its stand and be strong enough to enter into perfection until I content him, who is perfection itself, by purity and unity, and in all things to content him fully in very virtue…. For that is the most perfect satisfaction: to grow up in order to be God with God.[39]

Despite the erotic overtones in her description of anticipating the union, the goal of Hadewijch's quest for the sacred is not simply a physical sublimation, but a maturity into

the nature of God in her own being. This is an audacious declaration, but Hadewijch is no

shrinking violet. Faced with the full force of God's creative and destructive power, she

claims kinship with the sacred as part of her created nature. Yet she realizes here and

elsewhere (cf. Vision 1), that a certain element of maturity is prerequisite for the ultimate

union. True, God in Christ has taken on human form through his incarnation, and as such

is available to her in the Eucharist, but she implies that the full fruition between human

and human involves union of God and God as well.

Having thus readied herself for the possibility of union, Hadewijch receives her

call in a familiar shamanic form—the eagle messenger.

> As my mind was thus beset with fear, I saw a great eagle flying toward me from
> the altar, and he said to me: "If you wish to attain oneness, make yourself ready!"
> I fell on my knees and my heart beat fearfully, to worship the Beloved with
> oneness, according to his true dignity; that indeed was impossible for me, as I
> know well, and as God knows, always to my woe and grief. But the eagle turned
> back and spoke, "Just and mighty Lord, now show your great power to unite your
> oneness in the manner of union with full possession!" Then the eagle turned
> round again and said to me: "He who has come, comes again; and to whatever
> place he never came, he comes not.[40]

Mary Suydam reads this passage as great theater, imagining Hadewijch performing the

vision for her spiritual charges, speaking in the eagle's voice as it thunders annunciations

and displaying her own fear and trembling in anticipation of the coming of God.[41] It is

good drama; we have suspense, dread, rising action, inflated dialogue. We also have a

scene structured to highlight the paradoxical differences between the parties who yet

desire union and mutual satisfaction. Hadewijch does this in a way that emphasizes the

different status between herself and the object of her desire in language her students

would understand, the language of *Minne* that informs her poetry. Here in the *Visioenen*,

though, because she is supposedly transcribing an actual occurrence, she is not as free to

assume the knight errant status she adopts in her poetry or to describe Christ in his bodily form as Lady Love.

Instead, Christ is the Mighty Lord, the King with an eagle seneschal who announces his presence. Here as elsewhere (*Brieven* 22, *Vis*. 5, *Vis*. 11), the eagle for Hadewijch is a messenger, a guide, and a symbol of the inner soul with scriptural and mythic parallels.[42] The differing status of God and the fearful beguine is apparent, both in the eagle's description and in Hadewijch's own sense of inadequacy for the coming union. Despite her desire to be "God with God," she knows that she cannot meet God on equal terms—and she knows that God is aware of that. The eagle's descriptor of the Lord as mighty, *moghende*, plays on the double meanings of *moghen*, signifying might as potency, and might as potentiality.[43] She could have chosen the words she usually uses for power, *cracht* or *macht*, but Hadewijch knows the deep potentiality of the liminal state and contrasts it with her own weakness. Because there is no way the two sides of the human-divine equation are ever going to be in balance, the only thing left for her to do is reach out with the small, unfallen part of her that is God.[44]

After the eagle's thunderous announcement of the Mighty Lord, what directly follows is an extreme decrease in the tension as Christ steps from the altar in the guise of a three-year-old child, perhaps allowing Hadewijch to relax the tension she has built up in her own body and wonder at this particular manifestation. Once the child reaches for the ciborium and the chalice, turning toward her he takes on another appearance:

> …looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful, and beautiful, and with glorious face, he came to me as humbly as anyone who wholly belongs to another. Then he gave himself to me in the shape of the Sacrament…. After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my

humanity….so that I wholly melted away in him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself. [45]

Here we have the prototypical *Brautmystik*: Christ as Bridegroom coming for his Bride the Church, Bernard's gloss of the Lover and Beloved in the Canticles. In Hadewijch's theology, though, the union goes farther than it does in Bernard's sermons on the <u>Song of Songs</u>. Milhaven in <u>Hadewijch and her Sisters: Other Ways of Knowing and Loving</u> suggests that mystical union for Bernard stops at the satisfaction of the Bride:

> The mutual eating, as Bernard explains it, is not really mutual: God gives all and receives nothing. We give nothing and receive all. Hadewijch says what Bernard says but she leaves Bernard behind when she sees herself as satisfying God, affecting God by her passion and will.[46]

The emphasis in Hadewijch's spirituality on what humanity can offer back to God reciprocally is an expression of the new elevation of humanity through emphasis on Christ's incarnation.

In Vision 7 we can follow the mystic path through desire, fear, inadequacy, and difference to wonder and surprise, to sensual, tactile experience of the body, to a dissolving of the physical in an undifferentiated experience of relational and reciprocal satisfaction. "Then it were to me as if we were one without difference" (ll. 87-88).[47] Hadewijch can no longer distinguish her Beloved outside of herself or herself outside of him, "in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of the one in the other." The mutuality of this interpenetration of disparate natures is the salient and different characteristic in Hadewijch's visions as opposed to her contemporaries' descriptions of divine union; it is on the ragged edge of orthodoxy and comes very close to moving Bernard's *unitas spiritus* into the realm of *unitas indistinctionis*—not just spiritual union, but identity between God and human. Ulrike Weithaus reads Vision 7 as

an experience of mythic liminality, being swallowed in the abyss of the reconciliation of opposites where normal definitions and distinctions are meaningless. As such, the liminal experience is one of creative and endless possibilities, a *hieros gamos* or *syzygy* of opposites, a fruitful transformation of human into divine and vice versa.[48] Mary, for most medieval religious women, is the model for this holy marriage with God.

<div align="center">Mary and the Hieros Gamos</div>

As previously discussed, in the anchoritic works written by men for women, Mary is the great symbol of apophatic, totally passive submission who cancels her will altogether in order to receive God. Although as mother of God she obviously had a body and womb, Mary's most admirable quality for Aelred and others is her ability to shut down her own personality and essential nature in order to become a pure conduit of divine essence. Hadewijch also uses Mary as the ultimate model for her beguine charges, yet her reading of Mary's path and her role in the divine marriage, as might be expected, is more encompassing and more shamanistic than that expressed by the Church Fathers. Number 29 of the <u>*Strofische Gedichten*</u> and Number 2 of the <u>*Mengeldichten*</u> give us her upside-down reading of Mary as a force strong enough to call God to her through her deep longing and desire.

Mengelgedicte 2 suggests that in Hadewijch's cosmology, Mary is the polarized force that balances the overwhelming, creative Love of God with its opposite in the equilibrium of the universe. If God is supernally creative and spilling over by nature, then the necessary opposite of that broadcasting seminal Love is a boundless chasm or abyss exerting an equal and opposite force of desire and unfulfillment. Using terms from modern physics, the supernova of God that gives birth to the cosmos must be balanced by

the black hole of Mary that swallows all energy into itself.[49] Mary practices deep

humility, "*diepen oetmoede*," but it is not the humility of passivity; rather, it is an active

force that functions like gravity to pull the force of God in after itself.

> Woman indeed is rightly the strongest:
> She made the Lord a slave;
> Although he was the noblest in heaven,
> Her deep humility made him so submissive
> That he fell from his sublimity
> Into this unfathomable chasm.
> (ll. 61-66)[50]

With this solution to the question of how balance can be maintained in the mystic

pathways, Hadewijch proclaims that Mary is stronger than all of the Old Testament

prophets, for only she could call forth the ultimate expression of *Minne*, Christ.

In number 29 of the *Strofische Gedichten*, *strofe* 5, she joins imagery from courtly

love poetry, Christian symbolism, and shamanic language into a unified system of

interacting and conjoining opposites.

> The Father in the beginning
> Kept his Son, Love,
> Hidden in his bosom,
> Until Mary,
> With deep humility indeed,
> In a mysterious way disclosed him to us.
> Then the mountain flowed down into the deep valley,
> And that valley flowed aloft to the height of the palace.
> Then was the castle conquered
> Over which long combat had taken place.
> (ll. 41-50)[51]

Pulled by the desire of Mary and the burgeoning love of the Father, all nature and

humanity join in a reconciliation and melting together of court and country, mountain and

valley, height and depth, male and female. The seeming impossibility of human longing

or desire reciprocating the creative love of the Father, *Minne*, is shown in the paradoxical

image of deep humility pulling down love, which then rises up and overflows in the valley to the point that the valley flows back upwards to the palace and conquers the castle. The war of opposites is over as the entire universe is integrated into one.

But we cannot leave this discussion of Hadewijch and the *hieros gamos* without mentioning the very deepest level of her theology and her universe. It is not enough for opposites to balance each other in a reciprocal satisfaction, for not only is God's love eternally creative and overflowing because it is the nature of God, it is unmotivated in its essence. (As Hadewijch has just shown, it can be motivated in its action.) She must take one more step to match this *hoeghe Minne*, High Love. For unmotivated essential love, the alternative must be essential, and therefore unrewarded, desire. The paradox of her brand of mysticism is that in order to be strong enough to match God, the mystic must live in a state of desire that cannot be completely fulfilled even by God himself.[52] Just as the courtly lover must exist in a perfect state of unfulfilled longing, the sine qua non of *diepe oetmoede*, deep humility, is that it never be assuaged. To live without the benefit of union in the state of *orewoet* is the ultimate gift that the mystic offers back to God. Rather than experiencing the prototypical creative energy arising from the *hieros gamos*, Hadewijch gains her utmost creativity through fully recognizing that the divine marriage exists—and yet denying it to herself.

One can see now why this path calls for maturity rather than an immature craving for either satisfaction or complete escapism into a virtual universe that can be shaped by the imagination. According to Hadewijch, the challenge for living well as an integrated person is to function in this world in a practical way: loving, creating, serving, and guiding others. Rather than remaining in a non-communicative, irrational state of fruition

en abyme, the true test and the true gift is to use that creativity in service to this world. As Hadewijch grumbles to her students in *Brieven* 6, "We all indeed want to be God with God, but God knows there are few of us who want to live as men with his Humanity."[53] The emotional attraction to the heights of union is clear, but Hadewijch claims it is immature to demand God as a reward for good works. The mystic must do the good works in a spirit of altruism, not mercantilism. For Hadewijch, her good work in the beguine community is to initiate others onto this path of deep mysticism. In imitation of Christ leaving heaven for earth to redeem the world, she stays in this world in order to direct others, as we see in Vision 13, lines 241-247 when Mary tells her,

> See if you wish to have ampler fruition, as I have, you must leave your sweet body here. But for the sake of those whom you have chosen to become full-grown with you in this, but who are not yet full-grown, and above all for the sake of those whom you love most, you will defer it. And as soon as you wish, we will call you back…[54]

Throughout her writings, Hadewijch's commitment to her students is clear. She acts not just in a shamanistic way to mediate between the world of her students and the world she experiences in vision, but almost as a *bodhisattva*, delaying her own ultimate union in order to aid them in gaining theirs. The questions she raises about the interpenetration of the world of matter and spirit ultimately lead her to stand for the meaningfulness of human life with or without actual divine contact. To balance the patristic metaphors of penetration and endless creativity, she proposes a liminal, bottomless abyss of desire, un-faith (*ontrouwe)*, and unfulfillment to evoke that creativity. This must be a state of receptivity, anticipation, readiness, and desire with no hope of fulfillment or reward, or it will not match the unmotivated Love of God.

Hadewijch provides an upside down reading of the church's neoplatonic denigration of the body, and therefore, of women as more fleshly and corrupt than men. Through a radical identification with and imitation of Christ and Mary, Hadewijch seeks to go deep. If *Minne* is the same force that creates and then redeems the world, she serves *Minne* in the same way Christ does, to the point of repeating his words, "My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?" Rather than losing herself in *unio mystica* and staying in a state of reciprocity with the Godhead, she must leave the Trinity and remain on earth, working here for the love of God to redeem others. Her call for detachment from the results of her actions provides the balancing gift of her actions back to God, and that work in the here and now demands a body, just as it did for the shamanic Christ. The body and its demands therefore become a means of salvation for Hadewijch, not an impediment to it. Mary is exemplary for her submission, but hers is not the submission that silences the body; instead, it is the material power to draw the love of God down to earth in the Incarnation of Christ.

It is perhaps understandable why Hadewijch was exiled from her beguine community and faded into obscurity, as she often steps over the line of orthodoxy. Her belief in the incorruptible nature of the soul, her conflation of sublimity and humility, and her view of union between God and human as reciprocal and *sonder differencie* is close to the formulations of Marguerite Porete, a Parisian beguine who was burned in 1310 for refusing to recant and deny her book, *Miroir des simples âmes*, roughly sixty years after Hadewijch. Like Porete, she writes with supreme confidence in the validity of her vision, and the overwhelming impression of her personality is indeed that of a knight-errant, willing to do whatever it takes in service of Love, unwilling to compromise for the sake

of convenience. In the face of her extreme concern for the well-being of her spiritual charges, her exile from them must have seemed the ultimate detachment she could face, yet she does not back away from or qualify her vision of the world and her place in it. If Hadewijch had written sixty years later when the ecclesiastical reaction to beguine spirituality became more strident, it is quite possible that she would have shared Porete's fate. The extent to which Hadewijch pushes the boundaries of acceptable doctrine is more apparent by comparing her shamanic work with that of her contemporary, the beguine Mechtild of Magdeburg.

As we have already seen in Chapters 1-3, Mechthild has a deeper sense than Hadewijch of humanity's failings and her own self as sinner or trespasser against both God and the established church. The need for physical expiation for her is not just a spiritually hygienic ritual, but personal, and the need to participate in the expiation of others was a driving force in her life. In looking for the shamanic pattern in Mechthild's work, we can see that she uses similar images in a slightly different way, with a more orthodox interpretation. She too pushes the boundaries of acceptable doctrine but tries to stay more regularly within them. In her function as intercessor for the souls of others, she has a definite role as mediator between this world and the spiritual plane, but because of her complicated cosmology, she is unable to work out a means of organizing her universe that ultimately makes sense or gives her the security she needs to write with confidence. She claims authority, but she never loses her lingering anxiety about what she is doing.

One of the key signs of shamanic behavior is the ability to fly, and several of the female mystics use flight as a means of expressing their freedom from traditional behaviors or expectations. We have already witnessed flight as freedom from convention

as well as signifier of holy status in the <u>*Vita*</u> of Christina Mirabilis[55]; flying is also a means of escaping the medieval notion of fate or *Fortuna.* Hadewijch's contemporary Beatrijs of Nazareth (1202-1268) speaks in <u>The Seven Manners of Loving</u> of rising above the wheel of life in ecstatic trance, watching it turn below her.[56] Hildegard's paintings reflect a wide-angle view of the created world as a sphere which she can see *in toto* from a distance, and Julian's vision of all creation as a hazelnut requires some sort of flight to the outer reaches and beyond, or at least an expansion of the field of vision far beyond human capability.

Presumably, one who remembers the feeling of freedom while in union enough to be able to recreate it in writing is able to recollect it in tranquility, after the moment of union is past. Tapping into the energy or synergy created by the act of union, the mystic should be less constrained in daily life by a sense of the powerlessness of the individual, even after the soaring freedom of the virtual state is over. The increased autonomy engendered by the memory of freedom in flight is a necessary aspect of the female mystics' form of shamanism since it allowed them a certain perspective from which to view the ecclesiastical and social rules limiting their ability to express themselves. Not all mystics experience this flight in the same way, although most describe a soaring outwards toward love. Hadewijch is the young eagle able to renew the older eagle, Augustine, in order to spiral above the battlefield of codified church doctrine and attain union. In Book I. 15, Mechthild characterizes herself as a dove longing to take refuge from the trials of life in the lofty but porous and penetrable monolith of God:

> Lord, the wonder of you has overwhelmed me.
> Your grace has crushed me.
> O you lofty Crag.
> You are so nicely honeycombed.

In you no one can rest but doves and nightingales.
(Book I. 14, ll. 4-8)

Welcome, my precious dove.
You have flown so keenly over the earth
That your feathers reach to heaven.
(Book I.15, ll. 1-3)[57]

The broken body of Christ, penetrated by nails on the cross, offers her refuge and shelter

rather than soaring flight. If she had not flown accurately, however, she would not be able

to enter the dovecote. Rather than relying on grace alone, she does claim some

responsibility for the union she seeks. She deeply desires union on a spiritual level, but at

at least one point envisions angels trying to stop her as she tries to ascend with her body.

For Mechthild, the body is both the means of flight and the anchor preventing flight.

Although she agrees with Hadewijch and Bernard that the body can be a means

of grace as the vehicle for loving actions towards others, she is plagued by a Manichean

distrust of the body as a vehicle of damnation as well. She focuses more attention than

Hadewijch on trying to get rid of her body as a means of entering the other world, a

process she can only perform through concentration on love, and one which she

paradoxically must express with bodily metaphors. While Hadewijch's cosmology makes

herself and humanity a necessary force in the physics of the universe, Mechthild's ability

to describe movement between the two worlds, no matter how fiercely she longs to do so,

is ultimately held back by her interpretation of how the universe functions.

In Chapter 2 we saw that Mechthild considered God to be a sphere, the limits of

which were beneath all abysses and above everything that exists.[58] Creation occurs

within this unchanging sphere at the moment God's love pours out, since love needs an

object. The *jubilus*, or creative love impulse, creates humans who become conscious of

their individuation at the moment of creation through becoming objects of love. Therefore, although she does not acknowledge this, the *jubilus* impulse or divine creative love in Mechthild's universe actually creates the potential for disunity rather than unity. The consciousness of individuality and acknowledgement of distinct self opens the possibility for sin, leading her to a distrust of self-impulse.

Compounding this difficulty is the fact that hell, the abyss or the absence of God, must be present within the sphere of God. Hell is created by doubt or denial of God, yet it must be contained in a little bubble of unbelief within the sphere. Purgatory is perhaps the area encasing the bubble of doubt, serving as the bridge to the outer and encompassing love of God. Her spherical model is difficult for a linear thinker to imagine and it plays havoc with neoplatonic modes of climbing up toward unity and down from it. Her model is not in itself completely unworkable, except that Mechthild uses all the codes of beguine spirituality in describing movement within the sphere, codes built upon notions of ascent and descent.

Although Mechthild frequently refers to herself as a dove or has God referring to her as a dove, in Book V: 31 the dove of virtue becomes an eagle of desire. The impetus for this flight is the passing of Love through the soul; the soul does not initiate. Speaking to Love, she also speaks to her audience. "When you pass through the soul with all these things and she then rises up and begins to fly with the wings of a dove, which are all the virtues, and she then begins to desire with the longing of the eagle, she follows the heat up to heaven, for she finds everything transitory to be cold and tasteless."[59] Within the sphere of God, characterized by light and warmth, remain pockets of cold and darkness which humans generally inhabit. Hell and purgatory are even more unsavory pockets

within the larger sphere. Flying for Mechthild is not just a means of union on a higher

plane, but a way to scan and describe all the worlds encased within the nature of God.

Hell for her is a real, physical place. Her role as mediator between the divine and human

worlds, then, is not just to serve as a bridge from human to divine nature in a teaching

capacity for other mystics, but to intercede for the souls trapped in purgatory, bargaining

and trading in order to get them released. The otherworld for Mechthild in her

descriptions of purgatory and hell is full of shamanic ripping, dismemberment,

reconstruction: means of purification bodies need to go through in order to gain access to

the warmth that surrounds them.

Mechthild as shamanic voyager is able to travel to all of these worlds and

communicate with their inhabitants, relaying messages back and forth to others. The

implication in The Flowing Light of the Godhead is that it is very easy for humans to fall

into these pits through unbelief, sin, forgetfulness, unfulfillment of a promise, or lack of

charity. Many shamanic intercessors between the worlds exist in Mechthild's universe:

Christ, Mary, herself, other saintly people, but the combined effect of all these workers

and healers cannot bring into unity an entity that is supposed to be whole and complete in

itself. Hence her inability to rest easy or remain confident, her repeated injunctions to

prayer and self-examination, her pleas for union with her divine lover, her calls for ever

greater and more extreme spiritual tasks. The balance she achieves is often expressed as a

polarity between her nature and God's, as in Book V: chapter 10: "The greatness of

almighty God is similar to nothing as much as it is to the sinful immensity of my

wickedness."[60]

Reading the <u>Flowing Light</u> is an unsettling experience, taking the reader from heights of ecstasy to depths of despair. To carry the symbol of flight further, Mechthild, somewhat like Christina Mirabilis, is unable to remain in one place for very long. She vacillates between extremes of emotion, genres, voices, styles, confidence and self-abnegation in a frenetic manner, unable to find a resting place. In her preface to the Tobin translation, Margot Schmidt describes <u>The Flowing Light</u> this way:

> Reeling between exhilarating raptures and collisions with unyielding earthly realities, Mechthild is wrenched this way and that between her incomprehensible experiences of God on the one hand, and, on the other, the uncertainty and terror of entering into a state of defenselessness and peril because of her writing.[61]

Especially in the early books when she describes the state of union in the language of *Brautmystik*, Mechthild uses the concepts of hunter and hunted, mutual eating and being eaten, rapture, divine marriage, flight, surrender, and other shamanic structures with great effectiveness. As the book progresses, however, she becomes increasingly concerned with her shamanic role as describer of the horrors of other realms and rescuer of imperiled souls from them. Her writing increasingly devolves into Whitmanesque cataloging of everything that lives, moves, breathes, and has being, and even that is not enough to express how she feels. She cannot stop.

Her soul's ability to travel between worlds does give her authority to speak and to play a part in the great sphere of being; through the authority given to her in vision she can rise above circumstance and affect the fate of the world. The would-be healer, though, while claiming the absolute authority of personal experience of God, is unable to rest in healing herself. Terror at sin and anxiety over the need for expiation, combined with fear of being cast out of the church—the vehicle of her earthly salvation—consumes her as she returns to the same themes over and over throughout her long life. Despite her

belief in the flowing light of the godhead, the idea of reciprocal union with God that sustains and empowers Hadewijch is missing from Mechthild; for her, we are a small cup and God is a big bucket, and anything can cause the cup to tip over.

