Revelations to Others in Medieval Hagiographical and Visionary Texts

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns "revelations to others" in medieval hagiographical and visionary texts. Revelations to others take many forms—spiritual visions, dreams, visual and tactile witnessing of miracles, auditions—but they all are experienced by someone other than, or in addition to, the holy person who is the subject of the text. This type of revelatory experience is common and, I argue, highly significant. Most straightforwardly, revelations to others serve to further authenticate holy women or men, confirming their devotion to God, their miraculous abilities, and/or their favored position with Christ. But revelations to others do much more than authorize the visionary. They voice the possibility that one could learn to have visions, which has interesting connections to modern ideas of guided seeing, such as meditation. They suggest circumstances in which holy persons served as devotional objects, helping their viewers achieve a higher level of religious experience in a similar manner to stained glass windows, crucifixes, or images of Veronica's veil. For women, revelations to others sometimes offer access to spaces in which they could not physically step foot, such as the altar or the bedrooms of abbots. Moreover, by showcasing the variety of persons participating in divine experiences (monks and nuns, lay persons, nobility, and sometimes other holy persons), revelations to others speak to the larger visionary communities in which these holy persons lived. Through a series of close readings, this dissertation creates a taxonomy of revelations to others and argues for their necessity in understanding the collaborative nature of medieval spirituality.

DEDICATION

to Mom and Dad, for their unwavering faith and support

to Erik, my heart

and for my children – never doubt what you are capable of accomplishing

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CHAPTER ONE

REVELATIONS TO OTHERS

At dawn on the feast of the Ascension, Dunstan of Canterbury (c.909-988) was meditating alone when a multitude of angels burst through the church doors. They greeted and conversed with the holy man, told him of his impending death, and then floated off into the heavens. Simultaneously, a priest called Ælfgar, who was also awake in meditation, was "swept up above himself in a vision and saw blessed Dunstan sitting on the bishop's throne, and a huge crowd of beautiful young men stood about him . . . he heard these same young men say these things, which we have just recounted, to Dunstan." The narrator follows this account with an explication: "I believe that the Lord wished for this to be revealed to that man so that he might both commit the glory of the one about to depart to faithful testimony and aspire the more ardently himself for that same glory because of this revelation, and also so that later when he would become bishop he might preach about it more certainly to his people since it was known to him."[1]

What is the significance of someone other than the saint having a vision in a hagiographical text? What does it mean for the holy person to so pointedly not be the only one receiving messages from God? The most straightforward answer is the narrator's first elucidation above: "the Lord wished for this to be revealed to that man so

[1] Eadmer, *Vita S. Dunstani*, in *Eadmer of Canterbury: Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. and trans. Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 151-153. Translation and Latin transcription by Turner and Muir. "supra se ipsum per uisum raptus est, uiditque beatum Dunstanum cathedrae pontificali praesidere, et ei . . . formosorum iuuenum immensum agmen assistere. Audiuit etiam ea, quae proxime digessimus, eosdem iuuenes ei dixisse"; "Quod, ut reor, ea re uiro illi Dominus patefieri uoluit, quatinus et gloriam tanto indicio uehementius anhelaret, necnon antistes quandoque futurus eam suis utpote cognitam certius praedicaret" (64).

that he might . . . commit the glory of the one about to depart to faithful testimony." What I've termed "revelations to others"—revelations experienced by persons other than the protagonists of hagiographical and visionary texts—primarily serve to provide such testimony, creating witnesses of the saints' divine favor. But, as the explication clarifies, such revelations do more than authenticate the holy person. As a witness to Dunstan's vision, Ælfgar is encouraged in his own pursuit of the divine and empowered to help others in his community access revelatory knowledge as well.

Revelations to others permeate medieval hagiography. They take many forms—seeing Christ embracing the holy person; hearing a divine voice confirming the saint's favor with God; conversing with the visionary while simultaneously caught up in rapture; touching the blood miraculously dripping from a saint's unpunctured body. Their prevalence and their seemingly straightforward purpose of saintly substantiation seem the probable cause revelations to others have received limited scholarly attention. The witnessing of light shining from or around a holy person is a good example. This phenomenon occurs in a plethora of texts from a nun seeing a shrouded, shining body pulled to the heavens by bright golden cords in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* to a nun witnessing a glowing orb floating above the sleeping Angela of Foligno.[2] Like details of a saint's childhood that highlight their virtue from a young age, visions that repeat motifs of the Sacred Heart, or miracles of levitation, these revelations

[2] The nun has this vision a few days before the death of St. Æthelburh. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), IV.9. *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), 144.

to others are generally considered tropes incorporated to authenticate the visionary and fulfill expectations of what vitae should include. However, to dismiss tropes without considering their function risks missing how they have been adapted to and shape these texts, as well as their role in monastic memory and instruction.[3] Overlooking revelations to others in favor of the revelations had by the main holy persons also participates in what Anna Harrison describes as a long "tendency to see late medieval spirituality as focusing increasingly on individual, inner experience rather than on group practice, even when the context is religious or monastic community."[4] Harrison, focused on the thirteenth-century convent at Helfta, then calls for "the continuing reappraisal of the role of community in late medieval piety."[5] This dissertation aims to provide such a reassessment of medieval religious communities in general, bringing revelations to others to the forefront as group interactions and considering what they show us about the collaborative nature of medieval spirituality.

1. Goals, Texts, and Terminology

In order to understand their various and significant functions, my dissertation establishes a sort of taxonomy of revelations to others, cataloguing the different types of

[3] Mary Carruthers discusses how recognizing tropes is "a function of memory and shared experience, including shared education. Thus tropes are also social phenomena, and in monastic culture they were considered, as they had been in late ancient culture, to have ethical, communal instrumentality." Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

[4] Anna Harrison, "'Oh! What Treasure is in this Book?' Writing, Reading, and Community at the Monastery of Helfta," *Viator* 39.1 (2008): 105.

[5] Harrison, "'What Treasure is in this Book?,'" 106.

revelations had by others in religious communities, how they are experienced, and how the effects of these revelations are shared with holy persons, community members, and readers/hearers of the texts. It contributes to scholarship that focuses on the societal contexts of holy persons, on how saints are shaped by and contribute to their communities, rather than on their individual piety. While revelations to others are occasionally mentioned in these studies, they are rarely discussed in detail.[6] A study concentrated on these revelations does not exist. This dissertation works to fill this gap in the study of medieval spirituality.

When I began this project, I focused specifically on others having dreams or spiritual visions of holy persons. However, as I studied these occurrences I came to agree with Rosemary Hale's observation that "We miss something of the sensory dynamic of the world or culture of medieval mystics if we persist in interpreting their experiences solely as 'visions.'"[7] Community members also hear messages from the divine and witness bodily miracles manifested in the holy person. They touch, they taste, and they speak. Consequently, I settled on "revelations to others," a term encompassing visions

[6] For example, Penny Galloway in her article on devotional practices in beguine communities considers the daily devotional routines and religious celebrations of "ordinary" beguines but does not discuss their revelations. Penny Galloway, "Neither Miraculous Nor Astonishing: The Devotional Practice of Beguine Communities in French Flanders," in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact,* ed. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999).

[7] Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and See, For God is Sweet': Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience," in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism,* ed. Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas H. Bestuel, Janet Goebel, and William E. Pollard (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 14.

(bodily and spiritual), auditions, spoken/sung responses, and tactile encounters. For an event to be classified as a "revelation," it must also meaningfully affect the receiver. I do not consider a nun watching a holy person walking across the convent or even meditating on the Passion to be a revelation unless textually indicated through explication or narrative framing.

Considering the potential for confusion when discussing people having revelations of people who have revelations, I utilize separate terms for the roles played in these events. Thus the "other" experiencing the revelation is referred to by name (if known) or by position such as community member, nun, monk, priest, or lay sister. Only the holy person who is the subject of the text (such as Lutgard in the *Life of Lutgard of Aywières*) is referred to as the holy person/woman/man, the visionary, or the saint. When I use "saint," it is with recognition that protagonists of hagiographical texts were sometimes treated as living saints by their communities and continued to be recognized as such even if not canonized after their death.[8]

In this study, I focus on revelations to others that occur during the lifetime of the holy person. I do not consider postmortem miracle accounts, which function differently than revelations involving living saints. When a holy person appears from beyond the grave to heal or help one who prayed to them, they come as the divine. They are no longer questing for divine access amongst a religious community all seeking the same. A living saint, however, participates in collaborative devotion both physically and

[8] For more on living saints, see Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

spiritually. They may at times be the subject of others' revelations, but they are also still in the process of learning about the divine through revelations of their own. These are mutual experiences. Studying revelations to others occurring during a saint's life rather than in their miracle accounts thus provides us a better understanding of the shared revelatory culture of medieval religious communities.

In selecting examples of revelations to others for this study, I have not focused on a particular century, location, or religious order. One of my goals is to illustrate how abundant these revelations are in medieval hagiographical and visionary works, and discussing diverse examples seems the best way to reflect this prevalence. The main texts I include range from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries and from southern France to England and Germany.[9] Most of the chosen texts were written in Latin, French, or Middle English, but it should be recognized that revelations to others are also present in texts in other languages such as the fourteenth-century German Sister-Books.[10]

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[9] The key texts in this dissertation include, in order of appearance, the Thomas of Cantimpré's *Life of Lutgard of Aywières* (Latin); the *Life of Douceline of Digne* (Occitan); Philip of Clairvaux's *Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek* (both Middle English and Latin versions are referenced); Goswin of Bossut's *Lives* of Ida of Nivelles and Arnulf and Abundus of Villers (Latin); Prior and Master Peters' *Life of Birgitta of Sweden* (Latin); the *Life of Christina of Markyate* (Latin); Mechtild of Hackeborn's *The Book of Gostlye Grace* (Middle English) and *Gertrude the Great's Herald of God's Divine Love* (Latin). I provide general overviews, details of authorship, and other relevant information about each text in the chapters below. For all but two of these texts, I reference edited editions of the original language. My reasons for utilizing the Middle English versions of the *Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek* and Mechtild's *Book of Gostlye Grace* (both originally written in Latin) are also explained in the chapters below.

[10] For a comprehensive overview of these texts, see Gertud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996). Examples of revelations to others in the Sister-Books can be found on pp. 35, 77, 81, 85, 93, 121.

Revelations to others are far more common in narrated *Lives* than in texts written by the visionaries themselves. Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, for example, contains only her own visions, and even *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for all the other people who interact with Margery, rarely indicates how others experience the divine. This is not surprising—telling of others who saw you in a vision may cast doubt on your humility and remove focus from your own revelations. Because of this, however, the texts I've selected for study are written, at least mostly, by hagiographers.[11] This requires us to be especially conscious of the text's author and the author's purpose.[12] Revelations to others also show the continued importance of oral culture in the creation of these texts. Just as the visions of the holy person were shared with the narrator, so were the ways others experienced the visionary. In some cases, these *Lives* become collections of revelations to others carefully assembled by their composers—Philip of Clairvaux and Thomas of Cantimpré both describe actively gathering these accounts.

[11] Gertrude the Great's *Herald of Divine Love* is partially written by the holy woman herself. However, the portions of this text I focus on are written by another nun in her community. See chapter five below.

[12] For discussions of hagiographers as authors, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Madeleine Jeay and Kathleen Garay, "'To Promote God's Praise and Her Neighbour's Salvation.' Strategies of Authorship and Readership Among Mystic Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Women Writing Back/ Writing Women Back: Transnational Perspectives from the Late Middle Ages to the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. Anke Gilleir, Alicia C. Montoya, and Suzan van Dijk, *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* 16 (Boston: Brill, 2010); John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Chapter 13, "The Literature of Sanctity" in Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Narrators also frequently frame revelations to others, describing the situations in which they occurred and commenting on the significance of the revelation. These explications not only demonstrate the revelatory effect an experience has on its recipient, but also suggest what the reader may take away from this revelation. The reader becomes another witness. In her study of miracle stories and miracle collecting, Rachel Koopmans comments that personal stories "invite a sense of intimacy with the saint at the center of the story."[13] Accounts of revelations to others have a similar effect, allowing you to experience the holy person through the senses of their community.

In addition to these hagiographical and visionary texts, I draw on medieval theories of sight, sound, touch, and taste to better understand how revelations to others are experienced through the senses.[14] Medieval religious practices reflect a long history of using the senses to connect to the divine, along with concern about failures of the

[13] Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 22.

[14] While scent was also an important sense in religious communities and sweet smells sometimes accompany visions of the Lord, it is not as commonly mentioned as a way of sensing a living holy person. Sweet smells emanating from their tombs was a more frequent olfactory indication of saintly divinity than smells associated with saints while alive. For more on the medieval sense of smell, see C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 117-146; Catherine Saucier, "The Sweet Sound of Sanctity: Sensing St Lambert," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2010), 15; and Volker Schier, "Probing the Mystery of the Use of Saffron in Medieval Nunneries," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5.1 (March 2010), 59.

senses to accurately perceive God.[15] As pointed out by Laura Skinnebach, "The prospect of a sensory encounter with God enhanced man's desire for God in spite of the paradoxical nature of the matter. How may God, who is ultimately spiritual and incomprehensible, be comprehended and encountered by man who is bound to a physical and material body? . . . Nevertheless, it was agreed by early medieval theologians and re-stated in the later Middle Ages that the Incarnation [the physical presence of Christ on Earth] had legitimized sensory experience as a way of knowing God."[16] In this dissertation, theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, and Hildegard of Bingen, among others, provide a framework for working out how revelations to others offer this sensory accessing of the divine, and well as recognizing the narrative measures taken to assure their reliability.

