

An Analysis of the Dissemination and Evolution of Christian Mysticism
through Middle English Vernacular Literature

By Celeste Cruz-Carandang

MRST 493

Advisor: Professor Curtis Jirsa

Second reader: Professor George Bent

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on
this paper.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Blood Imagery and Richard Rolle's <i>Meditations on the Passion</i>	25
Chapter II: Middle English Religious Lyric: The Distortion of the Coenobitic Mystical Tradition.....	55
Chapter III: The Mundane in <i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i> : The final descent towards devotionalism.....	78
Conclusion.....	100
Bibliography.....	103

Acknowledgments

While I would not be wrong to thank Professor Curtis Jirsa for all the guidance, support, patience and inspiration he has given in order to help me complete my senior project, it would be a gross understatement. Truth be told, Professor Jirsa has not only been my advisor for just the year that it has taken to complete this thesis, he has also been my mentor for the past three years that I have known him. As my mentor, he not only assisted me with registration (as it got increasingly complicated over the years), but also taught me about the wonders of medieval literature, helped me narrow my overly ambitious ideas, fixed my computer, tolerated missed deadlines, suggested dietary alternatives to McDonald's and repeatedly regaled me with entertaining and embarrassing stories. He was my teacher, tech support, role model and friend. I cannot summarize my gratitude for Professor Jirsa, nor can I adequately summarize everything that he has done for me. This project is the result of three years of work with a professor whose efforts and passion helped me discover what it is I want to do with the rest of my life and what it takes to get there.

I would also like to thank Professor George Bent, my second reader. Despite his busy schedule, he always made time to give me a new perspective on my project. Indeed, even as his student, Professor Bent has forced me to examine problems from a different point of view, to pursue an original line of inquiry and to challenge what many consider to be "standard" positions. Since my first class with him my sophomore year, he has been pushing me harder than I had ever thought possible. More than once during this process, I thought that I would quit rather than respond to his many challenges. Instead, Professor Bent has helped me grow into an inquisitive student, a better art historian, and a more mature adult who now knows that she is only beginning to understand what her future holds.

Introduction

I. The evolution of coenobitic mystical thought: the impact of vernacular literature

My thesis examines a total of three works of literature written in Middle English. I believe that Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*, the medieval religious lyric I have selected and *The Book of Margery Kempe* demonstrate a transformation of Christian mystical thought as it had been conceived in the twelfth century. The progression reveals a movement away from the regular clergy's emphasis on spiritual and abstract meditation. With the increasing availability of vernacular religious texts, the laity began to a shift towards the heightened physicality of devotionism.

Rolle's *Meditations*, as a work written by an individual closely associated with the Church, contains elements consistent with monastic and mendicant mysticism. His use of graphic, albeit visceral, language encourages the reader to create intensely vivid pictures of the Passion story within his own mind. In turn, the meditator does not rely on an object such as a painting or relic; he simply uses his cognitive capacities. Although his physical senses, love for Christ, and emotions provide him with an abstract sense of the Divine, the contemplator does not use them as the vehicle for enlightenment.

In contrast, the reader of the Middle English lyric becomes dependent on his somatic faculties and emotions. Using the vocabulary of the Franciscans, this poem dilute mystical ideology. While Rolle's audience had employed their earthly senses as a primary step in knowing the divine, this lyric utilize them as their only measure. The reader becomes connected to Christ by way of emotional or sensory appeal.

Lastly, Margery Kempe demonstrates a blatant misinterpretation of this type of spiritual thought. Her only connection to Christ is through physical means. Her pilgrimage shows her

spatial association with him and her need to touch and see relics connected to the saints.

Although she claims to have visionary experiences, these divine encounters place her in the position of a lover or mother. She fails to reach the divine enlightenment described by the twelfth century exegetes.

II. The emergence of Christian mysticism

Christian mysticism has emerged as one of the crucial topics in medieval spiritual history. In spite of its significance, scholars cannot help but acknowledge the diversity of mystical doctrines and philosophies. Indeed, the importance of this topic lies in the multiplicity of ideologies concerning the proper method of divine communion. Regardless of the, at times, disparate theories regarding the *unio mystica*, its systems appear to share a common orthodoxy and history. These parallels link the main texts addressed by my thesis. Therefore, these works must be considered within the context of Christian mystical thought and the matters surrounding its development during the later Middle Ages.

Mysticism, as an element of the Christian faith, had been practiced long before the Twelfth century. Early believers had been using the Greek *mystikos* or the Latin *mysticus* to characterize the inner dimensions of their faith since the Second Century CE.¹ Likewise, the phrase, 'mystical theology', arose as a common expression close to the year Five Hundred CE to describe scriptural interpretation.² This modification in meaning, however minor, demonstrates an essential quality of mysticism: it is defined by the tendencies and events of the time period.³

¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 3.

² McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 3.

³ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xi.

That is to say, although a diachronic analysis would inevitably reveal certain trends and commonalities throughout the history of Christianity, a synchronic investigation of the mystical ideologies of the late medieval period will demonstrate how the social milieu of the era shaped Christian mysticism. These factors, in turn, influenced the literature being produced for both lay and ecclesiastical audiences.

Although a plethora of circumstances or occurrences may have contributed to the formation of late medieval mysticism, three major reasons emerge as the most salient when examining both religious history and the main literary works of this paper. As the Catholic Church grew increasingly powerful, its interests became progressively more secular and political. This led to a pontificate more concerned with the assertion of its bureaucratic authority than with the care of souls. Consequently, the divide between the laity and the Church started to grow as congregations were forced to find alternative methods of worship. These rather unorthodox devotional practices embraced a yet unforeseen emphasis on Christ's humanity, a concept that would later become a cornerstone of Christian mysticism. Finally, the establishment of new monastic and mendicant orders helped to further propagate the philosophy behind mystical thought as well as encourage the production and publication of vernacular literature.

III. The growing divide between the laity and the Church

During the Fourteenth century, the Catholic Church became extremely powerful. Through a series of events taking place at this time, religion started to become increasingly politicized. These affairs would in turn influence the perception of late-medieval authority in the civic, spiritual and even literary sense.⁴ Believers were forced to reexamine their relationship to both the sublime and their spiritual advisors. From the Eleventh century onwards, the papacy

⁴ Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, ed. Alastair Minnis, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7.

became more powerful and secularized. At the Council of Clermont in November of 1095, Pope Urban II delivered a sermon that used liturgical language to convey a political message. His speech incited fearful Catholics into military action with the promise of the full remission of their sins and the salvation of their eternal souls. At the same time, pontiffs such as Pope Gregory VII implemented reforms to declare their authority on a more local level. Papal, as well as the true extent of ecclesiastical authority, can best be seen in the role of the priest. Sacerdotal power of the later Middle Ages came not to be defined by spiritual influence, but by the ability to display and embody the eminence of the Catholic Church.

The role of the priest exhibited the nature and demonstrated the magnitude of the medieval Church's strength, in both the sacred and secular realms. As the Pope's canonical representative to the laity, the office of the priesthood became intrinsically tied to the political agenda of the current pontificate.⁵ Only priests could instruct their parish through preaching. According to medieval theories of authorship, they could claim that their authority came from ecclesiastical approbation or *ex officio*.⁶ This sanction was to be treated as indisputable. He functioned as a support for the medieval Church's claim to absolute power and control over the deliverance of its followers.⁷

Sacerdotal duty came to be viewed as having two parts that rendered the officiating priest indispensable to his congregation. He acted as both a doctrinal teacher and a link to God for the

⁵Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 55.

⁶"The Fourth Lateran Council," ed. Harry Rothwell, in *Readings in Medieval History*, comp. Patrick J. Geary, Third ed. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2003), 443.

⁷Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 252.

⁸Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 148.

laity. In this way, the priest formed a heavenly association by executing sacramental acts.⁸ The performance of these sacred rituals aggrandized the clerical office. That is to say, the ordained celebrant came to be perceived as Christ's earthly voice. Yet, he was not only perceived as a Divine representative; the priest was later elevated to a nearly saintly status. At many points during the Mass, sacerdotal authority was equated with celestial mandate. For example, Jesus' words at the Last Supper transformed into the priest's at the moment of consecration.⁹ The First Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, which met in 1215, drew attention to the connections amongst the unity of the Catholic Church, Christ's genuine presence in the Eucharist and the priest as a part of the apostolic tradition.¹⁰ Moreover, rituals and ceremonies surrounding the administration of the Host elevated the priestly occupation.

These reiterated observances contributed to the increasing differentiation between the clergy and the laity; only ordained members of the clergy had the authority to perform these sacred acts. By the Thirteenth century, the Eucharist had been established as the most important of these sacraments as a physical reminder of Christ's Passion.¹¹ The Passion had taken on a particular significance in Christian soteriology; it came to replace the Incarnation and Resurrection as the root of mortal salvation.¹² However, this segregation was also predicated upon the parishioners' assumption of certain responsibilities. The laity had the duty to not only make full confessions, but to also profess unwavering faith in church doctrines.¹³ Upon

⁹ Rubin, 55-6.

¹⁰ "The Fourth Lateran Council," 443.

¹¹ Wendy L. Anderson, "The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France," *Church History* 75, no. 4 (December 2006):753.

¹² Anderson, 753.

¹³ Anderson, 753.

examination of this relationship, it becomes evident that it was through the particular sacrament of Holy Communion, and specifically its administration by clerics, the Church sustained its temporal authority. Only upon fulfillment of these obligations could the individual become entitled to the Eucharist. Only those individuals who had acknowledged their sinfulness and expressed their contrition adequately to an ordained minister were permitted to receive the Host.¹⁴ The Fourth Lateran Council codified these ecclesiastical mandates. Communion could only be received after due penance and preparation and only on certain feast days such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.¹⁵ Canon twenty-one required annual confession, preferably at Easter, as a requisite for the receipt of Communion. At the same time, it imposed harsh penalties for any priest who compromised the confidentiality of the confessional.¹⁶ A century after the Council, local statutes increased the number of mandatory confessions. This legislation, coupled with the earlier edicts from 1215, forced the laity to recognize the importance of the sacrament of Holy Communion.¹⁷ Such strict control of Holy Communion distinguished its administration with an air of sacrality. In order to regulate the standards for worthy reception, the Church chose to apply further restrictions on lay access to the Eucharistic species.

The priest started to celebrate Communion with his back to the congregation or as a distinctly separate part of the Mass. Likewise, the physical reception of the Host became to represent exclusion rather than commensality. Members of the regular clergy were presented

¹⁴ "The Fourth Lateran Council," 444.

¹⁵ "The Fourth Lateran Council," 444.

¹⁶ "The Fourth Lateran Council," 444.

¹⁷ Rubin, 58.

with the Eucharist at the high altar while members of the laity were forced to process to the side altars. Women were ostensibly prohibited from being given either the body or the blood.¹⁸

Furthermore, the doctrine of concomitance dictated that both sacramental elements, the body and the blood, were contained within each species, the bread and wine.¹⁹ Therefore, since doctrinally the host contained both the body and the blood of Christ, the Church was justified in withholding the contents of the chalice from the laity.

By the thirteenth century, most laypersons were not permitted to partake of either the wafer or the sacramental wine. This originated with the practice of elevating the Host, a ritual known as ocular or spiritual communion. Beginning in Paris in 1200, this elevation denoted the gravity of the consecration as a specific liturgical moment.²⁰ The sight of the Eucharistic elements became imbued with a sense of spiritual value.²¹ As an ecclesiastical practice, spiritual communion stressed mental concentration as the mechanism of stimulating a unitive state with the Divine.²² This acknowledged the sacramental value of Holy Communion while permitting the laity to participate in the ritual in a vicarious fashion. It quickly became established as the only acceptable form of daily communion. These limitations caused desire for Communion to only increase and the significance of the Body and Blood to be distorted.²³ This resulted in devotional practices that challenged the sacramentality of the Eucharist as well as the powers of the priest.

¹⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 56.

¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 3 (London: Burnes, Oates and Washburne, 1920-42), q. 76 articles 1 and 2.

²⁰ Aquinas, q. 76 articles 1 and 2.

²¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 55.

²² Rubin, 150.

²³ Catherine Pickstock, "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist," *Modern Theology*, April 1999, 169-70.

IV. The Focus on Christ's Humanity

The import of the devotional movement in regards to Eucharistic practices can scarcely be exaggerated. The notion of spiritual or ocular communion proved to be one of the most notable of these alternative practices. At its inception, the Catholic Church sanctioned ocular communion.²⁴ Yet, the underlying devotional tendencies of conventional piety contributed to what the Church considered the corruption of ocular communion. Rather than using meditation to understand the nature of Christ's sacrifice, the laity began to worship or venerate the Host. By emphasizing the consecration of the Host, the congregation neglected other parts of the Mass. The laity's disregard for portions of the service brought to light a potential danger: members of the congregation may use ocular communion as a means of obviating parochial and clerical authority.²⁵

The practice of spiritual communion not only enabled the laity to circumvent sacerdotal authority to a significant degree, but also transported the ceremony of the mass into a more private and accessible sphere.²⁶ The Feast of *Corpus Christi* was instituted in 1264. Subsequently, cults dedicated to the veneration of the Host began to emerge.²⁷ In a similar fashion, cults centered around the Holy Blood arose as a product of a Thirteenth century royal initiative in England following the circulation of Passion relics and the sack of relics of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade.²⁸ These factions provided the laity with a plausible

²⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 55.

²⁵ Richard Kieckhefer, "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 37.

²⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 55.

²⁷ Rubin, 314.

²⁸ Kieckhefer, 37.

²⁹ Kieckhefer, 37.

way of partaking in the restricted ecclesiastical sacraments.²⁹ Devotionalism marked a departure from the clerical emphasis on introspection in favor of developing external demonstrations of faith. At times, these outward exhibitions of piety neglected the sacramentality of canonical ceremonies. The popular religiosity of the later Middle Ages was one increasingly preoccupied with that which was corporeal and tangible.³⁰ This movement relied upon developing a physical, rather than spiritual, relationship with the Divine. Its rituals and procedures focused on the emotions potentially elicited by a somatic connection to sacred materials. Relics, pilgrimage and affective veneration of Christ's lacerated body originated in this vernacular interest in and need for physicality.

Alongside this emergent demand for a tangible relationship with the Son came the redefinition of man's association with Him. If Christ was human, than individuals could consort with Him as they would any other mortal being: as a father, brother, friend and even as a lover. Hence, an interest in the problematic Song of Solomon arose again, for the first time since the patristic age.

The exegetical debates surrounding the Song of Songs summarize the Catholic Church's methods of asserting power during the Middle Ages. Although biblical commentary addressing the Canticle of Canticles did not become popular until the Twelfth century, many prominent theologians either drew from or referenced ideological traditions that had been established by the patristic fathers during the early Christian period. These religious scholars, despite their differences in interpretation, recognize the problem that the Song of Songs presents as a part of the religious canon. At the most basic level, the text does not make any explicit or direct mention

³⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 04 (December 2002): 688-9.

of God himself.³¹ Instead, it celebrates the amorous couplings of unidentified lovers. Officers of the Church became increasingly concerned with the lascivious content and tone of the work. They believed that it had the potential to compromise the morality of those who read it without proper ecclesiastical guidance. Most importantly, if the Song of Songs could not be viably reconciled with the remaining Biblical texts, it endangered the integrity of all spiritual writings; a lustful reader could use sacred scripture to incite his passions.³²

Theologians of the early medieval period emphasized the need to find an allegorical meaning embedded within the passages. According to Augustine, the biblical text has no less than four levels of meaning. All of these must be located in order to fully comprehend the import of a scriptural selection. His system includes: historical, etiological, analogical and allegorical. Through historical interpretation, a scholar may discern what exactly has been written or done. At the etiological level, he discovers the cause or intent behind the historical events. The analogical reading of a work rectifies any incongruous statements between the Old and New Testament. Finally, and perhaps most important to the early medieval commentators, the allegorical level of meaning demonstrates how particular parts are meant to be understood as figurative rather than literal.³³

I believe that this originates from their attitudes towards the function of love and desire in a religious context. In short, these exegetes sought to repress both impulses in order to discover the significance of this work. Yet, due to the evolving stance on Christ's relationship to

³¹ Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

³² Astell, 1.

³³ E. Ann. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, ed. by Edward Peters, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 53.

humanity, the viewpoints towards love, in both a religious and profane setting, also started to change. These alterations can best be seen in the establishment of the new clerical orders.

V. The Foundation of New Orders

New monastic and mendicant orders formed in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries. Many of the earlier Twelfth century orders evoked the influence of Cîteaux (est. 1098), the Cistercian monastery famous for one of its members, Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁴ The French abbey practiced complete separation from secular powers. Because of their Christocentric devotion, the Cistercians acknowledged only the authority of the Pope and of the Divine, but not of the French state. That is to say, these monks only recognized the power of the whole Christ: his human body, his divine Godhead, and his earthly Church.³⁵ Accordingly, the order became one of the most influential orders of the late medieval period. Soon, several other cloistered communities and orders started to emerge, all under the influence of the Cistercians and Cîteaux.

After the founding of Clairvaux Abbey in 1115, Bernard of Clairvaux became one of the most important figures of the medieval world. His influence extended outside of the monastic cloister and into the world of secular diplomacy. Although a discussion of Bernard's foreign and domestic affairs ventures outside of the scope of this paper, I surmise that his association with lay affairs impacted how he shaped his monastic ideals. Case in point, the Cistercians based their recruitment on a certain familiarity with earthly affairs. Whereas the older orders drew their novices from among the oblates, children of noble birth who had been offered to the order by their parents, the Cistercians made a point of only accepting older men as new initiates. Indeed,

³⁴ Bernard left Cîteaux to later found and become the first abbot of Clairvaux Abbey in 1115. While at Cîteaux, he was integral in upholding a strict observance of the Benedictine Rule in the Cistercian Order.

³⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52.

this compulsion arose as a direct response to the established methods of attracting new members. The Cistercians believed that their practice ensured that their novices had a genuine desire for an observant lifestyle, despite knowing the temptations of a secular lifestyle.³⁶ Hence, the decision to join a monastic order became more of a choice for the truly religious than a last resort for younger sons.³⁷

With this new brand of recruitment, the Cistercians cultivated an entirely different type of religiosity. Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs influenced Cistercian piety; thus, I shall now refer to it as Bernardine piety. His comments on the Canticles attempted to not only reconcile the work as a part of the biblical canon, but also tried to explain his idea of monastic love. He maintained that individuals need not repress concupiscence.³⁸ Instead, ardor could be channeled into religious fervor.³⁹ In his eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters and the first verse of the third chapter of the Song of Songs, Bernard compared the acts of carnal love described in the Song of Solomon to the process of salvation and reconciliation.⁴⁰ In doing so, he used the vocabulary of human and earthly love to delineate the nuances of monastic love.⁴¹ According to French Abbot, the Kiss of the mouth that opens the Canticles symbolizes the oneness of divinity and humanity. Similarly, the mutual love of the unnamed couple is analogous to individual communication with the Holy Spirit. Lastly, he attempts to justify the phrase

³⁶ Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France*, 9-11.

³⁷ Leclercq *Monks and Love*, 11.

³⁸ Beckwith, 51.

³⁹ Beckwith, 50.

⁴⁰ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 51

⁴¹ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 23.

"...breasts are better than wine."⁴² In Bernard's opinion, this excerpt voices Jesus' patient and steadfast love for those he saved; it speaks to the mystery and reward of His incarnation.⁴³

The enigmatic nature of Christ's Incarnation greatly fascinated the Cistercians. Bernard encouraged his disciples to take advantage of this sublime connection through contemplation and prayer. However, the Bernardine system of prayer differed from the older forms of monastic prayer. Under the guidance of the Song of Songs, Bernard redefined prayer within an amatory context. In his mind, the ecstasy of love characterized the most elevated state of prayer in which the soul, which he saw as feminine, was actually taken out of her.⁴⁴ This feeling of detachment was meant to mimic Christ's Ascension into Heaven.⁴⁵ Thus, through prayer and adoration, the male monastic became an image of Christ.⁴⁶ Most importantly, this deep affection brought understanding. To Bernard, without love, no monk or cleric could understand the dogmatic teachings of the Church.⁴⁷

The Victorines owed much to the Cistercians. The Cistercians found themselves linked to the Canons of the Abbey of St. Victor by a common Augustinian objective: attaining an actual vision of God.⁴⁸ At the same time, the Victorines devised an epistemological scheme that appeared to break entirely from the Bernardine point of view through its strict adherence to the teachings of St. Augustine. Due in part for their affinity for Augustinianism, the Victorines taught their followers the necessity of grace because of the inherently debased human

⁴² Canticles 1:1.

⁴³ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 51.

⁴⁴ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 51.

⁴⁵ Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, trans. Claire Lavoie, vol. 16, Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 143.

⁴⁶ Beckwith, 51.

⁴⁷ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 123.