Sixty years later, Julian of Norwich faced, if anything, an even more fragmented society than the one in which Mechthild lived, although that is only peripherally related in her work with reference to heresy, plague, and wars. She also sought balance and clarification of her place in the world through use of the shamanic symbols of Christianity as seen in her vision state, asking many of the same questions as Hadewijch and Mechthild. The beguine affective spirituality informing the two earlier mystics had fallen out of favor or had been somewhat toned down in northern continental Europe, although certain images had been carried over, living on in the anchoritic literature of England: visions of heaven and hell, distrust of the body, the need for female silence, and ascension toward spirit through a ladder of perfection. Julian's Book of Showings is so different in tone from its continental precursors, so measured, so objectively written, especially the Long Text, that her adoption of the shamanic role is not as immediately obvious. This is so even though she, more than Hadewijch and Mechthild, acted out a descent into the world of death through the enclosure of her own body. Her focus on the person of Christ is so complete that it is easy to lose sight of Julian herself, even while she records her dialogue and questioning of God.

We know that Julian's only experience of vision was brought about in typical shamanic fashion by a near-death experience and intense meditation upon the image of dismemberment and bodily rending captured in a crucifix held up to her gaze by an attending priest. She describes at great length the extremes of her physical disability and

clearly distinguishes between everyday sight, the pictures in her imagination, and the kind of revelatory seeing this experience offered her, something beyond the normal human capability. The vision of Christ's Passion is recorded with sharp focus on every detail: the pores and dryness of his skin, the force of the soldiers, the size of the droplets of blood streaming from the torn body. Although Julian had prayed to experience the Passion bodily in order to feel it more deeply herself, her narrative is at once detailed and detached because she focuses so sharply on the experience of Christ rather than her somatic experience within the vision state. Rather than carrying out extreme spiritual quests, hunts, games of love, or expiatory voyages in order to be a co-redeemer of the world, Julian is a recorder, a clinician, a researcher, an observer, an analyst—an organizer and communicator of experience with a clear sense that she writes for a potentially general audience of fellow questioners. Despite her elaborate physical descriptions of what she saw in vision and her own bodily re-enactment of death, she paves the way for an intellectualizing of the shamanic tradition, opening up a virtual or observational shamanism available to anyone who understands and can follow.

Confidence underlies Julian's ability to turn her back on inherited mystical tradition, which posits sin or materiality as a barrier to union. Without such confidence, she would not have stepped beyond the dictates of the Ancrene Wisse that require female silence. The surety produced by several years of meditation on the initial shamanic journey presented her with two important constructs: the showing of the created world as a hazelnut, already discussed in Chapter 2,[62] and the showing of the Lord and Fallen Servant in the Long Text, Chapter 51. She asks the same cosmic questions as the other female writers: if God is all powerful love, what do we as humans do in the face of that?

What is our role in the universe? What about sin? Can we balance human nature and divine nature? In a world riven by the Black Death, the Hundred Years War, rival papacies in the church, the Great Western Schism, and Crusades against heresy carried out at home and abroad, she needed to reconcile the concept of an ultimate loving god with situational evil and communicate that reconciliation to others. She achieves this shamanic balancing act with the perspective granted her through meditation upon her vision. On the one hand, the hazelnut shows her these questions are almost insignificant in the face of the enormity of the universe. The Lord and Servant vision shows her that reciprocity between god and man is unnecessary as long as both parties exist in a state of relational love. More than seeking balance, we just need to reorganize our thoughts and reframe the human question. Love is the dark matter binding the universe together. All seeming evil is temporary and and illusionary; ultimately, she echoes Mechthild's statement that we live in love as a fish swims in water,[63] but Julian consistently believes it.

The Lord and Servant showing starts with Julian's careful explanation of the two kinds of sight she has in this vision. One is physical sight of the bodies of the lord and servant, and the other is her "gostly" insight into what they are experiencing internally. The servant stands before the lord, "reverently redy to do his lordes wylle. The lorde lokyth vppon his seruannt full louely and sweetly and mekely. He sendyth hym in to a certeyne place to do his wyll."[64] The servant runs so quickly to do his master's bidding that he falls in a hole, injuring himself to the point of incapacitation: "… he gronyth and monyth and wallowyth and wryeth, but he may nott ryse nor helpe hym selfe by no manner of weye."[65] The servant is so physically injured he cannot even turn to look into

the face of his lord, who is observing him with great love and pity. Julian records the

thoughts in the servant's mind to re-emphasize that his intentions were good: he is angry

at himself for falling, he is in pain, he is weak, he can't get up, and he feels alone.

Anyone who has ever missed the mark when carrying out an important duty can imagine

the thoughts running through the servant's mind. Julian recognizes the servant as Adam,

and the lord as God. In contrast to Mechthild's deep anxiety over the possibility of sin in

every human action, Julian provides a balm, a healing view of sin as unintentional,

accidental, and incurring God's pity, not punishment.

The three stages of acceptance in her own mind as to the meaning of this showing

are carefully recorded so there can be no doubt as to the divine nature of this revelation

for her audience. The first is her initial understanding of the vision, the second is the

insight she has gained through long meditation upon it, and the third is the "hole

revelation fro the begynnyng to the ende which oure lorde god of his goodness bryngyth

oftymes frely to the syght of my vnderstondyng. And theyse thre be so onyd, as to my

vnderstondyng, that I can nott nor may deperte them."[66] She stresses that she has taken

twenty years minus three months to be sure of her interpretation, and that any insight of

her own is combined so tightly with the divine interpretation given her that there can be

no separating them.

God sent Adam out into the world, Adam tried his best but fell, he and his

descendants are blinded and injured by the fall, but if only they could see, they would be

assured of the love and pity of God. Adam's task was to take care of the earth and

provide nurturing gifts back to God, which he was unable to do because of his injury.

Looking at the vision another way, Julian sees the servant to be Christ, who was sent to

earth to take care of it just as Adam was, who was injured in trying to carry out the expectations of love, and who was ultimately raised up by the Lord even as Adam will be. Christ and Adam are conflated as representatives of the human nature, and together they reflect the divine nature as well:

> And thus I saw the sonne stonde, seyng in his menying: Lo, my dere fader, I stond before the in Adams kyrtylle, alle redy to sterte and to rynne…. Wher fore this menyng was shewed in vnderstandyng of the manhood of Crist. For all mankynde that shall be savyd by the swete incarnacion and the passion of Crist, alle is the manhode of Cryst….For the longyng and desyer of all mankind that shall be safe aperyd in Jhesu. For Jhesu is in all that shall be safe, and all that shall be safe is in Jhesu, and all of the charyte of god, with obedience, mekenesse and paciens and virtuous that longyth to vs.[67]

Scholars debate whether Julian is indeed proclaiming universal salvation with this vision, something Mechthild seemed to point toward as the outermost extreme of her experience of God's grace but just as quickly recanted. By directing her observational skills toward the motivations of the human and divine actors in the cosmic drama rather than focusing on the human actions necessary to achieve balance, Julian almost negates the need for balance at all.

Does it ultimately matter, she asks, whether human and divine nature balance out, since all are operating with the same ultimate purpose and guided by love? Does it really matter that one side is master and the other clearly a servant, as long as the two love each other? By taking the broad view, she moves toward a quietistic detachment that diminishes the need for personal drama and anxiety over universal verities. On the other hand, her calm tone and surety of expression belie the fact that in order to work this out, she entombed herself for the rest of her life. Her compulsion to get to the truth and to communicate that truth to others through her writing led her to extremes of behavior that Hadewijch and Mechthild did not consider. By detaching from the daily dramas of the

physical world, Julian was able to explore psychic reality on a quest for truth, and she was driven by a compulsion to write just as deep as that of her more histrionic sisters. As a result of her quest, she is able to bring back a gift to the world, her reworking of the divine—human relationship.

Once she was able to integrate or reconcile what she was taught by her faith with what she experienced in the world around her with her formulation of the Lord and Servant story, her book of showings ends. There is no need for her to write anything further, for she has now communicated everything she has discovered. She, like Hadewijch, reaches a still point of certainty and peace; unlike Hadewijch, she offers it to the world in a quiet way, a still, small voice presenting what she considered to be cosmic truths: "This is what I have found; perhaps it may be of help to you."

Each of the mystics in her writing seeks to make sense out of experiences in the liminal world, and their ability to do so reflects in their ability to consider themselves worthy of speech. The extent to which each one considered herself in a shamanic role impacts the quality and quantity of her literary production. Hadewijch in her bold cosmic explorations serves as a travel guide, in her refusal to retreat from the world in order to pursue her union undistracted by her students, she is a *bodhisattva*, part of a reciprocal force holding the universe in balance through longing and desire. Her satisfaction with her own interpretation of God's creativity and her mirroring of that allow her both the freedom to write and to tightly organize and control the flow of her words, containing the burgeoning spilling over of love and creativity within the tight meters of poetry. By enclosing her most crucial images in the center of her work, she leads her readers and listeners to follow her shamanoid journey deep into meaning rather than ascending away

from the human. She creates order out of chaos and is able to bring back the liminal experience, translating it to others.

Mechthild seizes upon the role of co-expiator, interceding for souls trapped in purgatory, volunteering for heroic duty as spiritual warrior-princess, but is ultimately unable to reach equilibrium. Perhaps her vision of the created world as surrounded by the sphere of God but containing the seeds of doubt and disbelief was reflected in her own inner doubts and anxieties. Hadewijch chooses un-faith, *ontrouwe*, as a role in order to increase her desire; Mechthild's unfulfillment is part of her very nature as she veers between drama, poetry, sermon, diatribe, confession, epistolary narrative, and allegory. For some, this lack of generic convention and organization is a virtue as it reflects her unorganizable experience in the world of Magdeburg as well as her forays into a non-linear visionary world. For others, it is her downfall, as it mirrors her inability to impose artistic form on that experience except in flashes of insight.

Julian in the Long Text writes with the clinical distance of someone at one remove from what she is reporting, cataloging an experience that has already happened and been processed rather than drawing us into the experience in an immediate way, despite her attention to sensory detail. In her role as shaman, she mediates between the chaotic social world she inhabits and her vision of unity. She presents the fruit of her integrating vision to a public who badly needs to hear it, remaining aware of her task throughout and recording with an empiricist's attention to detail. Despite the fact that she imposes voluntary enclosure upon herself in order to undertake this task, she simultaneously sets herself up as a public figure. We need to remember that the anchorage was attached to the cathedral in the center of town, and that by proclaiming

anchoress status, a woman was given the almost unheard of official authority to counsel others through her window on the world. If Hadewijch is the most integrated and confident as an artist, Julian is no less a synthesizer of complex thought into exquisitely crafted narrative.

All three of these women, along with the other female mystic writers, were liminal figures. They worked on the borderlands in varied ways: many were first-generation literate, moving from an oral culture to a written one, learning to think with a pen in hand. They lived on the cusp of a shift toward individualism and a cultural recognition that one person's revelation could change the social structure, and should, and sometimes did. As they retraced and relived the ancient shamanic psychic patterns, they helped to translate the hunter-gatherer rituals into a framework we still recognize today in our foundational mythologies. What does it mean to be a human, balanced on the middle way? What lessons learned in the world of imagination and vision can be brought back in service of the physical realm? Return they must, bringing with them a message to heal the brokenness of the world through art.

Questions remain in regard to viewing the mystics in light of the shamanic pattern. How can the self leave one plane of existence to travel to another with a different (or no) set of rules, definitions, and constructs, remaining open to the new way of seeing while retaining the words, the codes, the framework of the old way? How can the old words be used to transmit completely foreign experience? How can the memory retain the shamanoid experience, once back within the original paradigm? Is it possible for an individualized self to sever its ties with the world from which it gained its meaning? While the shamanic pattern upon close examination contains inherent problems as the

basis for artistic production, it allows us to see the more distancing activities of the

medieval mystics in light of a broader religious paradigm of mediation and travel

between different planes of existence. It also provides a way of seeing the mystics that

acknowledges and explains how they could be so simultaneously interior and exterior in

their motivations. However, the shamanic journey remains an archaic and mythic notion

that may in itself be too distancing to be completely satisfactory in re-seeing the mystics.

Chapter Five

Moving from Affective to Effective Piety

A New Poetics of Integration

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This is the witness that can be truly borne
At any moment by me and many others
to whom Love has often shown
Wonders by which we were mocked,
Imagining we possessed what she kept back for herself.
After first she played these tricks on me,
And I considered all her methods,
I went to work in a wholly different way:
By her threats and her promises
I was no longer deceived.

I will belong to her, whatever she may be,
Gracious or merciless; to me it is all one!

~ Hadewijch, *Mengeldichten* 13, ll. 39-50[1]

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The shift in emphasis in the period from the early 1200s to the mid 1300s from God as impassive, beyond comprehension or definition, to an emphasis on God as relational and motivated by love led to a re-evaluation of the universe and the human role. A concurrent shift occurred in the idea of human agency, as the Anglo-Saxon concept of fate (*wyrd*) and the Classical concept of *Fortuna* as irrational, unpredictable, and inevitable began to change to one in which the individual had more influence on his or her own life and on the lives of others. In the writings of the mystics, as in Chaucer's work, we can see a tension between an emphasis on fate, which Christians conflate with God's will, and an emphasis on free human will, between acceptance of the world as it is and personal action to change it. It is no accident that the concept of purgatory developed during this century since it is the only spiritual space in which human agency has any bearing. These changes in medieval European conceptions of God and humanity helped

to create a climate in which the female mystics could claim authority to write, and needed that authority in order to help their society integrate and balance new ideas.

One of the main questions fueling this investigation was how to explain the connection between mysticism (reaching the incommunicable) and authorship (communicating that experience to an audience). Since a centered self, individual agency, and control over one's medium appear to be necessary components for writing, and the end goal of mysticism appears to be dissolution of self into a greater incommunicable unity, the two seem antithetical. Nonetheless when looking at women's spirituality in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a definite correlation can be seen between those who chose a mystic path and those who shared their experiences through art. This chapter explores one other shift in the late medieval paradigm contributing to the rise in female authorship: a new concept of selfhood in the early modern period. A similar shift in definition of self occurring today may help us completely rid the mystics of their hysteria diagnosis and view them in an entirely different light.

The Late Medieval Self

It is impossible to clearly define the border between the individualism characterizing Renaissance thought and previous more collective notions of selfhood during the late Middle Ages in northern Europe, something which complicates our inquiry into the strategies of medieval writers. In claiming the right to authorship, a medieval female took on an inevitable agency and accountability, necessitating public exercise of the individual female will, which was so castigated and feared by the medieval church. According to Sebastian Coxon, "The sense of author as 'originator,' be

it the founder of a city, chief perpetrator of a crime or composer of a book, was invariably secondary to that of the author as 'authority' with juridical connotations of responsibility (*auctor* signified 'guarantor' in ancient and medieval common law)."[2] Bonaventure ranks *auctor* as the highest literary function, far above *scriptor*, *compilator*, and *commentator*. Scholasticism made the definition of authority even more precise, and although we cannot be certain all of the female mystics had read Aristotle on the scientific method, we can be reasonably sure their confessors and male spiritual advisors had. "The exact differentiation between causes which was a requirement of Aristotelian science encouraged exact differentiation between *auctor*, *materia*, *modus agendi*, and *utilitas*...."[3] Beguine authorship, with its permeable definitions of text as body and body as text, with the end goal of unity between subject, object, and audience, was rightly seen by the Scholastics as a transgression from Aristotelian distinction and classification. As such, taking on the position of *auctor* at a time when the general acceptance of female authorship was seen as problematic required a fully developed sense of self and the ability to transgress beyond the collective paradigm.

The mystic writers recognized this precarious balancing act between their need for both self-negation and authority. Despite lack of scholarly agreement on when or how the notion of individualized rather than collective self was loosed from its sinful connotations and became accepted as part of basic human nature, we can see in Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Julian a significant presence of individual as self-conscious writer, shaper, teacher, narrator, and actor in one's own drama. Sebastian Coxon suggests that the "anonymity and displacement of the author [in thirteenth-century German heroic epics] perhaps represents an assertion of collective identity,"[4] yet despite the use of these

same strategies by the mystics, the voice of individualized self strongly cuts through their desire to take the focus from themselves, or paradoxically, to guide their audience toward the path of self-annihilation. The question remains, however; is this strong, speaking self a narrative fiction using *motifs* the audience would expect and reward, or is it part of a new sense of narrative interiority? Or is it both? Anyone claiming to hear individualism in the medieval corpus must consider that the self that appears to be so tangibly speaking from the mystics' work may be the universal "I" of troubadour lyric,[5] or it may be one or several intentionally fictional literary constructs. The adoption of alternate *personae* in the mystic's writings further confuses the issue.

Paul Zumthor in <u>Toward a Medieval Poetics</u> represents one end of the critical spectrum in attributing all appearance of subjectivity to a social network of meaning, which the author mirrors for the audience. He warns against a too facile attribution of individuality no matter how clearly the medieval writer seems to speak. Writing of the troubadours he claims: "Clearly perceived 'human experience' leads to an impasse. …Even the apparent avowals that some of these poets seem to make regarding the personal nature of their message rarely have value beyond that of external and indirect evidence." Author and audience are intertwined, "constituent parts of a system."[6] Since up until the 1200s most literature was delivered orally, the speaking voice was a mere vehicle for a story originating elsewhere, and a medieval audience would not assume the "I" of a text to be the "I" of the author. Although Zumthor finds no notion whatsoever of medieval individualized authorship in the period before 1100, he does see some signs of "author-functionaries" emerging by the end of the 1200s, a full century after Régnier-Bohler pinpoints the rise in claims of individual authorship.

Although we have traveled far since Jacob Burkhardt clearly differentiated the darkness of medieval conformism and enlightened Renaissance individuality with his 1860 <u>Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy</u>, his shadow is still cast over the discussion. Few scholars want to push the rise of individualism or subjectivity too far backward in time. Coxon places the emergence of the individualized author squarely in the thirteenth century in his study of German heroic epics, a view shared by Olivia Holmes in her research into lyric authorship in the same period. However, rather than connecting this new authority with a simultaneous rise in individualism or notions of selfhood, as in the projects of Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès, Holmes prefers to see the connection strictly between authority and written literacy. Finding the "discovery of the individual" or "bourgeois subjectivity" is not necessary for her to study the implied authority behind a fictional narrator.[7] She relies on the work of Eric Havelock who, like Coxon, sees the motivating factor in the creation of vernacular authority as stemming from the move from an oral to a written culture. "By separating the knower from the known, writing makes the interior self a possible object of representation and facilitates an increasingly articulate introspectivity."[8] Locating the period of author emergence in the thirteenth century puts all of our mystics either in the center of the movement or in the century immediately afterward.

How do we know that the voice of the mystics is indeed the speaking "I" of their own subjective, interior narrative? One thing Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Julian all share is a consistency of authorial and physical presence in the text that makes them seem "real" in contrast to the female saints portrayed by male hagiographers. Though Mechthild and Hadewijch share borrowed themes and forms from the troubadour lyrics

and epic dramas of their time, each has a different voice. In the case of Hadewijch, we have pieces from many different genres that reflect a consistency of identity and content across literary forms. The narrator of her visions is the same "self" speaking from her poetry; the landscapes may change, the roles taken on by the narrator may shift, but the same feeling, questioning, fiercely engaged identity comes through. The questions Hadewijch asks in her visions are the same concerns she raises in her letters and in her poetry. She refers back to past incidents and situations in later works, talking about herself as previously immature, naïve, presumptuous, or awkward, providing continuity between the "I's" presented throughout her production.

Mechthild, as well, emerges through her book with a consistent yet complex identity clearly stamped within the pages. By Book VII, we know what to expect as she speaks. Despite the respect of her fellow religious and the responsibility she carries as head of a large household of beguines, underneath the over-exaggerated claims she makes about her spiritual abilities we see her interior struggles and the ways she must psyche herself up to meet the challenges of her everyday life. She, too, remains consistent in her inconsistency, to the point of mixing genres even within chapters of her book as drama turns to lyric, epic becomes epistolary confession, journalism merges with prayer. Although her tone is darker in the later books as she heads toward death, her voice is clear and consistent.

We cannot use the same criteria of consistent voice across genres in the case of Julian, although we can compare her Short and Long Texts of the Showings. Again, one is clearly a revision and expansion of the other, written by the same detailed, careful, probing individual. Because her work is so unique, it would be hard to identify which

cultural "I" she would be modeling if not that of her own self. The Short Text is more immediate, the Long Text more thoughtful. Julian tries to minimize her subjectivity and speak with the voice of Everyman in the Long text, but this reflects a shift in audience rather than speaker. It also indicates her awareness of a larger company of "even Christians." Her personality cannot help but emerge in the questions she asks, the descriptions she uses, the application of many kinds of "seeing" to solve the problems she confronts. Julian is very aware that, as Katherine Little writes, "to reform the language of lay instruction is to reform the self-understanding language makes possible."[9] By directing her revision to a larger audience, she fulfills the duty given her by the showings she received years before, despite the risks of being seen as a reformer in an insular and paranoid church.

Given the conflation of several crucial cultural shifts, and given the tradition of daily liturgy and self-examination from which they emerged, it would almost be surprising if religious women did not turn to writing narrative and poetry to make sense of themselves and their world. As Kiril Petkov writes in his sociological study of peace-making in the late medieval period: "Ritual 'sedimented' ideological precepts into the body; it thus secured the acquiescence of individuals in the networks of intentionalities in which they were enmeshed."[10] With lives steeped in ritual and community, the beguines developed a tradition of using the body as a textual locus to communicate to their network, blurring the lines between writing and action. They accomplished this while their spiritual practice of daily self-examination would have pushed all participants into a highly subjective, reflective state uncommon for the larger non-religious community. In this highly charged atmosphere of political and ecclesiastical chaos, daily liturgy, dogma,

awareness of imperfection, encouragement to pursue high goals, yet official disapproval of female action or speech, the very contradictions of daily life would have impelled many religious vocationers toward the new interiority we see occurring at this time.[11]

Paolo Freire would interpret the mystics' dilemma as similar to those caught in a struggle to pursue their ontological vocation toward humanization. He writes passionately about how contradictions between experiential reality and given doctrine can propel formerly passive individuals into critical thinking and action in his 1970 Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

> But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation."[12]

As a Marxist liberationist, Freire would have seen that the mystics had to be completely absorbed and connected to their society because humanization can not take place in isolation from others. Strangely, despite their ultimate goal of union with the divine, the female mystics would have agreed with this. Because Bernard had shown the church that the paths to humanization and divinization were one and the same, pursuing one's true vocation within the context of the medieval church meant turning away from the corruptions and imperfections of the actual world to follow the light of the real, ideal world—and then using that insight to create a more perfect physical world. Pursuit of the *via contemplativa* as the more perfect path has always been, in part, a reaction to a perceived irrationality in the world. The role of a contemplative is to try and stay as unbesmirched as possible by separation from all that is not God, passively accepting the world as fallen and dangerous and striving to rise above it. However, because of the

dialogic situation of the mystical experience and their personal responsibility for carrying out their half of the "linguistic situation," the mixed path of the beguine mystics encouraged them to imitate their creator God and thereby participate in the creative process. In effect, turning away from the world led them right back into it, just as annihilation of self eventually led to a greater acceptance of individualized revelation.