[15] For an overview of the senses in the Middle Ages, see Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, especially chapter two, "Ideas About the Senses." Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, eds., *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, *The Senses & Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2010) and Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz, and Alison Calhoun, eds., *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage/Fascinations/Frames* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008) provide helpful and fascinating collections of essays on the medieval senses. Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) is useful for placing medieval concepts of the senses in historical context.

[16] Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "Transfiguration: Change and Comprehension in Late Medieval Devotional Perception," in *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects and Practices*, ed. Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2016), 91.

2. Non-Goals

Having outlined the goals of this dissertation, I find it equally important to state what this project does not set out to do. First and foremost, this dissertation does not offer a comprehensive study of all revelations to others. These revelations are as diverse and abundant as revelations had by saints, and I have not yet collected a large enough database of revelations to others to assemble a macrocosmic picture of the sort offered of saints' lives by Weinstein and Bell.[17] I am more concerned in this work with sussing out how revelations to others supplement communal religious practices through close readings of select examples than in tracing how these revelations may differ by religious order, location, or century. I have not included examples of revelations to others from Iberian, Byzantine, or Middle Eastern hagiography because I have not yet spent significant time with these texts, though I am interested to see if revelations to others are as frequent or function similarly in these works as I expand this project.

While revelations to others often function to verify the visions or miracles of living saints, as discussed in the next section, my purpose in this dissertation is not to prove or examine the "truth" of these revelations. Regardless of whether anyone actually saw Douceline of Digne levitate or heard God affirm his love for Gertrude the Great, the inclusion and explication of these accounts in hagiographical and visionary texts are expressive of medieval spirituality.

Lastly, while my dissertation does not ignore gendered aspects of revelations to others, it does not make them an overall driving focus of the study. Revelations to others

[17] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints & Society: Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

are also present in hagiographies of male visionaries, and those in the vitae of women do not always serve a gendered purpose. An exception to this is chapter four, in which I discuss revelations in which men see women in male spaces.

3. Bearing Witness

Before delving into my chapters on the various ways they help others access the divine, I want to briefly discuss the most straightforward purpose of revelations to others—authenticating saints. When lay or religious persons touch a holy person in rapture, see them in a mutual vision, or hear them singing a celestial chorus, they bear witness to the saint's favor with God. These witness accounts are essential for verifying holy persons to their communities, to audiences of the hagiographical texts, and to ecclesiastical authorities considering them for canonization.[18] Authorial mindfulness of the authenticating function of revelations to others is clear in how they frame or explicate these occurrences, such as Eadmer's pointed statement that the Lord gifted Ælfgar his revelation so he could provide "faithful testimony" of Dunstan's glory. Though I point out such narrative framing when relevant, overall in this dissertation I move beyond witnessing to provide a more nuanced examination of revelations to others.

4. Chapter Overviews

My chapters present four categories of revelations to others. The roles and significance of these groupings are illustrated through sets of close readings.

In chapter two, I consider revelations in which holy persons serve as devotional objects. The chapter consists of close readings of revelations to others in the *Lives* of

[18] See chapters two and three in Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country*.

Lutgard of Aywières, Douceline of Digne, and (briefly) Elizabeth of Spalbeek. Utilizing medieval concepts of sight and touch, along with Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory and Gregory Minissale's theories of framing, I discuss how these holy women become points of divine access for others in their communities in a similar manner to relics, crucifixes, and images of Veronica.

Chapter three posits that revelations to others show us holy persons assisting or instructing members of their communities in having their own revelatory experiences. Adding contemporary theories of sound and taste to the visual and haptic philosophies of chapter two, I return to the *Lives* of Douceline of Digne and Elizabeth of Spalbeek as illustrations of learning to see through revelatory devotional performance. I then discuss revelations to others prefaced or followed by the support and mentorship of the holy person in Goswin of Bossut's *Lives* of Ida of Nivelles and Arnulf and Abundus of Villers. I argue that these edifying revelations not only speak to the reciprocal spiritual relationships between visionaries and their communities as teachers, students, and mutual witnesses, but also provide pathways for the audience to access the divine.

My fourth chapter offers a brief gendered reflection of revelations to others, considering how these visions do in some cases empower women differently than similar visions would men. I draw on discussions of medieval gendered spaces, Doreen Massey's theories of space as continuously constructed, and Augustine's concept of visual hierarchies to examine how revelations to others grant Birgitta of Sweden and Christina of Markyate access to traditionally masculine places.

In the final chapter of my dissertation, I return to Latour's Actor-Network-Theory as a framework for understanding revelations to others within the networks of the

religious communities at Villers and Helfta. I argue that studying revelations to others lets us hear voices besides the saints' and helps us see divine access as not localized to specific holy persons but distributed amongst different actors in a community-centric spirituality.

CHAPTER TWO

VISIONARIES AS DEVOTIONAL OBJECTS

When word spread of the death of Douceline of Digne, a thirteenth-century beguine of Marseilles, crowds swarmed her community. "Anxious to see and touch the holy body because of their devotion to her," people took her possessions, cut up her clothing, and pressed their own belongings against her body, eager to keep a relic of the woman. They were so forceful in their desire to gain a piece of Douceline that "one of the friars almost lost his arm trying to protect her from them" and even court guards armed with swords were "barely able to keep the people from tearing her body apart in their great devotion."[19] In the Christian cultural context of medieval Europe, this relic-izing of anything that Douceline had touched is not surprising. Relics, which Cynthia Hahn notes could be anything from a "bone or bones, some other portion of the body, or merely an object that has been sanctified through contact with a sacred person," were a common means of making contact with God through the virtues of the saints.[20] But relics were far from the only objects used for this sort of connection. The material remnants of churches,

[19] *The Life of Saint Douceline, a Beguine of Provence*, trans. Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 92-93. "e venia totz le pobols am gran abrivament, per vezer e per toquar lo sant corps, per gran devocion quell obols hi avia" (13.16); "uns fraires non hi perdet lo bras, car la lur defendia" (13.17); "A penas pogrom li armat gardar, que defendian amb espazas e am massas, aitant cant plus podian, quell sant cors non ta[l]lessan, per gran devocion" (13.21). All translations of *The Life of Saint Douceline* are by Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay, unless otherwise indicated. The original Provençale text provided in the footnotes is retrieved from J. H. Albanés's transcription of Douceline's *Vita* (*La Vie de Sainte Douceline Fondatrice des Béguines de Marseille*, transcribed and trans. J. H. Albanés (Marseille: Camoin,1879)).

[20] Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 8-9.

convents, and monasteries include carved, painted, and embroidered images that showcase a desire to see and touch the divine.[21] Hagiographical texts such as the *Lives* of Douceline of Digne (c.1215-1274) and her slightly earlier contemporary Lutgard of Aywières (1182-1246) echo the importance of objects to devotion, as the holy persons in these works often have revelations whilst meditating on depictions of Christ and his saints. My focus in this chapter, however, is not on how these visionaries accessed the divine, but on how they became objects themselves, providing spiritual avenues for those who gazed on and touched their living bodies.

1. "How she was seen": Lutgard of Aywières as Devotional Object

Born in Flemish Tongeren in 1182, Lutgard of Aywières joined the nearby community of women of St. Catherine at St. Trond at the age of twelve. In 1206, when Lutgard was twenty-four, St. Catherine's nuns were consecrated into the Benedictine order and Lutgard was elected prioress. Viewing this elevated position as interfering with her complete devotion to Christ, Lutgard moved to a house of *mulieres religiosae* at Aywières. This house joined the Ciscterian order in 1210, and Lutgard remained there

[21] There are many studies on material devotion in the Middle Ages. See Joanna E. Ziegler, "Reality as Imitation: The Role of Religious Imagery Among the Beguines of the Low Countries" in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 112-126; June L. Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, ed. Alison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 29 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan, and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, eds. *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects and Practices* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2011).

until her death in 1246. Thomas of Cantimpré (1201-1272), who viewed Lutgard as a sort of spiritual mother, composed the *Life of Lutgard of Aywières* within two years of her death.[22] Her *Life* is one of four vitae written by Cantimpré, and one of at least sixteen written about holy women in the Low Countries during the thirteenth century.[23]

As a visionary, Lutgard is known for bridal mysticism and early participation in the exchange of hearts that would become popular among female mystics in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[24] Her visions of the Sacred Heart, meditations on the Passion, dedication to saving souls through prayer and three seven-year fasts, as well as her mystical inability to learn French have all been the focus of scholarly study.[25] As with most other holy persons, revelations of Lutgard have been overlooked in favor of those by her, yet her *Life* contains more than a dozen revelations to others, most of which are visually experienced. Many of these shape Lutgard as a devotional object.

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[22] For more on Thomas of Cantimpré, see Barbara Newman, Introduction to *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, ed. Barbara Newman (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 3-51.

[23] For more on this prolific diocese, see Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds. *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact*, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 2 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1999).

[24] For more on Lutgard as mystic, see Amandus Bussels, "Saint Lutgard's Mystical Spirituality," in *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women* vol. 3, book 1, ed. by John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series, 113 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995), 211-24.

[25] For example, see Alexandra Barratt, "Language and Body in Thomas of Cantimpré's *Life of Lutgard of Aywières*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 30, no. 4 (1995), 339-347; and Margot King, "The Dove at the Window: The Ascent of the Soul in Thomas de Cantimpré's *Life of Lutgard of Aywières*," in *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women*, vol. 3, book 1, ed. by John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series, 113 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995), 225-54.

Before discussing these revelations, we need to look more closely at vision as a sense in the Middle Ages. Medieval theories of vision often included both the physical act of sight and the spiritual experience of having a vision, seeing the two as closely linked. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, philosophers and theologians including Robert Grosseteste (c.1175-1253) and Roger Bacon (c.1220-1292) expanded on classical concepts of optical theory, including theories of intromission and extramission. Both intromission (which suggests that an object emits rays that act on the passive eye) and extramission (which suggests that the eye actively emits rays that connect with objects), are concerned with sight as an interaction. We can see a basis for these theories in Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) *On the Trinity*, in which the theologian differentiates between the sense of sight and vision. Sight, Augustine explains, proceeds from "the body of the living being that perceives," for the body is always capable of sight even when there is nothing to be seen. Vision, on the other hand, "is produced from a thing that is visible, together with one who sees." If there is no object to be perceived, vision does not exist.[26] Grosseteste and Bacon, drawing on these theories, shaped the concept Suzannah Biernoff calls "reciprocal vision." According to this model of vision, the subject and the object are each altered by the other, stressing the intimacy and mutuality of sight through a process in which "looking becomes analogous to

[26] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Arthur West Haddan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130111.htm. XI.2.3.

touching."[27] This form of vision is corporeal, but is intertwined with spiritual vision because images must be transferred to the soul. Bodily sight was therefore seen as necessary for spiritual vision and as a method of "*participation* in the divine."[28]

This interactive understanding of vision is reflected in concepts of "devotional gaze." Devotional gaze centered on the idea that, as described by Thomas Lentes, "the inner person was to be trained by means of his eye and the manner in which he gazed . . . The inner person, the *imago Dei*, was an area where good and bad images were projected. By means of contemplating images, this *imago* was purified. The images penetrated the eye and were, so to speak, engraved upon the interior person."[29] Devotional objects facilitated such contemplation. Ranging from tapestries and liturgical textiles to manuscript illustrations to stained-glass windows, statues, and Veronicas, these items cultivated a spiritual joining with the divine through a process of visualization. June L. Mecham, for example, cites instances of nuns focusing on small statues of the Christ-child while having visions of caring for the holy infant.[30] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, in a chapter titled "Vision and the Veronica," similarly quotes divine encounters stimulated by gazing on the face of Christ.[31] In the *Life of Lutgard*, Cantimpré describes how

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[27] Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 85.

[28] Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 112.

[29] Thomas Lentes, "'As far as the eye can see…': Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 362.

[30] Mecham, *Sacred Communities*, 76.

[31] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 317-382; For information on sight and devotional piety in early Christin context, see Georgia Frank, "The Pilgrim's Gaze in the

Lutgard, "Whenever she was burdened by any disquiet of heart or body, she would stand before an image of the Crucified One. After she had looked at the image with a steady gaze for a long time, her eyes would close, her limbs would sink to the ground, and she would faint . . . Then, completely rapt in spirit, she would see Christ with the bloody wound in his side and, pressing the mouth of her heart against it, she would suck such sweetness that nothing at all could distress her."[32]

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) can be helpful in better understanding how these objects work as part of a devotional experience. ANT posits that objects have agency and are capable of behaving as mediators that "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry" rather than simply intermediaries that carry meaning without causing transformation.[33] As mediators, objects are actors, which Latour defines as "*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs

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Age Before Icons," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: See as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98-115.

[32] All translations of the *Life of Lutgard* are by Margot H. King and Barbara Newman unless otherwise noted. Latin text provided in the footnotes is from the *Lutgardis Virgo* accessed through The Acta Sanctorum Database. Thomas of Cantimpré, *The Life of Lutgard of Aywières*, trans. Margot H. King and Barbara Newman, in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, ed. Barbara Newman (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 229. "Cum aliquo incommodo cordis aut corporis gravaretur, stabat ante imaginem Crucifixi: & cum diu fixis oculis imaginem inspexisset, clausis oculis & resolutis in terram membris,… super pedes suos stare non poterat; sed elanguens prorsus rapiebatur in spiritu, & videbat Christum cum vulnere lateris cruentato; & exinde tantam dulcedinem apposito cordis ore sugebat, ut in nullo posset penitus tribulari."