⁴⁸ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century; Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. Jerome Taylor, trans. Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 55.

condition.⁴⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, in his *The Didascalion*, endorsed instruction and teaching as a medium of restoring the man to his true, purified, condition.⁵⁰ He had entered the Parisian abbey in 1115. From 1127 onwards, Hugh established himself as a committed teacher and eventually founded the school of St-Victor.⁵¹ Throughout his time as an educator, Hugh wrote *Didascalion*.⁵² One might surmise that his pedagogical experience provided him with the inspiration for his treatise praising the very subject. More so than the act of teaching, Hugh of St. Victor's tract also discusses the soul's ability to learn. Within the text, the author outlines the three-fold capacity of the human soul.⁵³ On the most basic level, it functions as the body's life force.⁵⁴ The soul's second ability is its power of sensory perception. The power of mind and reason forces the soul to utilize its highest faculties.⁵⁵

Hugh of St. Victor acknowledged that not all that exists within human consciousness can be divided into that which can be physically understood and that which must be mentally comprehended. Influenced in part by a Neo-Platonic system, he devised a system by which the cognitive faculty of *imaginatio*, or imagination, could comprehend substances and beings that were incorporeal in nature.⁵⁶ An intellectible substance was imperceptible to any mortal sense due to its intangible nature.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Chenu, 28.

⁵⁰ Renevey, 9.

⁵¹ Renevey, 9.

⁵² Renevey, 9.

⁵³ Renevey, 9-10.

⁵⁴ Renevey, 9.

⁵⁵ Renevey, 10.

⁵⁶ Chenu, 25.

⁵⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, 48-9.

In contrast, an intelligible material possessed the likeness of a sensible thing. Yet, similar to the Platonic form, it was not a sensible thing in and of itself.⁵⁸ As an intelligible object comes into contact with more physical objects, it degenerates; in this way, the intelligible body mirrors the quality of the soul.⁵⁹

While Hugh of St. Victor mapped the soul's deterioration into a merely corporeal entity, his successor, Richard of St. Victor undertook an effort to trace its redemption.⁶⁰ In his mind, contemplation provided man with the tools to redeem himself. Hugh of St. Victor saw contemplation, thinking and meditation as entirely different processes distinguished by their abilities to reach suprarational levels of knowledge.⁶¹ He elucidated his epistemological scheme in both *The Twelve Patriarchs* and its sequel, *The Mystical Ark*. Thinking allows the individual to experience the world through his physical senses. However, it is still an entirely discursive process. Meditation considers the data that we have in our mind and memory, in a similarly analytical process. In meditation, we are in a complex or obscure state and it is only through concentrated rumination that we can understand our thoughts.⁶² In comparison, contemplation entails an immediate and almost spontaneous grasp of our knowledge as a whole. As opposed to the discursive basis of both thinking and meditation, contemplation uses intuition as its basis.⁶³ Richard of St. Victor expands on his predecessor's treatises by considering the role given to

⁵⁸ Hugh Of St. Victor, *The Didascalion of Hugh of St. Victor: a Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. J. Taylor, Reprint 1991 ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 48-9.

⁵⁹ Renevey, 10.

⁶⁰ Reveney, 10.

⁶¹ Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400-1400*, ed. Robert Baldock, Yale Intellectual History of the West (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 230.

⁶² Colish, 230.

⁶³ Colish, 230.

imaginatio and dividing into two parts.⁶⁴ He classifies both Animal and Reasoned imagination. The former wanders randomly and without purpose while the later acts as a servant to reason.⁶⁵ Victorine writings, by both Hugh of St. Victor and his student Richard of St. Victor, place a great emphasis on somatic perception and its part in spiritual ascent.

Franciscan piety echoes Bernardine and Victorine piety in many ways. For example, all sought to elevate the human condition by recognizing the significance of Christ's Incarnation. Therefore, Jesus' body became especially crucial for the Franciscan friars; it represented the common space between the sublime and sensible, or temporal, worlds. In turn, they acknowledged the sensible world as the mechanism for ascent to the higher realm.⁶⁶ Hence, the Franciscans approach to divine communion tended to be highly somatic and physical. Their focus on the body led to a zealous devotion to the Passion of the Christ.⁶⁷ His torn and bleeding body became something to both worship and emulate through contemplation and prayer. In the framework of Franciscan piety, Jesus' body was the medium of spiritual transformation because it reoriented the sacred and the profane. Indeed, it was through the Crucifixion that Christ's body, a symbol of sacrality, was desecrated, or profaned.⁶⁸ Many Franciscan texts are saturated with bloody and gory descriptions of Christ's Passion. Such graphic accounts emphasize the importance of the individual's relationship to God and depict the Son as an *imago Dei* or image of God. His role as an *imago dei* gave Jesus the ability to resolve the ramifications of the Postlapsarian legacy: the separation between the human body and its eternal soul.⁶⁹ As an empathetic participant in Christ's Passion, the Franciscan monastic believed that he could close

⁶⁴ Reveney, 11.

⁶⁵ Reveney, 11.

⁶⁶ Beckwith, 47-8.

⁶⁷ Beckwith, 47-8.

⁶⁸ Beckwith, 47-8.

⁶⁹ Beckwith, 47.

the gap between Jesus' divinity and his own humanity, therefore giving a redemptive meaning to Christ's suffering.⁷⁰

Nearly all of these themes converged in St. Francis' mystical experience on Mount Alverno in 1224. From Thomas of Celano's *First Life of Francis*, penned in 1229, we learn an extended account of Francis' life and his stigmatization. Thomas' biography tells us that after fasting as the Son of Man did for forty days and forty nights, Francis received a vision: Christ descended from Heaven in the form of a six-winged seraph and appeared to him.⁷¹ Since the Thirteenth century, the Seraph embodied the image of Divine love.⁷² The wings, two over His head, two over His body and the final two over his arms, evoke images of Christ crucified.⁷³ What is more, upon experiencing his vision, Francis also received the wounds of Christ.⁷⁴ This demonstrated the Franciscan ideal of intersections between the sacred and the profane.

After Francis' stigmatization, the order attempted to make it accessible to both intellectuals and lay people.⁷⁵ Bonaventure, a member of the Franciscan order since his youth as well as a theologian educated at the University of Paris, wrote a number of seminal texts responsible for disseminating the Franciscan message. Nature was especially important to Francis and integral to his spiritual encounters.⁷⁶ Prior to his stigmatization, a falcon awakened Francis while bird surrounded him with song. He also spent much of his time meditating and praying in the wild. Thus, Bonaventure based his work, the *Vitis Mystica* or Mystical Vine, on botanical imagery. In the *Vitis Mystica*, Bonaventure argues that all of creation contains

⁷⁰ Colish, 237.

⁷¹ Thomas Of Celano, "First Life of Francis," in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, by Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 226.

⁷² McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 225.

⁷³ Colish, 236.

⁷⁴ Celano, 226-7.

⁷⁵ Colish, 237.

⁷⁶ Colish, 237.

emanations of the Divine. These can therefore serve as links to God and as mirrors of Him.⁷⁷ As objects of His creation, human beings are mirrors of the Lord as well.⁷⁸ Yet, these mirrors have become sullied through sin and must be cleaned in order for their natural likeness to emerge. This process of purification came about through the process of *imitatio Christi*, imitation of Christ. Like Francis' reception of Christ's wounds', the laity found it easiest to follow the example of contemplating on Christ's Passion. Texts became the most accessible medium by which to do this.⁷⁹

VI. The Franciscan Order and the Dissemination of Vernacular Devotional Texts

I posit that the publication of devotional works in the vernacular escalated due in part to the founding of the Franciscan order. Indeed, following the Fourth Lateran Council, the demand for religious instructional texts in both Latin and the vernacular languages escalated, specifically for the use of mendicant preachers such as the Franciscan friars.⁸⁰ Shortly after 1215, the Franciscan Friars in England began to circulate spiritual works in the vernacular tongue. Moreover, the familiar parlance, intentionally used by the Friars Minor in an effort to put an end to 'glosing', negated the common reader's need to rely on a priest's complicated exegetical mechanism or invocation of ambiguous ecclesiastical authority.⁸¹ That is not to say that the fraternal order terminated the medieval practice of editing and annotating texts all together. Instead, the vernacular writings circulated by the Franciscans conformed to the specific exegetical ideals of

⁷⁷ Bonaventure, "The Mystical Vine," in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, ed. Jose De Vinck, vol. I: The Mystical Vine (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), 163.

⁷⁸ Beckwith, 48.

⁷⁹ Beckwith, 52-3.

⁸⁰ Taylor, 356.

⁸¹ Beckwith, 52-3.

their order: a stress on the 'literal' sense above all else.⁸² In this way, the Friars made the scriptural message more accessible to the laity.

Texts also allowed lay people to participate in the previously exclusive practices of the regular clergy. The Franciscans stressed the importance of *imitatio Christi* to both their own members and the laity. Friars were expected to mimic the life of Jesus through contemplative imitation of the Passion. In contrast to this solely intellectual practice, the laity depended on texts as the vehicle for their transformation. The wide proliferation of religious works provided a detailed and often gory description of the tortured Christ. These tracts encouraged even the uneducated layperson to meditate on the significance of Jesus' Incarnation and Crucifixion.⁸³ By utilizing grotesque and intensely visual language to describe Christ's body, Minorite authors presented His holy flesh not only as the object of meditation, but also as a symbolic link between the sacred and the profane. The evocative language of the Franciscan writers lent a sense of immediacy to their text; their affective language transported the Passion narrative from the biblical age to the contemporary time of the meditator. Hence, lay people became active and empowered participants, rather than members of a passive audience.

Written in the Mother Tongue, Minorite authors presented secular readers with religious texts that prioritized their devotional experience over the assertion of institutional power. Their language concentrated on Christ's humanity, thereby forging a deeper relationship between the reader and the Divine. This made biblical lessons more easily comprehensible to a lay audience. More importantly, the pathos of Christ's suffering provided them with the incentive to embark on a life of *imitatio Christi*. Therefore, we can see how Franciscan vernacular literature allowed the

⁸² Beckwith, 146 n. 34.

⁸³ Beckwith, 52-3.

laity to bypass canonical influences and experience the divine on with a greater sense of intimacy.

VII. The Rise of the Vernacular

The colloquial languages began to emerge as the literary idiom in 1200.⁸⁴ Yet, it was not until the Fourteenth century that works written in Middle English began to overtake those penned in Latin.⁸⁵ This phenomenon coincided with major developments in the production of religious tracts during the latter quarter of the Fourteenth century.⁸⁶ By the fifteenth century, the readership of texts in the vernacular consisted of a progressively inclusive spectrum of social classes.⁸⁷ In spite of this, albeit marginal, rise in the English literacy rate, laypeople often came into contact with books through oral recitation and group performances.⁸⁸ Indeed, hearing rather than silently reading was the preferred method of textual study during the later Middle Ages, even among the highly literate.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 208.

⁸⁵ Claire Elizabeth McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*, vol. 4, *Studies in Medieval Mysticism* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 5.

⁸⁶ McIlroy, 5.

⁸⁷ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 112.

⁸⁸ Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books," in *The Idea of the Vernacular an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 356.

⁸⁹ Taylor, 356.

⁹⁰ Ruth Evans, Andrew Taylor, and Nicholas Watson, "The Notion of Vernacular Theory," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Ian R. Johnson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 322.

These gatherings highlighted the performative quality of Middle English. Hence, writing in the vernacular, more than doing so in Latin, created a sense of community amongst readers.⁹⁰ This feeling of sodality could only be sustained by the English vernacular that, while considered less prestigious, was both inherently performative and regarded as the *kynde* language. As the *kynde* tongue, this colloquial dialect was thought to have a particular effect on the reading experience. Specifically, because of its innate simplicity and accessibility, Middle English possessed the ability to affect the audience on an emotional level.⁹¹ This expressive power proved to be especially useful for spiritual writers of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries. Lay audiences desired texts that appealed to both their intellect and their sentiments. Utilization of the regional parlance allowed authors to cater to these inclinations.

VIII. The Development of late medieval Christian Mysticism and Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*

A historical analysis of mysticism may appear necessary when examining Rolle's writings simply because his texts have been designated as a part of the mystical tradition. Yet, I believe that the Hermit of Hampole's ties to the emergence of this convention run deeper than a simple classification. This religious background influences the way in which Rolle portrays himself, relates to his readers, and, ultimately, impacts the way in which he writes the text.

The definition of the priestly office and sacerdotal duties affected the manner in which Rolle asserted his own authority as an author. Without ecclesiastical sanction, he did not have any official approbation to preach. Rolle therefore had to substantiate his mandate through divine grace. On numerous occasions throughout the text, Rolle deliberately associates himself with the

⁹¹ Evans, et. al., 325.

apostolic tradition. His language implies direct ties with John the Evangelist, the only apostle present at the Crucifixion. Interestingly enough, it seems that Rolle is not only asserting priestly authority through apostolic associations, but is also claiming an even higher degree of power than the clergyman through the Johannine connections. In the same way, his ubiquitous use of blood imagery and Eucharistic language suggests the prerogative to perform and partake in the same sacred rituals as a priest.

Both the emphasis on Christ's humanity and the establishment of three new orders shaped Rolle's language. Rolle's fascination with Jesus' body produces a visceral and extremely graphic tract that would have been deemed unacceptable in the early Church. Furthermore, evidence of Cistercian, Franciscan and Victorine thought can be seen in Rolle's method of divine communion. Interestingly enough, Rolle based *The Meditations* on Bonaventure's *Vitis Mystica*.⁹² He would have become familiar with all three at different points during his lifetime.

IX. The Development of late medieval Christian Mysticism and the medieval religious lyric tradition

At an earlier stage in this project, I struggled with a semantic quandary: did the succession of texts demonstrate an *evolution* of Christian mysticism or a *degeneration* of this philosophy? Strangely enough, the answer became apparent at this intermediary section of my

⁹² McIlroy, 31.

paper. The lyricist exhibits an adherence to the mendicant tradition to a certain, if not limited, extent. Unfortunately, due to the *dilution* of the mystical thought related by the regular clergy, these poems fail to help their reader reach spiritual enlightenment.

The Franciscan poem, *The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross*, seems to be heavily influenced by the devotionism of the earlier medieval period. Its chiasmic form and dependence on visual imagery reveal an affinity for the physicality and somatic relationship with the Divine that had characterized the age prior to the foundation of the new orders. Nevertheless, the variability and mutability of Christ's role manifests the impact of the Song of Songs.

X. The Development of late medieval Christian Mysticism and *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Margery Kempe familiarized herself with the many of the seminal works of Christian mysticism. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, she even claims to have read works by Richard Rolle. As the daughter of a mayor, she had access to more religious texts. Although Margery herself probably could not read, she most likely heard these works read aloud.⁹³ Despite this, Margery's account of her countless pilgrimages around continental Europe manifest a flagrant and drastic distortion of mystical thought.

The narrative does not provide its reader with a list of Margery's journeys. Indeed, it would seem nearly impossible to count or map them all in the correct order. Her proclivity and incessant need to set out on a pilgrimage is one extreme aspect of the devotional tendencies that

⁹³ Taylor, 356.

have been examined earlier in this paper. The frequency and nature of her sojourns corrupts the sacramentality of the act of pilgrimage itself; it becomes more of a career than a spiritual quest. Such can best be seen in the conspicuous manner that Margery travels. Her emotional outbursts, piercing and audible cries, controversial choice in wardrobe as well as her tendency to condemn ecclesiastical authorities appear to extol Margery, as a holy figure on the earthly plane, rather than Christ.

Margery's visions and characterization of Christ or the Godhead are equally problematic. She herself exclaims at their 'domestic' nature. Similar to his role in the Song of Songs, Jesus appears to her as a husband, child or lover. Yet, she takes on every role from wife and mother to housemaid. Her mystical experiences are not only domestic and disconcertingly physical, but also force her to twist the nature of the trinity. At times, she seems to separate Christ from His Father to an almost heretical extent. This unorthodox orientation differs from Rolle and the earlier mystics. While many believed that they clashed with the Church, they never directly opposed or operated outside of the magesterium.

Chapter 1: Blood Imagery and Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*

I. Introduction

The medieval church asserted its power through a system of suppression. Frightening scenes depicting the Last Judgment appeared in books, paintings and on the tympanums of cathedrals. Intentionally graphic, these shocking images quieted heretics and non-believers. In the same way, a focus on original sin and the threat of eternal damnation quickly shamed men and women into stifling their sexual desires for one another. Yet, the ecclesiastical emphasis on repression began to change during the twelfth century.⁹⁴ Works by prominent theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Anselm of Canterbury redrew the boundaries between the sacred and the profane.⁹⁵ These exegetes forced their readers to appreciate the significance of Christ's Incarnation and Passion. While He remained divine, the Christians of the later Middle Ages based much of their spiritual devotion on an intense belief in Jesus' humanity. This was seen as a meaningful connection to a previously abstract and distant God. Flesh joined Christ to man.⁹⁶ It can therefore come as no surprise that the religious scholars of this period used the language of the flesh to describe their relationship with the Divine.⁹⁷ In short, it no longer became productive for the medieval church to suppress the affections of its members. Instead, love and desire became the very vehicles through which believers communed with the Godhead.

Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* must be considered as part of this tradition. His graphic and personal language compels his audience to truly appreciate the Passion by recognizing the gravity of Christ's sacrifice; our salvation came as a result of His physical pain

⁹⁴ Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-century France: Psycho-historical Essays*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 126.

⁹⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52.

⁹⁶ Beckwith, 50.

⁹⁷ Leclercq, , *Monks and Love*, 51.

and agonizing human suffering on the cross. Indeed, to a certain extent, Rolle even expresses gratitude for the Divine approbation of his own text. Still, he does not allow the reader to presume that his words are simply the product of celestial inspiration. Rolle's concentration on Jesus' wounded body creates an extremely visceral relationship between his reader and the sublime. In turn, these macabre images, stirring exhortations and poignant supplications come to define Rolle as both a spiritual authority and accomplished author. He constantly maintains a distinctive textual presence as both the writer of this work and the audience's link to Christ.

Specifically, I find that the pervasive use of blood imagery throughout the both the Longer and Shorter Meditations allows Rolle to establish correspondences with both Christ and his reader. He portrays blood in a variety of ways. The language pushes Rolle's audience to conceive of this substance outside of a Eucharistic context. Blood becomes not only the material of sublime communion, but also an agent of atonement, a reminder of man's culpability for Christ's crucifixion as well as the object of fierce devotion.⁹⁸ Thus, Rolle constructs an association between Christ and the reader on multiple levels. Moreover, these types of visualizations appeal directly to the reader's emotions. This affective parlance allows Rolle as an author to connect with his readers and not only function as an intermediary for the sublime. They are joined not simply through a pedagogical relationship in which Rolle acts as a religious advisor, but also by the fervor of the meditative experience.⁹⁹ In this paper, I intend to examine the blood imagery in the *Meditations* in order to discern exactly how the author's language engenders relationships within the text. I suggest that these bonds form a tripartite union amongst

⁹⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 04 (December 2002): 687-88.

⁹⁹ Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 122-3.

Rolle, his reader and the Divine. This then allows Rolle to position himself in a rather unorthodox position: as a spiritual mediator between his reader and Christ.

Rolle's place as a devotional intermediary is, admittedly, an unusual role for an eremitic author. Despite his lack of holy orders, Rolle seems to have given himself the role of a priest or spiritual confessor. While undeniably problematic for the era, it does not deviate from the coenobitic mystical traditions of the late medieval period. Indeed, this intercessory position separates Rolle from the ecclesiastics, associating him more closely with the monastic and mendicant visionary writers. He distinguishes himself from the magesterium by redefining the basis of pastoral authority.¹⁰⁰ At times, his language resembles liturgical vocabulary. Yet, Rolle's deliberate use of the first person and present tense reminds the reader that the text functions as both a tract of spiritual instruction and an account of Rolle's personal encounter with the Divine. Unlike priests, he does not simply write out of obligation to a congregation or to fulfill the duties of the Church's approbation. Instead, it appears that Rolle intends for his audience to utilize *The Meditations* as a template for their own spiritual enlightenment. By presenting his own experience as an example, Rolle forges a relationship with his reader that would seem unconventional for a priest or confessor. The text becomes imbued with a sense of familiarity and intimacy, a feeling referred to as *amicitia*. It would seem that in Rolle's *Meditations*, pastoral authority is not restricted to ecclesiastical sanction. Rolle derives his authority from the late medieval belief in the power of affective and personal experience as well as from his utilization of the several connotations of love.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, ed. Alastair Minnis, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231.

Here we see how the social environment impacted Rolle's mysticism. Specifically, medieval attitudes towards authorship and its definitions enabled him to use his own encounter with Christ as the basis for *The Meditations*. In a similar way, Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the Song of Songs revolutionized the manner in which the religious and lay communities of the Later Middle Ages thought about love and concupiscence. This, in turn, allowed Rolle to employ the vocabulary of both carnal and spiritual love in his text. However, Bernard was not the only monastic to influence Rolle's *Meditations*. His text demonstrates Rolle's knowledge of and affinity for the writings of the Franciscans, Cistercians and the members of the Abbey of St. Victor. Upon close examination of *The Meditations*, we not only find a resemblance in language, but also discover the preservation of coenobitic ideologies.