Most came away from the *unio mystica* with an increased sense of personal responsibility to shape this world based on the imperatives of the original creation. Dialogue demands reciprocity. Rather than passively accepting life in a fallen world as inevitably evil, the female mystics in general, but particularly the beguines, were compelled to act and write, the *via contemplativa* leading directly to the *via activa* as they saw themselves as co-creators with God. Paradoxically, attempts to negate what is individualized seemed to trigger exertion of a troublesome but productive individualism. Through the mystic experience the material world became more alien, but not unredeemable or unfamiliar; their goal was to live in that "alien" human world and transform it into something more perfect as they were transformed by the fires of love. They defined their role as providing a fulcrum or tipping point, a mediating and balancing between the world around them and the sacred world.

Writing is one of their most effective tools for action given their limited sphere of physical action, but it is not the only one. The output of the beguines in the founding of hospitals and schools, varied missions to alleviate poverty and suffering, not to mention the commercial enterprises they engaged in, is astounding. Ultimately the mystics were pushed by the act of mysticism itself back into their bodies and the physical world of human agency. As Freire would say, no one can learn in isolation, and self-knowledge is

only valid if it is part of a larger nexus of meaning constructed by and constructing everyone else. A mystic's act of detachment from the human realm often led her toward insight that inspired her to become a shaper of the human world as recorder, speaker, and editor of dialogue: *scriptor*, *auctor*, and *commentator*. Labeling the mystics as necessarily alienated from this world makes sense in a neoplatonic scheme, but it does not acknowledge their enormous energy in the actual world. Viewing them as perpetually longing for the unattainable is a poetic construct, but it does not match their actual life.

The Problems with Postmodernism

A Lacanian reading of the mystics' dialogic situation has become the popular basis for how many critics have viewed them, at this point. Everything falls together so well! Certainly, all neoplatonic mysticism assumes the existence of an ideal world we are trying to return to or catch sight of. For those who can comprehend, approximate, or even achieve a point of union with that other world, the loss of that experience creates what de Certeau calls "a poetics of desire," a poetics of nostalgia for an unreachable state of perfection. It is true that in the work of female mystics most influenced by the concept of *Minne* such as Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg, a sense of exile and nostalgia for the Other informs their poetry. Creation and manipulation of desire as action gives them a place in the universal transfer of energy from divine to human and back again. As lovers of the Other, they must live in a state of perpetual longing for what they cannot have, which produces the powerful emotions necessary for their art.

The "poetics of desire" explanation of the mystics as writers, actors, and theologians may be so deeply entrenched in our critical *oeuvre* because it works and it

seems unified. Yet this beautiful package, so neat and self-contained, is endlessly recursive and therefore not very satisfactory if we deconstruct it. In his reworking of Freud, as de Certeau records explicitly in "Lacan: An Ethics of Speech," Lacan creates a house "haunted by monotheism" and built on a Christian archaeology.[13] De Certeau quotes from Lacan's 1975 *Encore:Le Séminaire, Livre XX* , 'This Other [is] that I call here *the dark God*.'

> This monotheism resides in the concepts scattered throughout the discourse, concepts whose theoretical (and/or mythical) promotion is most often marked by a capital letter: *the* Word [*Parole*] is articulated on *the* Other by *the* Name of the father, *the* Desire, *the* Truth, and so on. Repeated throughout is the monotheistic form of the capital letter singular, an index of something which, under the signifier of the Other, always amounts to the same.[14]

According to de Certeau, mystical texts of Hadewijch, Eckhart, Luther, and Teresa of Avila "punctuate the Lacanian space where they figure as *exordia* (where does it begin?) or as exits (where to end?).…The figure of analyst as a 'saint' who 'wastes away,' one whose speaking, devoted to the price which the body must pay for having access to the symbolic, is a speech structured like that of the person praying." Lacan's 1932 thesis was dedicated to his brother, a Benedictine monk, whom he called, "my brother in religion."[15] Lacan, in effect, hangs his reinterpretation of Freud onto the existing Benedictine scaffold of monastic Christianity he knew so well, and then subtracts the relational God intrinsic to the Benedictine system.

This transforms Lacanian analysis into the mystic hunt for the receding, hidden God of truth or wholeness, which is there in memory but not there because it no longer exists. In such a system, wholeness is unreachable and ultimately everyone is diseased; the patient/artist and the therapist/critic are equally deceptive to each other, to their larger

audience, and to themselves because nothing can approach an ever receding Truth. Lacanian criticism is just what he calls it: a trick, a modern retelling of the Fall as a Fall from Nowhere. The unnamed God as Other to whom we must deny ourselves in order to increase our desire becomes an absurdist proposition condemning all reflective people to the analyst's couch, victims of narcissistic and hysterical longing.[16]

While de Certeau himself recognizes the cyclical logic at the heart of Lacanian analysis, he cannot leave behind the interpretive framework it affords him in his postmodern deconstruction of mysticism and its lasting effects on our culture. As perhaps the most insightful and compelling advocate for the "poetics of desire,"in his last words of The Mystic Fable, "Overture to a Poetics of the Body," he repeats the notion that in order to be a poet in a world without God, an artist must be crazy and babbling. One must wander drunkenly like Rimbaud, *un bateau ivre,* unmoored and lacking ballast, ultimately unable to communicate glimpses of a truth that does not exist to an uncomprehending world. "Henceforth this desire can no longer speak to someone. It seems to have become *infans*, voiceless, more solitary and lost than before, or less protected and more radical, ever seeking a body or poetic locus. It goes on walking, then, tracing itself out in silence, in writing."[17] It is a Romantic picture but a flawed one when applied to the medieval mystics; it does not match the reality of these women's lives.

Freud, reinterpreted by Lacan, and then reinterpreted by Cixous and de Certeau leaves us with a system that defines hysteria and narcissism by using the structures handed down by the mystics with the motivator for their actions removed, and then using those same structures to diagnose the mystics and all artists as hysterics and narcissists. We spin our wheels as long as we view the mystics, or any writers, or any humans,

through this lens. Although seeing them as shamanic figures seeking to balance or mediate the human and divine makes sense, this model also depends on the acknowledgement of other planes of existence, and it posits the movement of self from state to state within one physical being in an unsatisfactory way. The consciousness necessary to preserve the recording and sense-making capabilities would have to be left behind if the self actually voyaged to another semiotic plane, and the artist needs both the memory and the critical mind in order to recapture, organize, and transmit visionary experience.

How then should we view the mystics as writers and as humans trying to make sense of themselves and their world? Is it possible to take away the underlying religious scaffolding just long enough to see if we can consider them strictly as writers? Even though that means temporarily decontextualizing them from everything they stood for and believed, in order to truly explore the mystics as writers rather than just vernacular theologians, we need to try. Of course it is possible to say that they were mainly theologians who happened to have a way with words, but that means ignoring their connection with the strategies, themes, and concerns of other writers at the same time. We need an alternate way of considering what they were about. In order to step outside the ghostly structures of the platonic, monotheistic, and psychoanalytical paradigms we have inherited, perhaps we need to imitate Julian's vision of the hazelnut and take a wider view.

Vision as Virtual Reality

Let us consider the dialogic situation not just between Mystic and Other, God and Human, Ideal and Real, but between virtual and actual selves, between versions of the

self cycling toward integration in order to become agents of actual, real-world change through art. New studies from cognitive science on the individual mind as a society and the impact of virtual experience upon how people act in the actual world give us exciting new ways to look at what their visions might have accomplished for the mystics as writers. If we look at the visionary experience through the lens of virtual reality or "second-life," what the mystics were doing may suddenly make sense, even in modern terms, and we can more rightly consider the extent to which they were artists. What they learned through the sense of freedom, free will, and personal worth in the psychological free space of their vision—their encounters, role-play, and actions in the virtual world-- gave them the courage to act out those ideals and dreams in the real world.

Freudian psychology, Christian theology, and most Western paradigms until recently have assumed the necessity of a unitary self, the Ego, a single, basic kernel of individual personality we could judge as whole, happy, and healthy, or fragmented, confused, troubled, and ill. We have used this concept of the rise of unitary and individualized selfhood to draw the demarcation line between medieval darkness and Renaissance enlightenment in not just religious but also in social and political matters. The need to "find one's self" assumes that one has *a* self to be found, and that one will know that self when one stumbles upon it; the loss or denial of self is today considered a great tragedy. This is the mystic, mythic, romantic self left "alone and palely loitering" in the desert of Lacanian poetics, and part of the repulsion many moderns feel toward the mystics stems from the notion that they had to deny this unitary self and dissolve into inaction in order to carry out their purpose.

New definitions of the self coming from cognitive studies give us a different way to consider the mystic path. In the early 1970s, Marvin Minsky, head of Artificial Intelligence research at MIT, started the ongoing process of reverse-engineering the human brain in order to find out how it actually works; this led to the influential Society of Mind theory he published in 1987. Rather than a single self-concept darkly reflecting a perfect ideal concept, as in Neoplatonism, or a controlling Ego maintaining balance between SuperEgo and Id, as in the Freudian scheme, Minsky suggested that each person is a network of possible selves: potential, ideal, discarded, emergent, and negotiable selves.[18] If we have an ontological purpose as humans in Minsky's scheme, it is to successfully cycle through these selves in order to meet the various situations with which we are faced. Internal conversations between the selves keep the mind in balance, precluding any one of the selves from taking over and controlling the brain alone; total control by just one self-state might lead to a form of mania. Consciousness of a solitary "self" is merely a successfully integrated state of being interiorly "grounded" based not just on our practice in the external world, but on cognitive role-play and self-dialogue within the network of the mind.[19]

Daniel C. Dennett, Director of Cognitive Studies at Tufts University, uses Minsky's idea of a shifting network of conversant, situational selves to describe the artistic process of meaning-making in his 1991 book Consciousness Explained. The flexible network called the self is able to look at several drafts of a life narrative simultaneously and choose the best version, or build a new version combining elements of all the drafts. These different versions of reality can all be held open at once, similar to having several windows open on a computer screen and moving between them. As we

temporarily focus on and lose ourselves in one window, experiencing the reality there, we retain the memory that other windows exist and can easily recall what is in them in a discursive fashion while functioning in our present world.[20] In his essay "The Self as Center of Narrative Gravity" he writes: "We are somewhat disunified. Our component modules have to act in opportunistic but amazingly resourceful ways to produce a modicum of behavioral unity, which is then enhanced by an illusion of greater unity." Just as an object's center of gravity is impossible to physically isolate but determines when an object will tip, fall, or stay in balance, so what we think of as our "self" acts as a center of narrative gravity, keeping our identity in balance. According to Dennett, "The chief fictional character at the center of that autobiography is one's self."[21] Kenneth Gergen and Robert Jay Lifton have popularized the concept of the multiple, flexible, resilient, "protean" self as a way to survive in an "age of fragmentation."[22] The old Freudian diagnosis of hysteria has now been relabeled as dissociation to reflect a non-gendered state of disintegrated, multiple selves.[23]

This "new" definition of self as a protean, flexible, and socially constructed network plays havoc with the Burkhardtian idea that the Renaissance marked the triumphant emergence of autonomous individuality rather than medieval conformity,[24] and it calls for a reimagining of the "poetics of desire." In looking at the self as negotiated network of multiple self-images, it would be a somewhat tempting but facile imaginative leap toward interpretation of the mystic visionary state as a dissociative means of coping with the trauma of life in politically chaotic, ecclesiastically riven, misogynistic, plague-ridden northern Europe. However, that is merely a less-gendered way of saying the mystics were psychologically troubled escapists fleeing from their

problematic reality. The work done by Sherry Turkle and Jonathan Matusitz on the concept of identity in cyberspace provides a more productive and realistic way to look at vision or virtual reality as an artistic approach to integrative wholeness, meaning making, and narrative experience.

Our experience since the dawn of the Internet Age has called into question previously held notions of reality. In a sense, by drawing the majority of users into overt acts of virtual identity creation, role-playing, analogous description, and myth making generally associated with creative writing and imagination, the Internet has blurred the line between virtual and actual, between the old Marxist distinctions of theory and *praxis*. Since all research evidence and our own individualized experiences force us to recognize that what happens in the virtual world of cyberspace can be as shaping and "real" as experiential actuality, we no longer see the virtual world as unreal or a place of escape from the issues impinging upon our "real" lives. The virtual world can now be a locus of *praxis* and social dialogue. It has become a place many people go to find the solutions to problems presented in our physical world or to resolve internal conflicts.[25] In her article "Looking Toward Cyberspace: Beyond Grounded Sociology," Turkle writes that "playing with identity and trying out new identities…is psychologically real."[26] People build a sense of integrated self "by cycling through many selves."[27]

Turkle and Matusitz both consider the actual and ethical ramifications of trying on different identities or selves in the virtual world. Matusitz writes, "We consider that virtual reality becomes real life and the actions done by the web user are taken just as seriously as real life actions."[28] He also recognizes that by entering the virtual world, we are able to temporarily leave the ordinary social constructs that impact our interior

dialogue and identity making functions by exposing ourselves to new influences, ideas, ethics, and landscapes. Turkle provides many examples of people who deliberately try on new personae and use the collective experience of their virtual selves to impact their actual world identity, moving fluidly through many different social realities or "windows." In the Internet Age, we have left the idea of a deterministic social construction of identity behind and re-entered the world of reciprocity between self and society in a modern day, strictly human form of *regiratio*.

Of course, we have never needed the Internet to realize that we can enter the virtual world. Literature is virtual, and entering imaginatively into a work of fiction or poetry can create the same temporary suspension of self and give us the illusion of entering into someone else's experience. The act of reading creatively is often a form of virtual role-play, and anyone whose actual life has been impacted by the reading of a novel knows the unmistakable influence of the virtual upon the actual. Characters of fiction can sometimes be even more real to us than the actual people we encounter every day. The Internet has just given us a way to describe and explain this process to those who do not consider themselves to be literary and who often view the experience of literature as a form of escapism.

Turkle sees the virtual world as providing users with a "psychosocial moratorium" as described by Erikson in his 1950 <u>Childhood and Society</u>, a free space in which adolescents can try out relatively consequenceless behavior to imaginatively experiment with the boundaries between themselves and others, between themselves and their world. She summarizes Erikson's moratorium as "not a 'hold' on significant experiences but on their consequences…. Relatively consequence-free experimentation

facilitates the development of a 'core self,' a personal sense of what gives life meaning that Erikson calls 'identity.'"[29] For Turkle and Matusitz, roleplaying and even practicing deception on the web is therefore a creative enterprise useful in building reserves of knowledge, experimenting with different self-images, cycling between potential selves. It is not an escape, but a means of pursuing our ontological vocation toward humanization in concert with other selves engaged in the same enterprise in the workings of the society of mind.

Since Turkle wrote so glowingly about construction of identity on the web in the mid 1990s, we have had too many reports of those who were unable to escape from the virtual world, or whose virtual experience led to dire actual world consequences, to see this practice of identity morphism as completely positive. Not everyone is able to "cycle through" multiple selves in an integrated fashion, and the results sometimes look more destructive than creative. We can no longer see experience on the web as relatively "consequence free," although Erikson's moratorium is a useful construct if what happens in the free psychological space ultimately has a healthy outcome. We must remember, too, that Erikson saw the moratorium as a pre-adult stage of experimentation, and that Turkle could be accused of celebrating that nefarious web project, the "infantilization" of society warned of by Ellen Ullman.[30]

I suggest that one way to revise our analysis of the medieval mystics' experiences in the visionary state would be to consider them as a form of virtual roleplay—not imaginary, not delusional, but the active creation of a psychic space in which to try on different selves, to dialogue and ask questions that could not safely be asked in the actual world, to experiment with answers based on self-images constructed from their actual

world theological context, and to explore possibilities of new selves, new modes of action, new psychic landscapes, new ways of being. This notion of art enabling a utopian, somewhat consequence-free virtual world is explored by de Certeau in the chapter "Mystic Speech" in <u>Heterologies</u>, as he describes the setting of this "moratorium" as a "no-place in which to …create a world as text, a mystic space…outside the fields of knowledge. It is there that the labour of writing which is given birth through the animation of language by the Other takes place."[31] My problem with de Certeau's formulation is that he seems compelled to leave the artist there, making the writer a perpetual outcast dissociated from both a truly satisfactory relationship with the hidden/non-existant Other or the pedestrian world of less artistic souls. I see the mystics, and artists in general, as entering into this virtual state—not as a sign of lack of coping or actual world functionality, or even a rejection of the actual world—but as a deliberate, creative work. The process involves the continual dissolution and fragmentation of the socially constructed, unable-to-be-fully-integrated self, and the continual building up of a new, integrated, and more functional identity which can then communicate the possibility of wholeness back to the artist's world.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the similarities between late medieval Christian mysticism and the shamanic pattern of dismemberment and balance, or healing. That act of deconstruction and reconstruction can also be seen as part of this alternative "society of mind" way to describe the mystic pattern. Just as we could make the general claim that all artists are by nature narcissistic using the old Freudian paradigm, so we could say that all artists must undergo this creative process of disintegration of the actual, socially functioning yet socially limited self to enter a new, liminal mental space for the self to

experience and then describe to others. The contradictions between the respect the mystics were given by their contemporaries and their objectification by recent critics as damaged, delusional victims of their world can be resolved by looking at them as people working hard to integrate or synthesize their different self-images. They drew energy from that process in order to communicate what they saw and act upon it to transform their world. The concept of multiple selves in interior dialogue also allows us to reframe the Jungian archetype of the hero descending into chaos and returning to the level of "organized innocence" with a gift of new experiential meaning for the world. After all, tearing things down and building them up again in a new way has always been a common human response to problem-solving; *techne* is art, art is *techne*.

Those who would suggest that this form of cycling between and integrating various "drafts" of experience was foreign to the medieval mind should recall that dialectic and synthesis, or the simultaneous considerations of a point and its opposite in order to arrive at a more accurate truth, was not invented by Hegel but had its roots as a problem solving strategy in the scholasticism of medieval Catholic universities. Behind their laments for the hidden Other and their fierce longing for an unattainable perfection, the mystics themselves describe the multiplicity of simultaneous vision throughout their corpus. Desire is a fundamental theological concept for them, but desire alone does not produce art.

<div align="center">A Poetics of Continual Integration</div>

In order to realistically look at the mystics and their output through the "society of mind" lens, we would need to see that they used their vision space for a psychic moratorium in which to explore other possibilities for thought and action, and that out of

that liminal experience came the energy and impulse to impact their actual world through writing and creative acts toward their communities. Through experiencing the psychologically "real" virtual world, they would be faced with choices impacting their actual existence. One choice, certainly, is to remain suspended in or longing for the liminal state, which is physically impossible and psychologically damaging because it limits functionality in the actual world. This would have been somewhat appealing given the exigencies of their lives. One of their multiple selves would have control over the virtual world, ranging through inner space freely, engaging in the heroic exploits they report back to an eager audience, playing with agency and autonomy that were not available to them in the actual world. Surrendering control of their tightly regulated and scrupulously examined "actual" lives to a higher power in the virtual world must have given them an enormous sense of freedom to relinquish responsibility and experiment with no fear of personal consequences, to create with the sanction of the Creator. Play is the operative word: Hadewijch's *spelende*, Mechthild's *das spil*. The splitting off of virtual self from everyday self is understandable in a time of such physical and psychic turbulence, especially for those with a gift for inquiry, intellectual curiosity, and rational discussion.

However, role-play in the game of love must eventually come to an end, and the selves must reintegrate until the game begins again. The mystics must come back to reality, just as in the neoplatonic tradition the soul cannot separate from the body and remain in union with the divine forever until death on the physical plane. The nostalgia, the longing, the sense of exile from that sweet land of freedom must be integrated into the world to which they return. Being unable to re-experience the *jouissance* of ecstasy, the

higher synthesis, and the possibilities of an integrated existence while trapped in the
chaos of actuality would have created that sense of exile and yearning for the Other that
is the foundation of the "poetics of desire." However, the literary "I" of the yearning soul
gasping after the ineffable, while compelling and beautiful, is not the only self-state of
the mystics and not the one they ultimately embrace.

Each one of the women chooses integration of her multiple self states rather
than the dissociation of remaining locked in the ideal vision world. Focusing on the
narrative "I" of the vision, so tempting because it is expressed with such immediacy, can
make us forget that it is always being recorded after the fact, after the vision has ended,
by another "I" commenting upon it and interpreting it. Whether the mystics' acts of
vision triggered their literary output or their literary bent triggered their mystic vision, all
the women report the decenteredness that is necessary to "stand in the spaces" between
selves, according to Philip M. Bromberg. This removal of one's self from the center of
consciousness is a pre-requisite to creating the necessary dialogue and networking
between selves to hold the integrated identity together. Bromberg describes this state as
"a person's relative capacity to make room at any given moment for subjective reality
that is not readily containable by the self [s]he experiences as 'me' at that moment."[32]
Both the male and female mystics needed to experience and revel in this detachment from
basic reality, this "decenteredness," in order to create a literary space that did not exist
before, a vernacular space. The visionary state helped them gain the psychic energy and
insight to make sense of the actual world, to try new ways of coping with the actual
world, and then bring back what they discovered to the actual world through art.