[33] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39. For more on intermediaries vs mediators, see Latour's chapter "First Source of Uncertainty."

by making a difference."[34] Objects, he argues, make differences – hitting a nail with a hammer is not the same as hitting one without.[35] Rather, "things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on."[36] However, objects also tend to "quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries . . . This is why specific tricks have to be invented to *make them talk*, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do."[37] We can see this in the above example of Lutgard meditating on an image of the Crucifixion. An image of Christ on the cross, when sitting unobserved or simply glanced at in passing, is an intermediary. It carries the meaning with which it was created, but it does not cause transformation – it does not act. When looked upon by a disquieted, comfort-seeking Lutgard, however, the object becomes a mediator, rendering possible her vision of Christ and sucking of his sweetness. Lutgard's devotional gaze works to "make [the object] talk" and the object in turn makes Lutgard experience the divine, demonstrating the visual reciprocity stressed by Grosseteste and Bacon.

When considering how a living holy person like Lutgard becomes a devotional object themselves, it is important to note that devotional gaze is not the only "specific trick" that makes an object talk. Hagiographical texts, focused on authenticating their

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[34] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71.

[35] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71.

[36] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 72.

[37] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 79.

saint, often do not provide the same level of detail about others' gaze as they do about the holy person's. However, situational and narrative framing can also facilitate object agency through defining how subjects view an object and can be used to understand how a living devotional object transforms those gazing upon it. In *Framing Consciousness in Art: Transcultural Perspective,* Gregory Minissale defines a frame as "a way of thinking, as well as an object of thought."[38] He states that frames can be physical or non-physical boundaries, but "in both cases the frame's underlying logic is to show us what to look at, what to delimit. . . . [Frames] presuppose a gaze (and focus of thought) responsible for the delimitation."[39] As we move into discussing revelations to others in Lutgard's *Life*, we will see how frames often help focus the viewer on the holy woman as a devotional object through which they can further their own connection to God.

One of the earliest revelations to others recorded in Cantimpré's *Life of Lutgard* is the mutual witnessing of a miraculous event. In the chapter titled "How she was seen suspended in the air by the whole community," Cantimpré recounts in detail "a most glorious miracle vouchsafed to several persons. On the holy day of Pentecost, when the nuns were chanting 'Veni Creator Spiritus' in choir, they manifestly saw Lutgard elevated two cubits from the earth into the air." He follows this account with the explanation that Lutgard is raised towards heaven because her soul had already "gained

[38] Gregory Minissale, *Framing Consciousness in Art: Transcultural Perspectives*, Consciousness, Literature and the Arts, 20 (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2009), 132.

[39] Minissale, *Framing Consciousness*, 141.

possession of heaven . . . the land wherein she walked in her chaste mind."[40] Levitation is, of course, a hagiographical trope (one that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter), but as Barbara Newman points out, such topoi provide "literal, concrete representations of inner experience" that are highly valuable for authenticating the saint, and, I would add, for instructing the community.[41]

In this moment of levitation, Lutgard loses her physical human agency but becomes a mediator as an object of communal gaze. Like a stained glass window or an altarpiece, she represents and encourages reflection on the presence and power of God. The image-like quality of Lutgard is highlighed through the subject/object assigning language in this narration. Lutgard "was seen" by the nuns around her and her body "was thus raised." The nuns, in contrast, "manifestly saw." Moreover, Lutgard's levitation is not only a miracle that blesses the saint but a miracle "vouchsafed" to her community, given to them like visions are given to Lutgard and indicating the sight is of value for the viewer and not just for purposes of saintly authorization.

The value of Lutgard as devotional object in this miracle is further emphasized by the liturgical framing of the event. The liturgy often influenced which and how images

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[40] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 224-5. "Quomodo visa est a toto conventu in aëre suspendi. Ut ergo majora horum de ea credi pariter possint & probari, miraculum gloriosissimum votum pluribus enarrabo. In sancto die Pentecostes cum in choro a Monialibus, Veni creator Spiritus, cantaretur; ab his quæ in choro erant manifestissime visum est, Lutgardem ad duos cubitos a terra in aëre sublimari. Nec mirum si corpus a terra ad cælum suspensum sit, cujus anima mundo jam effecta sublimior, cælum secundum promissum Domini possidebat; Omnis, inquit, locus quem calcaverit pes vester, vester erit. Pede utique affectus cælum sine spatio illocale calcavit, quod ideo cælibi mente calcatum, etiam corporis gestu pro sua possibilitate suscepit. Fælix ergo Lutgardis per tantum miraculum, cujus corpus & anima exultaverunt in Deum vivum."

[41] Newman, introduction to *Thomas of Cantimpré*, 45.

were gazed upon during specific times of the day and year.[42] When Lutgard is raised up not only on Pentecost (the feast day celebrating the reception of the Holy Spirit by a community of disciples and converts), but more specifically during the chanting of "Veni Creator Spiritus" (a hymn asking the Holy Spirit to fill their hearts), these ritual details serve as non-physical boundaries directing viewers to gaze on the hovering woman within these limits of interpretation. Lutgard takes on the role of liturgical art, "anchoring the text and extending the meaning of the word by visualizing it and representing its significance to the community."[43] Though we are not told exactly how or if the nuns were transformed by looking at Lutgard's levitating body, the contextual frame clearly invites meditation on the reward found in receiving God.

Another vision focused on the elevation of Lutgard (this time figuratively rather than physcially) occurs during the ceremony consectrating St. Catherine's nuns. As the bishop fastens the linen wreath on Lutgard, "a certain holy and simple man . . . saw the bishop quite clearly place a huge golden crown on Lutgard's head, honouring her uniquely above the rest." Unlike Lutgard's levitation, this event is not communally witnessed—when the man asks the assisting priest why Lutgard's crown was gold, the priest mocks him, crying "'Are your eyes inside out that you call it a golden crown, when

[42] Lentes, "Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages," 366-70.

[43] Colum Hourihane, Introduction to *Objects, Images, and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy*, ed. Colum Hourihane, Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers VI (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

everyone here can see it is linen?'" At this, the "blessed man . . . smiled, for he knew of Lutgard's unparalleled merit."[44]

In some ways, this vision functions similarly to the witnessing of Lutgard's levitation. Once again, the holy woman is physically passive in the scene. She is "led" and "crowned" with no mention made of any action taken by her. Reminiscent of Mary in illustrations of the Coronation of the Virgin, she becomes an object of devotional gaze representative of divine grace, particularly as "The crown has a long tradition in Christian iconography as a symbol of the rewards due to the faithful in heaven."[45] As with Lutgard's levitation, the timing of this vision acts as a frame, delimiting focus to Lutgard's elevation by occurring during a ceremony consecrating and celebrating women as honored brides of Christ.[46]

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[44] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 232. "Proinde anhelare cœpit, ut ministerio consecrationis per manus Episcopi uni viro Christo Domino perfectius jungeretur; Huardus Leodiensis Episcopus statueret consecrare. Adducta est ergo & Lutgardis ad cœtum Virginum consecranda: quarum capitibus cum dictus Præsul, in signum coronæ aureolæ, sertum ex zonis factum innecteret, & ad Lutgardem in ordine pervenisset; cuidam viro sancto & simplici, qui astabat, manifestissime visum est Episcopum coronam auream maximam capiti Lutgardis imponere, & eam præ aliis singulariter honorare. Hoc cum videri ab omnibus æstimaret; quæsivit ab astante presbytero: cur soli Dominæ Lutgardi Episcopus auream coronam imponeret. Quem presbyter, rei nescius, irrisit, dicens: Numquid oculos inversos habes, ut auream coronam dicas, quam lineam omnes vident. Siluit ergo vir beatus & risit, & in Lutgarde meritum singulare notavit. Sed & hinc testes duos veritas habuit, quoniam hoc idem quædam de consecratis Monialibus vidit. Mirandis plus miranda succedunt."

[45] Julie Hotchin, "The Nun's Crown," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4 (2009): 187.

[46] For more on the significance of nuns' crowns and coronation ceremonies, see Hotchin, "The Nun's Crown," and also Caroline Walker Bynum, "'Crowned with Many Crowns': Nuns and Their Statues in Late-Medieval Wienhausen," *The Catholic Historical Review* 101, no.1 (2015), 18-40.

However, unlike the levitation, this vision is individual and speaks to a more private form of devotion. The narrative provides a bit more detail on how gazing on Lutgard affected the viewer than we saw in the description of Lutgard's levitation. While the vision itself authorizes the saint, the man's experience is inwardly focused—he does not protest that Lutgard's crown was gold to the jeering priest or exclaim his vision for the benefit of Lutgard or others. Rather, he smiles at his personal knowledge of Lutgard's merit. This smile acts as acknowledgement that he has participated in the divine by witnessing Lutgard and her golden crown and indicates that the crowned Lutgard "made a difference" as a devotional object.

Many of the revelations to others in the *Life of Lutgard* involve the seeing of light surrounding or emanating from the saint. Even more so than levitation, the appearance of light is a common trope indicating favor from God, likely because light was viewed as divine in nature. Medieval theories of light were strongly influenced by the late fifth or early sixth-century writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, who claimed light is an image of God and his goodness.[47] We see this idea reflected in the twelfth-century inscription Abbot Suger placed on the doors to his light-filled church of Saint-Denis, asking visitors to seek "the True Light where Christ is the true door," and in Robert Grosseteste's explanation of light as the primary body which is the "form and perfection of all bodies" in his *De Luce*.[48] Addressing the witnessing of lights that occur in the fourteenth-century German

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[47] Iain M. Mackenzie, *The "Obscurism of Light": A Theological Study into the Nature of Light* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996), 55.

[48] "Ad verum lumen, ubi Christus janua vera." Abbot Suger, *De Administratione*, trans. Erwin Panofsky, in *Abbot Suger: On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, ed. by Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 49;

Sister-Books, Gertrude Jaron Lewis points out that images of "saintly wom[en] radiating light captur[e] the essential human likeness to God that, in hagiographic writing, is reflected in the halo."[49] She then expands on the significance of light—light is miraculous in the darkness and reflective of God's creation of light to illuminate the world.[50] In his *Life of Lutgard,* Thomas of Cantimpré is very much aware of the divine implications of light and of the importance of Lutgard as a light in her convent. Recounting how she became prioress of St. Catherine's, Cantimpré describes Lutgard as a light-object, stating that "since it was not fitting for such a lamp to be concealed under a bushel, she was placed on a lampstand so that the respledence of her grace might appear to all."[51]

An early vision of light around Lutgard occurs one night while the holy woman "had been keeping vigil without interruption." Cantimpré narrates:

> lest the slightest suspicion remain in the hearts of her sisters, who seemed to envy her a little, Christ embellished his bride with a miracle in this wonderous way. It happened one night…that the nuns saw a heavenly radiance above her, more brilliant than the sun, lasting for a great part of the night. This light, poured

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Robert Grosseteste, *De Luce*, trans. Julian Lock, in Iain M. Mackenzie, *The "Obscurism of Light": A Theological Study into the Nature of Light* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996), 31.

[49] Lewis, *By Women*, 85.

[50] Lewis, *By Women*, 94-95.

[51] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 234. 'Præterea, quoniam tantam lucernam latere sub modio non decebat, posita est super candelabrum; ut fulgor gratiæ ejus omnibus appareret'.

> inwardly not only into her but also into those who saw it, increased the grace of their spiritual life.[52]

Though the primary purpose of this vision of light is the authorization of Lutgard within her community, Lutgard and the "radiance above her" also become a devotional image that assists the gazing nuns in accessing the divine. Lutgard is once again physically passive; as she keeps vigil she is unmoving and is "embellished" by Christ. The brilliant light above her lasts most of the night, allowing for prolonged gaze and contemplation to transfer the divine image to the soul. The picture of light being poured into both Lutgard and her viewers mirrors Grosseteste's description of the primary body spreading "light from every part of itself in to the centre of everything."[53] It also recalls the visual role of light. According to Grosseteste, visual rays consist of light which is generated by and penetrative of objects, allowing for corporeal sight.[54] Grosseteste further contributes spiritual vision to the presence of light, explaining that it is a "spiritual light" which

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[52] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 225. "Nec non & istud solemnissimum fuit miraculum, quod subjungo. Perfectius, secundum quod ei promissum a matre Domini fuerat, de die in diem semet ipsam Domino in holocaustum gratuitum dedit, corpus affligens jejuniis, & ab oratione spiritum non relaxans. Ne autem in cordibus Sororum, quæ æmulari eam aliquantulum videbantur, suspicionis alicujus scrupulus remaneret; Christus sponsam suam hujusmodi miraculo decoravit. Lutgarde ergo crebrius continuante vigilias, accidit una nocte, ut super eam a Monialibus super solis splendorem per magnum spatium noctis, jubar luminis videretur. Quod utique lumen transfusum interius non solum in ipsam, sed & in illas, quæ viderunt illud, spiritalis vitæ gratiam augmentavit."

[53] Grosseteste, *De Luce*, 28.

[54] Katherine H. Tachau, "Seeing as Action and Passion in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries." in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 340-1.

illumes "intelligible objects," making them visible to the "mind's eye."[55] Light, then, assists in the reciprocity of this visual experience in which Lutgard is both illuminated and illuminative, finding agency as an object mediating a divine encounter.