This paper will ultimately demonstrate Rolle's adherence to the original form of Christian mysticism as conceived by the monastic and mendicant authors. In order to do so, I will first attempt to contextualize the author within the larger discourse that he himself participated in: the issue of sacerdotal authority. As a spiritual writer and a hermit without any official clerical affiliation, this matter raised multiple inquiries regarding medieval authorship for Rolle. Furthermore, Rolle asserts his own brand of pastoral authority in a way that challenges the teachings of the Church. At the same time, by redefining the role of the priest, Rolle is able to function as one within the text and, to a certain extent, still operate within the doctrinal boundaries of Catholicism. This act of redefining can only be accomplished through the use of mystical philosophies. As opposed to religious lyrics and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, works that will be addressed in later chapters, *The Meditations* exhibits the uncorrupted continuation of monastic and mendicant mystical thought. At first blush, the pervasive use of blood imagery betrays an affinity for devotionism. Yet, upon further examination, it becomes evident that

Rolle's grotesque imagery does not create a reliance on the physical. Instead, it encourages the same contemplative and intellectual practices that his cloistered predecessors had promoted. Moreover, Rolle describes them in a parlance that his audiences, readers that would have been familiar with devotional tendencies, could comprehend; *The Meditations* does not exemplify Rolle's regurgitation of coenobitic notions of mysticism. Rather, this work demonstrates Rolle's intelligence as a scholar of Christian mysticism as well as an author, one who familiarizes himself with the character of his readership.

II. Richard Rolle

Modern scholars do not know many concrete facts regarding the life of Hermit of Hampole. We have much by way of absurd or wild stories, but not many studies have been done successfully on Richard Rolle's biography. The information regarding Rolle's life story comes to us mainly from the his Latin *vita* which forms part the *Officium et Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, a late Fourteenth century text prepared by the nuns of Hampole in anticipation of his canonization.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, because he was never canonized, the work was never circulated. It was, however, reserved for private devotion.¹⁰² It tells us that Rolle was born at Thornton Dale, a location at the edge of the North Yorkshire moors. Under the patronage of Thomas Neville, the younger son of a prominent Northern family, Rolle attended Oxford only to leave university at age eighteen. Upon his flight from university, he returned to his birthplace and consecrated himself a hermit by reclothing himself in a habit fashioned from his sister's donated dresses.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Claire Elizabeth McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*, vol. 4, Studies in Medieval Mysticism (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 2.

¹⁰² Ralph Hanna, "Rolle and Related Works," in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, by A. S. G. Edwards (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 19.

¹⁰³ Hanna, 19-20. This act of reclothing commonly signifies the hermit's transition from the secular realm to his eremitic sphere.

Patronized by the Dalton family of Pickering, Richard Rolle began his life as a local holy man.¹⁰⁴ He soon retired to a cell near the village of Hampole, where he forged a relationship with a nun of the nearby monastic community named Margaret Kirkeby who took her vows in 1343. Rolle acted as her spiritual advisor and subsequently wrote several texts either for her or inspired by her. However, many of Rolle's contemporaries questioned the legitimacy of the relationship between a reclusive male and a female monastic. Indeed, Rolle found it necessary to defend both his friendship with Kirkeby as well as the broader concept of spiritual friendship, or *amicitia* in a number of his works.¹⁰⁵ The theme of *amicitia*, as will be discussed later in this chapter, can even be seen in *The Meditations*.

Richard Rolle wrote the *Meditations* in Middle English, the vernacular tongue of his audience. This could be considered a significant departure from both the traditions of the religious canon and his own works. Although Rolle wrote in both English and Latin, the majority of his works were composed in the ecclesiastical tongue.¹⁰⁶ Yet, modern scholarship recognizes him as the most popular English spiritual writer of the late medieval period.¹⁰⁷ Over five hundred of his manuscripts remain in existence, fifty of which include his English writings. Such an impressive number of written and published works renders him a more widely disseminated author than Geoffrey Chaucer.¹⁰⁸

III. Rolle in the context of the magesterium

The medieval church placed many restrictions on the laity's access to the Eucharist. As a result of these regulations, ordinary people attempted to find ways to circumvent sacerdotal

¹⁰⁴ Hanna, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Watson, 224-5.

¹⁰⁶ McIlroy, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Hanna, 19.

¹⁰⁸ McIlroy, 1.

power.¹⁰⁹ Mystical visions became an alternative method of asserting spiritual authority.¹¹⁰ In the *Meditations*, Rolle achieves a visionary experience through the ecclesiastical practice of contemplation. His language often recalls Eucharistic themes; Rolle juxtaposes references to ocular communion with his ubiquitous use of blood imagery. This, in turn, reverses the symbolic significance of the body and the blood of Christ. Close to the beginning of the *Shorter Meditation*, he protests:

I will not turn my gaze upward to see that splendid spectacle, the vision of your wounds, because, glorious lord, I am guilty in many ways and am the perpetrator of them, and someone unworthy to look at that sight... I refuse to get up or move away in any direction until I am completely reddened with your precious blood, until I am marked with it as one of your own, and my soul is softened in that sweet bath.¹¹¹

In the passage, Rolle associates sight and Christ's body. He declares that he "will not turn [his] gaze upward to see that splendid spectacle." The words "gaze" and "spectacle" have obvious connections to visual perception. Yet, Rolle's language invokes more than the potency of vision. Rather than describing Jesus' body, he replaces any mention of it with 'spectacle' in the first line and 'sight' in the fourth. This substitution transforms our understanding of Christ's body. That is to say, he is no longer a man, divine or human, nor is he our savior. Furthermore, drawing connections between vision and Jesus' corpse, Rolle forces his reader to consider Christ's form in an entirely different light.

¹⁰⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 5.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 01 (January 2005): 5.

¹¹¹ Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," in *Richard Rolle, the English Writings*, ed. and translated by Rosamund Allen, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 103.

By drawing connections between vision and the holy corpse, Rolle forces his reader to consider Christ's body within a Eucharistic context. In fact, the act of spiritual communion required only that the meditator gaze upon the wafer, the earthly embodiment of His flesh. Hence, Rolle's allusions to Jesus' body become imbued with a sacramental connotation. This "sight" we are observing is the physical host of the Eucharist while the "splendid spectacle" becomes the ritual of ocular communion. However, by refusing to look at Christ's form, Rolle also refuses to partake of the host. By this time, ocular communion had become the only means by which the laity could receive the Eucharist on a regular basis. The Church and her followers considered communion to be the most accessible channel through which to elevate a Christian's life. He therefore rejects the single legitimate medium for receiving God's grace.¹¹² Furthermore, Rolle does this fully cognizant of his inherently sinful nature. He calls himself the "perpetrator" of Jesus' wounds because he is "guilty in many ways." Communion, according to late medieval doctrine, functioned as a rite of atonement as well one of remembrance.¹¹³ We can therefore see that Rolle also jeopardizes his spiritual salvation by refusing to gaze at Jesus' body and thus declining the host.

In this way, Jesus' body can be viewed as a mechanism of separation. Fourteenth-century Christians apprehended His flesh through the binary of open and closed. His wounds, with their entrances and exits from the flesh, produced this dichotomy.¹¹⁴ The *Corpus Christi* took on

¹¹² Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70.

¹¹³ Rubin, 22.

¹¹⁴ Beckwith, 42-3.

²² Beckwith, 42.

²³ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 11.

connotations of inclusion and community.¹¹⁵ Unlike the blood, represented by the sacramental wine, the host did not offer redemption by separating itself from Jesus' body. Instead, it derived its power from its intrinsic connection to Christ's crucified form.¹¹⁶ Upon closer examination of the excerpt, Rolle appears to have reversed the symbolic significance of the Eucharistic species. His syntax creates a contrast between the 'splendid spectacle' of Jesus corpse, who he refers to as the 'glorious Lord', and Rolle as the meditator or the 'guilty...perpetrator' who is 'unworthy' to even see the magnificence of Christ's divinity. Rolle's comparison, due in part to the emphasis on the author's culpability for the Crucifixion, reminds readers that Jesus' flesh, although human, is the only flesh free from original sin. His humanity no longer links mankind to the Divine; Christ's sinless body becomes yet another distinction between God and man. I would argue that Rolle's refusal to gaze at the Lord suggests more than a rejection of ocular communion. This deeper implication rests on the belief in the power of vision. The faculty of sight provided more than the ability to see physical objects. Augustine proposed that it encompassed physical, mental and spiritual sensation. This meant that in the medieval psyche, visual perception also afforded individuals the opportunity to have a spiritual encounter.¹¹⁷ By denying himself the sight of Christ's crucified form, Rolle ensures that the body cannot act as the means of attaining a mystical experience with the Divine. Both the author and his readers must then turn to another, less acceptable, channel to commune with the Lord.

In order to achieve this, the author's use of blood imagery must establish a clear distinction between the metaphorical implications of Christ's body and blood. This contrast had

²⁴ Augustine, "Book Twelve" in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond. Taylor, vol. 42, Ancient Christian Writers (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1982), 185-6.

not emerged until the Fourteenth century and contributed to the phenomenon of blood piety.¹¹⁸ Rolle's language demonstrates the unifying function of Christ's blood. It replaces the body as a mechanism of communing with the Divine by providing Rolle with both atonement and a sense of connection to Christ. Yet, in the late medieval ethos, the holy blood did not connote unification. Quite the opposite, it meant separation. As he did with Christ's body, Rolle reverses the symbolic meaning of His blood.¹¹⁹ This can be demonstrated more clearly in the text. The speaker first expresses the yearning to be 'completely reddened' by Christ's blood "until [he is] marked with it as one of [His] own." The author's soul will not be softened until it has bathed in this sacred substance. I believe that this selection creates a baptismal image, albeit one that replaces the holy water with the holy blood. The word 'bath' and the mental picture created by the phrase 'completely reddened' generates associations between blood and baptism. To the fourteenth-century reader, this connection would not appear arbitrary.

Blood and water, the integral fluid of baptism, shared a special significance in Christian doctrine. Both poured out of the Jesus' side wound during the Crucifixion.¹²⁰ Hence, the two came to represent cleansing at times of rebirth.¹²¹ Christ's death on the cross led to his Resurrection; his demise allowed him to be reborn as our divine savior. In the same way, baptism denotes a Christian's rebirth as a child of God and member of His Church. Rolle's use of blood imagery in a baptismal metaphor therefore draws on the parallels between blood and water as

¹¹⁸ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 04 (December 2002): 691.

²⁷ John 19:34.

²⁸ Marlene V. Hennessy, "Aspects of Blood Piety in a Late-Medieval English Manuscript: London, British Library MS Additional 37049," in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 188.

holy substances and the Crucifixion and baptism as moments of resurrection. What is more, by christening himself in blood, Rolle becomes a part of a larger community; the blood marks him as one of Jesus' own. In this way, it brings him together with the Divine. The holy blood, rather than the body acts as a vehicle of mystical communion by cleansing Rolle, or the meditator, of his sins. By drinking Christ's blood and rejecting ocular communion he becomes free from the iniquities of the flesh. Rolle can now look upon His crucified form. The powers of sight will then facilitate this spiritual encounter with the Lord.

To review the argument thus far, a careful reading of this passage from the *Meditations* supports the conclusion that Rolle's use of blood imagery contradicts popular late-medieval notions of Eucharistic devotion. Since he refuses to look at Christ's body, Rolle declines the opportunity to participate in ocular communion. Moreover, his language indicates that Jesus' flesh, previously a symbol of inclusion, now functions as a barrier between Rolle and the Divine. The holy blood may then act as the mechanism of spiritual communion. By creating a baptismal image in which blood replaces the blessed water, he demonstrates the purifying effects of blood. It is only after this act of cleansing that Rolle as the meditator is able to become closer with the Godhead and have a mystical experience.

Yet, when analyzing the summary of this argument, it seems impossible to reconcile his conception of the meanings of the Eucharistic elements and those of the medieval Church. This forces us to question exactly what entitles Rolle to make such an obvious and substantial deviation from the accepted theology concerning this sacrament. Some mystics, such as Marguerite Porete, did indeed view themselves as *extra ecclesiam* to a certain extent.¹²² Considering the small number of individuals who did challenge the institutional Church, the

¹²² Richard Kieckhefer, "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 35.

concept of the heretical mystic must be seen as the exception rather than the rule.¹²³ Although Rolle's writing does express a conviction contrary to the orthodox stance on the reception of the Eucharist, I do not believe that this places him immediately with those mystics who function entirely outside of the magesterium. Rolle's work articulates a more nuanced characterization of late medieval religiosity. His entire body of work, not only the *Meditations on the Passion*, raises Rolle from the position of spiritual advisor and promotes him to that of a priest. This empowerment appears to be predicated on the reader's belief that the author's lifestyle warrants emulation.¹²⁴ Specifically, the language of the *Meditations* as well as the body of Rolle's work promotes the superiority of the eremitic lifestyle.

During the late medieval period, theologians had begun to engage in a debate about the highest form of life. Disagreements arose between two main schools of thought: those who favored the contemplative life and those who advocated the active life. Having renounced the world in his late teens, Rolle clearly supported the contemplative life. Furthermore, he viewed the solitary life as the highest and most perfect form of the contemplative lifestyle.¹²⁵ As his writings profess, he perceived himself following the footsteps of Christ's apostles. In the *Meditations*, Rolle makes several allusions to John the Evangelist. In one example, he writes,

...Virgin and mother, you were really
dismayed when Christ said goodbye to
you and handed you into Saint John's

¹²³ Kieckhefer argues that those mystics or visionaries who did clash with the magesterium did so not because of the actual visions they had, but because they claimed they received these revelations in a private context rather than as a result of divine inspiration. Thus, they were engaging in theological speculation without the approval or cooperation of a spiritual authority; *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Lisa Manter, "Rolle Playing: and the Word Became Flesh," in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren, First ed., The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 16.

³² Watson, 8-11.

care; that grief could have killed you at that parting...O sweet lady, why could I have not been beside you, hearing what you were hearing, seeing that scene, right beside you, raking my share of that tremendous grief, perhaps being able to alleviate that misery? After all, people say it is a consolation to have a companion in trouble.¹²⁶

The first portion of the excerpt emphasizes the grief of the Virgin at her separation from Christ. Rolle recognizes her dismay and John's inadequacy as a substitute when being compared to the Son of Man. He says that her 'grief could have killed' her 'at that parting.' Moreover, he appears to be emphasizing her role as Jesus' parent in his manner of address. That is to say, he not only acknowledges the miraculous nature of her holiness by calling her 'Virgin', but also seems to appreciate the serious nature of her suffering by addressing her as 'Mother.' Mary's role as Christ's mother serves two purposes: a reminder of the extreme nature of her grief and as a testament to His humanity. That is to say, even Christ had a mother. Yet, in a rather heterodox fashion, the second half of the quotation looks to be devoted to Rolle asking to step in as Christ's replacement, or rather, as John's replacement. Thus, the speaker appears to both identify with John and see himself as more suitable substitute for Jesus. He believes that he could act as a better companion than the beloved apostle. To a certain extent, Rolle relates to him. As one of Christ's followers, John personified the apostolic tradition. Priests aligned themselves with the apostolic tradition through the liturgical practices of the medieval Church; their authority comes *ex officio*. Yet, by identifying with John, both an apostle and the chosen companion for Christ's mother, Rolle can claim authority *ex beneficio*. Furthermore, I propose that due to Rolle's affinity for Bernardine thought we must not only see the Virgin as Christ's mother, but also as *Ecclesia*. Therefore, by passing Mary-*Ecclesia* to the author as to the embodiment of an apostle

¹²⁶ Rolle, 120-1.

figure, Rolle can justify his divine investiture of authority. This spiritual appointment was the only way in which Rolle could justify preaching within the Church.

At the same time, the author makes use of Marian imagery in a different way: to bolster church doctrine. In this way, he can become a priestly figure and become invested with temporal as well as spiritual authority. By the Fourteenth century, the time when this text was written, theologians came to an accepted conclusion that the contemplative way of life was better than the active life.¹²⁷ Yet, other models existed that synthesized the two lifestyles. Preaching, in particular, became an integral part of the contemplative life. Therefore, Rolle found it necessary to preach in order to become a spiritual authority.¹²⁸ Drawing mostly from Bernard of Clairvaux, Rolle's utilization of Marian devotion supports orthodoxy and eliminates doctrinal problems of disbelief.¹²⁹ Contrary to the Church of the Early Middle Ages, Bernard chose to focus on the Virgin's role in the Salvation of humanity, rather than on¹³⁰ her privileges as Christ's mother. He therefore cast her in the role of *Ecclesia*, the material home of the body and blood of Christ. By extension, this meant that she contained Jesus' flesh in the same way that she carried Christ in her womb.¹³¹ In this capacity, she became especially important to the Eucharist. In the *Meditations*, Rolle emphasizes Mary's importance to the Eucharist and to Church doctrine by asking her to intercede on his behalf. Marian intercession had been a long-standing tradition in the Catholic faith.¹³² These miracles usually demonstrated Christian orthodoxy and an adherence

¹²⁷ Watson, 10.

¹²⁸ Watson, 17.

¹²⁹ Wendy L. Anderson, "The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France," *Church History* 75, no. 4 (December 2006): 748

¹³⁰ Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, trans. Claire Lavoie, vol. 16, Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 86.

¹³¹ Indeed, Northern Medieval art from the European continent often portrays Mary as a tabernacle or in a way that compares her to the altar.

¹³² Anderson, 749.

to the preachings of the Church. This type of devotion often reconciled controversies regarding the Host and the Passion. Consistent with Bernardine tradition, Rolle uses the courtly imagery to show deference to the Virgin when appealing to her. He begs,

"I'm not asking for castles nor towns, dear lady, or for any other worldly wealth, nor for the sun, nor the moon, nor any of the cosmic bodies, nor for any object; but it's wounds I yearn for, wounds of deep remorse, of anguish and sympathy for my sweet lord Jesu's suffering."¹³³

The visualizations of castles and towns recall chivalric scenes from the romances of the Twelfth century that authors such as Bernard would have been familiar with, due to geography.¹³⁴ In the same vein, Rolle frames his petition in the same form as a love plea. That is to say, he places himself in a subservient position while elevating the lady, or *domna*, to a dominant position. His diction emphasizes how earnestly he wants to atone for his sins: he 'yearns' for these wounds. Moreover, he does not ask for much: he is not appealing to his 'dear lady' for 'any other worldly wealth...nor for any object'. He only asks for the ability to perform penance through identification with Christ's suffering, an act that can be equated with taking the Eucharistic wafer and drinking the sacramental wine. Specifically, he asks the Virgin for her Son's wounds. This affirms the significance of holy blood as a mechanism for divine communion over the body, a concept of Rolle's own invention. Therefore, while Mary stresses the importance of the Eucharist, she serves the dual purpose of establishing the author's philosophical supremacy over the Church.

Through his extolling of the eremitic lifestyle and employment of Marian imagery, Rolle becomes both a spiritual advisor and priestly figure. He can claim both temporal and divine authority by operating within the regulations of the Catholic Church. Although his writings

¹³³ Rolle, 97.

¹³⁴ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 99.

sometimes express views that could be considered heterodox, this simply places him in a discourse with the ecclesiastical body. Rolle's writings demonstrate a sophisticated adherence to monastic traditions that allows him to explore the world of mysticism. Invested with both types of authority, he can guide his audience in their journey in both the earthly and celestial realms.

IV. Rolle's Relationship with his Audience

Rolle decided to compose *The Meditations* in the English vernacular. His previous works, such as *Ego Dormio* and *Melos Amoris*, had been written in Latin and had therefore appealed to an audience consisting mainly of priests and clerics.¹³⁵ A vernacular text expanded Rolle's readership to the educated laity as well as clergymen.¹³⁶ *The Meditations* functions as a testament to Rolle's awareness of the deeper meaning behind Middle English for the lay reader. Specifically, the English vernacular lends the text a sense of immediacy. While Rolle deliberately makes use of the monastic and mendicant traditions, the meditator is constantly reminded that *The Meditations* is a work recounting Rolle's personal experience, written in the author's own tongue, a language also spoken by the reader. Thus we see that the vernacular has two functions: as a reminder of the authority of personal experience and as a link between the author and his reader.¹³⁷

Many scholars believe that Rolle intended his *Meditations on the Passion* to be read by his disciple, Margaret Kirkeby. At the very least, several academics believe that the *Meditations*, if not meant for Kirkeby, was written with a feminine audience in mind. However, I believe that

¹³⁵ Denis Renevey, *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 68.

¹³⁶ Renevey, 68.

¹³⁷ Watson, 22.

the language and imagery that the author uses is meant to include both sexes. Furthermore, I suggest that Rolle wished to involve both men and women on an equal intellectual level.