Role-play and questioning in the vision state enabled the creativity and sense of individual agency with which the female mystics wrote; this is reflected in the difference between their free-flowing style and that of the Scholastics. If the world is the way it is and we have no real impact upon it, then as writers our best choice is to imitate the great writers of the past. For the early male mystics, this is reflected in the heavily academic style of the Scholastics, groaning under the weight of exhaustive quotation and reference. The later mystics such as Eckhart were able to write in a scholastic, heavily glossed style when using Latin, but felt free to use a more conversational, imagistic, narrative manner for their vernacular audience. Since most of the female mystics were denied classical training, they were not able to imitate past masters. Most had some knowledge of Latin but lacked the university training in dialectical argument available to the men, so they were spared the limitations of scholastic narrative models. As Mechthild would proclaim, that was a good thing for the history of literature as it enabled them to stand in a de-centered way outside the literary tradition and write more creatively, contributing to the rising tide of narrativity in their larger culture.

The writings of Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Julian all stress a turning away from what would later be called a "poetics of desire" and a characterization of that state as immature, delusional, and even somewhat lazy. The difficult, deliberate task of the writer is not living in the imaginative state or even longing for it, but seeking to continually integrate what one sees in vision with how one lives and what one communicates. Rather than losing themselves in an inward-turning rumination over the loss of their connection to the divine, we see the mystics who lived long enough to process their experience over many years directed outward. Most of them come away from the mystic union with an

enlarged sense of themselves as God in the world. Since the universe is created and sustained by love, and love is creative and expressive, relational love existing in the spaces between human and divine is ultimately more important than obsessing over or longing to escape the corruption or materiality of the world. As Julian can say with confidence at the end of decades of meditation on the nature and motivation of God, "Love was his meaning." Hadewijch sees love as "master of contraries."[33] Writing itself becomes an act of integrating love for the audience.

The mystics must turn outward, they must speak, whether to express their longing for the Other or to protest all that is not the Other, and they do so in the knowledge that they are performing a public function, creating a space for themselves that was not previously there, serving as messengers and mediators between one world and the other, *in imitatio Christi*. They must return—but must change that reality. The need to work out a way to integrate the visionary world with their own difficult times must have been one of the primary factors encouraging these women to write; in so doing they forged a new poetics of integration. The vision must be shared and more people brought into the game in order to create a movement that could bring the ideal as experienced in the virtual to the actual world.

Acting out the drama of dissolution, chaos, dismemberment, lack of control, and total surrender with the text of their own bodies, as well as their literary texts, gives the mystics an audience and a following to help them make the changes they inspire. The ultimate end of *Brautmystik* is not consummation or lifelong yearning for forgotten union; it's not the honeymoon but the years of marriage that follow. The goal of late medieval female mysticism is to ritually and artistically act out reconciliation between

human and divine; in order for the ritual to reach the level of sign, the mystics need to communicate the vision to an audience. As Underhill wrote many years ago, mysticism needs an audience to be real.

How do We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?

For the beguines Hadewijch and Mechthild, poetry, drama, and narrative are the literary means of communication, and both clearly build upon the troubadour themes and rhetorical strategies of the larger culture of letters. Although Julian employs imaginative narrative on occasion, she is harder to qualify as a creative writer. Primarily she is a theologian, a philosopher, and only incidentally an autobiographer.[34] Yet her personal voice is so distinctly intertwined in her work, and her sense of timing, audience, and detail so profound that she must be considered among the literary artists of her day. That the art had social purpose does not detract from its artistic nature. The question of whether social art is true art has been answered with a resounding yes by all except those who believe that there is a rarified state of true beauty divorced from the corruption of other people and accessible through fleeting glimpses and intimations.

Looking at the mystics in the context of the networked self theory has meant taking them temporarily out of their theological milieu. Retextualizing them, we have to admit that whether in a beguinage, convent, or anchorite's cell, these women lived and breathed in a world permeated by God-consciousness. Exploring the nature of God's creative impulse and the essential natures of divine and human in relationship was absolutely crucial for them before they could consider themselves to be legitimate writers. Within their actual world, the overwhelming message they received was that

what they willed, what they wanted to do, was dangerous, threatening, and censurable. Exploring these impulses in the vision world gave them the ability to claim authority and express themselves confidently. The extent of that confidence partly depended on how fully they could integrate their virtual experiences with their actual life and how much they could embrace the humanity to which they returned.

Hadewijch and Julian equate full-growness or maturity with a return to the actual. The shamanic pattern of psychic dismemberment and reconstruction, or the decenteredness of detaching from the workaday self may have helped them to rid themselves of social codes that might have kept them from the agency they required. Ultimately, though, the focus for the mystic writers shifts from vision to the goal of revision, remaking the actual world to fit the patterns they explored in the virtual world. In Vision 4, Hadewijch compares the depth and self-knowledge brought about by mature love to the ignorant or naïve infatuation of new love. Elsewhere she comments on her earlier immaturity in desiring constant experience of vision. Themes of fruition and gestation coalesce with the idea that both awareness and the ability to speak come from maturity. Everyone wants to be a visionary, she complains, but not enough people want to act out their vision in this world. Julian, too, recalls her initial prayers to share in Christ's passion as stemming from youthful naivete. Several concentrated years of intellectual work on her vision and life experience give her a greater sense of world-suffering that stimulates her compassion and her need to share her own attempts to integrate divine and human to her audience.

Hadewijch seems to have been able to fully integrate her world view, cycling gracefully among several self states of vision and action. She carries a Stoic sense of who

she is and what she is doing on a universal scale, having been given the virtual blessing

of pseudo-parent figures such as Bernard, Augustine, Mary, and God himself. Because

Bernard's vision of the relational God was still the accepted model in her actual world,

she did not face the same gulf between virtual and actual that Mechthild experienced. Her

art reflects this sense of integration and coherence. "These are the words that come

surging up in the soul with bliss from God's excellence (l. 80)."[35] Hadewijch writes these

words after trying to describe the unity in multiplicity that is the Trinity in her 28th letter,

the last before we hear of her eviction from the beguinage in Letter 29. Making the

connection between God's multiple nature and her own, she sums up her life as a mystic

and writer thusly:

> So I kept silence then and reposed in God, until the time when God bade me
> speak. I have integrated all my diversity, and I have individualized all my
> wholeness. And I have enclosed all my individuality in God until the time when
> someone will come with such discernment as to ask me what I mean. And since I
> feel with God in God, that nothing separates me more from him than having to
> speak, for this reason I keep silence." (ll. 250-261)[36]

Hart's translation of *gheproperlect* as "individualized" reflects the history of commentary

on Hadewijch's use of the word starting with Van Mierlo's critical edition. The Latin root

of the now-lost Dutch term must have been *proprius*, connoting exclusivity, peculiarity,

particularity, ownership. Another translation of the term might be "appropriated,"

meaning that she has put her own stamp upon the wholeness of God so that it also

becomes her own.

The concept captures Hadewijch's sense of what she is doing as an artist in

reaction to God. Rather than losing herself in God completely, she takes the unity she is

offered and makes it her own in the sense of making it particularly hers through the way

she shapes it. Bardo Weiss translates the line as "*Ich habe all meine Unterscheidungs-*

kraft ins Ganze und ich habe all meine Ganzheit ins Eigentümliche gebracht."[37] In

Hadewijch's use of the verb *gheproperlechen* and the adjective *properlike*, she presents

herself as much more than a conduit or even an arranger. She is an active shaper, taking

God's nature and it forming it in her own way, bringing it into something that makes

sense to her—mirroring and re-visioning the creative activity and integration she

witnesses in vision.

     As with many writers who seem to reach a point of resolution, however, she

claims nothing more can be said and then writes more—in her case three more letters

enjoining her audience to become visionaries and transform their world based on love.

For Hadewijch, the whole of life becomes divinized as the same unity that binds and

integrates the Trinity can integrate our disparate selves. She writes with conviction that

this integration is not only possible, but the end goal of human existence. She also knows

that the process of integration is a continual shaping of life that will only end with death.

If we stay true to who we are with integrity, faithfulness, *trouwe*, "Though we are far off,

we shall reach knowledge."[38]

     For the mystic writers, contemplating how the Creator God could be a union of

separate persons is a matter encouraging awe, inspiration, and imitation. The Trinity

itself is a "society of mind" of unity within multiplicity, a network of dialoguing selves,

as it is presented in the visions of Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Julian. Even though

Mechthild spends more time than any of the other mystics with the exception of

Marguerite Porete on levels, ranks, hierarchies, and status of the divine beings peopling

her universe, her language reflects a vision of God and eternity as non-linear, more like a

network than a straight line or chain of being. Her description of God as a sphere

containing everything, even sin and hell, is an attempt to integrate her universe that allows her to maintain orthodoxy yet remain true to what she envisioned. Her dialogues in the vision states between herself and different aspects of *Minne*, herself and Mary, the different persons of the Godhead, the prophets, and a whole host of others could be interpreted as her attempt to see God as a network of interacting, relational, and interdependent selves.

However, with the rise of empiricism and a diminishing of Bernard's emphasis on love, Mechthild has a harder time than Hadewijch integrating virtual and actual. Her book is a study in contrasts, extreme highs and lows, mixed genres, mixed messages. Interestingly, Mechthild makes the strongest claims to be full-grown in knowledge in her earliest book as she describes her union with Christ in full, physical *Brautmystik* terms. When she speaks of immaturity, it is usually in reference to others, not herself. Yet as she continues to write throughout her long life, her anxiety increases. Her inability to stop is driven by a nagging sense that she does not have it all worked out. She feels the personal connection with the divine and receives countless reassurances of divine protection and sanction in her virtual worlds, but the anxieties of her actual life in an increasing atmosphere of inquisition and ecclesiastical paranoia that was late thirteenth-century Magdeburg lead her to desperation about her role as a universal player.

She prays to be released from the need to write yet never truly achieves closure. Yet even though she is the mystic with the deepest sense of the power of sin to separate humans from God and the most disparaging about the body, she, too, ultimately chooses the human. In Book II.22, Lady Contemplation asks her if she would rather be one of the

Seraphim—the highest order of angels closest to God—or a human being. Lady Soul

replies:

> When the game is over, then let one see how the scales tip—the noblest angel,
> Jesus Christ, who soars above the Seraphim, who is undivided with his Father,
> Him shall I, the least of souls, take in my arms, eat him and drink him, and have
> my way with him. This can never happen to the angels….What, then, do I care
> what the angels experience?[39]

As with Hadewijch before her and Eckhart after, Mechthild realizes that the very body

that drags her down is the same vehicle raised to divine union in the person of Christ, and

that without sin, mercy would be pointless. To deny her humanity and disintegration

would be to deny the possibility of integration.

She cycles through selves several times within a single chapter, but ultimately

cannot settle or integrate completely. She goes overboard, or she doesn't go at all. Some

see this as her strength as an artist in reflecting the fragmented nature of her times; others

see it as an inability to organize her experience and shape it into a coherent whole.

Despite wonderful passages and sections of great poetry or narrative, ultimately

Mechthild's failing is an inability to edit, a process requiring a firm sense of self and

integrated vision of the whole. Finally, at the end of her last book, she, like Hadewijch,

rests in *triuwe*, fidelity, *gehorsami*[40] as the bond connecting her soul to God the Father,

her body to Jesus, and her five senses to the Holy Spirit, seeing the unity in multiplicity

of the Trinity as the only way to integrate her disparate selves.

For Julian, writing after Ockham and the rise of nominalism, observation is key to

her vision. She is so confident that what she has seen during her near-death experience is

worth studying that she makes it her life's work. She studies for years with both a

magnifying glass and a wide-angle lens, allowing her to assume a universal perspective.

Because she encloses herself in a creative space that severely limits external distraction

and input, she, too, achieves the integration necessary to hold the "seeings" of several

different cognitive selves simultaneously; she is able to network between them in order to

create a unified interpretation. Without that integration, she would not be able to

communicate her virtual experience back to the actual world as specifically as she does.

Julian conscientiously describes the differences between the almost simultaneous visions

of different self states within the same person in a way that resembles Dennett's concept

of having different windows open simultaneously on the same computer screen. She sees

the same vision with her "bodily sight," her "ghostly sight," appearances that are "ghostly

in bodily likeness," and even "more ghostly without bodily likeness." These different

experiences of vision are held together by "words formed in my understanding" so that

they "dwell in my understanding."[41] Ultimately, a sense of integration and integrity

based on mutual love and respect is what holds the universe together in her vision of the

interaction of the Trinity and their interaction with us.

We are still left with the question of whether we should consider the beguines as

artists or social activists since so much of their writing is driven by a desire to re-see and

reform this world, a trend absent from the strictly apophatic mysticism of the Desert

Fathers, as well as the writers of Deonise Hid Diuinite and the Cloud of Unknowing. Two

things may account for this: the greater sense that *wyrd* or fate was pliable and prone to

human influence that emerges in the late Middle Ages,[42] and the beguines' precarious

place in medieval society. I suggest that the beguine mystics may have been impelled into

social action because they did not have a set "place" for the integrated self to do its work.

Enclosed religious like the Victorines or anchorites such as Rolle already had a place in

medieval society and could therefore write and disseminate ideas through writing without translating that into direct agency upon the actual. In similar fashion, Julian in being confined to her enclosure had a severely limited scope of action, although she did function as counselor and advisor to those who came to speak with her through her window. The beguines, in contrast, lived in the midst of the dirty, scrabbling, urban world of commerce and human interaction. Taking what they learned and using it let them apply their knowledge more strenuously to actual physical concerns, expending that psychic synergy in the human sphere. They had to do something in this world in order to guarantee a place in their society.

Ultimately, their intent in communicating their visions had to be this-worldly: founding hospitals, educating children, providing food and shelter for the poor, caring for the elderly, embarking upon strenuous programs of prayer for souls in purgatory, advising political leaders, doing what they could to provide a salve for their energetic, ambitious, grasping, but not always compassionate society. Creating their own textual communities and educating the next generation of female thinkers and writers is part of that mission, using narrativity as a path to selfhood and definition. Acceptance of their humanity as the fundamental part of their essential nature is one sign that the mystics ultimately chose this disorganized world over the ideal world of unity, while maintaining that window of unity open and possible upon their mental screens. Inherent in that choice is an acceptance of human nature as less than ideal, but ultimately worthwhile, an acknowledgement that propels their culture toward the humanism of the future.

Conclusion

Making Sense of the Mystics

I started this research partly due to a fascination with the seeming paradox of women bold enough to write at a time when women's writing was anomalous, choosing to write about a topic they describe as incommunicable. The more deeply I read the work of the mystics, the more dissatisfied I was with the three prevailing schools of criticism of medieval mysticism. This study has been an attempt to see if I could make sense of the mystics and provide an alternative explanation that would not result in either forcing one to share in the mystics' belief system in order to explain their actions, or viewing them as perpetually crazed, immature, or damaged.

How do we explain these writers? Although all show evidence of early education and literacy, none, so far as we can surmise from their background, would have been raised in an atmosphere that encouraged a female to write about her own experiences, or even write at all aside from recording information important to a household or a business.[1] Something made them break away from the type of written communication typical of educated medieval women. Something made them think that their personal experience, thoughts, and ways of making sense of their lives on the theoretical plane were worth writing down and sharing with an audience. Something triggered a sense of authorship in them and allowed them to experiment and play with the literary forms and symbolism of their times, translating high theology into everyday speech, creating new language, images, and ideas for the next generation of poets to expand upon.

For most critics up until the 1980s, this "something" was God. Those who shared the mystics' faith saw no possible argument with their position; those who did not found

nothing to convince them that mysticism had a viable connection to medieval literacy as

an historical phenomenon. Critics coming from a Christian tradition necessarily assumed

the literal veracity of the vision was rooted in actual divine message, or at least tacitly

refused to comment on whether the vision was "real" or imaginary. Most scholarship on

the mystics up until thirty years ago had been done by Roman Catholic theologians,

partly because they were the only people who had access to the texts, cared about the

content, or even knew of their existence. For these scholars, the question of "What made

them write?" has had one answer, echoing what the mystics would have said themselves:

God did. Only to the extent that we can share their interpretive framework can we accept

this answer, and this atemporal interpretation only partly explains why a female mystic in

the late Middle Ages in northern Europe would write in her own historical moment. It

does not help us see her as an artist but only scribe, *scriptor* rather than *auctor*.

My goal has not been to judge the veracity of the visions, although if I had taken

this theological stance I would have to ask questions such as these. If they had truly seen

a more ideal reality, wouldn't it have seemed better than they relayed? Wouldn't Julian

have been able to see beyond her prejudice in regard to Lollards and Jews? Wouldn't

they be writing more textually and less contextually? Wouldn't Mechthild's visions have

looked less like the medieval hierarchy of potentates and powers than they do? Wouldn't

she have been less bothered by the Cathars? My supposition would be that if the vision

were actually of the nature of an ideal, Neoplatonic and transcendent God, the visionary

world described would have been purer than it was. However, seeing them this way

would be judging the mystics more harshly than we do other writers because it would be

imposing a standard impossible to meet: transcending the signs and symbols of one's

own socially constructed universe in order to imagine a completely different world of signs and signifiers. One could also argue that since they were writing for an audience, they had to use the tools, symbols, and mental patterns their audiences would understand. In looking at the mystics as writers, we cannot take the "God factor" totally out of the inquiry or we empty them of content and context. Nonetheless, as a literary critic I find the theological interpretation at least incomplete.

If God was not the Prime Mover of the critical approach, the veracity and meaning of the female mystic's visions have been skirted carefully by critics in order to claim the female mystics as pioneers of feminism. Viewing them as engaged in liberationist theology against patriarchal oppression is a tempting model, particularly in conjunction with the views of the vernacular theology school. This remains true even though the vernacular theoretical approach is now falling out of favor, as what were once seen as battlelines are now recognized to have been much more permeable than once thought. Ian Johnson writes persuasively that this "intractably problematic and attractive" way of seeing has run its course, a view I share after my own research:

> If pushed to *indiscretioun*, vernacular theology can slip into an essentialism which represents culture, personal experience, and authenticity as a reflex of linguistic vernacularity. Moreover, its tendency to subscribe to a liberationist narrative, which imagines linguistic and social boundaries as faultlines negotiated by vernacular theology, is understandable enough, tempting fare to modern academic taste—much more palatable than the comfortable but unthrilling fact that medieval people and texts crossed such boundaries routinely without transgression or trauma.[2]

Although I began the study conditioned by current criticism to see the mystics through this lens, what I actually found was more collegiality between the genders and between the vernacular and Latin church teachings and attitudes than I had expected. Where I anticipated disagreement and subversion, I found basic agreement and shared belief

structures. Even those behaviors seized upon by modern critics as reactionary or passive-aggressive blows against oppression (such as starvation, enclosure, or bodily disfiguration) were shared by male and female mystics, who were equally rewarded for them by their culture. Without the collegiality and shared inquiry that existed between genders working within the larger Roman Catholic system, we would probably not have the mystics' texts at all to study today.

Other problems exist with the vernacular school in its most strident form. For one, if the mystics are writing against patriarchy, all of their actions are reactions and they still take their meaning, their draft of experience, from what they are fighting against. More troubling, if we assume male discourse to be logical and female speech to be illogical, historically speaking, patriarchy seems to have won the battle with the triumph of Renaissance enlightenment and reason. The mystics-at-war view has them fighting a losing battle. Seeing them as precursors to the Reformation is probably accurate in a limited way, but the rise of Protestantism did little for the role of women in the church. Unfortunately, the flip side of gender-based criticism has viewed them as psychologically flawed, unconsciously contributing to the enslavement of other women in a masochistic wallow of insecurity, writing because their confessors told them to, reinforcing the codes of patriarchal society.

The final version of the mystics, and the most superficially attractive from an artistic point of view, is that given by those in the post-Freudian school of Lacan and de Certeau, who leave them stumbling, incoherent, and hysterical (or dissociated). Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous combine the Lacanian and the liberationist view but use that lens to sing paeans to hysteria, inarticulacy, and incomprehensibility as a means of critiquing the

patriarchal system of signification. How else can a woman react in a man's world? While tempting, this view fixes the mystics in the position analogous to that of addicted adolescent gamers of today, who react with such psychic violence against the "real" world and inability to process their actual world experience that they lose themselves in the virtual, and it denies the incredible work these women put into meticulous description, years of thought and revision, working and reworking their material to communicate something they felt was vitally important to their audience. None of them wanted to be seen as incoherent or confused.

The poetics of desire model still retains enough ghost of the unitary self that we read the mystics as moving chronologically from one world to another plane of existence and getting psychologically stuck there, or living in perpetual longing for a world they can never reach again. This image is attractive because of the power of art in portraying the desire for a different vision of life, but it is scientifically impossible unless we classify the writer as permanently dissociated. Creative and sensory description fixes the window of visionary experience, giving us the compelling but illusory narrative "I" of vision so distinctly that we may forget to retain the memory of other windows simultaneously open, the ongoing discourse of the artist's multiple, flexible selves. Bernini "captures" St. Teresa in ecstasy and we think we know her; we can forget her incredible activity and vital, shaping presence far into old age. Mechthild, Julian, and Hadewijch describe their visions in such detail we are drawn into that window of interpretation as well and feel we must choose this visionary self, that narrative presence, as the "real" one.

The need to choose which self is real and make pronouncements about the mental health of our subjects is an echo of a brain model that may no longer be viable. The

shamanic pattern, although it is perhaps the best explanation of mystic behavior to date, contains elements of the same problem. The idea of the soul voyaging out of normative existence and then returning reflects something many people have felt and recognize as possible, much in the same way as we recognize the sun "rising" in the east. Realistically, though, we need a new way to talk about the liminal state that reflects what we know of how the brain actually works. We do not need to deny the "reality" of vision, for to do so would force us to strip the writers of their text and the world of meaning in which they lived, leaving them damaged indeed. Studies of the brain coming from cognitive science and research into the behavior patterns of those who cycle regularly between the actual and virtual in our own age attest to the psychological reality and impact of the virtual world. We know it can be a place of reality, culture, social influence as well as imagination and vision, and that it is possible for a person to successfully move between and integrate the realities of several such worlds at once.