In a similar revelation to another, a man "in despair over the stain of his crimes was brought to Lutgard so that he might be consoled at least by speaking with her. No sooner had he sat down beside her and begun to listen to her words than he saw above her an indescribable brightness, brighter than any lightning. On seeing this the man was exhilarated and left greatly comforted at the hope of pardon."[56] This vision directly contrasts the powerful agency of Lutgard as a devotional object with the effectivness her conscious actions. Although the intention is that this man will find solace in Lutgard's words, it is the sight of light occuring around her that comforts him—there is no indication that what Lutgard actually says has any role in his relief. In this instance of being seen, Lutgard, like many other women visually represented in the Middle Ages, "appear[s] susceptible to invisibility" despite being an object of the gaze.[57] Though she

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[55] Robert Grosseteste, *In posteriorum analyticorum*, qtd. in Katherine H. Tachau, "Seeing as Action and Passion in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries." in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 343-4.

[56] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 261. "Homo quidam, in labe criminum desperatus, ad eam adductus est, ut saltem ejus colloquiis solaretur. Nec mora, ubi juxta eam resedit, & ejus verba audire cœpit; vidit ultra omnem fulgorem super eam inæstimabilem claritatem. Quo in visu exhilaratus homo, &, nimirum ad spem veniæ confortatus, abscessit."

[57] Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 15. Caviness discusses theories of "scopic economy" or a mutual gaze in relation to gender and sexual gaze. Her theories are applied to another vision of Lutgard below.

tries to assist the man through the human interaction of speech, her agency as human is here overshadowed by her capacity as a mediating object.

The last revelation of Lutgard I want to focus on here to some extent combines elements from each of the other visions of her we have discussed. It begins with Lutgard meditating on the Passion:

> Whenever she was rapt in spirit, remembering the Lord's Passion, it seemed to her that her whole body, her very essence, was reddened and besprinkled with blood. When a certain monastic priest had been told of this as a great secret, he approached to observe her at an opportune time when there was no doubt that, because of the season, she would be thinking of Christ's Passion. He found her leaning against a wall in contemplation. And behold, he saw her face and hands (the only exposed parts of her body) gleaming as if sprinkled with freshly shed blood, and the curls of her hair were also drenched with blood like 'drops of the night'. Seeing this, he secretly cut off a bit of hair with scissors and carried it in his hand to the light, where he marveled, astonished above all measure. When Lutgard returned from her rapture of contemplation to her outward senses, at once the hair which the astonished priest was holding also returned to its natural colour. Alarmed at such a prodigious spectacle beyond anything that can be believed, he almost fell flat on the ground. But note, reader, the reason why Lutgard seemed to become red with blood. In this life, she has a very special role among those who

> ‘washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb’, for, from the intellectual consideration of her mind inwardly, her body outwardly drew its likeness.[58]

As with Lutgard’s levitation, the liturgical framing of this vision is significant. Christ’s suffering at the Passion became an increasingly popular subject of devotional imagery in both art and text, and religious women’s immersion in these scenes was expected to “increase[e] the sisters’ faith, deepe[n] their worship, and engender[r] visions.”[59] In her study of the German Sister-Books, Lewis discusses several examples of religious women’s visions of the Passion and their achieving of deeper compassion for Christ through devotional imagery.[60] This vision of Lutgard does not give us any indication of whether Lutgard uses devotional imagery in her meditation on the Passion, but it does demonstrate that Lutgard, like her slightly later contemporary Elizabeth of

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[58] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 257. “Quoties, rapta in spiritu, passionis Dominicæ memor erat; videbatur ei, quod essentialiter per totum corpus sanguine perfusa ruberet. Hoc cum quidam religiosus Presbyter secretius audivisset, observans eam tempore opportuno, [in contemplatione passionis Christi,] quo dubium non erat, secundum tempus Christi fore memorem passionis; aggressus est illam videre: ubi acclinis ad parietem in contemplatione jacebat. Et ecce, vidit faciem ejus & manus, quæ tantum nudæ patebant, quasi recenti perfusas sanguine relucere: [sanguine perfusa conspicitur,] cincinnos vero ejus, quasi guttis noctium, infusos sanguine. Quod videns, clam forcipe partem illorum in partem tulit; & ad lucem eos in manu ferens, cum supra modum attonitus miraretur, pia Lutgarde de raptu contemplationis ad sensum forinsecus revertente, cincinni quoque in manu stupentis ad colorem naturalem protinus revertuntur. Qui statim ultra quam credi potest, ad tam ingens spectaculum pavefactus, fere cecidit resupinus. Nota autem Lector, quod nimirum pia Lutgardis rubere sanguine visa est, [uti & crines furtim tunc abscissi.] quia de illis specialissime fuit in vita, qui laverunt stolas suas in sanguine Agni: ex intellectuali enim consideratione mentis [Col. 0249D] interius, similitudinem traxit corpus exterius.”

[59] Lewis, *By Women*, 105-6.

[60] Lewis, *By Women*, 105-10. One of these visions even ends by “literally killing [a sister] with compassion.”

Spalbeek (whom we will discuss more later in this chapter and in the next), "does not merely simulate Christ's Passion; she becomes its authentic and charismatic reincarnation."[61]

Through her blood-besprinkled body, Lutgard herself becomes an object of devotional gaze for the priest and quite possibly for her larger community. When Cantimpré remarks the priest "had been told of this as a great secret," it is not clear whether Lutgard told him in confession, or whether he has heard of this miracle from others who have witnessed it. Regardless, this vision is also offered to the reader as a devotional image—Cantimpré encourages us to "note" Lutgard's bloodiness, promoting her inward piety as an object for our contemplation. The vision thus presents us with a *mise en abyme*, a "process of representation within representation . . . [in which] the internal representation is often a duplication of the external representation in which it is contained."[62] Lutgard meditates on the divine Passion, the priest interacts with meditating Lutgard and through her the divine, and we, as the reader, watch the priest interacting with Lutgard meditating on the Passion. This framework supports Lutgard's agency as devotional object – though she is not conscious of her surroundings, she provides the priest and additional viewers a platform for accessing the divine that reflects out from her own devout experience.

What is particularly fascinating about Lutgard as an object in this vision is her hair. First, it seems unusual that Lutgard would have hair visible to be cut, particularly

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[61] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 196.

[62] Minissale, *Framing Consciousness*, 4

since Cantimpré makes special mention that Lutgard's face and hands are the only visible parts of her body. Concerns about nuns showing their hair are apparent—Saint Aldhelm's poem for the nuns of Barking in the eighth century warns against visible, curled hair, and in the mid-twelfth century Hildegard of Bingen was scolded by a fellow abbess for allowing her nuns to wear "loosened hair."[63] However, Lutgard lived at the cusp of Cistercian reform—rules requiring nuns to dress in particular habits that included cowls and veils were not established until 1235, by which point Lutgard had been living in her Cistercian community for twenty-five years.[64] Similarly, rules that dictated cloistered women must maintain short hair were not established until the thirteenth century.[65] Even then, it not always clear how strictly these rules were followed and how much nuns may have mirrored current fashions as much as their habits and veils would allow. For example, a late thirteenth-century image found in a Cistercian *Life of Christ* shows two abbesses whose veils are turned up at the corners, creating a "fashionable 'horned' silhouette" that also happens to reveal some hair above the ears.[66] Perhaps this is how Lutgard styles her veil.[67]

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[63] Désirée G. Koslin, "'He hath couerd my soule inwarde': Veiling in Medieval Europe and the Early Church," in *Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 162.

[64] Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth Century Champagne* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 108-9.

[65] Koslin, "Veiling in Medieval Europe," 162-3.

[66] Koslin, "Veiling in Medieval Europe," 165.

[67] For more on nun's attire, see Eva Schlotheuher, "Best Clothes and Everyday Attire of Late Medieval Nuns," in *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Rainer C. Schwinges and Regula Schorta (Switzerland: Abegg-Stiftung Riggisberg and Schwabe

Regardless, what is truly troublesome about Lutgard's hair in this vision is the priest's decision to cut off a piece of it for his personal contemplation. As Robert Bartlett notes, "The most intimate of the things it was possible to separate from a saint—dead or alive—were hair and clothes."[68] There is consequently a sort of violent love inherent in this action; the cutting of a piece from her body is reminiscent of the mutilation of female martyrs, while the taking of hair is evocative of a love token gathered in a courtly romance. It is a problematic balance reminiscent of devotional images worn away by continual touching and kissing, belovedly battered in fervent adoration.

Furthermore, when the priest harvests a bit of Lutgard's hair, he collects a relic from a living saint, not only in the form of her hair but also some of her blood, which was one of the most valued of saintly remains.[69] This act contributes to what Dyan Elliot describes as the "very real sense in which these [holy] women [of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries] were relics before their time,"[70] an idea advanced by Thomas of Cantimpré's own concern with possessing a relic from Lutgard upon her death. While

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Verlag Basel, 2010), 139-54. For more on medieval hair styling and symbolism, see Roberta Milliken, *Ambiguous Locks: An Iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2012).

[68] Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 245. For more on relics in general, see Bartlett, Chapter 8 "Relics and Shrines."

[69] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints & Society*, 149. For more on blood relics and on blood droplets, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), especially chapters four and eight.

[70] Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 70.

Lutgard is still alive, Cantimpré approaches the abbess of the monastery and requests they cut off Lutgard's hand upon her death and save it for him. Lutgard hears of his request, and gently admonishes him that her little finger will be plenty. When Lutgard's dies, Cantimpré does receive the saint's finger in exchange for writing her *Life*.[71]

Discussing the fragmentation of women's bodies in specific medieval religious narratives in her book *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages*, Madeline Caviness describes the female body as "cut up like a credit card to take it out of the commercial exchange of sex…[so it could be] distributed for use as a medium for…communication with the divine."[72] She argues that this breaking up and "relic-izing" of the body "altered its nature as a viewing object, empowering it with a new subjectivity . . . [as] the parts serve to re-member the whole person."[73] This may well be the case after the death of the female saint, when her parts are placed in reliquaries and viewed as active means of communication with or healing through the deceased. However, when the holy woman is still alive, as is Lutgard when the priest takes her hair, this process of relic-izing serves only to make the saint herself more invisible. According to Latour, "to be accounted for, objects have to enter into accounts. If no trace is produced, they offer no information to the observer and will have no visible effect on other agents. They remain silent and are no longer actors."[74] When the priest removes a bit of her hair and carries it into the light,

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[71] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 290-1.

[72] Caviness, *Visualizing Women*, 129.

[73] Caviness, *Visualizing Women*, 132-33.

[74] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 79.

Lutgard herself is no longer the object of devotional gaze. She shifts to an intermediary, silently holding meaning but lacking the agency to act or transform. Her hair, separated from her body, becomes the focus of awe and devotion—it is now a mediator able to influence those who gaze upon it. Thus, when Lutgard wakes from her meditation and her shorn piece of hair instantly returns to its normal color, this "prodigious spectacle" does more than astonish the priest and authenticate Lutgard's holiness. It reduces the potential of this piece of Lutgard to maintain agency separate from her living body.

2. Touching the Divine: Haptic Encounters in *The Life of Saint Douceline*

My focus in this chapter so far has been mostly on vision, but other senses also had roles in establishing holy persons as devotional objects, particularly in conjunction with sight. Sight and touch, for example, are closely linked in medieval theories of the senses. In her article "Textile, Tactility, and the Senses," Barbara Baert refers to sight as a form of "meta-touch," explaining that "Medieval seeing was considered as touching the object with the light beam that departs from the eye and reaches, 'touches' the point that one 'sees.' Hence medieval seeing is a complex choreography that involves the whole body and even the sense of tactility."[75] Moreover, visual encounters with devotional objects were often accompanied by physical touch, as we saw in Lutgard's hair cutting incident. In the following paragraphs, I turn to Douceline of Digne to explore touch as a significant form of devotional interaction in revelations to others.

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[75] Barbara Baert, "Textile, Tactility, and the Senses: The 13th-Century Embroidered Antependium of Wernigerode Revisited," in *Clothing the Sacred. Medieval Textiles and Fabric, Form, and Metaphor*, ed. Mateusz Kapustka and Warren T. Woodfin. Textile Studies 8 (Gesamtgestaltung, Satz und Litho: Troppo Design Berlin, 2015), 101.

Born to a wealthy merchant family in thirteenth-century Provence, Douceline showed dedication to the poor from a young age. Encouraged by a vision of three beguines and by her brother, the well-known Franciscan preacher Hugh of Digne, Douceline made vows of virginity and poverty in her twenties. She then established beguine houses at Roubaud, Hyères, and Marseilles between 1241 and the mid-1250s, which she led until her death.[76] Douceline's *Life*, composed in the vernacular Provençal rather than Latin, was most likely written by her successor Philippine Porcellet.[77]

Throughout Douceline's vita, the heavy influence of St. Francis is readily apparent. The text describes how "She urged everyone to be devoted to him; and in almost all her discourses, she would talk about Saint Francis."[78] Her actions matched her words—in their introduction and interpretive essay for *The Life of Saint Douceline*, Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay note that Douceline not only demonstrates a Franciscan dedication to poverty, but "a Franciscan attention to the body and to the

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[76] Douceline's first community, Roubaud, was located along the Roubaud River on the outskirts of Hyères. This community seems to have closed sometime concurrently or after the establishment of a house closer to the Franciscan church in Hyères. The second community in Hyères and the community in Marseilles remained after Douceline's death. For more on the establishment of these houses, see J. H. Albanés, prolégomènes to *La Vie de Sainte Douceline Fondatrice des Béguines de Marseille*, transcribed and trans. J. H. Albanés (Marseille: Camoin, 1879), XLIV-LVI.