Despite having been entrusted with this degree of power, Richard Rolle does not create a pedagogical relationship with his readers. Unlike most spiritual writers of the time period, Rolle did not write his *Meditations* in Latin, nor did he use a direct address. This solidifies my assertion that the author intended to speak to equals. It creates the illusion that he is sharing his experience of Christ's Passion with the audience rather than recounting it to a listener. This intimate tone originates from the monastic concept of *amicitia* or spiritual friendship. Indeed, by using a more familiar voice, Rolle generates a more sensual relationship with the reader that inherently demonstrates a certain equality within love.¹³⁸ He addresses the reader's ascent to the unitive state by means of his own experience with the sublime. Hence, this communion becomes both a union with Christ and a union with Rolle himself. Rolle guides his readers in this manner:

I can see in my mind how pitifully you walk: your body is so bloody, so beaten raw and blistered, your crown is so sharp, pressing on our head; your hair moves in the wind, matted with the blood; your lovely face, so pallid and so swollen with punching and hitting, with spiting, with squirting, the blood gushed out as a result, which makes me shudder to look at it; so ugly and so loathsome have the Jews made you that you are more like a leper than a healthy man. Your cross is so heavy, so high and so rigid, and they have hung it on Your bare back, lashed so tightly.¹³⁹

I wish to treat this excerpt as the fusion of Rolle's visionary experience as the speaker with his reader's mystical encounter with the Divine. Rolle's account of own mystical communion lies within the text. His use of the first person and present tense allows him to break down the temporal boundary. That is to say, by beginning with "I can see," rather than with, "I saw," Rolle encourages an immediate visionary experience of the Passion event by his audience.

¹³⁸ Watson, 223-4.

¹³⁹ Rolle, 95.

Similarly, because Christ's body "is so bloody" and his "hair moves" rather than "was so bloody" and "moved", the meditator can coexist with Jesus. His or her understanding of the biblical scene becomes heightened by their imagined physical perception. In this way, Rolle integrates his reader's communion with the Divine with the description of his own. He reinforces their involvement with an emotional appeal. The simple, declarative statements at the end of the excerpt enable the reader to identify with Christ at a significant moment of His suffering. Rolle writes: "Your cross is so heavy" and "They have hung it on your bare back." Indeed, it is as if the contemplative helps Jesus to carry His cross by feeling the weight of the wood on their own in their minds.¹⁴⁰

Rolle also uses Marian imagery to guide the mediation of his audience. By including allusions to the Virgin, the participant, male or female, may participate fully in the apostolic life. Moreover, because of her role as the mother of Christ, this facilitates a close identification with the Passion. His employment of Marian devotion was inspired chiefly by the Twelfth century commentary of the Song of Songs. In asking the reader to identify with Mary, he not only utilized maternal imagery, but also cast his audience in the role of the bride of Christ. Furthermore, Mary repeats her role as *Ecclesia* and as an inclusive corporate figure, thus allowing the author to appeal to both men and women. She therefore transforms from the familiar symbol of *Ecclesia* to the embodiment of the exemplary utterance of the devout and a model for mystical meditations. Within the context of the Song of Songs, she encapsulates the appropriate form of love and longing for Christ. In the *Meditations*, Rolle clearly wishes his audience to imitate Mary's actions:

O sweet Jesu, then your mother was completely wretched;

¹⁴⁰ William F. Hodapp, "Richard Rolle's Passion Meditations in the Context of His English Epistles: Imitatio Christi," *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (September 1994): 97.

she stared now at your head and at the crown, now at your face, now at your hands with the nails, now at the wide gash in your side; now at your feet nailed to the cross, now at your flogged trunk, at every place she found a fresh (cause for) lamenting; she cried, she twisted her fingers, she sighed, she sobbed—now she collapses.¹⁴¹

This type of listing not only exemplifies the style of the late medieval monastic writers, but also is also demonstrative of a methodical and thoughtful meditation that could provoke a visionary experience. By describing the way in which Christ's mother stares at the suffering of her son, Rolle subtly instructs his reader with a suggestion of an image to create in their own minds. He begins at Christ's head, dwells at his face, and moves down his hands, then his side, feet and trunk. Rolle's writing mimics the thoughtful and tortured contemplation of a mother's grief. By using the point of view of the Virgin, he maintains the familiar tone of *amicitia* while heightening the emotional quality of his text. Through the author's rhetoric, Mary functions as a model for his audience; they are meant to experience the Passion as she does. Yet, they are still reading his account of her lament. He penned this sorrowful narrative and remains ever-present throughout the text. Thus, although the Virgin serves as a paragon of suffering and contemplation, it is Rolle who acts as the intermediary for his reader in the process of divine communion.

V. Rolle in the context of the coenobitic tradition

Richard Rolle appeared to be familiar with the works of the Franciscans, the Cistercians and the members of the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris. Indeed, many referred to him as the English Bonaventure. However, he did not fully agree with the manner in which one house elucidated divine communion. In this section, I argue that Rolle uses the language of these three monastic

¹⁴¹ Rolle, 124.

traditions in order to explain his own method of spiritual ascent. Most importantly, unlike other spiritual authors that will be discussed at a later point in this project, Rolle's writing fosters an intellectual as well as physical relationship with the Divine. The ability to guide his readers to this higher unitive state, a contrast to the lower union of sensual soul achieved by devotional writings and rituals, demonstrates Rolle's adherence to the coenobitic mystical conventions. At the same time, the tone and style of *The Meditations* does not wholly resemble the tracts by monastic authors such as Aelred of Rievaulx and William of St.-Thierry. It may appear more similar to the affective devotional writings of the thirteenth century. The pervasive allusions to and images of blood inject an unmistakable element of the physical into the text. Yet, this carnal aspect does not corrupt the meditator's spiritual ascent because it does not detract from the original doctrines of the Franciscans, Victorines and Cistercians. Instead, I argue that Rolle incorporates devotional components in order to communicate to a larger audience.

Devotional cults venerating Christ's blood emerged in England during the thirteenth century.¹⁴² While fascination with the holy blood spread all over continental Europe during the later Middle Ages blood piety did not reach the nearly idolatrous extremes that it did in England.¹⁴³ To a certain extent, Rolle's blood imagery may be drawing from England's historical obsession with Christ's blood. He nevertheless employs a coenobitic vocabulary to reference this sacred substance. For this reason, I believe that Rolle's utilization of blood imagery best exemplifies vernacular religiosity.

Rolle used Bonaventure's *Vitis Mystica* as a model for his *Meditations*. Throughout the text, the influence of the Seraphic Doctor's work as well as those of the Franciscans in general becomes apparent in the symbolic descriptions of Christ's blood. Particularly, both Rolle and his

¹⁴² Rubin, 314.

¹⁴³ Rubin, 314.

saintly predecessor linked thirst to blood, primarily by its Eucharistic connotations. By the fourteenth century, the sacramental implications of blood imagery had been well established.¹⁴⁴ Medieval devotional literature often likens the daily of drinking wine, and thereby quenching thirst, to consuming the holy blood during Communion.¹⁴⁵ By partaking in the Eucharistic species, the individual not only satisfied his thirst with an earthly substance but also relieved his eternal suffering by working to ensure his salvation.¹⁴⁶ The language of *The Meditations* as well as the *Vitis Mystica* draws from this association, but also presents a deeper figurative significance. Rolle reminds the meditator,

But, sweet Jesu, your thirst was of several kinds:
in your body because of pain, from sins of those
who were putting you to death, and you were
thirsting for the release of the souls in hell who
throughout their lives in the world had kept
your laws.¹⁴⁷

As the author, Rolle represents thirst in several ways within this passage. He first describes bodily thirst, forcing the reader to recall Christ's human condition. Rolle's immediate concentration on His humanity displays his familiarity for with the writings of the Franciscans, as well as with the works by Bonaventure. The Minorites, more so than the Cistercians or the Victorines, emphasized the Christ's humanity. He then attributes Christ's thirst to the dissolution of mankind, recalling an earlier passage: "O sweet Jesu, they gave you poison to quench your thirst with, and you gave them your heart's blood to assuage their sins and to heal their souls."¹⁴⁸ Man's culpability for the Crucifixion was a prevalent theme in both Rolle's works and Franciscan

¹⁴⁴ Bynum, "Blood of Christ", 686.

¹⁴⁵ Bynum, "Blood of Christ", 686.

¹⁴⁶ Rubin, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Rolle, 121.

¹⁴⁸ Rolle, 121.

writings. He ends by likening thirst to Christ's longing for our salvation: "thirsting for the release of the souls in hell." This final representation of thirst reminds the reader of His divinity, Christ's ability to redeem humanity through the sacrifice of His life and the miracle of His Resurrection. By describing both aspects of Jesus' nature, His divine and mortal halves, Rolle exhibits yet a deeper affinity for Franciscan thought. The Friars did indeed concentrate on Christ's humanity in order to allow their followers to find a heavenly figure more accessible. At the same time, their fascination with His mortal quality generated another interest in Jesus' hybridity. They preached the miracle of Christ's dual divine and human nature. Thus, Rolle's decision to illustrate thirst as a physical function and later as an expression of His love emphasizes this duality.

A century before Rolle, Bonaventure expressed similar ideas. The thirteenth-century *Vitis Mystica* came about as a result of St. Francis' stigmatization on Mount Alverno in 1224.¹⁴⁹ The Minorites felt compelled to circulate word of their founders' experience and instructional devotional tracts to both a clerical and lay audience.¹⁵⁰ As a Latin work, the *Vitis Mystica* appears to be aimed primarily at cenobites or ecclesiastics. Rolle's *Meditations* made the same messages available to the ordinary reader. Their symbolic use of thirst, although a century apart, show a number of striking similitudes. Bonaventure informs his audience,

"...the word 'I *thirst*' seems to have an additional meaning. It appears that, in so speaking, Jesus wanted to express the immensity of His love, for a thirsty man craves for drink much more desperately than a hungry man craves for food."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400-1400*, ed. Robert Baldock, Yale Intellectual History of the West (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 237.

¹⁵⁰ Colish, 237.

¹⁵¹ Bonaventure, "The Mystical Vine," in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, ed. Jose De Vinck, vol. I: The Mystical Vine (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), 179.

Like Rolle, the Seraphic Doctor writes about the physical sensation of thirst: "a thirsty man craves more drink much more desperately than a hungry man craves for food." Nevertheless, Bonaventure wants his reader to acknowledge the further significance of this yearning. He defines this figurative meaning in the same way as the Hermit of Hampole: as the embodiment of Christ's love for mankind. The Cardinal writes, "It appears that, in so speaking, Jesus wanted to express the immensity of His love." Both authors do not depict man in a state of dehydration. Instead, Rolle and Bonaventure's texts both contain images of Christ's suffering because of thirst. Their writing forces the reader to understand that this craving is not merely the result of a physical deficiency. He not only desires water, but for our deliverance as well. Indeed, Bonaventure clearly states, "...He thirsted for our salvation."¹⁵²

Interestingly enough, Bonaventure and Rolle alike focus their attention on the holy blood, rather than Christ's flesh, as the main substance of salvation. As I have already addressed, this concentration deviates from the ecclesiastical conventions of the time period. In the aforementioned excerpt, the Seraphic Doctor compares thirst to hunger: "for a thirsty man craves for drink much more desperately than a hungry man craves for food." Images associated with nourishment or consumption, at least within the context of medieval devotional literature, often corresponded to the Eucharistic wafer and sacramental wine.¹⁵³ By asserting a man's anguish for drink over food, Bonaventure appears to be declaring the merits of drink over food. In the eyes of a medieval reader, this signified the superiority of the holy wine over the Eucharistic wafer. That is to say, in the same way that Rolle rejected the flesh in favor of Christ's blood as the mechanism for divine communion, Bonaventure claims that Christ's love is best embodied in his bloodshed rather than in the sacrifice of his flesh alone.

¹⁵² Bonaventure, 179.

¹⁵³ Bynum, "Holy Blood", 686.

The blood allows us to not only commune with the Divine, but also become a part of Him through our salvation. In this way, Christ fulfills his role as the *Imago Dei*. That is to say, he restores the soul to the flesh and allows man to soul to once again become a mirror for God.¹⁵⁴

Rolle had most likely encountered Victorine ideology while attending Oxford.¹⁵⁵ The Victorines' differentiation amongst the cerebral processes of meditating, contemplating and thinking appeared to be based on degrees of sensory perception. Specifically, individuals reached the first level of understanding only through a physical comprehension of Christ. Without this, there could be no spiritual ascent. This reasoning is echoed in Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* when he writes,

O lord, I can see your red blood coursing down your cheeks, torrents after each blow, down front and back. Your crown has torn to pieces the skin on your head, every thorn in it penetrates your skull. I cannot bear to have it live and watch my gracious lord, so ailing and so submissive...I wish these would bring my death.¹⁵⁶

Once, again, Rolle encourages us to engage in an immediate and visionary experience of the Passion by using the present tense and first person. By creating a series of intensely visual and grisly images, Rolle transports his meditator from the Middle Ages to the biblical age. The reader no longer passively studies a manuscript page. Like the speaker, he or she witnesses or even participates in Christ's final hours. Rolle, as the textual speaker, announces that he can see Jesus' blood "coursing down [His] cheeks." He observes each thorn as it "penetrates [His] skull."

¹⁵⁴ Beckwith, 48.

¹⁵⁵ William F. Pollard, "Richard Rolle and the Eye of the Heart," in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 92.

¹⁵⁶ Rolle, 95.

Rolle thus not only encourages his meditator to assume a position close to the cross as Aelred had encouraged his sister to do in the twelfth century; his reader takes the place closest to Christ.

Most importantly, if interpreted using Victorine philosophy, I believe that the immediacy of Rolle's language becomes imbued with a deeper significance. In a similar way to the Franciscans, the Victorines paid increasing attention to the physical details of Christ's death.¹⁵⁷ These specifics urged the reader to empathize with the Savior and prompted a comparable feeling of suffering. Rolle's speaker conveys a similar feeling with, "I wish these would bring about my death." Like the members of the Abbey of St. Victor, the carnal, rather than spiritual, elements of Christ's death produced the speaker's desire to relate with Him, the need to die as Jesus did. This sentiment facilitated man's spiritual enlightenment and salvation.¹⁵⁸

According to Hugh of St. Victor, these somatic descriptions of the Passion can aid a readers' spiritual ascent only if they stimulate every order of vision.¹⁵⁹ In the lowest order, the meditator can only deduce the sites of the physical world. He does not use reason or contemplation to judge what he sees. The meditator only witnesses images, he does not create them.¹⁶⁰ However, in the highest order, reason must be used to generate an image. This brand of vision, similar to the one described by Augustine, forces the reader to engage his intellect and imagination. Using the sites and sensations of the physical world, he constructs a visualization in his mind.¹⁶¹ The higher order of vision, exclusively, can bring about divine communion. At first blush, this passage relies on the lowest order of vision. Rolle's language seems to betray a dependence on the physical senses and the exterior world. The speaker only relays what he

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Nolan, "The Vita Nuova and Richard of St. Victor's Phenomenology of Vision," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 92 (1974): 41.

¹⁵⁸ Nolan, 40-1.

¹⁵⁹ Nolan, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Nolan, 37.

¹⁶¹ Nolan, 37-8.

witnesses and therefore fails to produce an image from contemplation. Yet, we must recall that this experience stemmed from a meditative exercise; *The Meditations* is an account of Rolle's visionary experience, not a chronicle of an actual event. Furthermore, it also acts as a devotional guide for other readers. In this way, Rolle's repeated allusions to bodily and physical details compel his meditator to engage reason to construct a personal visualization.

Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian elucidation of monastic love became an integral part to Rolle's understanding of religious devotion.¹⁶² According to Bernardine piety, it is not enough to simply identify with Christ. Love becomes necessary in order to not compound the fragmentation that came as a result of the soul's separation from the human body.¹⁶³ Viewing Jesus as a man produces this a relationship that not only emphasizes Christ's humanity, but also encourages the meditator to experience His mortal nature in different ways. By focusing on scenes of Jesus' Passion and Crucifixion, Bernard encouraged his followers to connect with Christ as His lover, sibling or parent. By reminding the meditator of Christ's humanity and vulnerability, he or she gains a deeper understanding of His experience and sacrifice. In Rolle's *Meditations*, he employs extremely graphic imagery and diction in order to allow the reader to recognize Christ's humanity.

You are hanging entirely naked, your skin all torn to shreds, every limb wrenched from the others by cords, crowned with thorns, wounds gaping, countless and ghastly. Your mother's grief was more agonizing to you than all your [physical] anguish. See now...the perdition of the souls of the men who were tormenting you so cruelly. Sweet Jesu, your great mercy, your boundless love and compassion, these no one can possibly reckon or even imagine, seeing you suffered so terribly for those who were your enemies.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Pollard, 96.

¹⁶³ Beckwith, 51.

¹⁶⁴ Rolle, 122.

In a stark contrast to the writings of the early medieval exegetes, Rolle chooses to emphasize Christ's weakness in this passage. Rolle's language appears to accent the passivity of Christ's body His skin is "torn to shreds", his limbs are "wrenched from the others by chords," and, as a token of humiliation, a crown of thorns lies atop his head. Such a description reminds us of the suffering that Christ endured for our sake. He did not act out against his tormenters, he merely received their blows and repeated mutilations. This is the type of anguish that Rolle wishes his readers to experience. He first appeals to their empathy by mentioning the Virgin as Christ's mother: "Your mother's grief was more agonizing to you than all your [physical] anguish." The allusion to Mary was a popular trope in Bernard's writings.¹⁶⁵ Rolle's emphasis on her maternal role highlights Christ's humanity as well as his own grief and filial relationship. The final section extols His love for humanity: "your boundless love and compassion, these no one can possibly reckon or imagine, seeing you suffered so terribly for those who were your enemies." Love, rather than Christ's anguish, brought about our salvation. This sentiment conforms to the Bernardine mindset.

VI. Conclusion

In his *Meditations on the Passion*, Richard Rolle creates a series of relationships that allow him to become an intermediary between the contemplator and Christ. At this time, this intercessory position would have been considered a rather unorthodox position for an unordained individual. Yet, as Rolle proves throughout the text, his place in this tripartite correspondence is not unwarranted. Through three intratextual relationships, the author places himself between his reader and the Divine. Rolle forges associations with the Church, his audience and finally, with Christ himself. In turn, he aids his audience in the process of spiritual meditation and elevation.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, 86.

Blood imagery directs their religious contemplation and forces them to focus on the deeper implications of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion. It serves as a reminder of His Incarnation, recalls the significance of the Eucharist, and also as a reminder of humanity's culpability for His suffering. Blood allows Richard Rolle to break down the spatial and temporal barriers of the biblical text. Thus allowing the reader, Christ, Mary and the apostles to coexist and experience Jesus' agony together.

The language of the *Meditations* forces the audience to acknowledge the superiority of the eremitic lifestyle. Rolle stresses the primacy of his way of life by rejecting the ceremonies and rituals of the church and replacing them with his own. By encouraging his audience to emulate his lifestyle, Rolle demonstrates claiming authority *ex beneficio*. He can be likened to the ideal hermit: John the Baptist. At the same time, he does not operate outside of the magisterium. Instead, this places him in a discursive relationship with the Church. Indeed, the argument regarding the merits of each lifestyle had been a popular one in both the early and late medieval period and Rolle's contribution had been a popular point of view. Furthermore, his use of Marian imagery, although seemingly heterodox at first blush, does in fact bolster Church doctrine. In this way, Rolle becomes a priestly figure and can thus claim both temporal authority from the church, *ex officio* and spiritual authority from the heavens, *ex beneficio*.

Despite having been invested with both types of authority, Rolle does not assert a purely pedagogical tone within the text. Instead, he becomes more of spiritual advisor and familiar to his readers. He utilizes the monastic notion of *amicitia*. Rolle's use of the vernacular, coupled with his employment of the implied reader creates an intimate tone throughout the entire work. Thus, regardless of the sex of the reader, Rolle addresses him or her as an equal; he shares every step of his experience of Christ's Passion with his audience. Interestingly enough, Rolle's

inclusion of Marian imagery does not only appeal to a feminine meditator. The commentary pertaining to the Song of Songs cast the Virgin in the role of *Ecclesia*. In this corporate personality, she became venerated as an inclusive figure who embodied the Church and its members. Mary's power transcended both gender and class. Thus, as demonstrated by both Rolle and Bernard of Clairvaux, she acted as a meditative guide for both men and women.

Lastly, Rolle develops a relationship with Christ within the text by using the language of three monastic traditions. He applies ideas of Franciscan devotion and recalls the language of Bonaventure's *Vitis Mystica* when writing about the religious significance of thirst. Moreover, he produces an association between enlightenment and the senses by incorporating Victorine philosophies. Through a dramatically macabre illustration of Christ's Passion, Rolle engages the reader's physical sense of sight as well as his or her cognitive faculty of reason. It is this reasoning that enables the reader to create a personal visualization and to reach a higher level of spiritual ascent by identifying and empathizing with Christ. However, according to Bernardine piety it is not enough to identify with Christ; this will exacerbate rather than resolve the self-fragmentation that resulted from the Fall. Thus, love becomes necessary. Rolle's utilization of Bernardine piety shows a focus on Christ's humanity and love that is illustrative of Bernardine religiosity and ideology.

Richard Rolle's *Meditations* must be considered an example of a new type of literature. It is not only a highly expressive and emotional piece of vernacular writing, but it is also transcendental in a number of ways. At the most obvious level, this work enabled his readers to commune with the divine. The powerful imagery of the text evoked visualizations that elevated all those who read it. However, I find that its transcendental quality also speaks to its timelessness. The way that Rolle affected his readers in the Fourteenth century, still impacts us

today. We are repulsed and moved by the same images that the author created with his words centuries ago. Although we may not meditate on them in the same way, many are still compelled to ruminate on these texts in a similar fashion that the late medieval layperson or monastic would have been wont to do. In short, I believe that Rolle's *Meditations* not only allows us to commune with the divine, but also enables scholars and students to relate to a different time period.