Successful artists may be those individuals most capable of integrating these realities and negotiating between them. The compulsion to write can be a means of integration as well as of motivation to share that synthesis with others. The mystics lived and wrote at a time calling for integration of multiple conflicting messages about their own nature and the nature of the universe. In order to function within that world, they had to find a way to process and make sense of their existence. In looking back at them and what they accomplished, as literary critics we can have several windows open on the screen ourselves: what we perceive to be the integrity of a writer's literary experience or virtual reality, the opinions and ways of seeing inherited from past critics, and the drafts

we write within our own historical moment. Integrating these views gives us a meaning

for ourselves.

Appendix

Hadewijch, *Strofische Gedichte* 22
(The poem is discussed in Chapter 2, pages 80-86)

I
Mine noet es groot ende onbekint den lieden.
Si sijn mi wreet, want si mi gherne scieden
Daer mi die cracht<e> van minnen al toe rieden,
Sine kinne[t]s niet, ende ic en caent hen ghedieden.

5

    Dus moetic pleghen dat ic ben;
    Dat minne bracht hevet in minen sen,
 Ic ben indien: dies willic mi ghenieden.

II
Wat kere men mi dade dore die minne,
Daer willic dueren sonder scade inne.

10

Want ic versta in edelheit miere sinne
Dat ic in doghen om hoghe minne winne.
    Daeromme willic mi gherne gheven
    In pine, in raste, in sterven, in leven:
 Want ic dat ghebod van hogher trouwe kinne.

III

15

Dat ghebod dat ic bekinne in minnen natuere
Dat brinct mine sinne in avontuere:
En heeft forme, sake noch figuere;
Doch eest inden smake alse creatuere;
    Hets materie miere bliscape

20

    Daer ic in alre tijt na hake;
Dus leidic mine daghe in meneghen suere.

IV
 Van Minnen claghic ghene pine:
 Mi staet altoes! haer onderdaen te sine,
 Daer sijt ghebiedet lude ende stillekine.

25

Men canse niet bekinnen dan in scine.
    Hets een wonder onverstaen
    Dat mijn herte dus hevet bevaen,
 Ende doet dolen in ene wilde woestine.

V

Soe wrede wuestine wert nie ghescapen,

So die minne in haer lantscap can maken.
Want si doet met begheerten na hare haken
Ende sonder kinnen hare wesen smaken.
    Si toent hare als in een vlien;
    Men volghet hare ende si blijft onghesien:

 Dit doet alendeghe herte altoes waken.

VI

Spardic eneghe cracht van minnen rade,
Dat kinnen alle die minnen dat ic mesdade,
Ic mach nu meester zijn dies ic dan bade,
Ende so en verwonnic meer so grote[n] scade.

    Nu nemic in natueren delijt,
    Dat mi gheeft minne ende nuwen vlijt;
Dies ic in niede nemmermeer en sade.

VII

Mi swaert dat ic mi niet en can vercrighen
Int bekinnen, ic en moet mi selven ontbliven.

Al soude mi noch begherte therte tewriven
Ende cracht van minnen node, mi en soude ontbliven,
    Ic sal noch weten wat mi trect,
    Ende dicke so onsachte wect
Als ic mi stelven in rasten soude gheriven.

VIII

Waer iemant die mi richte, Ic soude hem claghen
Over mi selven: ic en caent niet wel verdraghen,
Dat mi die minne ye leidde so hoghe staghen
Ende icse nu ontmoete met selken wreden slaghen.
    In hebbere toe gheluc no spoet.

    In weet ocht minne selve doet;
 Ic duchte der ontrouwen wrede valsche laghen.

IX

 Dat ic ontrouwe ontsie, dats wonder clene:
 Si heeft mi ghepijnt meer dan ye scene;

30

35

40

45

50

55

Want dat ic ben ghestoert van dat ic mene,

60   Dat doet ontrouwe ende ander sake enghene.
           Si heeft mi selke scade ghedaen!
           Salic haer emmermeer ontgaen,
        Dat sal met hogher trouwen sijn allene.

          X
        Wat hulpet mi dat ic van minnen singhe,

65   Ende nu mi selven mijn quale linghe?
        Met wat node mi die minne bevinghe,
       Vore hare ghewout en hebbic gheen ghedinghe.
         Ic lie alle dies hi lien sal,
         Die der minnen cracht sijn herte stal.

70   Wat hulpet ic mine nature dwinghe?

        Want mine natuere sal al bliven
        Dat si es, ende dat hare vercrighen,
     Al maken die menschen haren wech so inghe.[1]

Stanzaic Poem 22
Translation by Mother Columba Hart

    I
My distress is great and unknown to men.
They are cruel to me, for they wish to dissuade me
From all that the forces of Love urge me to.
They do not understand it, and I cannot explain it to them.
5   I must then live out what I am;
          What Love counsels my spirit,
In this is my being: for this reason I will do my best.

    II
Whatever vicissitudes men lead me through for Love's sake,
I wish to stand firm and take no harm from them.
10   For I understand that from the nobility of my soul
That in suffering for sublime Love, I conquer.
        I will therefore gladly surrender myself
         In pain, in repose, in dying, in living,
For I know the command of lofty fidelity.

    III

15 This command which I come to know in Love's nature
Throws my mind into bewilderment:
The thing has no form, no manner, no outward appearance.
It can only be tasted as something actual;
   It is the substance of my joy,
20   Which I long for in every season
And because of which I spend my days in much bitterness.

  IV
I do not complain of suffering for Love:
It becomes me always to submit to her,
Whether she commands in storm or in stillness.
25 One can know her only in herself.
   This is an unconceivable wonder,
   Which has thus filled my heart
And makes me stray in a wild desert.

  V
Never was so cruel a desert created
30 As Love can make in her land!
For she impels us to long desiringly for her
And to taste her without knowing her being.
   She shows herself as she takes flight;
   We pursue her, but she remains unseen:
35 This makes the miserable heart ever exert itself.

  VI
If I spared any effort in following Love's counsel,
All who love know that I was offending.
Then I implored what I can now be master of;
Otherwise I could never have overcome such great harm.
40   Now in acting as what I am, I find delight
   That gives me love and new ascent;
Therefore in my fiery longing I will never be appeased.

  VII
It weighs me down that I cannot obtain
Knowledge of Love without renouncing self.
45 Even if desire crushes my heart,
Even if strength slips away from me through Love's coercion,
   I shall yet know what draws me
   And awakens me so mercilessly
If for a moment I seek pleasure for myself in repose.

  VIII
50 Were there someone to be my judge, I would complain to him

On my behalf: Indeed I cannot bear
Love ever should have led me to such summits,
And now I meet her with cruel blows.
      I have neither good fortune nor success.
55   I know not whether it is Love's own doing;
I fear a trick on the part of false and cruel disloyalty.

  IX

Small wonder I am afraid of disloyalty:
It has hurt me more than is ever guessed;
For my being withheld from the aim I intend,
60   Disloyalty and no other must take the blame.
      It has done me such harm!
      If I escape it in future,
This can only be by lofty fidelity.

  X

What use is it for me to sing of Love,
65   And newly prolong for myself my torment?
With whatever distress Love fetters me,
Before her might I am unable to plead.
      I avow what must be avowed by anyone
      Whose heart Love's power has stolen.
70   What use is it for me to force my nature?

      For my nature shall always remain
      What it is and conquer what belongs to it,
However men may narrow its path.[2]

Notes for the Introduction

[1] In an odd twist given its fame as the home of Julian the anchoress, Norwich was an exception among English cities for the existence of a community of women similar to the beguines of Europe, due perhaps to its location on the coast and to its frequent trade with Hanseatic League cities, among which beguinages flourished on the continent. See Ann Warren, qtd. in Carroll Hilles, "The Sacred Image and the Healing Touch: The Veronica in Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love." <u>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</u> 28(1998): 554.

[2] The incident occurs in both Chapter 10 of the short text and Chapter 19 of the long text, and Julian uses identical language in both versions. As she contemplates the figure of Christ on the cross, she hears a voice telling her to "luke vppe to hevein to his fadere." Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds. <u>A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich: Short Text and Introduction, 2 vols.</u> (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978) 236. In future references this source will be referred to as Colledge and Walsh I (Short Text and Introduction) and Colledge and Walsh II (Long Text and Introduction). The injunction is recorded as "loke vppe to hevyn to hys father" in the long text, Colledge and Walsh II, 370.

[3] John Giles Milhaven, <u>Hadewijch and Her Sisters: Other Ways of Loving and Knowing.</u> (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993) 4.

[4] In this instance, the relationship between Rolle the hermit and his Yorkshire patrons the Daltons was somewhat similar to that of Thoreau and his Concord neighbors. The solitude of neither Walden Pond nor West Riding was absolute, and the name hermit implies here a self-proclaimed status, lack of gainful employment, and irregular living quarters.

[5] Monica Furlong, <u>Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics.</u> (Boston: Shambhala, 1996) 32-33.

[6] For example, see Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," <u>Signs</u> (Summer 1976):87-93 and Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, <u>The Newly Born Woman</u>, trans. Betty Wing (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1985), pp. 136-60. The writers trace female creativity with the repressed desire in the body of a hysteric and follow the linking of hysteria, narcissism, and mysticism started by Freud. Cixous in her chapter "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" celebrates the preoedipal, disorganized, non-differentiated vocalizations of the child in contact with the mother before the intervention of male logic and order. Simone de Beauvoir devotes a chapter in her groundbreaking book <u>The Second Sex</u> to "The Mystic" and fixes for a time our modern view of the medieval female mystic as pathological, masochistic, and excessively narcissistic in her analysis of Angela of Foligno and St. Theresa of Avila. Simone de Beauvoir, <u>The Second Sex</u>, trans. and ed. by H. M.Parshley (1949; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968) 670-678. See also Luce Irigaray, <u>Speculum: Of the Other Woman</u>, trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 for a reinterpretation of Lacan's mirror example into a feminist poetics of liminal, non-linear speech.

[7] Flying (Fr. *voler*) for Cixous is analogous to a woman finding her own voice. This symbolism makes for a handy connection between her description of female speech and her post-Freudian interpretation of the mystic rapture described by the medieval women. However, a close reading of the medieval texts points more to a voice arising out of the need to describe the vision to others, not the moment of vision itself. The difference is crucial since need for an audience to

understand and follow is a hallmark of mystic writing.

[8] The word babble (Fr. *babil*) is used by Roland Barthes in <u>Le Plaisir du Texte</u> (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 12 with connotations of immaturity to signify the diffuse, pre-literate expressions of an infant, but the idea is celebrated as a contrast and an antidote to patriarchal speech and rational constructs by Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray. For these feminist critics, semiotic writing—female writing—subverts the male power structure and is revolutionary in its intent. The reading of the mystics, particularly by Cixous and Irigaray, assumes that they are hysterics subverting the patriarchy in which they are imbedded merely because they are women acting in an abnormal way writing about something illogical. To be a female writer is to be hysterical and reactionary, to practice the *écriture feminine,* which is intrinsically illogical, disorganized, unfinished, difficult to understand, and fragmented. Mikko Keskinen comments on the limitations in French feminist thought in "Her Mistress's Voice: Gynophonocentrism in Feminist Discourses," <u>Journal of International Women's Studies</u> 2 (2000), 10 July 2008 <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/nov 00/a_gynoft.htm>

[9] Evelyn Underhill, <u>The Mystics of the Church</u>. (London: James Clarke and Co, 1925), 54.

[10] Jacques LeGoff, <u>The Birth of Purgatory</u>, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (1981; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 4, 7, 291.

[11] LeGoff 291.

[12] An anchoress is a female anchorite, one who voluntarily submits to lifetime enclosure in an anchorhold, a space in which the person's contact with the outside world is limited to a shaded window through which food can be provided and waste removed, and through which some conversation with others such as confessors can be maintained. Many anchorholds attached to churches provided another small window through which the enclosed could watch the priest serving Mass at the altar.

[13] For instance, in her sixth letter, Hadewijch claims that loving God and serving people are one act of "fruition," a term usually reserved for the moment of union. She writes to her beguines, "With the Humanity of God you must live here on earth, in the labors and sorrows of exile, while within your soul you love and rejoice with the omnipotent and eternal Divinity in sweet abandonment. For the truth of both is one single fruition…serve the Humanity with prompt and faithful hands and with a will courageous in all virtues." (lines 117-130). All English translations unless otherwise noted come from Mother Columba Hart, O. S. B, trans. and ed. <u>Hadewijch: The Complete Works</u>, (NY: Paulist, 1980). This passage is found on p. 59.

 ["*Metter menscheit gods suldi hier leuen in aer- beide ende in ellenden, Ende metten moghenden eweleken god suldi Minnen ende Jubileren van binnen met enen sueten toeuerlate. Ende haere beider waerheit es een enich ghebruken…. Mer dient der menscheit met ghereeden handen van trouwen ende met starcken wille van allen doechden."*] 58-9. All Dutch originals of the letters are from Jan Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch:Brieven,</u> vol. 1 (Antwerp: Standaard, 1947).

Later in the same letter she writes, "Nowadays this is the way everyone loves himself; people wish to live with God in consolations and repose, in wealth and power, and to share the fruition of his glory. We all indeed wish to be God with God, but God knows there are few of us who want to live as men with his Humanity…." (ll 227-232). Hart 61.

[*"Daer in mint nu elc hem seluen: in troeste ende in rasten ende in rijcheiden ende in moghentheiden met gode te leuene ende in siere ghebrukeleker glorileecheit te sine. Wi willen alle wel god met gode wesen; Mer, wet god, luttel es onser die mensche met siere minscheit wille leuen"*] Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch, Brieven</u>, 64.

[14] Jan Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visioenen</u>, vol 2. (Louvain: Vlaamsch Boekenhalle, 1924-25) 35 (ll. 426-7). Hart 271.

Notes for Chapter One

[1] Jean Gerson, *Epistola…ad fratrem Bartholomaeum*, <u>Opera omnia</u>, I, 59, as qtd. in Ernest W. McDonnell, <u>Beguines and Beghards of Medieval Culture</u>. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954) 378-379.

[2] Suzanne F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Early Medieval Women," ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, <u>Becoming Visible: Women in European History</u>, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 132.

[3] Eleanor McLaughlin in "Women, Power, and the Pursuit of Holiness in Medieval Christianity." ed. Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin, <u>Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions</u>. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)104-108 traces the power Lioba exerted over her religious community and the Germanic people Boniface sought to convert, evidenced by the number of popular miracles attributed to her.

[4] Rudolf, <u>Life of Saint Leoba</u>, trans. and ed. C.H. Talbot, <u>The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany,</u> (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954) 222, qtd. in Reuther and McLaughlin, p. 107.

[5] Joan M. Ferrante, "The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy" Ed. Patricia H. Labalme, <u>Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past,</u> (New York: New York University Press, 1980) 15.

[6] The major European universities had already been founded by the time Hadewijch wrote (roughly 1220-1250 CE)—Bologna in 1088, Paris in 1150, Oxford in 1167, Cambridge in 1209, and Padua in 1222. Their influence grew once they became established as the dominant centers of learning, and by the time of Mechthild—the most anxious writer of the female mystics—the view of women promulgated by the Scholastics was in full force.

[7] Susan Stuard, "The Dominion of Gender: Women's Fortunes in the High Middle Ages." ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, <u>Becoming Visible: Women in European History</u>, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 159.

[8] The primary order of monastic life was made up of ordained priests and non-ordained monks. Secondary orders were made up of enclosed nuns, and tertiary orders were filled by pious lay people of both sexes. Members of tertiary orders were non-enclosed, living piously within their own homes under spiritual guidance, but more often in their own communities. Their residences could range in size from a single dwelling similar to a group home today, to a walled community for hundreds of members with several residences, a chapel, school, hospital, and industrial buildings.

[9] Michael Ripinsky-Naxon, <u>The Nature of Shamanism: Substance and Function of a Religious Metaphor</u>, (NY: SUNY, 1993), 58. Van Rubrouck's text is a unique document of early cross-cultural civil service and exploration in the service of the king. Guillaume du Rubrouck, <u>*Voyage dans l'Empire Mongol : 1253-1255*</u>. Ed. Claude Kappler and René Kappler. (Paris: Payot, 1985).

[10] Ed Emery, "The Trajectory of AABBBA from Ibn Quzman of Andalus, via the Marian Laudes to Dante's '*Morte villana di pietà nemica*'. <u>Emery's Occasional Papers</u>, 18. 1 May 2001. 15 February 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/dantestudies/ee1.html>.

[11] For an English version of poetry and prose by female Sufi mystics, see Camille Adams Helminski, <u>Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure</u>. (Boston, Shambhala, 2003). The relationships between the female Sufi mystics and the female Christian mystics would be a fascinating study, especially since Islam tends to praise women highly for their creative (not created) nature. How this distinction between Islamic and Christian thinking about women in the 1200s plays out in the writing of medieval women in both societies bears investigation. That Arabic thought influenced European ideas is undisputed, especially among the *jongleurs* and their celebration of Courtly Love. The extent of that influence is under debate. In particular, Rabi'a's praise of touch and taste ways of knowing rather than the European prioritization of sight would lend itself to a good comparative study, as would Rabi'a and her followers' elevation of copious, uncontrollable tears as a sign of mystic authority. My work in chapter 1 on Hadewijch's concentration on taste and touch is just a start to future research.

[12] Labalme 4.

[13] McDonnell 105-119. See also Francis Oakley, <u>The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages</u>, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) 92-93.

[14] Frederick Copleston, S.J. <u>A History of Philosophy, Part I: Augustine to Bonaventure</u>, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962) 148.

[15] Anselm. <u>*Proslogium*</u>, cap. 1.

[16] Bernard McGinn, <u>Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics</u>, (New York: Continuum, 1994) 8-9.

[17] Although Boethius had translated some works of Aristotle (*Categories, De interpretation*) in the 500s, most European scholars did not have access to Aristotle until the mid 1100s through anonymous translations of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, or Gerard of Cremona's translation of *De caelo*. James of Venice was responsible for making available to a Latin audience the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *De anima*, *De memoria*, *De morte*, and other works in the period from 1125-1150. William of Moerbeke retranslated some of these works (*Physics*, *De morte*) and added *Politics*, *De sensu*, and the *Poetics* in the period between 1266 and 1278. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was anonymously translated in the mid 1200s. The majority of these works were not accessible to a vernacular audience until the late 1300s when Evrart de Conty and others began to create Middle French translations for wider circulation. This information is taken from Norman Kretzmann, Anthony John Patrick Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, <u>The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600</u>. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 74-78.

[18] Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, II, 21, question 2, article 2, qtd. in Maria I. George, "What Aquinas Really Said About Women." <u>First Things</u> 98 (1999) 11-13.

[19] LaBalme, 25-26 quotes a passage from Hildegard's *Patriologia Latina*. In the selection, Elizabeth of Schoenau is writing to Hildegard that she has been having visions and has kept them hidden because she did not want to "appear arrogant or as the author of novelties." This secrecy was broken when an angel appeared and beat her with a whip for hiding God's gold that she had been given to pass on. Hildegard replies with her famous statement about "making a small sound on a trumpet by means of the living light."

[20] Hart 84.

[Want hemelsche redene en mach ertrike niet verstaen; want van allen dien dat in ertrike es, mach men redene ende dietsch ghenoech venden; Mer hier toe en weet ic gheen dietsch noch ghene redene. Nochtan dat ic alle redene can van sinne alsoe mensche connen mach, al dat ic v gheseghet hebbe, dat en es alse gheen dietsch daer toe: want daer en hoert gheen toe dat ic weet.(ll. 114-122)] Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch, Brieven</u>, 144-145.

[21] For example, in Vision 11, lines 46-47 she writes, "*Al dit worde te lanc; die latic bliuen…*" Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visioenen</u>, 112. "All this would take too long; I pass over it." Hart 290. A similar phrase occurs in *Visioen 13*, lines 86-87.

[22] See Ernest Robert Curtius, <u>European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.</u> trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 28 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 408-413.

[23] Grace Jantzen suggests that Hadewijch writes with more authority than do the other female mystics because she is not just writing for a female audience, but one younger female in particular with whom she has a close relationship. Because she is the mentor, she would not need to claim authority; she could take her superior status for granted. Grace Jantzen. <u>Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism</u> (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 176. Although this is a plausible argument for Hadewijch's unapologetic voice in many of her writings, it does not explain her overall confidence and authoritative stance. Besides, as a mentor of junior beguines, she would have been expected to also model humility, especially when encountering the divine.

[24] Hart 70.

[*God si v god ende ghi hem Minne. God gheue v te leuene der Minnen werc in allen dinghen die ter Minnen behoren. Dies beghinne ic ane die gherechte oetmoedicheit, daers sine minnersse ane began, daer sine in hare met trac. Noch moet hi alsoe doen die gode in hem trecken wilt ende sijns ghebruken in minnen. Hi moet oneuerheuen bliuen van allen dinghen, Ende onuerwonnen van allen dienste, ende euen sterc in den storm, Endeeuen vlietich int besoeken, Ende euen nydich int hanteren. Al wildi ghescreuen hebben, || dus ghedanes dinghes wetti selue ghenoech watmen om volmaectheit doen soude te gode.*] (Hadewijch, *Brief* 12: ll. 1-13). Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch, Brieven</u>, vol. 1, 101.

[25] Hart 94.

 [*Die gode wilt verstaen ende kennen wat hi es in sinen name Ende in sijn wesen, hi moet gode al gheheel sijn, Ja also gheheel dat hi hem al si ende sonder hem seluen: Want caritate en soeket niet dat hare es, Ende Minne en pleghet niet dan haers selues. Daer omme verliese hem seluen,*

die gode vinden wilt ende bekinnen wat hi es in hem seluen. Die luttel weet, hi mach luttel segghen: dat seghet die wise Augustinus. Alsoe doen ic oec, wet god; vele gheloue ic ende hope van gode. Mer mijn weten van gode es cleine: een cleyne gheraetsel maghic van hem gheraden; Want men mach gode niet tonen met menschen sinnen. Mer die metter zielen gherenen ware van gode, hi soudere yet af moghen toenen den ghenen diet metter zielen verstonden.] (Hadewijch, *Brief* 22, ll. 1-16). Van Mierlo, <u>*Hadewijch: Brieven*</u>, vol. I, 188.

[26] [*Over hem weet ik ook wennig.*] Van Mierlo, <u>*Hadewijch: Visioenen*</u>, vol. 2, 168.