[77] For more on the authorship of the *Life of Saint Douceline*, see Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay, Introduction to *The Life of Saint Douceline, a Beguine of Provence* (Cambridge, MA: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 15-22. See also Albanés, XXV-XXXIX. For more on Philippine Porcellet, see Sean L. Field, "Agnes of Harcourt, Felipa of Porcelet and Marguerite of Oingt: Women Writing about Women at the End of the Thirteenth Century," *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 298-329, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27644977.

[78] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 58. "e tota res qu'illi pogues movie az aver devocion en aquest sant; car ades, en totas sas paraulas fazia salsa de sant Frances" (9.44).

materiality of the Creation."[79] They point out that her *Life* is structured similarly to an Occitan version of Bonaventure's Franciscan vita *Legenda major*, and outline multiple examples of Douceline's visions and miracles mirroring those of St. Francis.[80] Some of these miracles include levitation in rapture, during which Douceline becomes a devotional object through the sight and touch of her community.

Rapture is a common occurrence in saints' lives and indicates the visionary is "positioned at the crossroads between the higher sublime world and the present state of wretchedness and corruption."[81] Holy persons in rapture are oblivious to the world around them, totally absorbed in experiencing the divine. Occasionally, this is accompanied by levitation, which was "attributed to a divine spiritualizing of the physical body that rendered it lighter than air."[82] Some of the more well-known levitators are Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who was seen elevated "two cubits" while praying, and St. Francis (c.1181-1226), whom Bonaventure describes in *The Minor Legend of St. Francis* (c.1260-1263) as "seen praying at night, with his hands and arms outstretched in the form of a cross, his whole body lifted up from the ground and surrounded by a sort of

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[79] Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay, "Interpretive Essay. Douceline de Digne: The 'Douce et Digne' Mother of Roubaud," in *The Life of Saint Douceline, a Beguine of Provence* (Cambridge, MA: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 137.

[80] See Garay and Jeay, introduction to *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 21-22 and "Interpretive Essay,"129-152.

[81] Dyan Elliot, "The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 1997), 144-145.

[82] Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 63.

shining cloud, so that the extraordinary illumination around his body together with its elevation, was a witness to the wonderful light and elevation within his soul."[83] As Robert Bartlett points out, these accounts of levitation seem particularly marvelous compared to phenomena such as healing miracles because they could not be explained away by natural causes. Levitation miracles either "truly took place or the witnesses who reported them were deeply misled by their own senses."[84]

This is not to say that rapture and levitation were accepted without question. Levitation could be faked or have sinister causes. Dunstan Lowe describes how levitation could be facilitated through ropes or magnetic suspension, though his focus is on floating objects/monuments more so than people.[85] People could also be lifted in the air through demonic possession or devil-granted powers.[86] The trance-like state of rapture likewise could be replicated by someone wishing to appear chosen by God. Those in rapture were

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[83] Bonaventure, *The Minor Legend of Saint Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 699, https://franciscantradition.org/early-sources#francis-the-founder. "Ibi visus est nocte orans, manibus et brachiis ad modum crucis protensis, toto corpore sublevatus a terra et nubecula quadam fulgente circumdatus, ut illustrationis et elevationis mirabilis intra mentem mira circa corpus cum elevatione facta perlustratio testis esset." For more on medieval examples of levitation, see Bartlett, 375-76.

[84] Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 375.

[85] Dunstan Lowe, "Suspending Disbelief: Magnetic and Miraculous Levitation from Antiquity to the Middle Ages," *Classical Antiquity* 35, no. 2 (2016): 247-278, DOI: 10.1525/ca.2016.35.2.247.

[86] Caciola gives the example of a group of nuns levitated through demonic possession in the vita of the fifteenth-century Columba of Rieti (Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 48). For more on demonic possession, see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, particularly the first chapter "Possessed Behaviors."

consequently subject to physical testing such as being roughly shaken or punctured with needles to confirm they were truly "rigid, immobile, and . . . miraculously resistant to all stimuli."[87] This type of testing necessitated tactile exchanges.

Touch was a frequent and powerful medium for religious interactions with relics and devotional objects. Hahn notes that "Relics and reliquaries were lifted and presented, carried in procession, and used as part of the liturgy and blessings from the earliest moments of the cult. They were physically used to solemnize oaths, to raise funds, to protect and heal."[88] In her study of material culture in late medieval Germany, Mecham describes not only visual contemplation of devotional objects but haptic interactions. Holy women such as Margaret Ebner and Margery Kempe cradled statues of the Christ-child with motherly Marian devotion. Nuns dressed statues of Christ, the Virgin, and saints in self-made garments and crowns, as well as donated jewelry, as a means of caring for their divine patrons.[89] Bynum notes that medieval images such as white linens embroidered with religious iconography in white threads "ask to be touched, more than seen."[90]

Holy bodies were also subject to touch. As we just saw with Lutgard, those witnessing persons in rapture were often compelled to touch them and even remove

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[87] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 64. For more on signs and examples of divine possession and rapture, see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 54-72. Also see Elliott, "The Physiology of Rapture."

[88] Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 147.

[89] See the chapter "The Art of Devotion" in Mecham, *Sacred Communities*.

[90] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 38.

pieces of their clothing or hair for remembrance and contemplation. There are also examples of this in Thomas of Celano's (1185-1265) *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* and *The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis*. Celano describes how "Men and women came running from every direction to see [St. Francis], and with their usual devotion wanting to touch him. What then? They touched and pulled him, cut off bits of his tunic, but the man seemed not to feel any of this."[91] He recounts how crowds rushed from Assisi to observe the saint after his death, emphasizing them (and possibly himself) as not only visual but physical witnesses of the saint's holiness:

We who say these things

have seen these things;

we have touched with our hands

what we are writing by hand.[92]

[91] Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 312, https://franciscantradition.org/early-sources#francis-the-founder. "Accurrunt undique viri et mulieres videre ipsum, et solita devotione contingere cupientes. Quid enim? Attrectant illum et trahunt, et de tunica sua succidunt petiolas et reponunt."

[92] Thomas of Celano, *The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 403, https://franciscantradition.org/early-sources#francis-the-founder. The editors note that it is not clear if Thomas refers to himself or the eyewitnesses through his use of first person.

Touch necessitated a closeness with the saintly body that sight did not. As described by Jacqueline Jung, it was "a robust sense: it provided direct, immediate knowledge of the world" that was not subject to the same interferences as visual observation.[93]

As a sense, touch thus had advantages over sight. In *De Anima*, Thomas Aquinas states that while "sight is the more spiritual sense," touch is the sense that places humans above animals and that best indicates human intelligence. He argues that "excellence of mind is proportionate to fineness of touch" because touch encompasses the entire body; "Therefore the finer one's sense of touch, the better, strictly speaking, is one's sensitive nature as a whole, and consequently the higher one's intellectual capacity." Furthermore, because one must be of sound body to have a fine sense of touch, and a stable body results in a balanced soul, "It follows that those whose touch is delicate are so much the nobler in nature and the more intelligent."[94] Medieval theologians such as Peter of Limoges (1240-1306) noted that sight could be easily misled, even whilst other senses such as touch maintained their integrity.[95] Thus in cases where sight could be fooled,

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[93] Jacqueline E. Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art & History*, ed. Colum Hourihane, Index of Christian Art: Occasional Papers XI (University Park, PA: Princeton University in association with Penn State University Press, 2010), 208.

[94] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, trans. Kenelm Foster and Sylvester Humphries (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), II.IX.484-485, https://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/DeAnima.htm#219L.

[95] Richard G. Newhauser, "Peter of Limoges, Optics, and the Science of the Senses," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2010), 37.

such as observing one in rapture or levitation, adding touch could help verify the miracle as this sense was less easily tricked.

Through this comparison of the two senses, I do not wish to suggest that touch and vision were intrinsically opposed. As mentioned in my discussion of visual theory above, intromission and extramission were compared to haptic interactions, in which object and subject touched and affected each other through visual rays. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of John,* Augustine also notes the relation of sight and touch, explaining that sight is "a kind of general sense . . . habitually named in connection with the other four senses." He links this to John 20:27, asking "what else does He mean but, Touch and see? And yet he had no eyes in his finger," of the Lord's invitation for the doubting Thomas to "'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands.'" Though he cannot believe the disciple actually dared to touch the Lord, Augustine acknowledges that touch could be included in relieving doubt: "Whether therefore it was by looking, or also by touching, 'Because thou hast seen me,' He says, 'thou hast believed.'"[96] Thus while seeing and touching could operate differently to interact with and verify divine presence, they also could also function in tandem to add additional support for belief.[97]

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[96] Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series,* edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 7. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), CXXI.XX.5.

[97] For more on the reciprocity of vision and touch, see Newhauser, "Peter of Limoges," 37-38; Robert S. Sturges, "Visual Pleasure and *La Vita Nuova*: Lacan, Mulvey, and Dante," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2010), 98-99; and Robert S. Sturges, "Desire and Devotion, Vision and Touch in the *Vita Nuova*," in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages,* ed. Manuele

Returning to Douceline's *Vita*, we find the holy woman is so spiritually uplifted through her divine contemplations that she very easily enters a state of rapture. On one occasion, just noticing the beautiful song of a bird is enough to send her into ecstasy.[98] Douceline's raptures often occur in public, and she frequently "would be suspended in the air, without supporting herself in any way. Her feet would not be touching the ground except for her two big toes. Supported by the strength of her amazing rapture, she would be so forcefully lifted up into the air that she would be the space of a person's palm above the ground. Many times people were even able to kiss the soles of her feet when she was in that situation."[99] This statement is followed by several accounts of Douceline being touched while in rapture by persons both within and beyond her community.

In one example, Lord Jacques Vivaud (knight and lord of the nearby castle of Cuges) and his family are in the same church as Douceline. When Lord Vivaud hears the holy woman is in rapture:

> he went to see her with great devotion. He saw her raised in the air where she remained suspended through the strength of the amazing attraction that she felt toward God. She was not touching anything and nothing supported her in any way. She was raised so high above the ground that the nobleman and his son knelt

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Gragnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (New York: LEGENDA, 2012).

[98] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 52.

[99] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 49. "Alcuna ves, estava sospenduda en aut, que non si sufria a ren, ni tocava de pe en terra, mai sol del artels majors; si que tan fort era eslevada en aut, sus en l'aer suferta per forsa de meravillos raubiment, que entr'ella e la terra avia d'espazi ben palm, e[n] tan que motas ves, estant en aquel raubiment, li baizavan las solas desotz los pes" (9.6)

> with great respect, removed their hoods, and very reverently kissed the soles of her feet. What they had seen filled them with wonderful joy and spiritual elation. They have since told many people about this, declaring firmly that this is just how they saw it with their own eyes, and that they kissed her feet with their own lips.[100]

Most basically, Lord Vivaud and his son authenticate Douceline's piety through visual and physical witnessing. When they not only gaze on but also touch her floating body, they confirm that Douceline is suspended without any support beyond her "amazing attraction…toward God." The encounter furthermore shows Douceline functioning as a devotional object, not only through sight but through touch. Her witnesses, observes Claude Carozzi, are "fascinated" by Douceline's body—"they want to touch it, they also want it to touch them."[101] If vision is reciprocal, allowing subjects and objects to alter each other, touch is even more of a mutual sense. As Corine Schleif explains, "Touch, more than the other senses, involves reciprocity [because] it is experienced on both sides,

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[100] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 49-50. "per gran devocion e ell l'annet vezer. E vi la eslevada sus en l'aer, tan taut qu'estava sospenduda per forsa d'aquell meravillos tirament ques avia sus a Dieu, qu'a ren non si sufria ni s'apilava; ans estava sobre terra tan taut quell nobles homs e son fill, a[m] mot gran reverencia aginollat, li baizeron per gran devocion las solas desotz los pes, amdui lurs capions baissatz. E foron plens de meravillos gauch e d'alegreir esperitall, per so que viron d'ella. E ho comteron pueis a ganres, a[m] motas de sertezas afermant qu'en aissi de lurs heuls ho avian vist, e de lur bocas baisat" (9.8).

[101] Claude Carozzi, "Douceline et les autres," in *La Religion Populaire en Languedoc du XIIIe Siècle à la Moitié de XIVe Siècle, Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 11 (Toulouse, France: Édouard Privat, 1976), 265. "Ce qui les fascine c'est le corps de Douceline, ils veulent le toucher, ils veulent aussi qu'elle les touche." Translation mine.

felt by both parties, the touching body and the touched."[102] Though Douceline does not feel this contact while in ecstasy (the significance of which we will discuss below), as an object she receives their touch and she touches back. Moreover, as "the aim of religious vision was to fuse entirely with one's object, God Himself,"[103] Douceline in rapture becomes a physical manifestation of the divine. Touching the holy woman with their lips as well as their gaze allows a more full-body experiencing of God to those not blessed with visions of their own—when the men see and touch her, they experience "wonderful joy and spiritual elation." The enraptured, levitating woman thus mediates their experience of the divine through her body as a visible, tangible object.

That many of the physical encounters with Douceline while she is raised by God involve kissing further shapes Douceline as a devotional object. Described by C. M. Woolgar as "a special form of touch," kissing in the Middle Ages was haptically intimate and volatile. [104] On the one hand, kisses could be perverted through lustful intentions, while on the other, if given earnestly in specific contexts, they facilitated a merging of

[102] Corine Schleif, "Medieval Memorials: Sights and Sounds Embodied; Feelings, Fragrances and Flavors Re-membered," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,* ed. Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2010), 81.

[103] Alicia Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens: Divine Visions as Cinematic Experience* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 118.