Chapter II: Middle English Religious Lyric: The Misinterpretation of the Coenobitic Mystical Tradition

I. Introduction

Spiritual authors of the early medieval period catered to an audience that consisted primarily of clergymen. Because these tenth and eleventh-century writers composed their religious treatises in Latin, their works appealed to a limited and specialized readership. The majority of lay people at this time period could not understand texts written in the canonical language. Apart from members of the nobility and those who had access to a Cathedral school or comparable ecclesiastical instructional establishment, most individuals had little or no knowledge of Latin.¹⁶⁶ However, due in part to the formation of new orders such as the Franciscans and the Cistercians, the audience for devotional works began to expand in the twelfth century.

Members of these religious houses encouraged both preaching and writing in the colloquial tongues.¹⁶⁷ Composed in their own language, texts containing biblical messages and interpretations became more intelligible to the laity. That is not to say that the increased availability of vernacular devotional literature precipitated a rise in secular literacy rates. The vernacular, particularly the English vernacular, came to be associated with communal

¹⁶⁶ Christopher M. Bellitto, "Revisiting Ancient Practices: Priestly Training before Trent," in *Medieval Education*, ed. Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski, Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 38-9.

² Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52-3.

³ Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books," in *The Idea of the Vernacular an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 356.

⁴ Taylor, 356.

performances.¹⁶⁸ Attending such oral recitations became preferred over the solitary act of reading.¹⁶⁹ Even the intellectual elite familiarized themselves with popular spiritual tracts by being a part of an audience rather than isolating themselves to the devoted and quiet perusal of a particular work.¹⁷⁰ Hearing and presentation defined the literary experience of the Middle Ages. Thus, in the medieval mindset, reading could be associated with both sensory perception and performance.

As such, the reading experience of the common people began to separate itself from the contemplative techniques of the regular clergy. At their inception, members of the religious orders intended for these widely disseminated tracts to empower those outside of the Church and enabled them to map their own experiences onto religious texts. In turn, devotional works became the primary vehicle for the spiritual transformation of the laity.¹⁷¹ While clerical and monastic tracts deliberately utilized a vocabulary that encouraged contemplation, the religious texts intended for lay people featured a heightened physicality that had not been present in clerical writings. The English vernacular's emphasis on somatic understanding and performance cultivated this fascination with a corporal, rather than spiritual, communion with Divine. This need for a bodily connection to the sublime resulted a misinterpretation of coenobitic mystical conventions that produced only the enlightenment of the sensual soul, rather than the attainment of higher truths.

In this chapter, I undertake the examination of the Middle English lyrical tradition by analyzing *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*. Certain aspects of the poets' language, use of contemplative techniques and religious allusions divulges some knowledge of the teachings of

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, 356.

¹⁷¹ Beckwith, 52-3.

either the Franciscan order. Yet, this lyricist juxtaposed their interpretation of the mendicant doctrines with an incorporation of profane elements in an allegedly sacred work. This forces me to conclude that the *Dispute* poet misapprehend the traditional mystical philosophy of the twelfth-century religious house. The author's failure to genuinely comprehend the nuances of the coenobitic philosophy renders his work incapable of stimulating a visionary or mystical experience. Their audiences will only obtain enlightenment of the sensual, rather than of the spiritual, soul.

The chapter only discusses a lyric that I will argue exhibits Franciscan tendencies. I have limited my scope to only one religious order because I believe that as mendicants, the laity would have been more familiar with their ideas. The Cistercians and the Canons of St. Victor lived in a cloistered community. Although they did publish texts in both Latin and the vernacular languages, their exposure to the secular world did not compare to that of the Franciscan order's. Thus, without proof of authorship, it is more likely that the *Dispute* poet had knowledge of the Minorite philosophies of mysticism than those of any other order.

In this portion of my chapter, I intend to prove how the *Dispute* poet's various presentations of suffering reveal the decay of the Franciscan mystical tradition. Although the lyricist incorporated several elements typical of mendicant literature, he also chose to use numerous motifs from earthly traditions. The writer's inclusion of secular conventions shifted the reader's attention from an internal experience of spiritual elevation to an increased concern with the external world and outward demonstrations of faith. The mendicant features of the lyric would have encouraged the reader to look inwards and contemplate on both Christ's torment and Mary's suffering in order to commune with the Divine. In contrast, the secular traditions cultivated a reliance on physical objects such as visual representations of the True Cross and promoted

emotional hysteria as a manifestation of piousness. These aspects of *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* exhibit the degradation of Franciscan mystical thought.

The Dispute between Mary and the Cross treats the theme of suffering in a multiplicity of ways. Such an observation may seem rather obvious for a work that has been designated as both a Marian lament as well as a Passion lyric. Still, I believe that the writer's numerous representations of anguish serve as the source of tension between the sacred and the profane. In certain respects, the *Dispute* poet exhibits an affinity for Franciscan mystical thought through his exploration of human suffering. Indeed, even when exclusively considering the powerful visual language and elements of Christological devotion alone, the poem would appear somewhat plausible as a mendicant composition. At the same time, these portrayals of torment present an obsession with exterior demonstrations of piety and grief, a fixation that had come to define the popular religiosity of the later Middle Ages. These outward displays of agony disregarded the importance of contemplation, an interior spiritual experience, within the earlier meditative and Franciscan tradition.

I. Literary background

Modern-day scholars currently recognize two extant versions of *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*: Vernon and Simeon MSS and MS Royal 18 A.10, which is presently housed in the British Library.¹⁷² The former boasts five hundred and twenty-eight lines arranged into forty stanzas.¹⁷³ The latter, lacking a total of twelve stanzas although supplemented by a thirteen-line

¹⁷² Albert E. Hartung, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500*; Based upon *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400*, by John Edwin Wells, New Haven, 1916, and *Supplements 1-9, 1919-1951* (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Acad. of Arts and Sciences, 1970), 684.

¹⁷³ Susanna Greer Fein, "Form and Continuity in the Alliterative Tradition: Cruciform Design and Double Birth in Two Stanzaic Poems," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1992): 105.

introductory stanza, only contains three hundred and seventy-two lines.¹⁷⁴ Academics consider Vernon and Simeon to be the superior, more complete, version.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, editors cannot ignore the literary elements that have been more accurately preserved in the shorter variant, Royal.¹⁷⁶ Although both date to the late medieval age, Vernon and Simeon appears to have been compiled in the late-fourteenth century (ca.1390) while Royal does not appear until the mid-fifteenth (ca.1450).¹⁷⁷ Their language, as was typical of the time period, is heavily alliterated and reveals a Southwest midlands dialect.¹⁷⁸

The Dispute belongs to a collection of Marian lyrics from the fourteenth century known as the Laments of Mary.¹⁷⁹ Despite some minor stylistic differences, it may also be considered a lyric on the Compassion of the Virgin.¹⁸⁰ Both classifications did not develop as an independent and distinct genre until the later Middle Ages.¹⁸¹ Indeed, it was not until the fifteenth century that the Marian lament emerged as an exact parallel of its Christological counterpart: the Passion lyric.¹⁸² In contrast to these earlier poems that only gave prominence to the Virgin's maternal role, these Mariological lyrics celebrated her part in the Redemption of mankind.¹⁸³ Amplifying the Latin *Planctus* form that characterized the mother's grief in the third person, these laments

⁹Fein, "Form and Continuity," 105.

¹⁰Susanna Greer Fein, ed., *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS in Association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1998), 97.

¹¹ Fein, *Moral love Songs*, 97.

¹² Fein, "Form and Continuity," 105.

¹³ Hartung, 684.

¹⁴ Hartung, 685.

¹⁵ Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*. (New York: Clarendon P., 1968), 252.

¹⁶ Woolf, 239.

¹⁷ Woolf 239.

¹⁸ Woolf, 239-40.

represented her despair in a manner that was considered stirring, yet decorous.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, the Virgin's sorrow functioned as both an appeal to the meditator and as a model for his own emotional response.¹⁸⁵

In addition to its Marian designation, *The Dispute* can also be regarded as a Crucifixion lyric. Medieval poets treated the theme of Christ's death in a diverse array of forms, divided mainly by their didactic efficacy.¹⁸⁶ Written as a dialogue, the lyric is centered around the exchange between the Virgin and the Cross, the two disputants named in the poem's title.¹⁸⁷ Mary and the Cross speak in balanced turns.¹⁸⁸ She begins the primary portion of the lyric with an impassioned lamentation directed towards the Cross.¹⁸⁹ Typical of dialogical form, the Blessed Virgin refuses to accept the necessity of her son's sacrifice.¹⁹⁰ She knows her son only as a man, not as a divine being. In this way, the *Dispute* poet exposes Mary's limited insight into the true character of her son; she fails to recognize and appreciate the duality behind his hybrid nature.¹⁹¹ The Cross, which she had previously identified as her "fo" (l.102), attempts to address the concerns of Christ's sorrowful mother in a proportional amount of stanzas.¹⁹² The opening section of the poem starts the same way as it began: with the Virgin's complaint to the Cross (l.222 and jus as Mary had began the first half of *The Dispute*, the Cross starts the dialogue in the last segment of the lyric (l.261).

¹⁸⁴ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 155.

¹⁸⁵ Woolf, 241.

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Appleton Weber, *Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric; a Study of Sacred History and Aesthetic Form*. ([Columbus]: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 125.

¹⁸⁷ Weber, 125.

¹⁸⁸ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89; also see *The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross* 1.3-104.

¹⁹⁰ Weber, 127.

¹⁹¹ Weber, 133-4.

¹⁹² Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89.; also see *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* 1.105-221.

A series of dichotomies develop out of *The Dispute's* conversational structure. Indeed, the Blessed Virgin and the Cross embody a number of polar binaries that Susanna Greer Fein has already discerned. According to Fein, the disputants are "opposed in emotional register (compassion/dispassion), gender (female/male, by pronoun) and species (human/nonhuman)."¹⁹³ The *Dispute* poet also distributes a parallel ratio of stanzas to both speakers.¹⁹⁴ In the first half, Mary speaks for eight stanzas, followed by the Cross' nine-stanza speech. The primary section closes with the Virgin's second lament, consisting of three stanzas. The Cross begins the latter portion with a three-stanza address, followed by nine for Mary and a final eight attributed to the Cross. Upon closer examination, the proportion generated could suggest a deeper significance: 8:9:3//3:9:8.¹⁹⁵ The ratio has been ostensibly arranged as a set of opposites. Thus, like the series of contrasts that Fein devised, this correlation functions as yet another symbol of the dissimilarity between Mary and the Cross. Yet, the proportion features the same numerical components. In this way, this mirrored ratio underscores a broader theme of *The Dispute*: the similarities between the two disputants that become apparent because of the dialogical organization of the lyric.

Although I intend to address the similitudes in greater depth at a later point in this chapter, I believe that a cursory examination within the context of the dialogue form will allow me to reconstruct the medieval reading experience with greater accuracy. The audience's involvement in the text directly corresponds to the preservation or corruption of mendicant mystical thought; the text influenced the readers to turn inwards for their spiritual journey or sacrifice contemplation in favor of a dependence on outward exhibitions of faith. *The Dispute*

¹⁹³ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89.

¹⁹⁵ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 89. Fein bases her structural analysis on the version of the poem found in the Vernon and Simeon MSS.

featured a poetic debate. At the same time, because the participants often employed a similar vocabulary, made analogous allusions and seemed to associate with Christ in comparable fashions, we can no longer simply classify them as symbolic contrasts. The *Dispute* poet uses maternal language to describe both Mary and the Cross (l.67, 450-51, 491). Just as the Cross, a Rood tree, transforms into a mother, the Virgin changes into a tree (l. 478).

To a certain extent, this series of oppositions and similitudes allows the poet to build yet another structure for the text: *The Dispute* begins to take on the shape of a cross. Indeed, the lyricist embedded the chiasmic shape at the center of the poem in order to echo its emblematic shape.¹⁹⁶ Hence, and the further implications of the writer's inclusion of a visual aid will once again be discussed in due course, the reader no longer has to imagine the True Cross. Instead, he or she can rely on its physical representation within the text.

II. Identification of Franciscan Mystical Elements

The *Dispute* poet's discussion of Christ's anguish and Mary's sorrow supposedly characterizes this lyric as a Franciscan composition. Content seems to be most chief among these mendicant features. As a Crucifixion lyric, *The Dispute* exhibits a particular interest in Christ's Passion. Interestingly enough, the Franciscans were the first to popularize the subject of His Passion as a literary concern.¹⁹⁷ In keeping with this fascination with the Crucifixion, devotion to Christ's body as well as the True Cross came to distinguish the piety of the Friars Minor.¹⁹⁸ The Franciscans considered His flesh to be a locus of transformation because of the physical torture

¹⁹⁶ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 91.

¹⁹⁷ Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Authors of the Middle English Religious Lyrics," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 39, no. 2 (April 1940): 232.

¹⁹⁸ Beckwith, 52.

He endured.¹⁹⁹ Christ's body marked the place where the sacred and the profane intersected; his suffering denoted the presence of both a divine and mortal being.²⁰⁰ In this way, the Franciscans viewed Christ's flesh as man's link to the sublime and medium for the transference of sacrality.²⁰¹ Minorites considered His wounds as the primary vehicle for transference; these lacerations produced a collection of entrances and exits.²⁰² Through these portals, man could become closer to the Divine.²⁰³

Like many Franciscan authors, the lyricist stimulates profoundly sorrowful and even macabre visualizations of Christ's suffering through the use of illustrative language. These verbal images allowed the meditator to ruminate on the human nature of Christ and its impact on His agony during the Passion story.²⁰⁴ Indeed, powerfully descriptive language and the images that it produced distinguished Franciscan literature during the late medieval period.²⁰⁵ A demonstration of Christological devotion, mendicant imagery shattered both spatial and temporal barriers during contemplation. Freed from worldly restraints, the meditator could fuse his own metaphorical experience of Christ's Passion with the actual biblical event.²⁰⁶ Jacopone da Todi, a thirteenth-century Franciscan Tertiary, composed a meditational piece using the stylistic techniques of affective devotion. His "Donna del paradiso" involved the reader in the Crucifixion scene through its vivid imagery and tragic intensity. The poem begins by addressing the Blessed Virgin Mary:

¹⁹⁹ Beckwith, 52.

²⁰⁰ Beckwith, 50.

²⁰¹ Beckwith, 52.

²⁰² Beckwith, 42-3.

²⁰³ Beckwith, 42.

²⁰⁴ John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 250.

²⁰⁵ Fleming, 250.

²⁰⁶ Fleming, 255.

Lady, they have taken your son
 Lady, they've taken one of His hands,
 Pressed it against the cross,
 And the nail has ripped through the flesh.
 ...
 Lady, they've taken His feet
 And nailed them to the tree;
 They have broken all His bones and joints.²⁰⁷

Jacopone uses language to foster feelings of compassion in his audience. He begins by prefacing the lyric as a warning to the Virgin: "Lady, they have taken your son." Yet, her child's torture progresses without her; Mary's laments and efforts to prevent His death are futile. Jacopone stresses the Virgin's helplessness by referring to Christ's tormenters simply as "they." Her enemy, her son's murderers, remain both nameless and faceless. She cannot fight an unidentified foe. Furthermore, the poet's repetition of the phrase, "they've taken", accents Mary's forced passivity; she could not have thwarted His capture. Moreover, Jacopone's recount of Christ's Crucifixion objectifies His body as the focus of devotion. The writer only addresses the Virgin during the lyric; he does not engage with Christ. *Donna del Paradiso* appears to treat His body as a sacrificial object, one defined by his passivity. Jacopone's use of the word 'taken' implies that Christ's capture and Crucifixion was not just an execution, but a theft as well. The anonymous "they" perform their abuses on His body while Christ himself remains inactive. Lastly, the poet's list of actions allows the meditator to fuse his own visionary experience with the biblical event. These phrases, although written in a past tense, include a great amount of detail and seem to narrate every instant of Christ's anguish. In this way, Jacopone transports his reader to the moment of the Crucifixion.

²⁰⁷ Jacopone Da Todi, *The Lauds*, trans. Serge Hughes and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 279.

The *Dispute* poet appears to be utilizing graphic imagery to provoke a comparable response in a lay reader. Mary tells the Cross:

But whon the Roode ros and doun was squat,
 The nayles renten His hondes and feete;
 Thorwout His hel, the harde hat,
 The thornes into His flesch gan threte;
 His joynes unjoynet I tok good gat.
 Tho weop I water and teres leete—
 ...
 In cloddres of blod Heis her was clunge
 The flesch was from the bones swonge,
 Druuiye drinkleles was His tonge;
 His lippes to cloven and chyned.²⁰⁸

In a similar way as Jacopone, this lyric underscores the notion of the Virgin's helplessness. The lyrical tradition of Dispute poems emphasizes Mary's inability to accept the necessity of her son's death. Still, the Virgin describes Christ's torture in graphic and evocative detail. Like the Franciscan Tertiary, Mary recounts every moment of the Crucifixion: "The nayles renten His hondes and feete/Thorwout His hel, the harde hat,/The thornes into his flesch gan threte." Her language resembles Jacopone's in that it not only recreates the Passion, but also makes Christ's body a sacrificial object defined by passivity and vulnerability. Just as in *Donna del paradiso*, Christ simply receives the actions performed by his torturers. Interestingly enough, the *Dispute* poet, through the voice of Mary, has identified His enemies as the instruments of torture, rather than those individuals who wield these tools. It is "the nayles" that tore at Christ's hands and feet, not the Roman soldiers. Mary blames the "thornes" of His crown for piercing her son's flesh instead of those who had humiliated him with a disgraceful coronation. Associating Jesus' body with nails and thorns seems to be a part of the *Dispute* poet's characterization of Christ's body as

²⁰⁸ "The Dispute between Mary and the Cross," in *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, ed. Susanna Greer Fein, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS in Association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1998), 1.315-320, 322-325.

an inanimate object. Resembling the affective tradition used in *Donna del paradiso*, the objectification of Christ's body reveals His hybrid nature as both a divine and mortal being. As the Son of God, he does not protest the pains inflicted upon his flesh. At the same time, His human nature renders Him too weak to take action against His enemies.

The second section of the passage draws attention to Christ's humanity: "In cloddres of blod His her was clunge;/ The flesch was from the bones swonge;/ Druiye drinkeles was His tonge:/ His lippes tocloven and chyned." These details create an image of a defeated, rather than triumphant being. Bonaventure explains the significance of Christ's mutilated appearance on the Cross in his *Vitis Mystica*. According to the Seraphic Doctor, those who focused on His appearance alone would not fully comprehend the reason behind his torture. Bonaventure writes, "Those who are led only by appearances saw on the cross Him who is fairer in beauty than the sons of men deprived of beauty or human sightlines. They saw a disfigured face and distorted body. Yet, from this disfigurement of our Savior flowed the price of our grace."²⁰⁹ Here we see how the Cardinal emphasizes what the Virgin, in *The Dispute* is unable to see: the importance of the Crucifixion for man's Salvation. Bonaventure's sentiments echo those voiced by the Cross throughout the medieval lyric; it is the Cross that reminds Mary of the reason for the Crucifixion just as Bonaventure reminds his readers.

The *Dispute* poet also incorporates arboreal and fruit imagery throughout the lyric. Such language is also reminiscent of the *Vitis Mystica*. Bonaventure explains the redemptive power of Christ's death through his nature-based metaphors. He refers to Jesus as the "most sweet Vine,"

²⁰⁹ Bonaventure, "The Mystical Vine," in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, ed. Jose De Vinck, vol. I: The Mystical Vine (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), 168.

further describing him as "bountiful."²¹⁰ His blood acted as the nutriment for mankind, saving man from the consequences of Original Sin. In this way, the Cardinal likens Christ to both a parent and the fruit-bearing vine: "[Man] was the fruit that was borne by the vineyard you have brought out of Egypt."²¹¹ We can find similar images in the opening of *The Dispute*:

Oure Ladi freo · on Rode-treo
 Made hire mone.
 Heo seide, "On the · the Fruit of me
 Is wo-bigon!
 Mi Fruit I seo · in blodi bleo
 Among His fon!
 Serwe I seo · the veines fleo
 From blodi bon!
 Tre, thou dost no trouthe
 On a pillori my Fruit to pinne!
 He hath no spot of Adam sinne.
 Flesch and veines nou fleo atwinne!
 Wherefore I rede of routhe."²¹²

The allusions to trees and fruit give shape to a series of transmutations that, in turn, draw attention to the numerous parallels between the role of the Virgin and that of the Cross.²¹³ Mary names Jesus her "Fruit." The Cross, a faithless "pillori", has robbed her of her Fruit, despite his purity. Interestingly enough, this theft has cast the Cross in the role of Christ's mother; he now bears the fruit of Mary's womb.²¹⁴ This reconfiguration is typical of the dialogue, a form that the Franciscans used as a part of their dialectic.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Bonaventure, *The Mystical Vine*, 165.