[27] Ulrike Wiethaus, "Hadewijch's Model of Spiritual Growth." <u>Faith Seeking Understanding</u>*:* <u>Learning and the Catholic Tradition,</u> ed. George C. Berthold (Manchester, NH: St. Anselm College Press, 1991) 91-92.

[28] Wiethaus 92.

[29] Hart 264.

 [*O moghende ende stacke, die den moghenden ende den starcken god verwonnen heues van aneghinne sijns selfs die sonder beghin was ende met him die ewelecheit ghewelden sals in eeuwecheiden, les ended verstant.*] Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visioenen</u>, vol. I, 13-14.

[30] "*Non es meravelha s'eu chan / melhs de nul autre chantador, / que plus me tra. l cors vas amor / el melhs sui faihz a so coman.*" "No marvel if my song's the best, / of any sung by troubadour; / My heart is drawn to love the more / And I more shaped to love's behest." Robert Kehew, ed, <u>Lark in the Morning: The Verses of the Troubadours</u>, trans. Ezra Pound, William De Witt Snodgrass, and Robert Kehew. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005) 96-97.

[31] Hart 79.

[*alse ghi den berch op gaet, datghi sere nicken selt, Dat es dancken in al die pinen die v toe comen omme der Minnen.… alse ghi den berch nedergaet, seldi recht gaen; Dat es: al moetti biwilen sinken int nemen uwer noetdorf ende int gheuoelen der behoeften uwes lichamen, nochtan seldi uwebegherte op houden te gode metten heyleghenDie hoghe leueden, ende seiden: al onse wandelinghe es inden hemel/.*] (Hadewijch, *Brief* 15, ll. 88-102.) Van Mierlo, <u>*Hadewijch: Brieven*</u>, vol. 1, 128.

[32] See Chapter 4, pp. 152-154 for a reading of Hadewijch's inverted ascent toward union.

[33] Frances Beer. <u>Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages</u>. (Suffolk, UK: St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd, 1992) 80.

[34] "I am a fully awakened bride; I want to go after my Lover." [*Ic bin ein vollewahsen brut, ich wil gan nach minem trut.*] Mechthild von Magdeburg. <u>*Das Fleissende Licht der Gottheit: Nach der Einsiedler Handschrift in kritischem Vergleich mit der gesamten Überlieferung.*</u> ed. Hans Neumann. Band 1: Text (Munich: Artemis, 1990) 30. To distinguish this edition from the translation, future notes will refer to it as Neumann, Band 1.

[35] See Gisela Vollmann-Profe. "Prolegomena" in Neumann, Band 1, xiii-xix for a complete list of the manuscripts and their transmission.

[36] The Latin translation of *Das Fliessende Licht*, *Lux Divinitas*, contains this note about Mechthild's brother Baldwin. "Finally, because of the merits of his sister, he was received into the Order of Preachers." In Frank Tobin, trans and ed. <u>Mechthild of Magdeburg: The Flowing Light of the Godhead</u>, (NY: Paulist, 1998), 355, n. 44.

[37] Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*. (1935; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961), 190-195.

[38] Robert Lerner. <u>The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages</u>. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972) 229-233. See also Lerner's "Introduction to the Translation" in Herbert Grundmann, <u>Religious Movements in the Middle Ages</u>, trans. Steven Rowan (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), where he quotes Alexander Murray as stating, "recent research, even where it has sought to reverse Grundmann's findings, has in effect usually only confirmed them" (xxiv).

[39] Lerner has an interesting discussion of the class assumptions of the mystics in <u>Heresy</u> 232-235.

[40] See Paul Martin, "The Body in the Realm of Desire: Gendered Images on the Horizon of the Divine," <u>Mystics Quarterly</u> 30.3-4 (2004): 106-108 for a discussion of Mechthild's "lack of self-esteem."

[41] Amy Hollywood reports that many of her students are struck by Mechthild's bipolarity in proclaiming "absolute insignificance and radical proximity to God," something she calls the "narcissism of humility." In "Who Does She Think She Is? Christian Women's Mysticism." <u>Theology Today</u>, 60 (2003) 9.

[42] Caroline Walker Bynum, <u>Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Signficance of Food to Medieval Women</u>. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 263ff.

[43] Bynum suggests that Mechthild has a psychological need to see sin as something being done to her by a third party, Satan, rather than accepting it as part of the human condition. (Caroline Walker Bynum, <u>Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages</u>, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982) 233.

[44] The number of confessional prayers rises exponentially in Books VI and VII.

[45] Mary Carruthers, <u>The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 60.

[46] Elizabeth Dreyer, <u>Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant</u> (NY: Paulist, 2005) 108.

[47] Grundmann 203-205.

[48] Grundmann 312-317.

[49] Lerner, <u>Heresy,</u> 94.

[50] McDonnell 96.

[51] In his chapter "The Via Media," McDonnell portrays the exponential growth of loosely organized beguinages and the rise in number of beguine women living at home as reciprocal with ever stricter regulation of these "extra-regular" women. As beguines grew in strength and number, they challenged the capability of the church to oversee their activities, hence creating a situation in which beguines were enjoined to accept supervision that was not readily available. (McDonnell, 120-140). As female leaders such as Mechthild and Hadewijch necessarily took on many of the administrative tasks meant for monks or priests, the line between female preaching (always forbidden by the church) and oral instruction of those under their care was often a matter of semantics.

[52] Paul Fredericq, _Geschiedenis der Inquisitie in de Nederlanden_. vol 1 (Ghent: The Hague, 1892-1897) 167 as qtd. in McDonnell 344.

[53] Lerner, Heresy, 94.

[54] Furlong 40.

[55] Colledge and Walsh II 306.

[56] Joan M Nuth, "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich." Theological Studies 53(1992): 611-645.

[57] Most scholars of theology still follow the dating of Edmund Colledge and James Walsh in their critical edition, which would put the short text written immediately after the initial vision of May 13, 1373, and the long text following after several years of meditation upon the experience, shortly after 1393. (Colledge and Walsh I, 18-19). However, those interested in literary and textual studies follow Nicholas Watson, who has made an excellent case for a later composition of the short version, closer to 1388 and the sixteenth revelation. Watson still sees the Long Version as having come after the Short, perhaps even as late as 1410 or 1415, pushing Julian's writing career to forty years. Sadly, this would mean that Julian had worked for most of her life on a book she then had to suppress. See Nicholas Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love," Speculum 68(1993): 637-683 and also "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," Speculum 70 (1995): 822-864.

Others such as Julia Bolton Holloway firmly believe that the long text came first and the short text was a redacted version in response to Chancellor Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions of 1408 forbidding lay reading of the vernacular Bible, unauthorized translation of the Bible by lay people, and the teaching of theology by women.

[58] Norman Tanner, Popular Religion in Norwich with Special Reference to the Evidence of Wills, 1370-1532. (Oxford, D. Phil dissertation, 1973), qtd. in Colledge and Walsh, I, 39.
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[59] Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Order, Freedom, and 'Kindness': Julian of Norwich on the Edge of Modernity. Theology Today 60(2003): 63-81. Bauerschmidt includes a discussion of how Ockham's doctrine of nominalism pushes Julian's life and work into the "liminality on the edge of modernity" (64-70).

[60] For the proximity of Julian's cell to the execution place of Lollards, see Georgia Ronan Crampton, The Shewings of Julian of Norwich, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute

Publications, 1994) and Alan Webster, "Julian of Norwich," <u>Expository Times</u> 84(1973): 229.

[61] Colledge and Walsh, I, 43.

[62] The argument is discussed in Hilles 573; see also Norman Tanner, <u>The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532</u>, Studies and Texts 66 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1984) 64-66 and Gail McMurray Gibson, <u>The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages</u>, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 22.

[63] Textual evidence would argue against this since the anchorage was too small to allow so many visitors. If she had been enclosed before the showing, the only way she could have her mother and other visitors present would be if she had been granted dispensation to go home in her extreme condition, which would be highly unlikely.

[64] Watson, "The Composition," 672-673. In particular, Watson focuses on perceived references to rulings of the Council of Blackfriars in 1382 on the veneration of images, along with evidence of another showing, the 16th, which is reported to have occurred in 1388.

[65] All texts referred to are in W. Meredith Thompson. <u>Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerde</u> (Cotton Titus D. XVIII). [Early English Text Society 241] (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

[66] Thompson 20.

[67] Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, trans. <u>Anchoritic Spirituality</u>, (NY: Paulist, 1991) 247-248.

[68] See Beer, "From Warrior to Lover," in <u>Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages</u> (56-77) for a discussion of how the Anglo-Saxon treatment of Christ as ultimate hero and ring giver translated into Christ as ultimate lover in post-Conquest English devotional literature. The anchoritic literature of the 1300s includes both motifs for Christ, but with the role of hero gradually being assumed by the enclosed woman through her identification with Christ's Passion. Savage and Watson in the General Introduction to <u>Anchoritic Spirituality</u> also discuss the main themes of female anchoritic devotional works: Christ as lover, Mary as intercessor, woman as vile yet heroic through identification with Christ, intense concentration on the Passion, and spiritual ascent over the body.

[69] Nicholas Watson, "The Methods and Objectives of Thirteenth-Century Anchoritic Devotion" in Marion Glasscoe, ed. <u>The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England : Exeter Symposium IV: Papers read at Darlington Hall, 1987,</u> (St. Edmunds, Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press, 1987) 139.

[70] Savage and Watson 149.

[71] Savage and Watson 55.

[72] Savage and Watson 74-75.

[73] Savage and Watson 76.

[74] <u>Sawles Warde</u> in Richard Morris, <u>Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises..of the 12th and 13th Centuries</u> [EETS 34], (London: Trubner, 1868) 245-267.

[75] Barbara Newman goes so far as to say that for enclosed women, "to grow in spirit is not to ascend but to remain quietly where one is." Barbara Newman, From Virile Woman to Woman Christ (Philadelphia: U of PA Press, 1995) 45. Sandi J. Hubnik in "(Re)constructing the Medieval Recluse: Performative Acts of Virginity and the Writings of Julian of Norwich" The Historian 67.1 (Spring 2005) 43-61 writes that by undergoing enclosure, anchoresses went through a process of regendering.

[76] Morris 186. "þuurh þis lowe cluppinge. Me mot come to þe heie; þet wule bi-cluppen þe þer swuch;…he mot cluppen þe her…ne wene nomon to stihen wið este to þe steorren." Þis is on Wel Swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti. In Morris 201.

[77] Watson, "Methods" 141.

[78] Watson, "Methods" 143.

[79] Alexandra Barratt, ed. Women's Writing in Middle English, (NY: Longman, 1992) 5.

[80] Hart 188. [*Wat hulpet ic mine nature dwinghe?*] Van Mierlo, *Strofische Gedichten*, vol. 1 (Antwerp: Standaard, 1942), 142.

[81] Mechthild von Magdeburg, The Flowing Light of the Godhead, Frank Tobin, trans. and ed. (NY: Paulist Press, 1998) 61. To distinguish this translation from the Neumann edition, future notes will refer to it as Tobin.

[*Wie moehte ich denne miner nature widerstan?*] (Neumann, Band 1, 31)

[82] Julian 285.

"And I sawe no difference betwen god and oure substance, but as it were all god." Colledge and Walsh II, 562.

[83] Julian 168.

"And cause why we ere travayled with thamm is for vnknawenge of luffe….And this nknawynge it is that most lettis goddess luffers, for when thay be gynn to hate synne and to amende thamm by the ordynannce of holye kyrke, ₃it þere dwelles a drede that styrres thamm to behaldynge of thamm selfe and of þer synnes before done. And this drede þay take for a mekenesse, bot this is a fowlle blyndehede and a waykenesse…For luffe makes myght and wisdome fulle mege to vs…" (Colledge and Walsh, I, 274-275).

[84] Ralph McInerny and John O'Callaghan, "Thomas Aquinas," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring 2005, Ed. Edward N. Zalta, 13 July 2007 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2005/entries/aquinas/>.

Notes for Chapter Two

[1] In this she follows Bernard closely, who defined freedom as freedom from the distractions of sin, freedom to pursue love. The *imago Dei* is the free will of humanity. See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion.

[2] Hart 367, n. 37.

[3] Hart 18.

[4] Hart 47.

[*God die de clare minne / die onbekint was verclaerde bi siere doghet daer hi alle doghet bi verlichte in siere claerheit der minnen / Hi moet v verliechten ende verclaren metter claerre claerheit daer hi hem seluen claer met es ende al sinen vrienden ende sinen naesten gheminden. Die alre meeste claerheit die men hebben mach in ertrike Dat es ghewaricheit in ieghenwordeghen werken van gherechticheden, Ende van allen wesenen waerheit te pleghene omme claerheit der edelre minnen die god es. Ay hoe groete claerheit es dat / Datmen, gode ghewerden late met siere claerheit! Daer in werct minne hem seluen. Ende allen creaturen elken na sijn recht Dat hem sine goetheit gheorconden mach te gheuene met gherechticheden in claerheyden.*] Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Brieven</u>, vol. I, 16.

[5] Eckhart (1260-1327) typifies the flexibility required of male spiritual writers in this time of tension and change between the Scholastic and vernacular piety. He wrote highly glossed Latin sermons for academic use and German sermons for delivery to his non-university trained followers. In his vernacular sermon "On the Oneness of Things," he writes that as one detaches from all created things, this enables the little spark of God in the soul that is not constrained by time or space. This spark is in all creatures and inclines only toward God, due to the shared nature between them." [*Wenn sich der Mensch von sich selbst und von allen geschaffenen Dingen abkehrt, so weit du das tust, so weit wirst du geeint und beseligt in dem Fünklein der Seele, das nie Zeit oder Raum berührt hat. Dieser Funke entzieht sich allen Kreaturen und will nur Gott, wie er an sich selbst ist.*] Eckhart, "13. *Von der Einheit der Dinge / Vom Unwissen*," <u>Predigten</u>. 13 June 2008 <http://www.praktizierender-philosoph.de/pdf/meister_ eckhart_predigten.pdf>

[6] [*Ubi autem amor est, labor non est, sed sapor.*] Bernard of Clairvaux, <u>Sermones super Cantica Canticorum</u> 23: 14, 3.

[7] Two instances in which she quotes Bernard without acknowledgment on this theme are in Letter 6, line 101 [*qui amat non laborat*] and Letter 13, lines 66 and following.

[8] *Regiratio*, a term used by Jan van Ruusbroec, is the cyclical going out and return to rest of God. Although Paul Mommaers, the foremost Ruusbroec scholar, finds this idea original to him, it is clear that this is an idea he has borrowed from Hadewijch. For a short clarification of Mommaers' thought, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "A Review of Mysticism, Buddhist and Christian: Encounters with Jan Van Ruusbroec," <u>Modern Theology</u> 13 (October 1997), 547-548.

[9] Arnaut Daniel in "*Autet e bas entrels prims fuoills*," for instance writes "*Dieu o grazisc e a mos huollis, / Que per lor conoissensam venc. / Jois qu'adreich auci e fola / L'ira qu'ieu n'aqui e l'anta./ Er va sus / Qui qu'en mus, / D'Amor don sui fis e frems;…*"   "I thank my God and mine eyes, too / since through them the perceptions reach, / Porters of joy that have refuted / Every ache and shame I've tasted; They reduce / Pains, and noose / me in Amor's corded net;…" Kehew 200-201.

The image of the eyes as windows to the soul and therefore messengers of love goes back at least to the second century, CE. "…vapor emanating from purified blood in the brain mediated between the soul (the *anima*) and the organs of the senses and that this spirit –the *pneuma*

psychikon or *spiritus animalis*) as defined by the tradition going back to the second century physician Galen—could be carried from the body by light rays extending from the eyes. These rays could capture the eyes or pierce the heart." Patricia Lee Ruben, "The Eye of the Beholder," Images and Identity in Fifteenth Century Florence (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007) 157. Building on the troubadour and mystic tradition, Marsilio Ficino transmitted the priority of sight as a means of grace and wisdom to the writers of the *dolce stil nuovo*. Dante, for example, uses the image in his "*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*" (*Vita Nuova*, XIX) and "*Ne li occhi porta la mia donna Amore*" (*Vita Nuovo*, XXI), *Inferno*, V, and in *Paradiso*, XXIX when he sees the still point at which all time and space is centered reflected in Beatrice's eyes. Petrarch, Lorenzo d'Medici, and Castiglione refer to sight leading to union of the soul with God through love in the same multi-layered way, Castiglione in Pietro Bembo's famous speech on Angelic Beauty concluding his *Il Cortegiano*. An interesting discussion of Dante's use of sight as the primary sense can be found in Paolo Valesio, "Canto V: The Fiery Dove," in Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross, ed. Lectura Dantis: Inferno, A Canto by Canto Commentary, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998) 63-83.

[10] Poem 19 puts off the nature reference until the second stanza, while number 31 refers to springtime in stanza 5.

[11] The incident is recorded in Exodus 33: 20-23. The similar cloaking of Christ after his resurrection is described in Luke 24:15-16 "And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him." (KJV).

[12] Hadewijch may have been familiar with troubadour themes in Middle High German poetry because of the similarity in Middle Dutch and Middle High German and their shared literature in the thirteenth century. She also shows similarity to the Brabantine poet Heinrich van Veldeke (ca. 1150-1190), especially in the references to nature which open her lyrics. Van Veldeke's *Natureingang*, his comparison of the natural world to the emotional state of the poet, and his use of oppositions within the verse mark him as one of the first named Dutch poets as well as an acknowledged influence on later Middle High German writers such as Gottfried von Strassburg. Literary themes of opposition, questing, and battle were also present in the many contemporaneous Arthurian sagas such as the *Lancelot-Compilatie* assembled in the Brabantine region. She may also have been aware of early versions of Diederic van Assenede's *Floris ende Blancefloer*, published in 1260.

[13] Tobin 144.

[Do hies er mich das, des ich mich dike weinende scheme, wan minú grossú unwirdekeit vor minen ŏgen offen stat, das was, das er eim snœden wibe hies us gottes herzen und munt dis bůch schriben. Alsust ist dis bůch minnenklich von gotte har komen und ist us menschlichen sinnen nit genomen.] (Mechthild, Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit, IV:2, in Neumann, band 1, 114).

[14] [*us gottes herzen und munt, minnenklich von gotte har komen*] (ll. 133-4).

[15] Beer 78.

[16] Neumann and Tobin concur that this passage was probably a general introduction to the full text before it was distributed (Tobin 338, n.1).

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[17] The number of female mystics who waited to write until after the age of forty, or who were only then given permission to write, perhaps reflects the church's reliance on Plato's <u>Republic</u>, Book 5. According to Lynn Staley Johnson in "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe," "After menopause, women were supposed to become more male, freer, healthier" [<u>Speculum</u> 66 (1991): 838, n. 47]. Grundmann, McDonnell, and Lerner all report that as the thirteenth-century church tried to come to grips with the burgeoning number of women seeking admission to orders, the decision was made to prohibit anyone under 40 from entering a women's house, a regulation that, like many others, was only effective on paper. An example of this ruling would be the decision of the Synod of Mainz (1261).

[18] Tobin 106-7.

[*Nu mag etliche lúte wundern des, wie ich súndig mensche das mag erliden, das ich sogtan rede schribe. Ich sage úch werlich fúr war: Hette es got vor siben jaren nit mit sunderlicher gabe an minem herzen undervangen, ich swige noch und hette es nie getan. Nu wart es mir von gottes gúte nie kein schade; das kumt von dem spiegel miner offenen bosheit….*] (Mechthild, III, 1: ll. 162-166) Neumann, band 1, 78.

[19] Sebastian Coxon, <u>The Presentation of Authorship in Medieval German Narrative Literature, 1220-1290</u>. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 146.

[20] Coxon 99.

[21] Bynum, <u>Jesus as Mother</u>, 241-242.

[22] Joachim's prophesies had been explicitly condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 but had nonetheless become ingrained in popular religious thought.

[23] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff provides context on the high academic pursuits of the Helfta nuns under the aegis of its abbess of forty years, Gertrude of Hackeborn. In Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, <u>Medieval Women's Visionary Literature.</u> (NY: Oxford, 1986) 208-211.

[24] Tobin 96. [*Ich wart vor disem bůche gewarnet, und wart von menschen also gesaget: Woelte man es nit bewaren, da moehte ein brant úber varen.*] Neumann, band 1, 68.

[25] Tobin 96-97.

[*Lieb minú, betruebe dich nit ze verre, die warheit mag nieman verbrennen. Der es mir us miner hant sol nemen, der sol starker denne ich wesen. Das bůch ist drivaltig und bezeichent alleine mich. Dis bermit, das hie umbe gat, bezeichent min reine, wisse gerehte menscheit, die dur dich den tot leit. Dú wort bezeichent mine wunderliche gotheit; dú vliessent von stunde ze stunde in dine sele us von minem goetlichen munde. Dú stimme der worten bezeichenet minen lebendigen geist und vollebringet mit im selben die rehten warheit. Nu sich in allú disú wort, wie loblich si mine heimlichheit meldent, und zwivel nit an dir selben!*] Neumann, band 1, 68.

[26] [*in dise bůche stat min herzeblůt geschriben*] Neumann, Band I, 195.

[27] It is interesting to compare Mechthild's explanation of her motivation to write with that of Marguerite d'Oingt (d. 1310), prioress of the Carthusian nuns of Pelotens, who also claimed that

God was writing the text of her book on her heart. She experienced such congestion from the force of the words that she became seriously ill and had to write the words on paper in order to gain relief from the pressure. "She began to write everything that is in this book… and as soon as she put a word in the book, it left her heart." (Petroff, MWVL, 278)

[28] Compare Suydam's discussion of Hadewijch's textual physicality in "Beguine Textuality: Sacred Performances." In Mary A Suydam and Joanne E. Ziegler. Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality (New York: St. Martins, 1999) 193.

[29] Tobin 96-97.

[*Tochter, es verlúret manig wise man sin túres golt von verwarloesi in einem grossen herwege, da er mitte ze hoher schůle moehte varen; das můs ieman vinden. Ich habe von nature daz getan manigan tag, wa ich ie sunderliche gnade gap, da sůchte ich ie zů die nidersten, minsten, heimlichosten stat; die irdenschen hohsten berge moegent nit enpfan die offenbarunge miner gnaden, wan die vlůt mines heligen geistes vlússet von nature ze tal. Man vindet manigen wisen meister an der schrift, der an im selber vor minen ŏgen ein tore ist. Und ich sage dir noch me: Das ist mir vor inen ein gros ere und sterket die heligen cristanheit an in vil sere, das der ungelerte munt die gerlerte zungen von minem heligen geiste leret.*] (Mechthild II, 26: ll. 24-33). Neumann, band 1, 69.