[104] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England,* 39-40. For an in-depth history of the kiss in the Middle Ages, see Yannick Carré, *Le Baiser sur la Bouche au Moyen Age: Rites, Symboles, Mentalités, à Travers les Textes et les Images, XIe-XVe Siècles* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1992).

souls through which "a sweetness of mind awakens."[105] According to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), in such spiritual kisses "the Spirit of God purifies all things and by sharing himself pours in a heavenly flavor."[106] Although Aelred focuses his discussion on kissing as a gesture between people, kissing objects was also a common sign of veneration. The action played a religious role "both liturgically and ceremonially, for example in the service of Maundy, kissing the feet of the poor, kissing the cross during its adoration on Good Friday, kissing the altar at various points in services, and, in meditation, the novice in choir contemplating and metaphorically kissing the wounds of Christ on the cross."[107] It "convey[s] an intention of reverence or respect and beyond this at least a desire for the transfer of further powers." [108]

The reverence involved in kissing Douceline is evident in the men's accompanying gestures of kneeling and removing their hoods, as well as the narrator's descriptions of them as acting "very reverently" and with "great respect." Both the religious precedence for kissing objects and the reverence with which they complete this gesture allow persons such as Lord Vivaud to interact with Douceline on a more intimate level than would otherwise be permitted. That Douceline is unaware of the kisses and that the kisses are given in the church with signs of veneration exonerate those involved from

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[105] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland, ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 2.23 (p.76). For more on Aelred's views on kissing, see 2.23-27.

[106] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 2.26 (p.76).

[107] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 39-40.

[108] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 41.

potential allegations of licentious behavior. Instead, they allow for her community to mingle with Douceline, to draw from her spiritual benefits as one might from kissing a relic. These observers are so affected by the closeness of this encounter that the kiss becomes a key part of their witnessing account – when they tell others of their experience, they specify that not only did they see Douceline, but they "kissed her feet *with their own lips*."

In addition to transferring virtue, the benefits of touching Douceline while she is in rapture include healing. Healing is commonly associated with touch in a medieval context. Medicinal cures required touching the body. Christ and his saints were known for healing through the touch of their living bodies or through physical contact with their relics; as Woolgar notes, "A wide range of miraculous cures was ascribed to the virtue of touch itself."[109] We see some of this range of cures through touch when Marseille citizen Raymond of Puy approaches Douceline as she levitates in rapture before the altar of the church. Raymond

> knelt reverently and, with his hand, measured the distance that she was above the ground and he found it to be more than a hand's-breadth. Filled with faith, he put his whole head, which had been causing him pain, beneath her holy feet, and kissed them with great devotion. Afterwards he had no more headaches. His head was free of pain from then on, and he was very strong and healthy. In addition, he had a fistula on one of his eyes, which had been troubling him for

[109] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 42. For more on healing miracles and relics, also see Deirdre Jackson, *Marvellous to Behold: Miracles in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: The British Library, 200) 70-75.

> some time, and he had been unable to cure it. But from that moment on, he was never afflicted with that illness and he was completely cured in a very short time. He also told people that, because of her qualities, God had been very gracious to him.[110]

Kissing Douceline also results in "many years [of] perfect peace" between Raymond and his wife by prompting repentance and a confession from a woman who had been trying to harm them.[111] This brings to mind what Aelred calls "the kiss of Christ," in which Christ uses the lips of another to "inspir[e] in friends that most holy affection, so that to them it seems that there exists but one soul in different bodies."[112] Though the kiss is between Raymond's lips and Douceline's feet, Douceline nevertheless acts as a proxy for this spiritual touching of the divine, which in turn rekindles unity between the de Puy couple. By touching and kissing Douceline, Raymond is thus healed not just physically but emotionally, in both the short and long term: his head "was free of pain from then on," he was "never afflicted" with his fistula again, and he and his wife had lasting peace. The holy woman, unaware of this interaction, serves once again as a devotional object – she

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[110] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 50. "Adoncs e aquel cieutadans, am gran devocion va si aginollar, e mezuret am sa man propria l'espazi qu'estava sobre terra, e atrobet largamens un palm que non tocava en terra. E am gran ge e ell mes tot son cap, ques avia malanans, desotz los sieus santz pes, e los li baizet am gran devocion. Anc pueis non ac malannansa el cap; ans ac bona, e sana, e sobre fort la testa per azenant lonc temps. Atressi ell avia en l'un de sos huels festola que li avia durat alcun temps, e non podia garir; e anc pueis d'aquell'hora enant, non senti negun toc d'aquella malautia, ans fon del tot garit denfra fort pauc de temps. Comptava atressi aquel mez[e]us que Dieus li avia fach una gran gracia per los sieus meritis" (9.9-11).

[111] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 51. "ans visqueron ben e em pas lonc temps" (9.11).

[112] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 2.26 (pp. 76-77).

facilitates Raymond's faith and reception of heavenly grace not through words or actions, but through her visible and tactile bodily presence.

While discussing Lutgard above, I pointed out how the holy woman as object is often framed by the liturgical context in which others see her, delimiting their focus to a specific message as they observe her body. Lutgard is also seen in a private or publicly-limited setting—her viewers are primarily other religious persons from her community. In contrast, Douceline stands out for the public, non-delimited nature of her raptures and levitations. Though we are occasionally told the spiritual context for Douceline's levitations,[113] the narrator generally does not specify what Douceline meditates on or provide liturgical information to guide the observers' or readers' witnessing of her miraculously raised body. Instead, the focus is on how her observers are affected by seeing and touching the holy woman, as with Lord Vivaud and Raymond de Puy, and on the breadth of her audience.

The text emphasizes that Douceline's raptures are witnessed by a plethora and variety of people:

> These raptures became so strong that she could not hide them, even from the lay people; for she had reached the point where she could not hear the mass or sermons, or receive communion, without being enraptured the whole day. That is why many people observed her, both seculars and nuns, countless people,

[113] For example, a lady named Beatrice once sees Douceline levitating "on the feast day of Our Lady, after she had received communion in the chapel of Saint Cecilia" (*The Life of Saint Douceline*, 51). "una festa de Nostra Donna, ques avia cumenegat en una capella de sancta Cesilia" (9.12).

> both barons and prelates, even princes, kings, counts, and many others . . . Crowds of people rushed to see her and to look at her in that state . . . The people, in their devotion, would be so eager to rush toward her, and even to touch her clothing, that they were often in grave danger because of the crush.[114]

When Douceline is shut in the chapel after communion, so many people climb the gates trying to catch a glimpse of her in rapture that they are at risk of breaking.[115] Hahn notes in her study of relics and reliquaries that "without some form of recognition, a relic is merely bone, dust, or scraps of cloth. An audience is indispensable. It authenticates and validates the relic."[116] The array of persons, from lay to religious, from poor locals to royalty, that observe Douceline provide this audience, authenticating the holy woman through recognition of her spiritual value in the same manner audiences validate relics. Her role as an object with agency to change those interacting with her is underscored by the crowds that threaten to crush the chapel gates. Latour specifies that "An 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it."[117] Douceline in levitation literally has

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[114] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 53. "A tant gran cauza venc d'aquestos raubimens que non si poc rescondre, neis a las gens seglars; car a tant venc, qu'il non podia auzir ni messas, ni sermons, ni cant cumenegeva, que tot lo jorn non estessa raubida. Per que, mot de gens ho viron, seglars e religiozas, e comtes, e motas autras gens […] Tan grans era le pobols que hi si acampava, per vezer e per esgarder la en aquel estament […] E abricavan si tan fort las gens ves ella, per tocar li neis son vestir, per gran devocion, que a gran peril n'eran alcunas ves, per la gran prieissa del pobol que i era" (9.22-24).

[115] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 53.

[116] Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 9.

[117] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46.

others swarming towards her. She does not physically act but takes on value as a devotional object, conveying a divine presence to a wide community eager to experience God.

For some of Douceline's witnesses, however, simply viewing, touching, or kissing the holy woman is not enough to verify her raptures. On multiple occasions, people seek confirmation that the holy woman is truly unaware of her surroundings while in ecstasy by testing her

> unscrupulously in painful ways. They stuck needles into her fingers, between the skin and the nail, to make her suffer more pain, so that she might move. But God's Saint was so attracted by the true and strong feeling that she had for Our Lord that, when she was in that state, she did not feel any bodily pain, however severe it might be. That is why she did not move, no matter what they did to her. But afterwards, when she came out of her holy ecstasy, she bore the marks of it and suffered great pain. Because of all this, the whole court praised God for what they had seen in her, and from then on they regarded her with extreme reverence.[118]

[118] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 56. "Mais alcunas personas, per plus fort aproar, feron li adoncs d'engoissos proamens, com non s'en davan sueinh. Plantavan li agullhas per los detz, entre la carn e l'ongla, per plus fort afligir, per so que si moguessa. Mais li Sancta de Dieu era tan tirada per verai sentiment e fort ques avia de Nostre Seinnhor, que ren d'afliccion de son cors, cant que fossan greus, non sentia adoncs en aquell estament; per que anc non si moc, per ren que li fezessan. Mais apres, cant fon retornada d'aquell sant raubiment, n'estet mot afligida, e 'n sufri gran dolor. Per aisso, tota li cortz lauzavan Dieu de so qu'avian vist d'ella, e l'agron d'aqui enant en mot gran reverencia" (9.35). The court mentioned is that of Charles of Anjou, Count of Provence and later King of Sicily. Charles's wife Beatrice is helped through a difficult childbirth through the prayers of Douceline after she has a dream about the holy woman (4.10-14). From then on, the

For us as modern readers, this is cringe-worthy. As Marla Carlson comments, in the modern world "the violated body [is] a familiar sign of injustice…[and] whether caused by injury or by illness, bodily suffering evokes outrage."[119] But aside from one use of "unscrupulous," the text does not flinch at these actions. The people who here stab Douceline with needles or in a later example pour boiling lead over her feet are not judged or punished for doing so, either by God or the community, and no action is taken to prevent further testing of the holy woman.

Contextually, this is not surprising. As pointed out by scholars including Elaine Scarry, Mitchell Merback, and Esther Cohen, pain's cultural setting heavily shapes how it is experienced and expressed.[120] While many modern cultures approach pain as a sensation to be avoided or treated, "late medieval pain culture," as stated by Cohen, "was characterized by . . . the tremendous *positive* significance identified in pain. Suffering was not to be dismissed, vanquished, or transcended: suffering was to be felt with an ever-deepening intensity."[121] In a religious context, pain and suffering were popular avenues for *imitatio Christi*, as evident in the *Life of Douceline*. Its accounts of her

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count and countess are frequent witnesses of Douceline's sanctity and patrons of her beguinage.

[119] Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6.

[120] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[121] Cohen, *Modulated Scream*, 4.

extreme fasting, binding her body with knotted cords, wearing a hair shirt that cut into and tore off bits of her skin, and suffering the crucifixion through meditation on the Passion fit neatly with experiences of self-inflicted pain in other holy women's narratives of the high and late middle ages, particularly as affective devotional practices gained traction. Her raptures themselves already carry a sense of violence. The term derives from the Latin verb *rapire*, "which was common legal term for rape or any violence against a woman in the Middle Ages."[122] That the strength of rapture was enough to lift Douceline from the ground echoes this awareness of force.

Douceline's frequent physical suffering at the hands others is a little more unusual, but the pain is essential to authenticating her experiences and allowing others to touch the divine through the holy woman. Dyan Elliot, remarking on the dangers of venerating a living saint, points to the necessity of firm proof of holiness. While touch was less subject to trickery than sight, it still had the potential to be fooled. Descriptions of raptures and mystical phenomenon like levitation, "impressive as they were, did little to establish the objective reality of a given mystic's condition, even with the hearsay corroboration of partisan witnesses. A holy woman's supporters needed to assemble more substantive proofs, preferably from witnesses who allegedly had been skeptical of the holy person's claims and were subsequently converted."[123] For a medieval audience, inquisition through torture and ordeals of pain provided such substantive proof. Torture, as defined in a 13th century legal treatise, was "an inquiry performed in order to elicit the

[122] Elliot, "The Physiology of Rapture," 142.

[123] Elliot, *Proving Woman*, 183-184.

truth by means of bodily torment and pain."[124] While the literature on torture cautions against its "unrestricted use" and stresses the need for evidence of guilt before its practice, the credibility of confession under torture was never questioned—the result was always truth.[125] Douceline's impassivity to her torturers authenticates her ecstatic state to an extent that witness accounts of viewing and kissing her levitating body cannot.

However, her initial imperviousness to pain contains some risk. Writing about impassivity expressed by medieval martyrs and criminals, Cohen notes that "in a world where pain was ubiquitous, and in a culture that glorified the sensation of pain, the idea that some people might be immune to pain was strange and unnatural."[126] For Douceline to remain completely pain-free could raise questions of heresy and demonic influence. This is resolved by observations that Douceline did feel pain after rapture: when she returns from an ecstasy during which the future king had lead poured over her feet, "she felt great pain in her feet and her anguish was unbearable. She was very ill from it and unable to walk."[127] After describing a man sticking Douceline with an awl, the text notes that "later, when the Saint had returned to her normal state, she often felt severe pain and suffered greatly, although she did not complain."[128] This contrast of Douceline moving

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[124] Cohen, *Modulated Scream,* 42.

[125] Cohen, *Modulated Scream,* 42-43.

[126] Cohen, *Modulated Scream,* 227.

[127] *The Life of Saint Douceline,* 51-52. "Mais apres, cant fon retornada d'aquell sant raubiment, senti mot gran dolor dels pes, e tan fers engoissa que non si poc sufrir. E ganren en malavejet, que non podia annar" (9.16).