⁴⁶ Bonaventure, *The Mystical Vine*, 165.

⁴⁷ *The Dispute*, 1.1-13.

⁴⁸ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 88.

⁴⁹ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 88.

⁵⁰ McNamer, 159.

Marian laments traditionally glorify the Virgin.²¹⁶ In Franciscan literature, she undergoes a brand of apotheosis that enables her to express an alternative ethic, one that stresses Christ's innocence.²¹⁷ Her protests against her son's death often defined late medieval Franciscan literature.²¹⁸ The Virgin's objections force the reader to realize that her son was falsely condemned. The *Dispute* poet reminds the reader of Christ's sinless nature in the first stanza: "He hath no spot of Adam sinne."²¹⁹ By the end of this section, Mary has reminded the cross that her son is free from Original sin. Moreover, her use of arboreal imagery throughout the stanza may refer to the typological association between the Virgin and Eve, parallel to the one between Jesus and Adam. However, it is the Cross that reminds the meditator of the significance of Christ's uncorrupted nature; only he can redeem mankind. Along these same lines, mendicant literature often featured an anti-Semitic sentiment that emphasized Christ's guiltlessness by contrasting it with the dissolution of his accusers.²²⁰

'The feolle Jewes, with false othe,
 Jewes ston-hard in sinnes merk,
 Beoten a Lomb withouten lothe,
 Softur then watur undur serk,
 Meode, or milk medled bothe.'
 The Jewes weoren harde stones;
 Softur then watur, or eny licour,
 Or dewz that lith on the lilie flour,
 Was Cristes bodi, in blod colour;
 The Jewes brisseden His bones.²²¹

Mary portrays the Jews as remorseless and greedy torturers. In the passage, she refers to them as "ston-hard", a common epithet originating from the *Planctus* form. Within the context of the

²¹⁶ Woolf, 254.

²¹⁷ McNamer, 159.

²¹⁸ McNamer, 155.

²¹⁹ *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, l. 11.

²²⁰ McNamer, 159.

²²¹ *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, l. 225-234.

Marian lyric, the phrase emphasized the Jews' lack of compassion in contrast to Mary's limitless love for her son and the members of the Church. Here, the Virgin uses their hardness as a distinguishing trait from her son's, rather than her own, compassion. She describes Christ as a "lomb" who was "Softur then watur under serk." His body was "Softur than watur...or dewz that lith on the lilie flour" and was therefore no match for the hardness of the Jews. It was their cruelty and inhumanity that shattered, or "brisseden", his body.

Mary's explanation for the breaking of her son's bones demonstrates the poet's remarkable skill with language. While the words "hard" and "softur" previously had a metaphorical significance, their definitions evolved into something much more literal. That is to say, the hardness of the Jews formerly referred to their lack of compassion. This contrasted with Christ, whose body was "softur" than any earthly material because of his love for mankind. Yet, by the second portion of the stanza, where the indentation occurs, the Jews are no longer "ston-hard"; they are "harde stones." Their internal flaws takes on a physical manifestation. Likewise, Christ's love for man, an inner emotion, becomes an external vulnerability when exposed to the 'petrified' Jews. While this type of wordplay was not typical of Franciscan texts, it does seem to foster the same response as affective meditation. Minorite lyrics of the medieval period portrayed the Jews as the culprits for Christ's death. The *Dispute* poet's language echoes this sentiment while his semantic shifts foster feelings of compassion for the afflicted Christ and sorrowful Virgin.

III. Identification of elements using earthly traditions: Creation of Textual Tension

The Dispute conforms to the coenobitic tradition to a limited extent in that the lyricist employs Christological devotional language and incorporates imagery that binds Mary's real experience of the Passion to the reader's metaphorical one. Still, the *Dispute* poet corrupts these vestiges of mendicant theology through the inclusion of a number of elements from secular

literature. Using the same vocabulary and techniques of some earthly conventions, *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross* cannot be considered a work of Franciscan mysticism alone.

Moreover, the poet's juxtaposition of secular elements with religious ones creates an unresolved tension within *The Dispute*.²²²

The influence of the chivalric tradition can best be seen in the characterization of Christ as a lover-knight. In the medieval period, knights performed acts of bravery as a sign of loyalty to their king, a demonstration of devotion to their lady and as a part of their duty towards the common people. According to the chivalric code, it was love that inspired their valiant actions. Like the twelfth-century authors of the French romances, the *Dispute* poet represents Christ as a knight. Rather than rescuing a distressed maiden or slaying a monstrous creature, Christ is charged with the task of liberating souls from Hell:

On a stokky stede · He rod, we rede,
 In red array;
 From develes drede, · that Duyk us lede
 At Domesday!
 Whon peple schal parte and pace,
 To hevene halle or to helle woode,
 Cristes Cros, and Cristes blode,²²³

Resembling a knight, Christ charges into hell on a "stede." Indeed, the horse was emblematic of the knightly class. The *Dispute* poet refers to him with a royal title, "Duyk", yet another indication of the impact of the chivalric convention.

At the same time, the confluence of the sacred and the profane makes this passage rather problematic. Earthly and mendicant conventions coalesce and contribute to the lyricist's

²²² Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 141.

²²³ *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, l. 512-18.

construction of Christ's role as the lover-knight, a part that I believe challenges the readers to contemplate on issues on agency and futility, rather than assure them of their salvation. Indeed, while this text utilizes the chivalric vocabulary of the medieval romance as well as the literary tropes of the Franciscan friars, it repudiates the central teachings of mendicant mystical thought by emphasizing Christ's role as a passive object. The Minorites had drawn attention to His helplessness and had indeed regarded His body as a sacred object to a certain extent. Still, they had done so in order to ruminate on the significance of the Crucifixion. Christ's death, although a passive act, took on a greater meaning when considered as the vehicle of man's redemption and the ultimate expression of His love. In this sense, the Franciscans acknowledged that Christ's inaction demonstrated his strength and compassion. In contrast, the *Dispute* poet appears to misunderstand the nuances behind mendicant theology. Because Christ appears passive, he attributes the victory in the Harrowing of Hell to Mary and the Cross. In spite of the fact that Jesus rides on the Cross to rescue mankind from Hell, he does so as a completely passive figure. The disputants, rather than Christ himself, play the role of the protagonists in this scene. The glorious red knightly garments, in reality his bleeding flesh, remind readers of his incarnation through Mary. More than a token, Christ's armor identifies Him as the son of the Virgin, not as the son of God. His flesh becomes intrinsically bound to Mary's and therefore to the earthly realm.²²⁴ Her body formed his, his flesh stemmed from hers. This notion strips the Crucifixion of its significance in that after His death, Christ should be viewed as the mother of all mankind. His divinity, rather than his humanity, should be emphasized. In the same vein, the Cross carries Christ into Hell as his "stokky stede." Hence, the Cross becomes a literal vehicle for man's communion with the Divine; it is the Cross, instead of Christ, that facilitates the care of souls.

²²⁴ McNamer, 165.

The lyricist also decided to include a visual element within the text, one not created by words. He affixed an image of the cross to the center of the poem. This fascination with images and physicality recalls the devotional cults that appeared during the mid-thirteenth century in England.²²⁵ Against the recommendations of the patristic fathers and the religious orders, these groups encouraged the use of images during worship.²²⁶ Although *The Dispute* cannot be viewed as a solely religious work, it does encourage spiritual meditation. Therefore, image of the cross at the lyric's center is reminiscent of the tenets of secular religiosity and, in particular, devotionalism.

Some may argue that the lyric's chiasmic form may be yet another display of Franciscan thought and devotion to Christ's cross. However, as a visual representation of the implement of Christ's death, the mendicant order would have discouraged its use in contemplative exercises.²²⁷ Because images encouraged a dependence on what Julian of Norwich refers to as *bodely* sight, the Franciscans would have forbidden such a form for a lyric.²²⁸ Minorite writers from the later Middle Ages instructed their readers that in order to truly experience Christ, they must reject all that is physical.²²⁹ The Friars Minor believed that earthly images only hindered spiritual enlightenment. Yet, the *Dispute* poet uses a depiction of a cross. I believe that this demonstrates

²²⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 55.

²²⁶ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 121.

⁶² David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 162.

⁶³ Despres, 137.

⁶⁴ Augustine, "Book Twelve" in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond. Taylor, vol. 42, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1982), 185-6.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Genesis*, 185-6.

⁶⁶ Despres, 137.

a corruption of mendicant thought. Their meditational experience relied on the tripartite theory of vision, as first elucidated by Paul then by Augustine in *De Genesi ad litteram*.²³⁰ On the first level of sight lies the physical sense of visual perception. This somatic understanding through what *bodely* sight only allows the meditator to comprehend the emanations of God.²³¹ In contrast, the last degree forces the individual to engage with the world through an intellectual perspective: this site uses what we refer to today as our mind's eye.²³² This type of vision enables us to comprehend abstract concepts and commune with the Divine.²³³ Due to a reliance on physical senses, the reader would only understand God in his ghostly and shadowy emanations.

IV. The Impact on the Reader's Experience: Enlightenment of the Sensual Soul

Philip de Greve's thirteenth-century Latin lyric, *Crux de te Volo* has been identified as the analogue for *The Dispute*.²³⁴ Because the poet adhered to the conventions of coenobitic mysticism, the reader achieves genuine spiritual enlightenment. In contrast, the *Dispute* poet's deviations from mendicant teachings cause the audience's journey to fall short of divine communion. I intend to examine *Crux* in order to determine how medieval lyricists successfully implemented mystical instructions in a literary setting. I will then contrast this with *The Dispute* to demonstrate how the author fails to preserve the mendicant tradition.

Philip de Greve presents two speakers that are removed from the historical scene.²³⁵

Although the Cross speaks, it speaks fiction. Furthermore, he composes his poem as more of a

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Genesis*, 185-6.

⁶⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 57.

⁶⁹ O. S. Pickering, "Middle English Metaphysical Verse? Imagery and Style in Some Fourteenth-Century Religious Poems," in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O. S. Pickering (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 89.

²³⁵ Woolf, 253.

debate than a dialogue. Still in keeping with the traditional Marian lament, this negates the possibility of visualizing the disputants in a scene of exchange.²³⁶ The setting of a disputation at Christ's Crucifixion produces three levels of meaning.²³⁷ To be read literally, Mary comprehends Christ's suffering because Christ commands his mother to be glad.²³⁸ At the same time, it is his exhortation that reveals the divide between His divine understanding of the reason behind His suffering and human emotionality as embodied by the Virgin.²³⁹ Yet, while this second level exposes an opposition between Christ and man, the final reading joins them: His death leads to the salvation of humanity. This unites the souls imprisoned in Hell with God in Heaven.²⁴⁰ These three interpretations, along with Philip de Greve's stylistic technique demonstrate how *Crux* roots itself in a literary tradition and grounds itself in a biblical scene.²⁴¹ References to the gospel texts had become especially important to the Franciscan order. They used the narrative and lyric form as a way to identify with Christ; reading and recitation became an exercise of *imitatio Christi*.²⁴²

The English poem, *The Dispute*, amplifies the conceits found in its Latin counterpart.²⁴³

While it does include traditional descriptions of Mary's grief, the poet sometimes violates doctrinal portrayals of Christ's mother.²⁴⁴ Her grief, meant to be a model of poignant decorum, transforms into expressions of hysteria.²⁴⁵

I serwed sore, for to sei so;
I say whon that my Derlyng deyde;
With dundes He was to deth ido;

²³⁶ Woolf, 253.

²³⁷ Weber, 135.

²³⁸ Weber, 135.

²³⁹ Weber, 135.

²⁴⁰ Weber, 135-6.

²⁴¹ Woolf, 252-3.

²⁴² Despres, 136.

²⁴³ Woolf, 253.

²⁴⁴ McNamer, 155-6.

²⁴⁵ McNamer, 157.

Upon a Tre His bodi was teyde.
 Whon Trouthe is told and darterd,
 Of alle joyes God is welle;
 Ther mihte no serwe in Him dwelle —
 I serwed sore, as clerkes telle;
 Mi pyne was not departed.²⁴⁶

The Virgin confesses that her sorrow could not be abated: "My pyne was not departed." She repeatedly alludes to grief, saying that she "serwed sore", "might no serwe in Him dwelle", "I serwed sore, as clerkes telle" and once again when she tells readers that her pain did not depart. Such a display of unadulterated emotionalism appears to lack a higher purpose. That is to say, Mary fails to fulfill her traditional role as the meditator's guide toward divine communion and a deeper understanding of Christ's love. Furthermore, her hysteric focus on her maternity distracts the focus from the redemptive nature of His death and forces the reader to meditate on the sadness of the event. Without a guide, the lyric loses a theological frame of reference. In turn, *The Dispute's* dialogical structure, becomes problematic. While *Crux* had demonstrated an apotheosis of the Virgin, *The Dispute* not only glorifies Mary in this way, but the Cross as well. Deified, the Cross assumes the role of a doctrinal instructor, a place conventionally occupied by St. John the Evangelist or even Christ himself. It becomes equated with either an apostolic figure or a divine one, despite its inanimate nature. Hence, an object becomes the medium of divine communion and the vehicle for spiritual understanding.

V. Conclusion

Prior to the Harrowing of Hell passage, the poet includes a puzzling collection of lines:

The clerk that fourmed this figour
 Of Maries wo, to wite som,
 He saih himself that harde stour

²⁴⁶ *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, 356-64.

Whon Godes armus weore rent aroum.
 The Cros is a cold creatour,
 And evere yit hath ben def and dom —
 Theih this tale beo florissed with faire flour,
 This point I preve Apocrafum:
 For wisse was never foundet
 That nevere Cristes Cros spak;
 Oure Ladi leide on him no lak;
 Bot to drive the devel abak,
 We speke hou Crist was woundet.²⁴⁷

These lines appear to be the lyricist's confession. He admits that he fabricated this dialogue because the Cross, a "cold," "def and dom" object, was never alive.²⁴⁸ Still, his meaning remains unclear to the reader.²⁴⁹ Mary's earlier lament mentioned, "as clerkes tell." This leads us to question whether the poem came about as a result of falsification or contemplation. Furthermore, although he referred to the Cross as "def and dom", he still considers it useful as a verbal talisman: "to drive the devel abak." These contrasts contribute to the tension between the metaphysical and the real, a divide that the coenobitic tradition attempted to close through contemplation.²⁵⁰ Yet, it seems that the poet personally struggled with this concept of reality; he invaded the literary space of his own poem in an effort to identify his poetic fabrications for the reader. The lyricist's own difficulty with this notion of binding the mental experience to the physical experience of daily life may mirror the laity's plight.

It appears that the poet, like his mendicant predecessors, also catered to a particular audience, one that did not fully comprehend the teachings of the Franciscan friars. Similar to the ecclesiastics, monastics and mendicants, secular listeners and readers approached the text with a

²⁴⁷ *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, 495-507.

²⁴⁸ Derek Brewer, *English Gothic Literature*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares, History of Literature Series (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 59.

²⁴⁹ Fein, *Moral love songs*, 157.

²⁵⁰ Brewer, 59-60.

profusion of expectations. In contrast to the clerics who anticipated intellectual stimulation, this audience had developed a particular reliance on spiritual works creating a physical relationship with Christ. The popularity of the Middle English lyric marks a shift from a concern with interiority of faith to an increasing obsession with exteriority. That is to say, expressions of piety became much more overt following the emergence and rise of vernacular religious literature. With this change, comes the movement away from true spiritual enlightenment and a progression towards the attainment of lesser experiences.

Chapter III: The Mundane in *The Book of Margery Kempe*: the final descent towards devotionalism

I. Introduction

The Book of Margery Kempe, a record of the title character's visions, travels and trials, features a woman whose disobedience represents her faith and holiness.²⁵¹ At a time when obedience encapsulated the duties of both a Christian and a female, Margery defied all earthly authority to demonstrate her devotion to Christ alone. Faith, as Margery Kempe implied in her text, was a singular experience that inherently conflicted with the medieval construction of community.²⁵² Indeed, *The Book* describes her multiple confrontations with principal figures invested with both spiritual and secular authority. She challenged bishops and priests in the same way as she ignored her husband and the mayor of her hometown. All of these disputes allowed Margery to express her faith and allegiance to Christ.²⁵³

Margery's deviation from communal standards affirmed her sanctity, her "singularity."²⁵⁴ Therefore, I believe that we cannot examine Margery Kempe only as a mystic or as a female visionary; we must also consider her as a part of late medieval English society. Indeed, *The Book of Margery Kempe* integrates elements of biography with the literary characteristics of a hagiography.²⁵⁵ In doing so, the author sought to create the image of a spiritual exemplum by recounting the events of Margery Kempe's life within a cultural context. Therefore, to Margery Kempe, the spiritual experience becomes defined by the construction of her identity just as much

²⁵¹ Janette Dillon, "Holy Women and Their Confessors or Confessors and Their Holy Women?," in *Prophets Abroad: the Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-medieval England*, by Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 134.

²⁵² Lynn Staley, "Margery Kempe: Social Critic," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992): 166.

²⁵³ Dillon, 134-5.

²⁵⁴ Staley, "Social Critic", 168.

²⁵⁵ Kathleen Ashley, "Historicizing Margery: The Book of Margery Kempe as Social Text," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 371.

as it is characterized by the creation of a personal relationship with Christ. Thus, the consideration of the text as biography becomes integral to our analysis of Margery as a mystic.

The Book of Margery Kempe has been identified as the first work of biography written in English.²⁵⁶ While Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich had incorporated some personal elements into their writings, neither one had done so to the extent that Margery Kempe did. Indeed, while biography was merely a characteristic of Rolle's and Julian's texts, it defined Margery's associations with the Divine. It is in this way that *The Book of Margery Kempe* differs from the other pieces that I have examined thus far. The heightened physicality of her language, her obsession with exterior demonstrations of devotion and the mundane nature of her faith originates in the way that Margery conflated her experiences as a wife and mother with her visions of Christ. Thus, the decay of the coenobitic mystical tradition and the final shift towards devotionalism lies in the fact that Margery redefines, or, quite literally, redirects, the concept of spiritual ascent. Due to her synthesis of visionary and daily experience, Margery's notion of divine communion becomes predicated on the descent of the divine into the earthly realm rather than her ascent into the celestial one.

II. The life of Margery Kempe: Creating the character of Margery

²⁵⁶ Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 1. Staley concedes that "biography" is, in and of itself, a Post-Romantic notion. However, for the purposes of this paper, the designation of the text as an biographical one is an important consideration. For medieval biographical and autobiographical texts, she refers her readers to C. D. Ferguson, 'Autobiography as therapy: Guibert de Nogent, Peter Abelard and the making of medieval autobiography', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1983), pp. 187-212.

I suggest that we must acknowledge a distinction between Margery Kempe as an author and the character that she creates specifically for *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery.²⁵⁷ Comparable to the differentiation between Geoffrey Chaucer and his poetic alter ego, Geoffrey, or William Langland's lyrical persona, Will, the separation between Margery Kempe and Margery forces us to recognize *The Book* as the work of a self-conscious author.²⁵⁸ Still, like the works of Chaucer and Langland, Kempe's "biography" is one whose foundation in reality is rather tenuous.²⁵⁹ Kempe does not compose *The Book* in order to simply relay the facts of her life; she wants to tell the story of an exemplary female, Margery.

A number of factors in Margery's background helped to shape the character that her scribes portray in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Her social rank, her family's experience traveling as well as her time as a young wife contributed to the development of the headstrong, unreserved, and outspoken woman whose cries could be heard around the majority of continental Europe. Thus, prior to the examination of the actual text, I have chosen to undertake an exploration of the life of Margery Kempe.

Margery was born in c.1373 in the English village of Bishop's Lynn in Norfolk to one of the most prominent families in her town.²⁶⁰ Her father, John Brunham, held many distinguished

²⁵⁷ Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 3.

²⁵⁸ Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 3.

²⁵⁹ Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 2.

²⁶⁰ Maureen Fries, "Margery Kempe," in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe: Fourteen Original Essays*, by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 217.

¹¹ Anthony Goodman, "Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, C. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. A. J. Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Brepols Essays in European Culture (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 217.

¹² Goodman, 225.

¹³ Fries, 217.

¹⁴ Goodman, 227.

¹⁵ Fries, 217.

positions in local government throughout his daughter's life.²⁶¹ Beginning as an eminent merchant, Brunham began to build his reputation as a governmental officer.²⁶² He filled the post of burgess at the time of Margery's birth and later went on to serve as the town's Mayor five times.²⁶³ The members of the Holy Trinity Guild, the most prestigious merchant's guild in Bishop's Lynn, elected Brunham as their Alderman in 1394. He held the position for the next seven years.²⁶⁴ Although civic documents tell us nothing about her mother, we do know that Margery had one sibling: a brother, John, whom Margery's father named as his heir.²⁶⁵ John did not share his father's political ambitions and therefore held no civic offices.²⁶⁶ In contrast to her brother, Margery related to her father's drive and sense of enterprise. Indeed, the Holy Trinity Guild admitted her as a member in c.1438.²⁶⁷ Because of their shared sensibilities, Margery occasionally identified herself in reference to John Brunham.²⁶⁸

Margery became exposed to a world of commerce and transit through her father's occupation as a merchant. Still, the port town of Bishop's Lynn familiarized her with a variety of different cultures as well as both foreign and domestic travel.²⁶⁹ The town's location on the estuary of the

¹⁶ Goodman, 227.