[30] Bynum, Holy Feast, 279.

[31] Luke 2: 46-47; Isaiah 11:6.

[32] This is in reference to one of the most quoted passages of Mechthild's, from Book I: 44. Speaking to her five senses she cries,

> [*Wie moehte ich denne miner nature widerstan?*
> *Ich mueste von allen dingen in got gan,*
> *der min vatter ist von nature,*
> *min brůder von siner moenscheit,*
> *min brútegŏm von minnen*
> *und ich sin brut ane anegenge.*] (ll. 72-74) (Neumann, band 1, 31)

> "How, then, am I to resist my nature?
> I must go from all things to God,
>   Who is my Father by nature,
> My Brother by his humanity,
> My bridegroom by love,
> And I his bride from all eternity." (Tobin 61)

[33] Tobin 256.

[*Ich sprache an einer stat in diseme bůche, das dú gotheit min vatter ist von nature. Das verneme du nit und spreche, 'Alles, das got mit úns hat getan, das ist alles von gnaden und nit von nature.' Du hast war und ich had ŏch war.*] (Mechthild VI: 31, ll. 3-5). Neumann, band 1, 238.

[34] Tobin 257-8.

[*Wa was got, eb er ihtes iht geschǔf? Er was in im selber un im warent allú ding gegenwúrtig und offenbar als si hútte sint. Wie was únser herre got do gestalt? Rehre ze glicher wis als ein clot und allú ding waren in gotte besclossen ane sclos und ane túr. Das niderste teil des klotes das ist ein grundelosú vestenunge beniden allú abgrúnde, das oberste teil des clotes das ist ein hoehi, da nút úber ist, das umbezil des clotes das ist ein cirkel unbegriffenlich. Nochdenne was got nit schepfer worden. Do er aber allú ding geschǔf, [wart do] der clot ufgesclossen? Nein, er ist noch gantz beliben. Do got schoepfer wart, do wurden alle creaturen an in selben offenbar: der mensche, got ze minnende, ze gebruchende und ze bekennende, gehorsam ze blibende; vogel und tier, ir nature ze pflegende; die toten creaturen, ze stande in irme wesende. Nu hoere: Was wir erkennen, das ist alles niht, wir minnen denne got ordenlich in allen dingen, als er selber allú ding in ordenlicher minne geschaffen hat und úns selben minne gebotten und geleret hat.*] (Mechthild VI:31, ll. 24-39). Neumann, 239-240.

[35] Tobin 50-51.

[*Do únsers vatter jubilus betruebet wart mit Adames valle, also das er mǔste zúrnen, do underfieng dú ewige wisheit der almehtigen gotheit mit mir den zorn. Do erwelte mich der vatter zǔ einer brut, das er etwas ze minnende hetter, wand sin liebú brut was tot, die edel sele; …ich soegete die propheten und die wissagen, e dene ich geborn wart.*] (Mechthild I:22, ll. 43-46, 52-53). Neumann, band 1, 18-19.

[36] "Purgatory did not exist before 1170 at the earliest." Le Goff 135.

[37] See Eileen Gardiner, Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante, (New York: Italica Press, 1989) for several tales and *exempla* that were circulated by both the Cistercians and the mendicant orders.

[38] "Then you took my self into your self and gave me to know what you are, and that you hate and love in one Being. Then I understood how I must hate and love wholly with you, and how I must be in all respects." (Hadewijch, *Visioen* 5, ll. 52-57) in Hart 277.

[*Doen ghi mi seluen in v. seluen naemt/, ende daet mi weten hoe ghedaen ghi sijt / ende haet ende mint in enen wesenne/, doe bleef mi bekint/ hoe ic al met v. soude haten ende minnen/ ende in allen wesenne sijn*.] Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch:Visioenen,* 61.

[39] Gertrude of Helfta, *Oeuvres 2: Héraut*, I:16., also III:9, as qtd. in Bynum, Jesus as Mother,189. Bynum suggests that because of Mechthild's lack of confidence in herself due to her sense of her own femaleness, she cannot see God as similar to the critical and corrupt male figures around her. Gertrude, in contrast, having been raised in the affirming female influence of Helfta as an oblate from the age of 6, has no problem with God as both just and kind parent.

[40] Beer 102.

[41] Although Mechtild recounts releasing a thousand souls from purgatory with tears of love in Book II: 8, her references become more frequent in later books. See, for instance, VI:10, VI:28, VI: 37, VII:2, VII: 21, and VII: 41 for several examples of her efficacy in releasing souls.

[42] Here, too, Julian demonstrates her knowledge of the theological differences between *bodylye syght* and *gastelye syght*, carnal and spiritual seeing. Bodily sight is considered a lower form and precursor of spiritual sight, similar to the *lowe cluppinge* and *heie cluppinge* of the <u>Ureison</u>.

[43] Julian 131.

[And in this he schewyd me a lytille thynge, the qwantyte of a haselle nutte, lyggande in the palme of my hande, and to my vndyrstandynge that, it was as rownde as any balle. I lokede þer oponn and thought: Whate maye this be? And I was answered generally thus: It is alle that ys made. I merveylede howe þat it myghte laste, for me thought it might falle sodaynlye to nought for litille. And I was answered in myne vndyrstandynge: It lastes and euer schalle, for god loves it; and so hath alle thynge the beynge thorowe the love of god.] Colledge and Walsh, I, 212-213.

Julian's visionary conflation of space and time reflects the experience of other visionaries across cultures. Practicioners of siddha yoga, for instance, reach a high point of meditation when they envision a "blue pearl" similar to the vision of the earth from outer space. William Blake, too, saw the eternity in a grain of sand.

[44] Compare to *das niht* of Mechthild and Eckhart.

[45] Julian 131-132.

[And this is the cause why that na saule ys restede to it be noughthed of alle that es made. Whenn he is noughtid for love, to hafe hym that is alle that is goode, than es he abylle to resayue gostlye reste.]. Colledge and Walsh, I, 216.

[46] Julian 134.

[For sothly it was nought schewyd vnto me for that god loves me bettere thane the leste sawlle that is in grace. For I am sekere thare ys fulle many that nevere hadde schewynge ne syght botte of the commonn techynge of haly kyrke that loves god better þan I. For ₃yf I loke syngulerlye to my selfe I am right nought; botte in generalle I am in anehede of charyte with alle myne evynn cristene. For in this anehede of charyte standes the lyfe of alle mankynde that schalle be safe….And thus wille I love, and thus I love, and thus I am safe. For y mene in the personn of myne evyn crystene…] Colledge and Walsh, I, 220-221.

[47] Julian 134-135.

[Botte god for bede that ₃e schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nou₃t soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a woman, leued, febille and freylle. Botte I wate wele, this that I saye, I hafe it of the schewynge of hym tha(t) es souerayne techare. Botte sothelye charyte styrres me to telle ₃owe it, for I wolde god ware knawennn, and mynn evynn crystene spede, …Botte for I am a womann, schulde I therefore leve that I schulde nou₃t telle ₃owe the goodenes of god, syne that I sawe in that same tyme that is his wille, that it be knawenn? And that schalle ₃e welle see in the same matere that folowes aftyr, if itte be welle and trewlye takynn. Thane schalle ₃e sone forgette me that am a wrecche, and dose so that I lette ₃owe nought, and behalde Jhesu that ys techare of alle.] Colledge and Walsh, I, 222.

[48] Johnson 820-282. Johnson shows that despite the humility of the scribe, his or her position was one of power. The scribe can either bungle or authenticate a text.

[49] In S:22, she does report Jesus's reassurance to her: "Know it well, that was no hallucination which you saw today." He verifies her sight, but he does not command her to write.

[50] For instance, at the end of S:6, she writes "I never understood anything from it which bewilders me or keeps me from the true doctrine of Holy Church." Julian 135. "I vndyrstode neuer nathynge þer yn that stone₃ me ne lettes me of the trewe techynge of halye kyrke" Colledge and Walsh, I, 223.

[51] For two discussions of the importance of the vernicle to Julian's separation of herself from the Lollard controversy, see Hilles and also Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," Speculum 68 (1993): 414.

[52] The theme of spiritual discretion while in the visionary state was also present in Mechthild, who was often tempted by demons in the disguise of priests and even of Jesus himself. Julian is following the tradition of the anchoress as demon-warrior given to her by translations of continental sources like A Tretis of Discrescyon of Spirites and the models of female piety like Katherine, who bodily wrestle with demons in their cells. A Tretis… in Phyllis Hodgson, *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, [EETS 231], (London: Oxford Univerity Press, 1958) 79-93.

[53] Julian 143.

[In this tyme I walde hafe lokyd beside the crosse, botte I durste nou₃te, for I wyste wele whilys I lukyd vpponn the crosse I was sekyr and safe. Therfore I walde nought assente to putte my sawle in perille, for beside the crosse was na syekernesse, botte vglynesse of feendes. Than hadde I a profyr in my resone, as ₃yf if hadde beene frendlye. I(t) sayde to me: Luke vppe to hevenn to his fadere. Than sawe I wele with the faythe that y felyd that thare ware nathynge be twyx the crosse and heuenn that mygt hafe desesyd me, and othere me behovyd loke vppe or els annswere. I answered and sayde: Naye, I may nought, for thowe erte myne heuen. This I sayde for I walde nou₃t: for I hadde levyr hafe bene in that payne to domysdaye than hafe commenn to hevene othere wyse than be hym.] Colledge and Walsh, I, 236.

[54] This is true if we follow the common view that the long text came after the short text.

[55] Colledge and Walsh 45-47.

[56] Johnson 831.

[57] Downing writes that "Neither Hadewijch nor Julian seem to find it at all strange that God in Christ should have a deep and rich relationship with a woman such as she; nor in either case does the relationship seem to be qualitatively different from what a male might hope to be drawn into. There is no suggestion that as 'a daughter of Eve' a woman might be more prone to sin than men are. For Julian, 'even Christians' are simply that" (433). F. Gerald Downing, "Theological Breadth, Interconnection, Tradition, and Gender: Hildegard, Hadewijch, and Julian Today," Anglican Theological Review 86.3 (2004): 423-450.

[58] Norwich was a center for spiritual studies and had two large theological libraries, one at the cathedral containing the library of Adam Easton, Benedictine, Oxford Master, and Cardinal, and

one at the Austin Priory near Julian's cell. Calderwood makes a strong case for Easton as Julian's patron due to his sporadic residency in Norwich, his support for female religious writing, and his Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae in defense of the canonization of another holy woman, Birgitta of Sweden. Robert H. Calderwood, Julian's Challenge, (NY: Vantage, 1995) 2.

[59] Bauernschmidt and Downing have both used the language of experimentation to characterize Julian's approach to spirituality. See Downing 437 and Frederick Christian Bauernschmidt, "Seeing Jesus: Julian of Norwich and the Text of Christ's Body." Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 27.2 (1997): 200.

[60] "Then seide oure good lorde asking: Arte thou well apayed that I sufferyd for thee?...If thou arte apayed, I am apayde." (L:22). Colledge and Walsh, II, 382.

Notes for Chapter Three

[1] John 1.1,14.

[2] de Beauvoir 743.

[3] Tobin 187. [...*den můs ich min herzeblůt ze trinkende geben*.] (Mechthild V,4: l. 48). Neumann, band 1, 162.

[4] The opposing force, the cardinal virture counterbalancing *superbia* was *humilitas*, humility, defined by Aquinas as knowing one's place and keeping to it (*Summa contra gentiles*, IV:55). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles, IV: Salvation* , trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 233-245. Rpt. of On the Truth of the Catholic Faith (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1957).

[5] Hilles 556. See also Hilles, note 11 for the discussion on the importance of images granted by the Council of Nicaea (787) and Archbishop Arundel's defense of images as figuring the Incarnation: "Lewid losel, in þe olde lawe, before þat Crist toke mankynde, was no liknesse of ony persone of þe Trinyte neiÞer schewid to man ne knowen of dedli man, but now siþ Crist bi cam man it is leful to haue ymagis to schewe his manhood" In"The Testimony of William Thorpe," in Two Wycliffite Texts, ed. Anne Hudson, Early English Text Society o.s. 302 (London, Oxford University Press, 1993), 57.

Debate about the essential nature of sacred images continues today with different definitions of the Eucharist, between Roman Catholics partaking of divine essence through ingesting the transubstantiated body of the host, and Protestant congregations symbolically commemorating Christ's last supper with his disciples with substances remaining bread and grape juice.

[6] Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe. Ed. Sanford Brown Meech. Early English Text Society os. 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940, rpt. 1961).

[7] Karma Lochrie. Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 4.

[8] See especially Caroline Walker Bynum. Holy Feast.

[9] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff. <u>Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 205.

[10] See Augustine, *Tracts on the Gospel of John* 80; *Epistles* 98; *Contra Faustum* 19. 16; *Sermons* 272.

[11] Bynum, <u>Holy Feast</u>, 55.

[12] McDonnell 305-307.

[13] McDonnell 311.

[14] Gertrude, <u>*Legatus divinae pietatis*</u>. [English]. Ed. and trans. Margaret Winkworth. <u>The Herald of Divine Love.</u> (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1993) 207-8.

[15] Gertrude, <u>*Legatus*</u>, 208.

[16] Gertrude, <u>*Legatus*</u>, 207-208.

[17] Cristina Mazzoni <u>Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture</u>. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[18] Luce Irigaray. <u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u>, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985).

[19] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1986).

[20] I use the term "actual" rather than "real" in an effort to distinguish experience on the physical plane from the neoplatonic "real"—which is actually the virtual or ideal from a this-world perspective.

[21] Geoffrey Chaucer, <u>The Canterbury Tales</u>. In F. N Robinson, ed. <u>The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer</u>. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 18-19.

[22] Jean de Meung, <u>*Roman de la Rose*</u>. Ed. Ernest Langlois, (Paris, 1914-1924), III, 226-27.

[23] "The Corrector and Physician of Burchard of Worms" (1008-1012), In John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, <u>Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales</u>. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 336.

[24] "The Corrector," in McNeil and Gamer 327.

[25] Halitgar, "*Poenitentiale Romanum*," in McNeill and Gamer 304.

[26] "*The Corrector*," in McNeill and Gamer 332.

[27] Nathalie Fraise. <u>*L'Anorexie mentale et le jeûne mystique du moyen âge: faim, foi, et pouvoir*</u>. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), cover. Rudolph Bell covers this topic as well in his book <u>Holy</u>

Anorexia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[28] Martha Greene Eads, "Sex, Money, and Food as Spiritual Signposts in Doris Bett's Sharp Teeth of Love," Christianity and Literature, 54.1 (2004) 40.

[29] William N. Davis. "Epilogue" in Bell 190.

[30] Thomas de Cantimpré,. The Life of Christina of St. Trond, Called Christina Mirabilis. In Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 185.

[31] Jacques de Vitry, "Preface to Life of Marie d'Oignies," in Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, eds. Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) 140-1.

[32] Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 174.

[33] Jacques de Vitry, "Life of Marie d'Oignies," in Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 180.

[34] Amy Hollywood, "Suffering Transformed: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Problem of Women's Spirituality" Bernard McGinn (ed.) Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete (NY:: Continuum, 1994) 92-93.

[35] See Sarah Beckwith. Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings. (London: Routledge, 1993) and "Ritual, Church, and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," Ch. 3 of Culture and History, 1350-1600. Ed. David Aers. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). Also Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible" Speculum, 68 (1993) 389-418. Mary A Suydam and Joanne E. Ziegler in Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality (NY: St. Martins, 1999) have collected several essays on female mystic writers (and one male—Thomas de Cantimpré) exploring the ways performance shaped the narratives we have today. Even the additions and deletions of scribes and translators can be "read" as performative, with the ultimate performance being that of the reader who experiences the narrative personally.

[36] Mary A. Suydam, "Beguine Textuality: Sacred Performances," Suydam and Ziegler 174.

[37] For an interesting personal commentary on links between Christina's vita and that of her schizophrenic aunt, see Katheryn M. Giglio, "Spirituality and Self-Representation in The Life of Christina Mirabilis,"Essays in Medieval Studies, 15 (1998) 115-117.

[38] Margot H. King, "The Desert Mothers Revisited: The Mothers of the Diocese of Liège." 6 Mar. 2005 < http://www.peregrina.com/matrologia_latina/DesertMothers2.html>.

[39] Teresa herself described the visionary experience this way in her Life: "In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the

sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God." E. Allison Peers, trans. and ed., <u>The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila.</u> (London: 1946; New York: Random House, 1960) 274-275. There is no mention of the cherubim reaching for her breast or aiming the spear at her genitals; although of course the image is one of divine penetration, in her description her heart is pierced.

Notes for Chapter Four

[1] See Alice Beck Kehoe. <u>Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking.</u> (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2000) for a most incisive attack on several aspects of Eliade's work, particularly his lack of firsthand fieldwork, his lack of acknowledgement of some sources, his positing that shamanism is a primitive phenomenon based on hunting and gathering, displaced by agrarian and industrial societies, and his overt "romantic conception of an eternally manifesting sacred." (Kehoe 2).

[2] For example, Arctic shamans do not need drugs to reach a trance state, while southern and western shamans do use hallucinogens. In Kehoe 64-65.

[3] Joan Halifax. <u>Shaman: The Wounded Healer.</u> (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982) 8.

[4] Victor W. Turner. <u>The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure</u>. 1969. (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1995). Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner. <u>Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives.</u> (New York: Columbia, 1978). Interestingly, Edith Turner, although an avid observer and recorder of ritual seeing and healing, was never able to see the *sacra* displayed by the elders to the young initiates until after the death of her husband. Her account of finally understanding ritual on an experiential level is recounted in Edith L. B. Turner with William Blodgett, Singleton Kahona, and Fideli Benwa. <u>Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing.</u> (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

[5] Mircea Eliade. <u>Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy</u>. (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen /Princeton UP, 1964).

[6] Kehoe 59.

[7] Corelynn F. Senn. "Journeying as Religious Education: The Shaman, the Hero, the Pilgrim, and the Labyrinth Walker. <u>Religious Education</u> 97 (2002): 124-139.

[8] See Karen A. Smyers. "Shaman/Scientist: Jungian Insights for the Anthropological Study of Religion." <u>Ethos</u> 29, (Dec. 2001): 475-490. Also Daniel W. Gade."Scholars and Shamans: The Questing Self as Archetype" <u>ReVision</u> 24 (2002) 39-45. Simple human curiosity is seen as a shamanic impulse by Gade, who implies that most autodidacts who are able to transcend the paradigm of their own historical moment are shamans. He mentions Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Law Olmstead, and George Perkins Marsh as Western shamans. Anyone who indulges in clichéd behavior of "pushing the envelope" or 'thinking outside the box" could be considered a shaman, according to his definition.

[9] Michael Harner. <u>The Way of the Shaman</u>. (London: Harper/Collins, 1980). Harner resigned from his work as an anthropology professor to concentrate on his Foundation for Shamanic Studies, which runs shamanic journeying workshops and counseling sessions based on "core

shamanism" or "urban shamanism." While he still presents at academic conferences, he also sells tapes of his drumming in order to induce a "shamanic state of consciousness" in the listener. See Kehoe 82-83.

[10] See Stefanie V. Schnurbein. "Shamanism in the Old Norse Tradition: A Theory between Ideological Camps." History of Religions 43.2 (2003): 116-138. Schnurbein mentions several scholar/practitioners, including Robert Wallis, Jörgen Eriksson, Stephen Flowers/Edred Thorsson, Stephan Grundy/Kveldulf Gundarsson, Jenny Blain, Fleck/Geirr Bassi Haraldsson, Donate Pahnke, and Diana Paxson. A troubling mix of neopagan syncretism and *völkisch* proto-Germanic right-wing politics inform much of the work put out by these sometime warring practitioners. Maintaining a balance between experiential knowledge and scholarly inquiry is never easy, and active religion is always syncretic, but modern day adaptions of Siberian shamanism show the dangers of applying the concept outside of its proper context. Pahnke, for instance, is a practicing *Ritualfrau.*

[11] "Whatever the past was like, it would be a mistake to dismiss the reconstruction and practice of these contemporary Celtic and Heathen religions as invalid or inauthentic." Robert J. Wallis. Shamans/neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans. (New York: Routledge, 2003) 139.

[12] Eliade 379.

[13] Kehoe 42.

[14] In addition to romanticism and racism, Eliade is also accused of fascism and anti-Semitism.

[15] Angela Marie Hibbard. "Christina of St. Trond: Legend, Madwoman, Shaman?" Studies in Spirituality 10 (2000): 107-124.

[16] Sarah Lynn Higley. "Dirty Magic: *Seiðr*, Science, and the Parturating Man in Medieval Norse and Welsh Literature." Essays in Medieval Studies 11(1994): 137-149.

[17] King, "Desert Mothers," n. 57. Connections between Celtic legend and Norse are starting to be documented. The similarities between the Irish *gelta* and the Norse *galdr* (poetic frenzy, noble magic) require more study. See also Padraig O'Riain "A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Men," Eigse 14 (1971-1972) 182. However, this field may also be somewhat clouded by the work of "practicing" scholars who follow "Germanic-Celtic shamanism." The Swedish group *Yggdrasil*, for instance, feels comfortable blending these two mythologies.

[18] Christopher R. Fee and David A Leeming. Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 112-113.

[19] Ramsey MacMullen. Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). Although MacMullen's title stops at the eighth century, his analysis at times pushes further, making reference to early modern middle Eastern and Mediterranean agrarian practices as reflections of the pagan tradition. MacMullen's reading of history from non-ecclesiastical sources convinces him that the silence of the church historians about the continuation of pagan practices in no way reflects actual social behavior.

[20] "*Qui masculam vel feminam in lupinam effigiem alicuius animalis*" The Penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus in McNeill and Gamer 350. See also The Corrector, in McNeill and Gamer 338: "Hast thou believed what some are wont to believe, either that those who are commonly called the Fates exist, or that they can do that which they are believed to do? That is, that while any person is being born, they are able even then to determine his life to what they wish, so that no matter what the person wants, he can be transformed into a wolf, that which vulgar folly calls a werewolf, or into any other shape."