[128] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 51. "en tant quell Sancta, cant era retornada, en sentia apres, motas ves, gran dolor e gran afligiment; jassiaisso qu'illi non s'en plaisses" (9.15).

from impassive to clearly in anguish furthers the truth of her rapture—it is after witnessing this shift that the court comes to "[regard] her with extreme reverence" and the future King Charles to "[hold] her in such affection . . . that he made her his commother."[129]

Furthermore, experiencing pain allows Douceline and her community to participate in *imitatio Christi*. In her work on Christ's body in the Middle Ages, Sarah Beckwith has noted that though often seen as a private experience, affective piety had significant public functions. Referencing Christ's body and suffering could "animate the relationships between individual and group, between the sacred and the profane, between representation and experience."[130] Poked and punctured with needles and awls in a manner reminiscent of Christ's tortures and crucifixion, Douceline suffers like Christ, furthering both her devotional piety and her influence as a devotional object. Her initial impassivity to her torturers emphasizes that while in rapture Douceline's agency is as an object—she cannot move to free herself from the painful touch of her observers, but she strengthens their spirituality through her visible, touchable presence. Subjecting Douceline to trial by ordeal while she is in rapture acts as the sort of "specific trick" to make objects talk referenced by Latour.

Interestingly, Douceline is also subject to her own touch, and forms herself as an object that acts upon others through self-inflicted pain. Some of this pain I have already

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[129] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 52 and 56. "De que le reis la pres en tant d'amor ques en fes sa comaire" (9.16). "e l'agron d'aqui enant en mot gran reverencia" (9.35).

[130] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 72.

mentioned, such as her hair shirt and knotted cords. These offer example of Douceline's piety and self-penitence, but the text specifies the privacy of these actions. When Douceline requires help forcefully removing her hair shirt, or when her servant discovers her knotted cords and iron girdle, she swears her to secrecy (although clearly the information came to light somehow). In contrast, some of Douceline's self-inflicted suffering is publicly observed and furthers Douceline as a devotional object within her community. For example, the countess of Provence sends for Douceline, desiring to see her in rapture. She asks Douceline to take communion with her, and when the holy woman humbly declines, the countess summons a friar to preach before them. At this, Douceline is moved to rapture

> despite her efforts to do those things to herself that might keep this feeling from happening. She had so tortured her hands during the sermon that they were covered in bruises. When the countess observed this wonder, she rejoiced greatly in Our Lord. She summoned all her children, and made them kneel reverently before the Saint, with their hoods removed, and she made them kiss her hands. She remained in that state of rapture for a long time. And the countess, who was later the queen of Sicily, held her in great and special affection from that time on.[131]

[131] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 55-56. "jassia qu'illi a si mezeesma n'agues fach tota la forssa que pogues, per destorbar aquell gran sentiment, que non aques adoncs; que totas las sieuas mans eran pur blavairols, en aissi az aquell sermon las s'avia tormentadas. Cant li comptessa vi aquella meravilla, fon mot alegra en Nostre Seinnhor. Fes venir totz sos enfans, e fazia los estar am reverencia de ginols davant ella, lurs capions baissatz, baizar las sieuas mans. E estet longamens en aquell raubiment; don li comptessa, li quals fon pueis reina de Cesilia, la prese n gran amor e en especial, d'aquell hora enant" (9.33-34).

Douceline's pain in this and other similar instances is a sign of her humility, for "whenever she felt or knew that strangers had seen her [in ecstasy]" she cried bitterly and ordered her "unfaithful sisters" not to let anyone see her in rapture.[132] It is also further proof of the strength and realness of her rapture, for just as injuries inflicted on her during ecstasy cannot wake her, self-harm cannot keep her from entering this state. Laurie Finke has argued that "the mystic becomes at once both torturer and victim…the mystic's pain—her inflicting of wounds upon herself—grants her the authority to speak and be heard, to have followers, to act as a spiritual advisor, to heal the sick, and to found convents and hospitals."[133] When Douceline publicly wounds herself, she is both torturer and victim, suffering from the pain and attention while revealing the truth of her raptures and crafting herself as an object for the devotional consumption of others. Like Christ's stigmata, Douceline's bruised hands become the focus of public worship, available to the reverent touching and kissing of her community.

At other times, visual evidence of her pain causes spiritual suffering in those gazing upon her. When Douceline meditates on the Passion, "her face looked so exceedingly afflicted and tormented that it was hardily possible to look at her during that day when she was enraptured…She cried so loudly, in such bitter grief that it pained

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[132] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 57-58. "E ab amars plors, dizia a totas: 'Falsas sorres, per que ho aves sufert, ni con m'aves mostrada?' […] E totas ves qu'illi sentis ni connogues que res estrani l'agues vista en aquell estament, menava aquest trebail" (9.40-41).

[133] Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 42.

them all to see her so distraught."[134] In her book on performances of pain in the Middle Ages, Marla Carlson suggests that "because pain so powerfully solicits the spectator's engagement, aestheticized physical suffering plays a vital role in creating communities of sentiment and consolidating social memory."[135] Although her observers may not feel Christ's pain to the same extent as Douceline, through watching her, members of her community are able to join in her divine suffering. Her pain increases their devotion and invites them to take part in a communal experience of affective piety. Aviad Kleinberg argues that the "picture that emerges from the *Life* of Douceline is not one of spiritual co-operation. Douceline does not seem to have been interested in letting her community actively participate in her spirituality…Her ecstasies likewise did not call for participation, but for amazement and admiration…Douceline, in short, was holy apart from her community, not with it."[136] I disagree. While it is true that Douceline is in many ways set apart from, perhaps even above, her sisters and townspersons, narratives of pain build a sense of community within the text. Mitchell Merback describes medieval pain as "a powerful emblem of intersubjective experience; it actuated empathic bonds between people" rather than "alienating, isolating, or stigmatizing" them.[137] When people torture

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[134] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 59. "E era tans grans aquella terribilitat de dolor e d'engoissa que mostrava la sieve cara, que a penas res la podia sufrir d'esgardar aquell jorn, cant ill era raubida […] Cridava autamens, am tan amara dolor, que totas n'eran afligidas de la gran engoissa qu'illi mostrava" (9.48-49).

[135] Carlson, *Performing Bodies,* 2.

[136] Kleinberg, *Prophets,* 123.

[137] Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel,* 20.

Douceline, observe her self-infliction, or witness her pain during her raptures, they are participating in her spirituality by becoming part of her pain narrative.

Jacqueline Jung observes that "three-dimensional images were far more publicly accessible than those in two dimensions" and were thus "the direct impetus for, and were the subject of, much visionary experience in medieval Europe."[138] She points out that sculptures offered several advantages over works such as paintings. They were easier to image as real, depending on their size and location they could be viewed from different angles and were more simultaneously visible by multiple people, and they "appealed to the sense of touch more directly and vividly than any other medium."[139] Douceline, in her levitational ecstasies, is perhaps then best understood as a statue rather than as a stained-glass window or manuscript illustration. Her hyper-focus on her holy visions, and consequential lack of awareness of those around her, subject her to the touch of her community on individual and group scales. The physical evidence of torture, both self and communally-inflicted, bears witness to her body as a handled object. Visual confirmation of her rapture is not enough—those who see her are compelled to touch her, not only to witness her sanctity but to make fleshly contact with the divine.

3. Vera Icons

Moving towards the conclusion of this chapter, we pause briefly on another holy woman that became a devotional object in her community. Elizabeth of Spalbeek (c.1246-1304) was a beguine in Liège known for her highly performative meditations on

[138] Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary," 215.

[139] Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary," 206 and 215.

the Passion. Her *vita*, written in Latin by Philip of Clairvaux (d.1273) during her lifetime, was later translated into Middle English in a fifteenth-century manuscript that also contains the *Lives* of Christina Mirabilis (c.1150-1224) and Marie d'Oignies (c.1170-1213).[140] We will focus more on Elizabeth in the next chapter as a teacher of revelatory experiences, but for now I want to discuss a passage from Philip's text that is omitted from the Middle English version. In this section, Philip compares Elizabeth to St. Francis, describing both as living examples of Christ who visually spread the Lord's message even to those unable to read the Scriptures. He declares that no person, no matter how "illiterate and simple" can claim not to comprehend the "mysteries" of Christ when they gaze on Elizabeth, for her body can be read like parchment. She is a "living and public Veronica," a "living image of salvation and a living history of redemption" so legible even the uneducated can manage to understand her.[141]

We cannot know why the Middle English translator left out this description of Elizabeth, since they offer no explanation for this decision. However, Jennifer Brown

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[140] For an overview of this manuscript, MS Douce 114, see the introduction to Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège*: *A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 1-25.

[141] Philip of Clairvaux, *Vita Elizabeth Sanctimonialis in Erkenrode, Ordinis Cisterciensis, Leodiensis Dioceses*, in *Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicorum Bibliothecae Regiae Bruxellensis*, ed. Edmund Hogan (Bruxellis: Typis Polleunis, Ceuterick et Lefébure, 1886), 373. "et nihil excusationis praetendere possit homo, quantumcumque illitteratus et simplex, quem interneratae Virginis partus redemit, ut dicat: 'Non possum gere aut intelligere tam profunda mysteria, quia nescio litteram' vel 'quia liber clausus ets' cum non in membranis aut chartis, sed in membris et corore memoratae nostrae puellae, scilicet vivae et apertae Veronicae, suae salvationis vivam imaginem et redemptionis animatam historiam sicut litteratus ita valeat gere idiota." Translation mine.

offers the plausible speculation that "such a statement was too bold to exist in the vernacular in the fifteenth century where it was all too easy to be charged with heresy."[142] This brings to mind Caroline Walker Bynum's point in *Christian Materiality* that the use of relics and other devotional objects was paradoxically accompanied by an increasingly iconoclastic focus on inner spirituality. Bynum argues for a need to consider the problem of physicality—that the trouble with devotional images was not "only the impossibility of picturing God" but the potential idolatry of "manifesting the divine in the material."[143] But what happens when the devotional object is a living person? Does this negate any aspects of the problem of physicality?

Perhaps it did not for Elizabeth's translator, leading them to remove the reference to the holy woman as a living Veronica, but I would suggest that living devotional objects offer some advantages over inanimate icons against increasing iconoclastic concerns. The most significant of these is the lack of object permanence. Material objects such as an image of the Veronica, a statue of the Crucifixion, or a saintly relic incased in a bejeweled reliquary always had the potential to mediate an encounter with the divine. They presented the risk of being worshipped in place of God, or of being manipulated to spur false faith. They could also be transported – André Vauchez notes that traveling images and relics "began to acquire an autonomy and a mobility which made them prime instruments in the diffusion of their cults."[144] While this helped spread belief in the saints,

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[142] Brown, *Three Women of Liège*, 217.

[143] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 45.

[144] André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 450.

it also moved objects from the protection and context of the church. Holy persons, in contrast, were localized within their religious communities; while people could, and did, travel to see Douceline in rapture, the levitating saint could not be taken from city to city like a relic.[145] These living saints did not always have agency as objects and were not perpetually available for visual and tactical consumption. Though "tricks" such as prayer, communion, or torture could be used to try to make them talk, ultimately holy persons only took on the role of devotional objects through God. To witness them in rapture or levitation, sprinkled with blood, or impervious to pain, was to receive a revelation.

In her brilliant new monograph *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens: Divine Visions as Cinematic Experience*, Alicia Spencer-Hall suggests saints not only see God, but serve as screens on which God projects his divinity. These saints become "image-objects," representing "divinity that is accessed not by looking at the image itself, but looking through the image—a 'window to heaven'—to see the divine presence signified."[146] As this chapter has illustrated, I firmly agree that living saints could and did become image-objects (or devotional objects), and in so doing provide access to the divine. However, to fully understand how living devotional objects affect their observers, we have to look beyond "the imprinting of Christ's image upon the holy women,"[147] beyond the levitation, beams of lights, drops of blood, and other physical evidence God

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[145] Lowe makes this point about levitating objects as well: "As an architectural installation or localized miracle it is by definition non-portable and cannot, like most artificial wonders or holy relics, be brought from the periphery to the center of scholarly, religious, or popular experience." Lowe, "Suspending Disbelief," 250.

[146] Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens*, 247.

[147] Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens*, 247.

displays on their bodies. When we also consider how these holy persons as objects are contextually and narratively framed, how they are seen and touched and tested, we gain a better sense of how they encourage others in their communities to cultivate their own divine experiences. We can see that devotional gaze and touch position holy persons like Lutgard and Douceline as actors and mediators, as devotional objects that mirror the divine but also have agency to transform their viewers.

CHAPTER THREE

LEARNING TO SEE

While chanting in the choir, a nun standing opposite Lutgard of Aywières during vespers saw "with her bodily eyes a flame of material light rising from Lutgard's mouth and piercing the upper air." This sight makes her so distressed that she nearly faints. Seemingly noticing the nun's anxiety, "when vespers were over Lutgard sweetly consoled the nun. Since she was still frightened, she said, 'I do not want you to be terrified by this vision, my dearest daughter, because you should understand that in truth it was divinely sent.'"[148] In her introduction to the *Life of Lutgard*, Barbara Newman makes the claim that Thomas of Cantimpré "sought to arouse *admiration*" while other hagiographers "wrote expressly to encourage *imitation*."[149] I think the above revelation indicates this is not necessarily the case. Lutgard here has agency as a devotional object, clearly affecting the nun who gazes upon her. But she also has agency as a human actor, providing narrative framing for herself as devotional object by encouraging the nun to

[148] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Lutgard*, 253. "Itaque non posset credi de facili, cum quanta spiritus alacritate in cantandis Horis Domino deserviret. Cum ergo die quadam in Vesperis cantaret in choro, Monialis quædam, quæ ab opposita parte in choro stabat, visibilibus oculis corporalis luminis, flammam de ore ejus vidit ascendere, & in sublimi aëre penetrare. Ad cujus visum insolitum timida & pavefacta puella, fere exanimis facta est. Finitis ergo Vesperis, pia Lutgardis Monialem dulciter consolata, tandem adhuc timenti dixit: Nolo te filia carissima, ista visione terreri; quia in veritate divinitus factam intelligas. Nota ergo Lector, quod de multis hoc legitur accidisse: & corporalem flammam in eis visam, fervidæ orationis desiderium figurasse. [Plerique minus spirituales mirati sunt, quomodo in factis tam magnificis calcare humanam gloriam potuisset. Et, respondeo: Adeo (ut mihi ipsamet dixit) spirituali & solida interius gloria plena fuit, quod nulla eam forinsecus inanis gloria vexare potuit; sed veluti columnam Spiritus sanctus eam immobilem fixit]."