¹⁷ Fries, 217.

¹⁸ Goodman, 227.

¹⁹ Goodman, 227.

²⁰ Goodman, 227.

²¹ Goodman, 227.

²² Dillon, 116.

Ouse made it a key site in the internal English trade route.²⁷⁰ Moreover, Lynn's merchants engaged in overseas trade with places such as Iceland, the Low Countries and Gascony.²⁷¹ It also functioned as the main port for travel between Sweden and England.²⁷² Hence, Margery may have been aware of the developing Briggitine order.²⁷³ Indeed, we know from her text that Margery had at least been familiar with the life of St. Bridget.²⁷⁴ Her acquaintance with Bridget's writings, and with the continental mystical tradition, may have been the result of geographic coincidence. Born into an elite class accustomed to both local trips and overseas expeditions, Margery acquired the skills to develop social, cultural and economic relationships.

Margery's life began in a conventional fashion. Although her family was rather affluent, they still followed the social traditions of the late medieval period. Case in point, Margery married John Kempe in c.1393.²⁷⁵ As a brewer, Kempe lacked the wealth and prominence of Margery's

²³ Dillon, 116.

²⁴ For mention of St. Bridget see *The Book*, 58.

²⁵ Fries, 217.

²⁶ David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), 73.

²⁷ Aers, 73.

²⁸ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: the Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 15.

²⁹ Atkinson, 15.

³⁰ Atkinson, 15.

³¹ *The Book*, 21.

father.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it appears that he still belonged to the elite class of Bishop's Lynn.²⁷⁷ He had also been a town burgess, albeit one less notable than his father-in-law.²⁷⁸ A year after marrying Margery, he was elected one of the four city chamberlains, a post that his own father had filled in 1372²⁷⁹. However, soon after her marriage, Margery's life and conduct began to deviate from cultural norms. Her atypical behavior seems to have started with a very difficult pregnancy and subsequent delivery.²⁸⁰ The complications of childbirth had made Margery extremely ill and she soon became fearful that she would die without having confessed to a priest.²⁸¹ Her companions sent for a confessor, but Margery could not bring herself to confess the sin that had been troubling her conscience for so long.²⁸² The priest became stern and abrupt with Margery, reproving her for her lack of contrition.²⁸³ His condemnation induced a hysterical

³² *The Book*, 22.

³³ *The Book*, 22-3.

³⁴ *The Book*, 23.

³⁵ *The Book* 23.

³⁶ *The Book*, 24.

³⁷ *The Book*, 24.

³⁸ *The Book*, 24.

reaction in Margery: "And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body agen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon other instrumentys, and wers sche wold a don saf sche was bowndyn and kept wyth strength bothe day and nygth that sche mytgth not have hir wylle."²⁸⁴

Margery gave her readers a horrifying and vivid account of her reaction. She includes details of her self-destruction ("shce roof hir skyn on hir body agen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly."), recalls having to be restrained ("wers sche wold a don saf sche was a bowndyn") and remembers how she posed a threat to others. Finally, when Margery had lost hope and forsaken the Lord, Christ appeared to her in a vision and said, "Dowtyr, why hast thow forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?"²⁸⁵ Healed by the sight of Christ, Margery attempted to resume her household and wifely responsibilities in service to the Lord. Regrettably, she could not relinquish her worldly vices, particularly pride and vainglory.²⁸⁶ Clothed in opulent and spectacular attire, Margery conspicuously displayed her wealth.²⁸⁷ She soon took to managing a brewery for three or four years, only repenting after the business failed.²⁸⁸ Yet, soon after the unsuccessful venture, she

³⁹ *The Book*, 24-5.

⁴⁰ *The Book*, 25.

⁴¹ *The Book*, 26.

⁴² *The Book*, 26

⁴³ *The Book*, 26-7.

⁴⁴ Goodman, 218-9.

⁴⁵ Goodman, 219.

⁴⁶ Goodman, 219.

invested more funds in a horse mill, confirming her obsession with wealth and profit.²⁸⁹ With two failed businesses to her name, Margery's reputation became severely damaged. Only then did she renounce her worldly ways.²⁹⁰

Despite her repentance, Margery's behavior became even more peculiar. According to *The Book*, the sound of heavenly music startled Margery one night as she was lying in bed with her husband.²⁹¹ The celestial sounds generated a strange sensation inside of her; Margery began to feel disgust at the thought of copulating with John Kempe, an activity she claimed to have previously enjoyed.²⁹² Although John had accommodated her previous whims, he felt adamant about having the opportunity to exercise his conjugal rights.²⁹³ Consequently, Margery bore him children for three more years.²⁹⁴ She continued to carry out her religious observances and practice a stringent penitential regime throughout this entire period.²⁹⁵ Many aspects of her routine proved to be an embarrassment to John. Due to his wife's fasting, John could no longer dine with or entertain other members of the town.²⁹⁶ This inability to socialize damaged his civic career. Furthermore, Margery's hair shirt, constant presence in the local church and copious weeping, something that would in fact become the hallmark of her piety, deterred most residents of Bishop's Lynn from approaching her. Perturbed by his wife's disturbing behavior, John soon

became apprehensive about making any sort of sexual advance.²⁹⁷ He agreed to live in marital chastity from June 23, 1413 on the condition that Margery pay his debts prior to her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When she agreed, the two took their oaths of chastity before Philip Repingdon, the Bishop of Lincoln.²⁹⁸ In fact, the two lived mostly apart and in separate dwellings until John's death in 1431.²⁹⁹

Soon after her husband's death, Margery traveled to Germany for a year.³⁰⁰ It appears that after her return to Bishop's Lynn, she regained her previous social standing as the Holy Trinity Guild granted her admittance in 1438.³⁰¹ Little is known about Margery after that date. She did make a final foreign excursion to a Briggitine monastery in Syon.³⁰² We can conclude that she died soon afterwards, already having lived to the age of sixty-five.

III. Learning and Literacy: Margery's exposure to the mystical tradition

Literacy among the laity had started to increase during the late medieval period.³⁰³ Yet, the question of whether or not Kempe had the ability to read and write in either Latin or the vernacular remains debatable. *The Book of Margery Kempe* contains an account of its rather problematic genesis, describing Margery's countless struggles with a male scribe who was

²⁹⁷ Margery had also warned John that God would smite him if he had had intercourse with Margery ever again. During a pilgrimage to the shrines in Yorkshire, a piece of masonry fell from the roof of a church. When the couple narrowly escaped with their lives, John capitulated.

²⁹⁸ Goodman, 219.

²⁹⁹ Fries, 217.

³⁰⁰ Fries, 217.

³⁰¹ Fries, 217.

³⁰² Dillon, 117.

³⁰³ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 112.

⁵⁴ Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, by Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 197.

hesitant to take down her spiritual experiences.³⁰⁴ Thus, if Kempe was in fact literate, the text fails to showcase her skills.

Regardless of her abilities, *The Book* testifies to Margery's extensive knowledge of the Scriptures and mystical literature. Like the majority of lay people during the fourteenth century, Kempe may have been dependent on oral learning.³⁰⁵ Conversations with learned clerics such as Alan of Lynn, a friend of Kempe's as well as a Carmelite friar and Doctor of Divinity, substituted for the formal education literacy provided.³⁰⁶ *The Book* also recounts Margery's conversation with an unnamed priest. During the exchange, which took place sometime between 1414 and 1420, the clergyman read a number of spiritual works to Margery.³⁰⁷ According to *The Book*, "He red to hir many a good boke of hy contemplacyon and other bokys, as the Bybyl wyth doctowrys thereupon, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, *Stimulus Amoris*, *Incendium Amoris*, and swech other."³⁰⁸

She also appears to have been extremely fascinated by the religious culture of Norwich, a town that was less than a day's ride from Bishop's Lynn.³⁰⁹ Norwich was home to churches and spiritual sites that played a key role in English religiosity.³¹⁰ Kempe's journeys to the town

⁵⁵ Naoë Kukita. Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: the Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography*, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2007), 26.

⁵⁶ Dillon, 117.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love," *Speculum* 68, no. 3 (July 1993): 682.

⁵⁸ *The Book*, 141.

⁵⁹ Goodman, 231.

⁶⁰ Goodman, 231.

⁶¹ *The Book*, 53.

⁶² Goodman, 225.

exposed to a diverse array of contemplative practices and works. Indeed, *The Book* reports her multiple visits to the English village, once to visit Julian of Norwich.³¹¹

As previously mentioned, Margery alluded to a number of mystical authors throughout the text. While we cannot confirm how she acquired her knowledge of vernacular and Latin writers such as Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle, *The Book of Margery Kempe* delineates the extent of her exposure to these religious tracts. It includes references to several essential works of contemplative literature from "Bridis Boke" to the *Incendium Amoris*, meditative pieces from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Kempe's treatise, although highly original in some respects, used these works as a model.³¹² By imitating the language and structure of these texts, Kemp lent her own work a degree of authenticity.³¹³ In citing the names of revered authors, she associated her name and work with theirs. Thus, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, warranted or not, now becomes a part of this collection of contemplative works.

IV. Devotionalism in *The Book of Margery Kempe*: the intermingling of the celestial realm with the earthly sphere

Devotionalism encouraged the connection of the sacred to the profane, the spiritual to the physical. Members of the devotional elite, such as Margery Kempe, found themselves drawn to pilgrimage shrines, immersed in the intricate beauty of books of hours, and fascinated by the splendor of the diptychs for their private oratories.³¹⁴ All of these objects engaged their bodily senses and assured them of the existence of a previously abstract, and therefore absent, deity.

⁶³ Goodman, 225.

³¹⁴ Kieckhefer, 38.

Moreover, the same individuals comforted themselves with ritualistic practices and affective worship. These customs appealed to their emotions and intuition, allowing them to understand and connect with the humanity of Christ. They expressed their internal feelings of faith with external demonstrations, displays that were characterized by a heightened physicality.³¹⁵ Indeed, the body became an integral part of devotionalist worship; it allowed the individual to express the diverse array of emotions associated with affective piety.³¹⁶ A pilgrimage to the site of Christ's death would trigger tears, wails, and any dramatic exhibition of sadness. In the same way, the Easter Mass should evoke a joyous response. *The Book of Margery Kempe* contains evidence of devotionalist tendencies. While not always dependent on objects, Margery's piety exhibits the convergence of the celestial and earthly realms.

The degeneration of coenobitic mystical thought stems from the blending of traditions within *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Kempe fused biography, an earthly genre, with the spiritual conventions of the visionary account, hagiography and pilgrimage narrative. Her text, like her way of life, represents the contrived union of the sacred and the profane. In fact, *The Book* reports numerous instances in which Margery easily passed in and out of a meditative trance.³¹⁷ In one incident, she and her husband had been traveling in York.³¹⁸ John, somewhat arbitrarily, urged her to renounce her newfound chastity and to fulfill her conjugal duties. Margery refused and begged him to take a vow of chastity with her. Angered by his wife's disobedience, John threatens to force her to copulate with him, "then schal I medyl yow ageyn."³¹⁹ Fearing rape,

³¹⁵ Kieckhefer, 39.

³¹⁶ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 130.

³¹⁷ Ashley, 86.

³¹⁸ *The Book*, 38.

³¹⁹ *The Book*, 38.

Margery kneels down in a field to pray and ask Christ to resolve her dilemma: "Then sche kneyled down besydn a cros in the feld and preyd...and than owyr Lord Jhesu Cryst wyth grewt swetness spak to this creatur, comawndyng hir to gon agen to hir husbond and prayn hym to grawntyn hir that sche desyred."³²⁰ This event demonstrates Margery's ability to move from the spiritual realm, in which she can converse with Christ, to the earthly sphere, in which she communicates with her husband. Yet, contrary to the traditions of the time period, she does this without a conventional meditative space or apparatus and without the aid of a spiritual advisor or confessor.³²¹ The fact that she could "cross-over" of her own volition not only reveals that she had fluent access to the Divine, but also that Margery had a thin threshold between her physical and spiritual lives, an opening that would allow the sacred and the profane to converge.³²²

Moreover, although the text makes no explicit mention of pieces by twelfth-century coenobitic authors, Margery described her spiritual experience using the same terms as monastic authors like Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of St. Victor.³²³ Yet, in contrast to the *Dispute* poet, whose incorporation of mendicant elements produced a piece that bore some ideological resemblance to the Franciscan authors, Margery's use of Bernardine and Victorine language generated a text that reappropriated coenobitic vocabulary to illustrate a purely devotionalist experience rather than a contemplative one. In particular, she used the terms "contemplacyon" and "meditacyon" to recount spiritual experiences that had been stimulated by an earthly image. For example, Margery remembered that on Purification day, "was sche so comfortyd be the contemplacyon in hir sowle that sche had in the beholdyng of owr Lord Jhesu Crist and of hys

³²⁰ *The Book*, 38.

³²¹ Ashley, 86.

³²² Ashley, 85.

³²³ Yoshikawa, 9.

blissyd Modyr, of Simeon the preyste, of Joseph."³²⁴ At the sight of a wedding, "anon sche had in meditacyon how owr Lady was joynyd to Joseph and of the gostly joynyngof mannys sowle to Jhesu Crist."³²⁵ Both examples illustrate how Margery's personal terminology relates to her meditational experience. Although she described her vision in the idiom of the monastic writers, Margery used the words "contemplacyon" and "meditacyon", terms that the Victorines had defined separately, in an ambiguous fashion.³²⁶ Yet, for Margery, both processes occurred in the same way. Margery saw a particular sight, "pepil wyth her candelys in cherch" for the Purification day vision and "whan sche sey weddyngys" for the nuptial image, that reminded her of a biblical or religious scene.³²⁷ This inspired a feeling of mediation or contemplation that, in turn, produced a vision of this specific episode. Thus, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the words have been used interchangeably.

Furthermore, Margery stimulated her meditative/contemplative state with the aid of a visual device. On Purification Day, the spectacle of people gathered in a church prompted Margery's vision. In the same way, she only had to catch a glimpse of a wedding in order to envision the Virgin's marriage to Joseph as well as the soul's union with Christ. Both instances require an earthly picture to produce an encounter with the divine. However, medieval monastic and mendicant theology required that the individual transcend all images in a genuine contemplative experience.³²⁸ Any vision not constructed within the mind itself, a prop or display such as Margery's, forced the meditator to become dependent on their lower cognitive faculties and

³²⁴ *The Book*, 188. Purification day, February 2, commemorates Mary's purification after giving birth as well as her presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple.

³²⁵ *The Book*, 189.

³²⁶ Yoshikawa, 9.

³²⁷ *The Book*, 188 and 189.

³²⁸ Denise L. Despres, "Memory and Image: The Dissemination of a Franciscan Meditative Text," *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (September 1990): 137.

neglect reason.³²⁹ Most importantly, they were reminiscent of the devotional experience, one that permitted the use of relics and icons.³³⁰ Hence, Margery did not misuse the terms "contemplacyon" and "meditacyon" simply by conflating their definitions. Instead, she took words that had been imbued with a contemplative and monastic significance and redefined them within a devotionalist context. For these reasons, Margery only had a superficial connection to the mystical authors she mentioned. She may have alluded to their works and even employed their lexicon, but still, Margery preserved her devotionalist mentality.

Margery mentioned "Hyltons boke", or Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*.³³¹ The Augustinian Canon wrote the two-book volume for an anonymous anchoress.³³² Book one describes a traditional threefold division of the stages of contemplation: knowledge of God through reason, love of God that does not depend on reason, and final stage that unites reason and love of the Divine.³³³ In the second volume, Hilton addressed the soul's ascent towards God. He urges his reader to meditate on the events of Christ's life that capture His humanity best: His birth or His Passion.³³⁴ This forces the individual to consider the significance of the Incarnation's redemptive meaning and might therefore induce internal spiritual transformation.³³⁵

³²⁹ Despres, 139.

³³⁰ Richard Kieckhefer, "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 41.

⁸¹ *The Book*, 51.

⁸² Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 184.

⁸³ McGinn, *Essential Writings*, 184.

³³⁴ McGinn, *Essential Writings*, 184-5.

³³⁵ Yoshikawa, 123.

Like the majority of late medieval mystical women, Margery identified with Christ rather than with a female saint or martyr.³³⁶ Perhaps following the recommendations of Walter Hilton, *The Book of Margery Kempe* chronicles her responses Christ's Passion. In many instances, Margery forced herself to imagine His pain in order to comprehend and share His Passion. Her identification becomes most acute during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, specifically when a group of friars leads her to Mount Calvary, the actual site of Christ's Crucifixion. The sanctity of the pilgrimage site triggers a vision of Christ's crucified body. As Margery gazes at it, her identification with Christ transforms into a physical mimesis.³³⁷

sche fel down that sche mygth not
 stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd and
 wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hlr
 armys abrode, and cryed wyth a lowde
 voys as thow hir hert schulde a brostyn
 asundyr, for in the cite of hir sowle sche
 saw veryly and freschly how owyr Lord
 was crucifyed. Beforn hirface sche herd
 and saw in hir gostly sygth the mornyng
 of owyr Lady, of Sen John and Mary
 Mawdelyn, and of many other that lovyd
 owyr Lord.³³⁸

This passage illustrates Margery's cursory understanding of Christ's Passion. From her reaction, it becomes evident that she comprehends the sadness of the event: "sche fel down that sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd and wrestyd wyth hir body." For all her sadness, it does not seem that she realizes the significance of Christ's sacrifice. Much like Mary in *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, her emotions prevent her from recognizing the redemptive meaning behind His suffering. Moreover, Margery's identification with Christ and meditation on

³³⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 152-3.

³³⁷ Beckwith, "Material Mysticism", 208.

³³⁸ *The Book*, 75-6.

His humanity does not provide her with any further understanding of His Incarnation, as Hilton had specified in his *Scale of Perfection*. Her apprehension of the Incarnation appears to be quite literal. Margery's mimetic reenactment of the Crucifixion looks to be the extent to which she understands the concept of Christ becoming man.³³⁹ From Margery's point of view, the Incarnation forges a connection between her and Christ, an association predicated on His humanity.³⁴⁰ Margery, consistent with devotionalist practices, expresses this relationship physically, by stretching her arms out in the shape of a cross: "spredying hir armyes abrode."

V. Margery and St. Bridget of Sweden: Becoming the "housewife" of Christ

Kempe's incorporation of biographical elements complicated the text's relationship to the mystical tracts Margery mentioned. To a certain extent, I believe that Kempe invoked the authority of authors such as St. Bridget of Sweden to legitimize her status as a married woman and mother of fourteen children who had saintly aspirations. Specifically, Kempe must have recognized the problems that her sexuality provoked. Using such models as St. Bridget, Margery could profess her "reclaimed" virginity in the same way as the Northern European saint did. Still, she conflated her earthly experiences with the spiritual ones that her role models had described. This led to a sanctification of the ordinary, the descent of the divine into the earthly sphere.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Beckwith, "Material Mysticism", 209.

³⁴⁰ Beckwith, "Material Mysticism", 209.

³⁴¹ Peter Pellegrin, "'I Would Thow Were Closyd in a Hows of Ston': Sexuality and Lay Sanctity in the Book of Margery Kempe," in *Lay Sanctity, Medieval and Modern: a Search for Models*, by Ann W. Astell (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dome Press, 2000), 98.

"Bridis boke", another text Margery alluded to, unmistakably refers to the Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations*.³⁴² The cult of Saint Bridget had been fostered even before the order's arrival in England; Cardinal Easton, who had promoted Bridget's case for canonization, maintained ties with his former monastery in Norwich.³⁴³ Both Bridget's visionary account and the details of her life had already become well known in England by the fifteenth century.³⁴⁴ Scores of surviving manuscripts and early printed English translations of *Revelations* survive to this day, even if just in fragments.³⁴⁵ Although *The Book* affirms that Margery did come into contact with Bridget's writings, it appears that they did not affect Margery to the extent that Bridget's actual life did.³⁴⁶

Saint Bridget of Sweden lived during the fourteenth century; she was born in 1302 or 1303 and died during the year of Margery's birth, 1373.³⁴⁷ Bridget had been a member of the Swedish aristocracy.³⁴⁸ At the age of thirteen or fourteen, she married Ulf Gudmaarson.³⁴⁹ The couple had eight children together throughout their thirty-year marriage.³⁵⁰ During the course of their marriage, Bridget felt that God had called her to serve as his divine instrument, proclaiming His

³⁴² *The Book*, 51. During Margery's time, Bridget's *Revelations* were circulated under the title *Liber Revelationum Celestium S. Birgitte*.

⁹³ Dillon, 116.

³⁴⁴ Atkinson, 174

³⁴⁵ Atkinson, 175.

³⁴⁶ Atkinson, 175. In fact, the majority of *Revelations* manuscripts had been owned by aristocratic women and monastic or clerical men. The text seems to have impacted this demographic, rather than mercantile class females, the most.