[21] Maria Gimbutas. Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

[22] Schnurbein 130.

[23] An example of this kind of uncritical acceptance of Eliade's brand of shamanism is recounted by Peter Furst. He and Barbara Myerhoff, both graduate students, were discussing the leaps over a waterfall of Ramón, a Huichol *mara'akame*. Furst relates that when Ramón explained that he took them to the waterfall to show them "what it means to have balance," "Barbara and I looked at each other and said, almost simultaneously, 'Eliade!'" Ramón is forever identified by them as a shaman, even though his actual practice is not exactly parallel to that of the true Arctic shaman. The account is recorded in Furst's "Introduction: An Overview of Shamanism," In Gary Seaman and Jane S. Day. Ancient Traditions: Shamanism in Central Asia and the Americas (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1994) 129.

[24] See Chapter 1, p. 32.

[25] Halifax 19.

[26] Calvin Stapert. "Gregorian Chant and the Power of Emptiness," Faith Seeking Understanding*: Learning and the Catholic Tradition, ed. George C. Berthold (Manchester, NH: St. Anselm College Press, 1991) 109.

[27] *Marguerite d'Oingt, Letters*, pars. 137-138, p. 143, in Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature 278.

[28] A sickness crisis is only healed by the assumption of the shaman's role, accepting the initiation rite and beginning to practice (Eliade 42; Halifax 16-17; Kunimitsu Kawamura. "A Female Shaman's Mind and Body, and Possession," Asian Folklore Studies 62.2 (2003): 260-262.

[29] Rasmussen, Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos, 55-6, qtd. in Halifax 6.

[30] Hart 263. [*Daer wasic te kinsch toe ende te onghewassen*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen*, I, 9, ll. 9-10).

[31] [*Jn een pleyn dat hiet die wijtheit der volcomenre doechde*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen*, I, 10,ll. 20-21)

[32] Hart 266.

[*Doen leidde hi mi voert in die middelt der wijtheit daer wi in wandelden. Dar stont een boem die hadde wortele op wert ende den tsop neder wert. Die boem hadde vele telghere. Die nederste*

telghere die de tsop waren, die yerse was gheloeue; die andere hope daer die menschen bi beghinnen. Ende di inghel seide noch te mi: O meestersse vanden beghinne toten inde op climmende desen boem ter dieper wortelen des onbegripelecs gods, verstant hoe dit es Die wech der beghinnender ende te gheduerne der volcomender. Ende ic verstont dat was die boem der bekinnessen gods die men met gheloeue beghint ende met minnen volhint.] (Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visionen,</u> I, 21, ll.185-201).

[33] Halifax 21.

[34] "The Dream of the Rood," in Charles W. Kennedy, ed. <u>Early English Christian Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 94.</u>

[35] Hart 280.

[*Te enen cinxen daghe wart mi vertoent inde dagheraet, ende men sanc mettenen inde kerke ende ic was daer; ende mijn herte ende mijn aderen ende alle mine lede scudden ende beueden van begherten; ende mi was alst dicke heft gheweest Soe verwoeddeleke ende soe vreeseleke te moede dat mi dochte ic en ware minnen lieue ghenoech ende mijn life en uerwlde minen nyet, dat ic steruende soude verwoeden ende all uerwoedencde steruen.*] (Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visionen,</u> I, 74, ll. 1-10)

[36] Mary Suydam. "Heavenly Space in the Visionary Realm of Beguines." Paper presented at the 33rd International Medieval Conference at Kalamazoo, MI, May 1998.

[37] Ana Barro, "Language and Mysticism in the 'Spiritual Canticle' by St. John of the Cross," <u>Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature</u>, ed. Philip Leonard. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 19.

[38] The Middle Dutch *verwoeden* comes from the same roots as the Norse *ōrðr* and the Anglo Saxon *wód*, both connected to the Odin, or Woden—god of poetry, beserker rage, and healing.

[39] Hart 280.
[*Jc begherde mijns liefs te vollen te ghebrukene / ende te bekinnenne ende te ghesmakene in allen uollen ghereke/; Sine menscheit ghebrukeleke mitter miere / Ende de mine daer in te ghestane/ ende starc te wesene in onghebrekelecheiden te valne / dat ic hem weder / dat ghebrekeleke ghenoech ware/: Suuer ende enech / ende in allen te vollen ghereke ghenoech te doghene in elker doghet/. Ende daer toe woudic van binnen….Want dat es dat volco—menste ghenoech doen te wassene god met gode te sine*]. (Van Mierlo, <u>Hadewijch: Visioenen,</u> I, 75, ll. 21-36)

[40] Hart 281.

[*Doe mi Aldus vreeseleke te moede was, doe versaghic vanden outare comen gheuloghen te mi enen are die groet was; ende hi seide mi; Wiltu een werden soe ghereide di. Ende ic stoent op mijn knien ende mijn herte gheberde vreseleke dat enechleke te anebedene na sine werde werdecheit, dat doch mi onghereet ware, dat wetic wel, wet god, altoes te minen wee ende te minen sware. Ende gheen aer keerde segghende: Gherechte here ende moghende, nu tone dine moghende cracht dijnre enecheit te eneghene na ghebruken dijns selues. Ende hi keerde hem*

weder ende seide te mi: Die ghecomen es hi comt weder ende daer hi nye en quam, daer en comt hi niet.] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen,* I, 76-77, ll. 42-57).

[41] Suydam, "Beguine Textuality," 189.

[42] See Chapter 1, p. 39 for a discussion of Hadewijch's vision of herself and Augustine as young and old eagles.

[43] This double meaning has come down to us in current English in our verb "might" and our noun "might."

[44] Here again she either prefigures what Eckhart would later call the *götterfünklein*, the little spark of God in the soul, or they both received the image from an earlier source.

[45] Hart 281-2.

[…*also ghedane mensche ende man. Soete ende scoene ende uerweent ghelaet tonende ende also onderdanechleke te mi comende alse een die eens anders als es. Doe gaf hi mi hem seluen in specien des sacraments…. Daer na quam hi selue te mi ende name mi alte male in sine arme ende dwanc mi ane heme ende alle die lede die ic hadde gheuoelden der siere in alle hare ghenoeghen na miere herten begherten na miere menscheit….Hier na bleef ic in ene veruarne in mijn life dat ic al versmalt in heme ende mi mijns selues niet en blief.*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen,* I, 77-79, ll. 64-94)

[46] Milhaven 34.

[47] [*Mi was op die vre ochte wi een waren sonder differencie.*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen,* I, 78)

[48] Wiethaus 102.

[49] One is reminded of Newton's third law of motion: "For every force there is an equal and opposite force."

[50] Hart 320.

[51] Hart 209.

> *Die vader van anebeghinne*
> *Hadde sinen sone, die mine,*
> *Verborghen in sinen scoet,*
> > *Eerne ons maria,*
> > *Met deepen oetmoede ja,*
> *Verholentlike ontsloet.*
> *Doen vloeide die berch ten deepen dale,*
> *Dat dal vloyde even hoghe der sale.*
> *Does wardt die casteel verwonnen,*
> *Daer langhe strijt was an begonnen.*

(Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Strofische Gedichten*, 188.

[52] The mystical paradox of an all-powerful God not being able to do something is analogous to the Zen koan as a meditation tool. The mystic's desire, if deep enough, is as strong as the rock that God himself cannot lift.

[53] Hart 61. [*Wi willen alle wel god met gode wesen; Mer, wet god, luttel es onser die mensche met siere minscheit wille leuen.*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Brieven*, 64, ll. 230-232).

[54] Hart 301. [*Sich wil tuus alsoe voert meer ghebruken alse ic / Soe moestu dinen sueten lichame hier hebben. Maer omme die die du vercoren hebs met di in dit te volwassene die noch niet volwassen en sijn ende te vorst die du alre meest mijns, so wiltuut noch versten. Ende in die eerste vre die du wils hale wi di…*] (Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Visioenen*, 153, ll. 241-247).

[55] See Chapter 3, p. 128.

[56] "So the soul has climbed in spirit above time and eternity, it is exalted above all that love can give into the eternity which is love itself, which is beyond time, which is set above all human modes of love, the soul has transcended its own nature in its longing for the life which is there." Beatrijs of Nazareth. There are Seven Manners of Loving in Petroff, MWVL, 205.

[57] Hart 47. [*XIV. Eya vroelichú anschowunge! Eya liepliche grûs! Eya minnenlichú umbhalsunge! Herre, din wunder hat mich verwunden, din gnade hat mich verdruket. O du hoher stein, du bist so wol durgraben, in dir mag nieman nisten denne tuben und nahtegalen!   XV. Siest wilkomen, min liebú tube, du hast so sere geflogen in dem ertriche, das dine vedern sint gewahsen in das himelriche.*] Neumann, band 1, 14.

[58] See Chapter 2, pp. 96-98 for Mechthild's description of God in Book VI: 31.

[59] Tobin 213.

 [*Alse du die sele mit allen disen dingen durchvarest und si den sich ufhabet und beginnet vliegen mit tubenvedern, das ist mit allen tugenden, und beginnet denne ze gerende mit des aren girheit, so volget si der hitze uf ze himmele, wan es dunket si alles kalt und ungesalzen, das zergenglich ist.*] Neumann, band 1, 191.

[60] Tobin 188. [*Der almehtigen gottes groessin ist kein groessi so gelich so dú súndige groessi miner bosheit.*] Neumann, band 1, 164.

[61] Tobin xxvi.

[62] Chapter 2, 104-106.

[63] Book I: 44: "A fish in water does not drown. A bird in the air does not plummet. Gold in the fire does not perish." Tobin 61.

[*Der visch mag in dem wasser nit ertrinken, der vogel mag in dem lufte nit versinken, das golt mag in dem fúre nit verderben…*] Neumann, band 1, 30.

[64] Colledge and Walsh, II, 514.

[65] Colledge and Walsh, II, 515.

[66] Colledge and Walsh, II, 520-521.

[67] Colledge and Walsh, II, 536-538.

Notes for Chapter Five

[1] Hart 345.

> [*Dies ic ende menich dat orconde*
> *Wel moghen draghen in alre stoned,*
> *Die <n> de minne dicken heuet ghetoent*
> *Saken daer wij [bi] sijn bi ghehoent,*
> *Ende waenden hebben dat hare bleef.*
> *Sint si mi ierst die treken dreef*
> *Ende ic ghemercte al hare seden,*
> *So hildicker mi al anders mede;*
> *Hare ghedreich, hare ghelouen*
> *Daer met en werdic meer bedroghen.*
>
> *Jc wille hare wesen al dates si,*
> *Si goet, si fel: al eens eest mi.*] Van Mierlo, <u>Mengeldichten</u> 62.

[2] Coxon 5.

[3] See Alastair J. Minnis, <u>Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages</u>, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) 93.

[4] Coxon 174.

[5] Danielle Régnier-Bohler writes that "The 'I' that occurs in their [troubadour] lyrics, however, is not a unique and fully realized individual but a universal 'I.' Based on repeated motifs, the lyric did not embody a voice that revealed the individual, not even when the name Vidas or Razos had been applied retrospectively to the poet's work." Nonetheless, she hears individualism and authority in the late 1100s with Hélinaut of Froidmont. In "Imagining the Self" trans. Arthur Goldhammer. <u>A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World</u>. eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1988) 375-6.

[6] Paul Zumthor, <u>Toward a Medieval Poetics</u>, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 40-1. Zumthor asserts that "we get a glimpse of our authors' personalities only when we consider them as members of social categories" (43).

[7] Olivia Holmes, <u>Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000) 3-4.

[8] Holmes 2.

[9] Katherine C. Little, Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 2.

[10] Kiril Petkov, The Kiss of Peace: Ritual, Self, and Society in the High and Late Medieval West (Boston: Brill, 2003) 10.

[11] Katherine Zieman writes of the situation in the late fourteenth century ecclesiastical community that "Lollard controversies, the Oxford translation debates, and other late medieval conflicts I have thus far loosely characterized as 'hermeneutic struggles' make clear that 'understanding' has become a site of contest, a textual relation potentially separable from both Latinity and clerical identity, and one more urgently in need of monitoring." Katherine Zieman, Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 75.

[12] Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000) 75.

[13] Michel de Certeau, "Lacan: An Ethics of Speech," Representations, 3 (1983 Summer): 31.

[14] De Certeau 31.

[15] De Certeau 32.

[16] One might argue that Lacan is using already existing definitions of narcissism and hysteria from Freud, but in deconstructing that we can still find lurking the hidden but omnipresent Father.

[17] Michel de Certeau, The Mystic Fable, vol. 1, trans. Michael B. Smith (1982; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 299.

[18] Marvin Minsky, The Society of Mind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

[19] Minsky, "Interior Grounding, Reflection, and Self-Consciousness," In Brain, Mind, and Society, Proceedings of an International Conference on Brain, Mind, and Society. (Sendai, Japan: Tohoku University, 2005). 14 July 2006 <http://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/papers/Internal%20 Grounding.html>. Minsky expanded his discussion of brain as networking center of discourse in The Emotion Machine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

[20] Daniel C. Dennett, Consciousness Explained (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

[21] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives, ed. F. Kessel, P. Cole, and D. Johnson (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992) 114.

[22] Trade books such as Kenneth Gergen, The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and Robert Jay Lifton, The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation (New York: Basic Books, 1993) represent a popularizing of the self as network theory. Lifton writes "A continuous quest in our time is for what I would call 'integrative proteanism.' Not a contradiction in terms, integration here involves holding together, however, loosely, disparate elements of the self. It imposes priorities among the elements and the emotions they contain, and can include certain images and forms that are both

enduring and energizing" (87).

[23] Post-postmodern psychoanalysts such as Philip Bromberg, building on the new theory of self as multiplicity rather than monad, publish psychoanalytic approaches to dissociation, or dissociative identity disorder. Bromberg restricts this term to an unhealthy ability to network properly between self states usually brought about by childhood trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder. A good overview of the field is available in Valerie Sinason, Attachment, Trauma, and Multiplicity: Working with Dissociative Identity Disorder (USA: Psychology Press, 2000). Although listed in the DSM-IV, the dissociative identity disorder is not a universally accepted diagnosis since it is largely restricted to North America. Since I consider dissociation to be a term loosely employed by sociologists now to describe anyone experiencing postmodern fragmentation, I do not find this a helpful term in analyzing the medieval mystics.

[24] Holmes suggests that we now see the human subject as "immanent and conditioned by its cultural and material circumstances, in an area of conflict between preconscious desires and external forces" (4). Holmes' interpretation of self, like Petkov's and Freire's, follows more along the lines of post-Marxist social constructivism than Minsky's "society of mind," but it does reflect the idea that our self is negotiable and constantly engaged in conflict resolution, internal dialogue, and meaning making. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes "The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background is…a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding, Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion eds. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 126.

[25] For this idea I am indebted to a generation of students who have tried to convince me that virtual reality was "just as good" as "real" reality, and that by spending so much time in chat rooms, virtual communities such as Second Life, and Massively MultiPlayer Online Role-Playing Games [MMORPGs] they were actually contributing to the development of their personalities, buiding their actual identities, and brainstorming with others about ways of solving actual life problems. I am only convinced that this has happened if I see the results in the actual world, which is the same standard I use when looking at the mystic visionary experience as an integrative exercise.

[26] Sherry Turkle, "Looking Toward Cyberspace: Beyond Grounded Sociology," Contemporary Sociology 28.6 (1999) 643.

[27] Turkle, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) 178.

[28] Jonathan Matusitz, "Deception in the Virtual World: A Semiotic Analysis of Identity," nmediac: The Journal of New Media and Culture 3.1 (2005). 14 July 2006 <http://www.ibiblio.org/nmediac/winter2004/matusitz.html>

[29] Turkle, "Looking." 644. The moratorium is described by Erikson as a temporary but necessary withdrawal from responsibilities. In his chapter "The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity," Erikson writes of adolescents that "They need, above all, a moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed in the foregoing to the childhood stages: only that now a larger unit, vague in

its outline and yet immediate in its demands, replaces the childhood mileau—'society.'" Erik Erikson, <u>Identity: Youth and Crisis,</u> 1968. (New York: Norton, 1994) 128.

Although Erikson concentrates on this moratorium as an adolescent stage, he uses the same idea to characterize anyone experiencing or needing a period in which to process conflicting ideas in a safe space. For instance, in his analysis of Martin Luther, he treats Luther's entrance into the monastery as a way of trying to come to terms with his father's demands and his own desires in a relatively structured space freeing him from the necessity to take responsibility for his action. This is treated in his second chapter, "The Fit in the Choir" of <u>Young Man Luther</u>: <u>A Study in Psychoanalysis and History</u> (New York: Norton, 1958) 23-48.

[30] Ellen Ullman, "The Museum of Me," <u>Harpers </u>May 2000: 30-33. Ullman bewails the narcissitic and childish babytalk of "MySpace," My Documents," "My Pictures," as well as the instant gratification of googling information, the self-reinforcing behavioral mechanism of chatrooms, and the ability to completely personalize one's virtual world. She would consider Turkle's use of an adolescent behavioral stage to describe all web users as part of the general infantilization brought about by the cyberworld.

[31] De Certeau, <u>Heterologies</u>, 89-90.

[32] Philip M. Bromberg, <u>Standing in the Spaces</u>: <u>Essays on the Clinical Process</u>, <u>Trauma</u>, <u>and Dissociation</u>. (New York: Routledge, 2001) 274.

[33] Hart 219. [*Minne es meester meneghere dinc*.] Van Mierlo, <u>Strofische</u> 207.

[34] If we use Wordsworth's definition, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," <u>Norton Anthology of English Literature</u>, vol. 2, ed. M.H. Abrams, et al. (New York: WW Norton, 1974) 138.

 Through her act of enclosure, Julian provided herself with all the tranquil time and space she needed to recollect the powerful feelings brought about by her moment of vision. Neither the short or long text qualifies as spontaneous overflow; however, neither do many other writers' carefully crafted and highly revised creations, including those of Wordsworth himself. A later comparison to Julian in terms of style would be Castiglione, a keen observer and recorder of the inner and outer worlds through which he cycled successfully.

[35] For Brief 28, see Hart 109-113. [*Dit sijn woerde die met verweentheiden comen wallende vter fijnheit gods.*] Van Mierlo, <u>Brieven</u> 232.

[36] Hart 113. [*Soe swighe dan ende ruste mi met gode tote dien tide, dat mi god spreken hetet. Jc hebbe al mine bescedelecheit gheheelect, Ende ic hebbe alle mine gheelheit gheproperlect. Ende ic hebbe alle mine properleecheit ghehouden ghe- daen in gode tote in dien tide dat yemant comt met alsoe selker onderscedecheit, Die mi vraghet wat dat es dat ic meine, Ende dat ic dies gheuoele met gode in gode, dat ics maer te meer en ben onversceden, Alse mi es te sprekene, Ende hier omme swighic sachte.*] Van Mierlo, <u>Brieven</u> 239.

[37] Bardo Weiss, *Die deutschen Mystikerinnen und ihr Gottesbild: Das Gottesbild der deutschen Mystikerinnen auf dem Hintergrund der Mönchstheologie*, *Band 1*, (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004) 174.

[38] (Mengeldicht 16, l. 212) Hart 358. [*Al es men verre, men saelt bekinnen*.] Van Mierlo, <u>Mengeldichten</u> 85.

[39] Tobin 87. [*Swenne das spil úberein get, so sehe man denne, weles allermeist wege, den werdesten engel Jhesum Christum, der da swebet oben Seraphin, der mit sinem vatter ein ungeteilet got můs sin. Den nim ich minstú sele in den arm min und isse in und trinke in und tůn mit im, swas ich wil. Das mag den engeln niemer geschehen…Was wirret mir denne, was die engel bevinden?*] Neumann 55-56.

[40] Interestingly, the concept of integrity, or the Middle High German *triuwe*, individual fidelity in a bargain or legal contract, was seen as a personal rather than social attribute starting around this time. *Triuwe* was tied to the concept of self-worth, or the moral worth, of an individual in the late 12th to early 13th centuries according to Kiril Petrov (66-68). Hadewijch's earlier use of the term *trouwe* no doubt reflects this idea of personal integrity as well. The closest modern translation of Mechthild's term *gehorsami* would probably be obedience, reflecting the same sort of bond between human and divine as Julian describes in her parable of the Lord and Servant.

[41] This precision in ascribing different ways of seeing to different aspects of her brain is particularly true of Julian's visions of the Trinity, as in book 5: 5-40, book 22:7-23, and book 68: 2-52.

[42] Anne Savage describes the impact of the medieval sense of *wyrd* on the emptiness and futility of this world in her essay, "The Place of Old English Poetry in the English Meditative Tradition (Exeter Symposium IV, Papers Read at Darlington Hall, July 1987)." <u>The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, ed</u>. Marion Glasscoe. (St. Edmundsbury, Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1987) 91-110. The starkness of the Old English visionary world is a direct contrast to the world of mountains, streams, trees, wildlife, waterfalls, glaciars, whirlpools, knights errant, and overbursting dams in the visionary landscape of the beguines. People and places seem much more important in the literature of the late Middle Ages.

Notes for Conclusion

[1] Writing a few decades after Julian, in contrast, Christine de Pisan (1363–c.1434) was immersed in a literary atmosphere almost from birth. She is an anomaly, though, and still faced disapproval from clerics like Jean de Meung despite court patronage.

[2] Ian Johnson, "Issues: Vernacular? Theology? Vernacular Theology?" <u>Geographics of Orthodoxy</u> (2008 Apr 08) 2009 Jan 26 < http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/discuss/2008/04/08/vernacular-theology-vernacular-theology/>. Johnson is particularly responding to the general tenor of sessions on late medieval religion and culture at the 2007 Kalamazoo Conference on Medieval Studies, with some scholars acting as if the paradigm of vernacular theology was still firmly entrenched while others used "scare quotes" when mentioning the term, and others treated it only in the past tense.

Notes for Appendix

[1] Van Mierlo, *Hadewijch: Strofische Gedichten*, *1* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1942) 139-142.

[2] Hart 186-189.

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