⁹⁷ Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, Studies in Medieval Mysticism (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2001), 19.

⁹⁸ Sahlin, 14.

⁹⁹ Sahlin, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Sahlin, 15.

greatness and celebrating His word everywhere she could go.³⁵¹ According to her *vita*, her husband agreed to a mutual vow of chastity and both planned to enter a monastery.³⁵² However, her husband died soon after, in the Cistercian monastery in Alvastra.

It was during the year of her husband's death, 1344 or 1346, that Bridget heard the voice of God calling her to become Christ's bride. The marriage appoints her as Christ's vessel, a being entitled to know all of His secrets.³⁵³ Christ marries Bridget by saying, "I have chosen þe and taken þe to be mi spouse...for I will shew to þe mi preuai secretis. For þou arete mine be a manre of [r]ight."³⁵⁴ Although the nuptials do not echo an earthly ceremony, the intimacy between Bridget and Christ becomes evident with, "for I will shew to þe mi preuai secretis." Thus, Bridget's role as the bride of Christ, or *sponsa Christae*, symbolizes His love for mankind as well as the eminence of His word. In this way, the mystic marriage demonstrates the ultimate example of divine communion.

Bridget's *vita* offered Margery the opportunity to reconcile her status as a mother and as a wife who wished to lead a holy life. Their lives shared several commonalities. Both women had been born privileged, albeit Margery less so than Bridget. Margery, like her example, had several children with her husband. The two women also had taken vows of marital chastity. Still, Margery's mystical marriage to the Godhead emerges as the most striking similarity between her and St. Bridget. The union took place in Rome, during Margery's return from her pilgrimage to

³⁵¹ Sahlin, 16.

³⁵² Sahlin, 16.

³⁵³ Yoshikawa, 55.

³⁵⁴ Bridget of Sweden, *Liber Celestis: the Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B I, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Ms.*, ed. Roger Ellis (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), Bk I, ch. 2, p.8, l.14-16.

Jerusalem.³⁵⁵ In many ways, Margery's journey to the eternal city demonstrates her emulation of Bridget who had permanently moved to Rome and 1350.³⁵⁶ The mystic marriage represents the culmination of her imitation of the saint. Yet, the differences between the two revelations draw attention to Margery's corrupted form of mysticism. While Bridget becomes Christ's spouse, a mouthpiece for God and the embodiment of *Ecclesia*, Margery assumes a role that resembles that of a housewife for Christ, rather than his spouse or bride.

Margery envisions her own mystical union in the literal terms of a medieval wedding ceremony. I suggest that her experience as John Kempe's wife influences the way she sees her marriage to God. She weds the First Person of the Trinity, the Father, before a wedding party comprised of "the Sone and the Holy Gost and the Modyr of Jhesu and alle the twelve apostelys and Seynt Kateryn and Seynt Margarete and many other seyntys and holy virgyne wyth gret multitude of awngelys."³⁵⁷ God the Father seals the mystical marriage with a familiar phrase, one popularized by the matrimonial rite: " I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar."³⁵⁸ In a stark contrast to Bridget's mystical marriage that had signaled her transformation from the earthly wife of Ulf to the spiritual bride of Christ, Margery's role does not change, especially since John Kempe was still alive. Indeed, she had two earthly husbands. Instead, the mystic marriage forces the Father to change; it debases him. The earthly wedding ceremony relegates him to the role of an earthly husband. Thus, rather than denoting one of the highest forms of spiritual ascent and divine communion, Margery's mystic marriage has resulted in divine descent.

In the same vein, Margery's life as a housewife impacted her understanding of the Passion

³⁵⁵ Yoshikawa, 54.

³⁵⁶ Yoshikawa, 43.

³⁵⁷ *The Book*, 92.

³⁵⁸ *The Book*, 92.

and identification with the Virgin. Consequently, *The Book* is replete with scenes from daily life, details that recall an ordinary existence in a medieval English town. Medieval contemplative texts directed at female readers often urged them to picture the Crucifixion and stand next to the Virgin. Aelred of Rievaulx instructed his sister to do so in a letter.³⁵⁹ However, Margery's life experiences forces her to be concerned with more practical matters than the redemptive significance of the Incarnation. In a vision taking place after Christ's death and burial, Margery sees herself comforting the Virgin by preparing a hot drink,

Than the creatur thowt, whan ovr Lady was
comyn hom and waseyd down on a bed, than
sche mad for ovr Lady a good cawdel and
browt it hir to comfortyn hir, and than ovr
Lady seyde unto hir, "Do it away, dowtyr.
Geve me nomete but myn owyn childe."
The creatur seyde agen, "A, blissyd Lady,
ye must nedys comfortyn yowrself and
cesyn of yowr sorwyng."³⁶⁰

The exchange not only echoes Margery's limited understanding of the Passion, but also reveals the impact that her secular life had on her visions. Even after the Virgin refuses, "Do it away dowtyr. Geve me nomete but myn owyn childe", Margery responds with a rather maternal insistence that Mary consume the drink because she "must nedys comfortyn yowrself and cesyn of yowr sorwyng." Still, her last statement implies that the "cawdel", a warm concoction brewed from gruel and spiced wine, can ease the pain of Mary's loss.

³⁵⁹ Susanna Greer Fein, "Maternity in Aelred of Rievaulx's Letter to His Sister," ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, in *Medieval Mothering*, *The New Middle Ages* 3 (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 147.

³⁶⁰ *The Book*, 186.

VI. Conclusion

The Book of Margery Kempe is the final step in the regression towards devotionalism. We began with the emergence of the coenobitic mystical tradition in the twelfth century, continued with a piece that adhered to its conventions with Richard Rolle's *Meditations*, saw the start of its deterioration with *The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross* and finally watch it come to an end, with the decay of its doctrine and the descent of the Divine. Interestingly enough, Margery Kempe's interest in devotionalism is rooted in her biography. We can attribute her obsession with exteriority, physicality and tendency to sacralize mundane events to the influence of her life experiences. Thus, her rejection of spiritual ascent in favor of celestial descent, articulates a need to understand an abstract deity in familiar terms.

Conclusion

This thesis includes considerations three different texts. I have treated these works in a way that contrasts them, that reveals their disparate ideologies, conflicting religiosities and opposing points of view. However dissimilar these three texts may be, they share one basic commonality: to a certain extent, they all tell a story. Richard Rolle's *Meditation on the Passion* not only recounts Christ's death, but also describes the author's personal divine encounter. In *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, the Virgin and the true Cross relate the Crucifixion narrative. In doing so, the disputants impart the story of man's Redemption. *The Book of Margery Kempe* gives an account of the title character's numerous pilgrimages around continental Europe as well as present-day Britain. Margery's scribes also recorded her unusual visionary experiences. Considered separately, each work not only conveys the stories of its author, but of its time period and society as well. Examined as a whole, these texts relay the story of Christian mysticism and the tales of those who practiced it.

I stated earlier in this paper that I wished to prove that vernacular Middle English literature regressed, from works that adhered to the tenets of coenobitic mysticism to texts that defied those philosophies in favor of the physical and exterior demonstrations of faith that defined the earlier devotionalist movement. While I still present this project as an argumentative one, I also want my reader to consider it within the context of the aforementioned story. I believe that this gives as a new perspective on late medieval religion and literature.

Our narrative begins during the twelfth century, with the establishment of the new monastic orders. These religious houses introduce the reader to the hero of our narrative, coenobitic mysticism. It emerged to fight against the ignorant, yet formidable enemy: devotionalism. Characters such as St. Francis of Assisi and Bernard of Clairvaux take up arms

the side of mysticism, writing innovative texts that force their audience to see Christ in an entirely different light. We then move the setting of our tale to late medieval England, where Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* initiates the action in this story. His text adheres to the philosophies and practices described by the twelfth-century cenobites. Rolle's powerfully illustrative language challenges his reader to use his bodily sense of sight as well as his cognitive power of vision. More importantly, the *Meditations* also enables the meditator to commune with the divine by using techniques described by the Cistercians, Franciscans and the Victorines. We then continue with *The Dispute between Mary and the Cross*, a fourteenth-century lyric with vestiges of Franciscan ideology. Unfortunately, despite its mendicant features, *The Dispute* includes earthly motifs that reveal an obsession with physical demonstrations of faith. Indeed, this poem marks the shift towards exterior expressions of piety from interior forms. The story ends with Margery Kempe, a pilgrim whose fixation on exteriority and physicality completely distorts coenobitic mystical thought. A contrast to the cenobites who sought spiritual ascension in an effort to commune with Christ, Margery forces the divine to descend to the earthly realm. For example while the female religious pictures herself as Christ's Bride, a role that mirrors that of *Ecclesia*, Margery envisions herself in bed with Christ as his earthly wife. Her *Book* denotes the complete degeneration of coenobitic mystical thought.

This thesis, like the texts it examines, is a story. It has a beginning, a middle, an end, along with elements of love, chivalric romance, tales of suffering and violence, and even, some might say, comic relief provided by the histrionic outbursts of Margery Kempe. Yet, as lengthy as this work is, it only addresses a segment of the larger narrative. What happens to this "regression" when we consider what happened before this story began and what happens after it ended? Looking to the sixteenth century, I could contend that the Reformation revealed a desire

to return to the contemplative and interior religiosity of the twelfth-century cenobites. At the same time, by examining the vernacular literature of later religious movements, heretics, and smaller devotional sects, I may reach an entirely different conclusion. Thus, I may only state definitively that the relationship of literature to mysticism, and religion as a whole, is as variant and mutable as the associations portrayed in the Song of Songs. Like those in the Canticle, they may change suddenly or evolve gradually, and at times these relationships are ambiguous and perhaps disconcerting. For all of these Byzantine connections and associations, the figures in the Song of Songs relate to each other in the same way that literature relates to mysticism: both express the love of Christ for mankind.

Bibliography

- Aers, David. *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360-1430*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Anderson, Wendy L. "The Real Presence of Mary: Eucharistic Disbelief and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Fourteenth-Century France." *Church History* 75, no. 4 (December 2006): 748-67.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Vol. 3. London: Burnes, Oates and Washburne, 1920-42.
- Ashley, Kathleen. "Historicizing Margery: The Book of Margery Kempe as Social Text." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 371-88.
- Astell, Ann W. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Atkinson, Clarissa W. *Mystic and Pilgrim: the Book and the World of Margery Kempe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Augustine. "Book Twelve: Chapter Six." In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, translated by John Hammond. Taylor. Vol. 42. Ancient Christian Writers. New York, NY: Newman Press, 1982.
- Bartlett, Anne Clark. *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Beckwith, Sarah. "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe." In *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, by Jane Chance, 216-36. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.
- Beckwith, Sarah. *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Bellitto, Christopher M. "Revisiting Ancient Practices: Priestly Training before Trent." In *Medieval Education*, edited by Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski, 35-49. Fordham Series in Medieval Studies. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- Bonaventure. "The Mystical Vine." In *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, edited by Jose De Vinck, 145-205. Vol. I: The Mystical Vine. Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960.
- Bonaventure. "The Triple Way, or Love Enkindled." In *The Works of Bonaventure*, translated by Jose De Vinck, 59-94. Vol. I: Mystical Opuscula. Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960.
- Brewer, Derek. *English Gothic Literature*. Edited by A. Norman Jeffares. History of Literature

- Series. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.
- Bridget of Sweden. *Liber Celestis: the Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B I, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Ms.* Edited by Roger Ellis. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* New York: Zone Books, 1994.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* Edited by Stephen Greenblatt. *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages." *Church History* 71, no. 04 (December 2002): 685-714.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Wonderful Blood.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Chenu, Marie-Dominique. *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century; Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West.* Edited by Jerome Taylor. Translated by Lester K. Little. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Colish, Marcia L. *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400-1400.* Edited by Robert Baldock. *Yale Intellectual History of the West.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Cousins, Ewert H. "Bonaventure's Mysticism of Language." In *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 236-58. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Da Todi, Jacopone. *The Lauds.* Translated by Serge Hughes and Elizabeth Hughes. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.
- Despres, Denise L. "Memory and Image: The Dissemination of a Franciscan Meditative Text." *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (September 1990): 133-42.
- Dillon, Janette. "Holy Women and Their Confessors or Confessors and Their Holy Women?" In *Prophets Abroad: the Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-medieval England*, by Rosalynn Voaden, 115-40. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996.
- "The Dispute between Mary and the Cross." In *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, edited by Susanna Greer. Fein, 106-22. *Middle English Texts.* Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS in Association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute

Publications, Western Michigan University, 1998.

Evans, Ruth, Andrew Taylor, and Nicholas Watson. "The Notion of Vernacular Theory." In *The Idea of the Vernacular: an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Ian R. Johnson, 314-31. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Fein, Susanna Greer., ed. *Moral Love Songs and Laments*. Middle English Texts. Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS in Association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1998.

Fein, Susanna Greer. "Form and Continuity in the Alliterative Tradition: Cruciform Design and Double Birth in Two Stanzaic Poems." *Modern Language Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1992): 100-25.

Fein, Susanna Greer. "Maternity in Aelred of Rievaulx's Letter to His Sister." Edited by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. In *Medieval Mothering*, 135-56. The New Middle Ages 3. New York: Garland Pub., 1996.

Fleming, John V. *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977.

"The Fourth Lateran Council." Edited by Harry Rothwell. In *Readings in Medieval History*, compiled by Patrick J. Geary, 443-69. Third ed. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2003.

Freedberg, David. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Fries, Maureen. "Margery Kempe." In *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe: Fourteen Original Essays*, by Paul E. Szarmach, 217-36. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.

Goodman, Anthony. "Margery Kempe." In *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, C. 1100-c. 1500*, edited by A. J. Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, 217-36. Brepols Essays in European Culture. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010.

Gray, Douglas. *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.

Hamburger, Jeffrey F., Petra Marx, and Susan Marti. "The Time of the Orders, 1200-1500: An Introduction." In *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, translated by Dietlinde Hamburger, 41-75. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Hamburger, Jeffrey F. *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late*

- Medieval Germany*. New York: Zone Books, 1998.
- Hanna, R. "Rolle and Related Works." In *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, by A. S. G. Edwards, 19-32. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004.
- Hartung, Albert E., ed. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500 ; Based upon A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400, by John Edwin Wells, New Haven, 1916, and Supplements 1-9, 1919-1951*. New Haven, CT: Connecticut Acad. of Arts and Sciences, 1970.
- Harwood, Britton J. *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*. Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Hennessy, Marlene V. "Aspects of Blood Piety in a Late-Medieval English Manuscript: London, British Library MS Additional 37049." In *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, edited by Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger, 182-91. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Hill, Thomas D. "Androgyny and Conversion in the Middle English Lyric, "In the Vaile of the Restles Mynd"" *ELH* 53, no. 3 (1986): 459-70.
- Hodapp, William F. "Richard Rolle's Passion Meditations in the Context of His English Epistles: Imitatio Christi." *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (September 1994): 96-104.
- Hugh of St. Victor. *The Didascalion of Hugh of St. Victor: a Medieval Guide to the Arts*. Translated by J. Taylor. Reprint 1991 ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Jantzen, Grace M. *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Julian of Norwich, and Denise N. Baker. *Showings: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2005.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe: a New Translation, Contexts, Criticism*. Translated by Lynn Staley. New York: Norton, 2001.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Edited by Lynn Staley. Middle English Texts. Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS in Association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996.
- Kieckhefer, Richard. "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety." *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 32-51.
- Kratzmann, G. C., and James Simpson, eds. *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G.H. Russell*. Wolfebro: D.S. Brewer, 1986.

- Langland, William. *Piers Plowman*. Edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H.A. Shepherd. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2006.
- Lawler, Traugott. "Conscience's Dinner." In *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, edited by M. Teresa Tavormina and Robert F. Yeager, 87-104. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995.
- Leclercq, Jean. *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*. Translated by Claire Lavoie. Vol. 16. Cistercian Studies Series. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976.
- Leclercq, Jean. "Monasticism and Asceticism II: Western Christianity." In *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, edited by Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq, 113-31. Vol. 16. World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. New York: Crossroad, 1985.
- Leclercq, Jean. *Monks and Love in Twelfth-century France: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Lochrie, Karma. *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*. New Cultural Studies Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- Mann, Jill. "Eating and Drinking in Piers Plowman." In *Piers Plowman*, by William Langland, edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H.A. Shepherd, 533-44. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006.
- Manter, Lisa. "Rolle Playing: and the Word Became Flesh." In *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley. Warren, 15-38. First ed. The New Middle Ages. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Matter, E. Ann. *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Edited by Edward Peters. Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.
- McDonnell, Ernest W. "The "Vita Apostolica": Diversity or Dissent." *Church History* 24, no. 1 (March 1955): 15-31.
- McGinn, Bernard. "First Life of Francis." In *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 226-27. New York: Modern Library, 2006.
- McGinn, Bernard. "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism." *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 197-219.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York: Modern Library, 2006.

- McGinn, Bernard. "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism." In *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 202-35. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- McIlroy, Claire Elizabeth. *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*. Vol. 4. Studies in Medieval Mysticism. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004.
- McNamer, Sarah. *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*. Edited by Ruth Mazo Karras. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- "Medieval English Mystical Lyrics." Edited by Douglas Gray. In *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, edited by William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig, 203-18. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997.
- Newman, Barbara. "What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture." *Speculum* 80, no. 01 (January 2005): 1-43.
- Nolan, Barbara. "The Vita Nuova and Richard of St. Victor's Phenomenology of Vision." *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 92 (1974): 35-52.
- Pellegrin, Peter. "'I Would Thow Were Closyd in a Hows of Ston": Sexuality and Lay Sanctity in the Book of Margery Kempe." In *Lay Sanctity, Medieval and Modern: a Search for Models*, by Ann W. Astell, 91-104. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dome Press, 2000.
- Pennington, Basil. "The Religious World of the Twelfth Century: The Cistercians." In *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, edited by Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq, 205-17. Vol. 16. World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. New York: Crossroad, 1985.
- Pickering, O. S. "Middle English Metaphysical Verse? Imagery and Style in Some Fourteenth-Centry Religious Poems." In *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, edited by O. S. Pickering, 85-104. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997.
- Pickstock, Catherine. "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist." *Modern Theology*, April 1999, 159-80.
- Pollard, William F. "Richard Rolle and the Eye of the Heart." In *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, edited by William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig, 85-106. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997.
- Renevey, Denis. *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001.
- Robbins, Rossell Hope. "The Authors of the Middle English Religious Lyrics." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 39, no. 2 (April 1940): 230-38.

- Robertson, Elizabeth Ann. *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Rolle, Richard. "Meditations on the Passion." In *Richard Rolle, the English Writings*, edited by Rosamund Allen, 90-124. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Sahlin, Claire L. *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*. Studies in Medieval Mysticism. Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2001.
- Schroeder (Carruthers), Mary C. "The Character of Conscience in "Piers Plowman"" *Studies in Philology* 67, no. 1 (January 1970): 13-30.
- Staley, Lynn. "Margery Kempe: Social Critic." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992): 159-84.
- Staley, Lynn. *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Stanbury, Sarah. "Arts of Self-Patronage in the Book of Margery Kempe." In *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England*, 191-218. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- Stouck, Mary-Ann. "'In a Valey of Pis Restles Mynde': Contexts and Meaning." *Modern Philology* 85, no. 1 (August 1987): 1-11. doi:10.1086/391592.
- Taylor, Andrew. "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books." In *The Idea of the Vernacular an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, 353-65. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- Thomas of Celano. "First Life of Francis." In *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, by Bernard McGinn, 226-27. New York: Modern Library, 2006.
- Vitz, Evelyn B. "Liturgy as Education in the Middle Ages." In *Medieval Education*, edited by Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski, 20-34. Fordham Series in Medieval Studies. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- Watson, Nicholas. *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*. Edited by Alastair Minnis.

- Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 13. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Watson, Nicholas. "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love." *Speculum* 68, no. 3 (July 1993): 637-83.
- Weber, Sarah Appleton. *Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric; a Study of Sacred History and Aesthetic Form*. [Columbus]: Ohio State University Press, 1969.
- Wimsatt, James I. "St. Bernard, the Canticle of Canticles, and Mystical Poetry." In *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe: Fourteen Original Essays*, edited by Paul E. Szarmach, 82-88. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.
- Wimsatt, James I. "The Canticle of Canticles, Two Latin Poems, and "In a Valey of Pis Restles Mynde"" *Modern Philology* 75, no. 4 (May 1978): 327-45.
- Windeatt, B. A. "The Art of Mystical Loving: Julian of Norwich." In *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at the Exeter Symposium, July 1980*, by Marion Glasscoe, 55-71. [Exeter, Devon]: University of Exeter, 1980.
- Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular: an Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- Woolf, Rosemary. *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*. New York: Clarendon P., 1968.
- Woolf, Rosemary. "The Theme Of Christ The Lover-Knight In Medieval English Literature." *The Review of English Studies* XIII, no. 49 (February 1962): 1-16.
- Yoshikawa, Naoë Kukita. *Margery Kempe's Meditations: the Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography*. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages. Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2007.
- Zeeman, Nicolette. *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.