[149] Newman, introduction to *Thomas of Cantimpré*, 21.

learn from the vision, to realize it came from the divine and as such is nothing to fear. The event does not merely seek witnessing and admiration of Lutgard, but pushes for the nun and readers to imitate her awareness of the divine.

In my previous chapter, I discussed how holy persons could help others access the divine as devotional objects. As objects, they are limited to certain types of interaction – they have the agency to influence those who experience them and provide them an avenue to the divine, but they do so unconsciously and motionlessly (even when levitating, Douceline is explicitly static). In this chapter, I consider revelations to others in which holy persons take an actively instructional role in helping others to reach the divine through demonstration and mentoring. I start by returning to Douceline of Digne and Elizabeth of Spalbeek as objects in motion, physically guiding their witnesses into revelations. Then, I discuss a thirteenth-century trio of texts by Goswin of Bossut in which visionaries teach others to see through mutual visions and open instruction.

1. Revelation through Sound and Performance in the *Lives* of Douceline of Digne and Elizabeth of Spalbeek

My second chapter mentioned liturgy as a narrative framing device, shaping encounters with devotional objects including holy persons as objects. As I move into thinking about holy persons as instructors of divine access, liturgical practices continue to play a significant role in helping us understand how visionaries were experienced by their communities.

Colum Hourihane defines the medieval Christian liturgy as "a unifying force" that "provided direct meaning, continuity, and involvement to the worshipper, as well as . . . reinforced social bonds at every celebration. The liturgy was, in fact, a performance in

which the worshiper was both audience and actor."[150] We can see the performative nature of the liturgy in both daily liturgical practices and in the development of special processions and rituals accompanied by liturgical texts. Narratives of key moments in the life of Christ, for example, were often marked by elaborate dramatic performances. Mecham describes how such processions in late medieval German convents "transformed the static space of a church into the scene of an active search for Christ. Nuns used artwork and other props to recreate the sacred place of Jerusalem and Jesus's tomb within the monastic enclosure or church. Gesture and vocal quality conveyed the deep emotion of participants in the most moving scenes, such as Mary Magdalene's grief at Christ's death."[151] Although some of these performances were kept communal within monasteries, others (particularly those for Easter and Christmas) were open to public attendance and participation, as they were seen as effectively instructing the laity in liturgical engagement.[152]

These performances, both quotidian and special, were auditory experiences. Reverberant with readings, prayers, songs, and bells, the liturgical soundscape overlapped the objects, architecture, candles, clothing, and gestures that made up the visual landscape of the liturgy, emphasizing the importance of the sense of hearing in accessing the

[150] Hourihane, Introduction to *Objects*, 4.

[151] Mecham, *Sacred Communities*, 30. For more on these performative rituals, see Mecham's chapter "*In Festo Paschali*: Performative Devotion and Liturgical Ritual."

[152] Mecham, *Sacred Communities*, 28.

divine.[153] As with theories of vision and touch, medieval concepts of sound and hearing varied somewhat between philosophers.[154] However, hearing was generally viewed as the second highest sense—not as superior as sight, but more important than touch, taste, or smell.[155] In his commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, for example, Aquinas remarks that "before dealing with touch and taste, we must consider sound and smell; but first sound, because it is more spiritual."[156] Albertus Magnus (c.1200-1280) also noted the spiritual

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[153] Woolgar points out the importance of thinking about medieval sound in context. The overall sound level would have been quieter, and those sounds that were above 60 decibels, such as "storms and thunder; the cries of some animals, for example barking dogs close at hand; and a few man-made sounds—shouting, bells, music in a confined environment or the sound of some wind and percussion instruments and, exceptionally, explosions caused by gunpowder" would have seemed more intense and striking. The construction of different buildings, from daub and wattle houses to stone buildings to acoustically designed cathedrals would have affected how sounds were muffled or amplified. Woolgar also describes the different signals and bell systems used by various orders "to punctuate or define the day in sound." Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 66 and 69-70. For more on daily routines of sound and silence in monastic settings, see Sheila Bonde and Clark Maines, "Performing Silence and Regulating Sound: The Monastic Soundscape of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes," in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015), 47-70; Elizabeth Valdez del Álamo, "Hearing the Image at Santo Domingo de Silos," in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015), 71-90.

[154] The following paragraphs will provide a brief overview of sound/hearing in the Middle Ages. For more in-depth studies, see Charles Burnett, "Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages," in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 69-84; Woolgar, Chapter 4 "Sound and Hearing."

[155] One exception to this is Richard de Fournival (1201-c.1260), who, in discussing sight and hearing in his *Bestiaire d'amours* "treats them as equals and does not establish a hierarchy between the ear and the eye." Mark Cruse, "Matter and Meaning in Medieval Books: The Romance Manuscript as Sensory Experience," in *Pleasure and Danger in Perception: The Five Senses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Corine Schleif and Richard G. Newhauser, *The Senses & Society* 5, no.1 (March 2010), 50.

[156] Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.VIII.440.

quality of sound fell between sight and smell, as sound "is not as spiritual as light, for it can be dulled by wind, but it is more spiritual than odour (which can be utterly destroyed by wind)."[157]

Drawing on models of sound from Aristotle and Avicenna (c.980-1037), medieval theorists including Aquinas and Albertus described how sound was produced through the contact of two materials. Aquinas explains that "no single thing by itself can produce sound—the reason (or sign) of this being that the cause of sound is percussion, which implies a thing struck and a striker."[158] The speed and force of the stroke, along with the nature of the struck body, determine the volume and quality of the sound. The sound then reaches the ear via the medium of air. [159] Exactly how sound travels through the air was debated:

> One view was that sound, like sight, was conveyed through *species*, the one touching the next and causing it to vibrate. Sound had no material substance itself, but was a perceivable quality, caused by the operation of a physical 'suffering' at one point, that is, the striking or shaping of the air; the sound was then transmitted through the air . . . The alternative school of thought held that sound was a

[157] Burnett, "Perceiving Sound," 78.

[158] Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.VIII.442.

[159] Aquinas notes that soft objects like wool will not produce sound when struck, and that objects struck slowly will not produce as much (if any) sound as "if the impact is swift and violent." Aquinas also comments that sound can travel through water, but that water is not as effective in this transmission. Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.VIII.443-446.

material substance, coming from breath or *spiritus*, and as a material substance—a subtle form of air, it might be perceived as a form of touch.[160]

Either way, sound differed from both sight and touch in its ephemeral qualities. Diffused through the air, sound could be experienced from manifold directions concurrently—it was capable of completely engulfing its hearing subjects.[161] Furthermore, sound could penetrate or flow around barriers, reaching subjects through walls or across buildings in a way visual rays could not.[162] Yet, sound was also fleeting; while an object could always be seen or touched, it could only be heard if it was made to produce sound.[163]

When sound was produced from air in the body, it could have special spiritual qualities as "voice." Aquinas clarifies that not all sounds made by animate objects qualify

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[160] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 64. See also Burnett, "Perceiving Sound," 73-79. For more on the relationship between sight and sound, see Susan Boynton and Diane Reilly, eds., *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015).

[161] Catherine Saucier points out that scent, which she argues resembles sound, also possess this surrounding quality as it to was transmitted through air. Saucier, "Sweet Sound of Sanctity," 19.

[162] Burnett, "Perceiving Sound," 81.

[163] Aquinas explains that objects have actual and potential sound. Objects do not hold sound within them as they do color or smell: "the actuality of sound involves the medium and the faculty of hearing. For we can speak of a sense-object as actual in two ways: (1) So far as the object is actually being sensed, i.e. when its likeness is affecting the sense-organ. In this way a sound is actual when it is heard. (2) So far as the object actually is such that it can be sensed, but is such simply in its own objective being, outside the senses. And in this way the other sense-objects, colour, odour, savour, etc., exist actually in coloured or odorous or savourable bodies. But not so sound; for in a sound-productive body there is sound only potentially: actual sound exists only when the medium is affected by a disturbance from that body. Therefore the act of sound exists . . . in the medium and in the hearing, but not in the audible body." Aquinas, *De Anima,* II.VIII.441.

as voice. For a sound to be defined as voice, it must be made by air striking "something alive, or with a soul, and also, accompanying this, that an image be present which is meant to signify something. For voice must be a *significant* sound,—significant either by nature or conventionally. Hence the statement that vocal impact proceeds from the *soul*." Noises such as coughing, then, do not qualify as voice because they are a sound of "mere impact" rather than soulful intent.[164] Moreover, because voice is not necessary for "mere existence" (unlike other airway-related tasks like tasting and breathing), the "expression of meaning by means of speech is for the sake of a more complete existence."[165] Speech thus was an important part of what elevated humans and allowed them to pursue a higher purpose than inanimate objects or non-speaking creatures.

Voice and speech were recognized as having powerful effects on both those who received and those who produced sound.[166] The manner and quality of one's speech, or in some cases one's silence, conveyed information about their moral and spiritual state. A sweet voice, for example, was thought especially influential. It was "well ordered" and "made people joyful and stirred them to love, showing the passions of the soul, its

[164] Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.VIII.477.

[165] Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.VIII.473.

[166] For a detailed study of speech and voice in the Middle Ages, see Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 84-104.

strength, virtue, pureness and goodness of disposition."[167] Silence could also be powerful, often conveying one's interior quest for spiritual enlightenment.[168]

In a religious context, voice and hearing were a way to receive and share the word of God, particularly in a time when people more likely to have heard the word of God than to have read it. Voice served as "a vehicle of . . . the human, divine and prophetic spirits which are embodied in the sounds."[169] Holy persons, following in the tradition of Christ, performed miracles through their words. As described by Woolgar, "sermon[s] transferred the moral benefit of the word of God to the listener through speech, [and] so did the recitation of holy words. The continuous round of the liturgy, the reading of the monastic rule or readings from spiritual texts were much more than practices of piety: they created a moral force through sound."[170]

Music, especially singing, was also a significant part of the medieval monastic soundscape and a means to access and celebrate the divine. Music was seated in the body, produced not only through voice but bodily function (heartbeat, breathing) and movement

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[167] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 84. For more on sweetness, particularly in relation to sound, see Saucier.

[168] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 96.

[169] Burnett, "Perceiving Sound," 80. This was precedented through a multitude of biblical examples and reflected in their subsequent depictions in medieval texts and art. The Annunciation is one of the more famed illustrations of the power of voice, with Mary's reception of the Holy Spirit through Gabriel's words resulting in the conception of Christ. For example, Fra Angelico's *Annunciation of Cortona* (c. 1433-1434) depicts Gabriel and Mary's words streaming between them, highlighting the importance of speech in this scene.

[170] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 87. Woolgar also notes that speech could also have corruptive powers if spoken by the devil or immoral persons – see pp. 91-94.

(playing instruments, using body as instrument).[171] In a letter to the prelates at Mainz (c.1178-79), Hildegard of Bingen described a vision in which God conveyed to her the creation of music and its role in "bring[ing] back the sweetness of the songs of heaven." Hildegard explains that when Adam lost his divine voice at the Fall, God called on the holy prophets

> to compose psalms and canticles (by which the hearts of listeners would be inflamed) but also to construct various kinds of musical instruments to enhance these songs of praise with melodic strains. Thereby, both through the form and quality of the instruments, as well as through the meaning of the words which accompany them, those who hear might be taught . . . about inward things, since they have been admonished and aroused by outward things. In such a way, these holy prophets . . . recall to mind that divine melody of praise which Adam, in company with the angels, enjoyed in God before his fall.[172]

She argues that "the canticle of praise, reflecting celestial harmony, is rooted in the Church through the Holy Spirit . . . and so it is proper for the body, in harmony with the

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[171] For an in-depth study of medieval music as bodily practice, see Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer*, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[172] Hildegard of Bingen, "Letter 23: Hildegard to the prelates at Mainz," in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 78. For more on Hildegard's writings on music as well as her musical compositions, see William T. Flynn, "Singing with Angels. Hildegard of Bingen's Representations of Celestial Music," in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, ed. Joad Raymond (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 203-229.

soul, to use its voice to sing praises to God."[173] This underscores the musical culture of medieval Catholicism, in which choirs of religious singing the liturgy echoed visual and written imaginings of angels serenading in Heaven. Music punctuated the monastic day, marking the canonical hours and elevating mass through liturgical chants that were thought to "rise heavenward like the scent of incense."[174]

While song and liturgical performance were a routine form of speaking to and thinking about God, much like (and often in conjunction with) meditation on sacred imagery, these practices also played a role in revelation to others in which holy persons taught those in their communities to access the divine. We see this in the *Life of Douceline*, when, on the eve of the Ascension of Christ, the enraptured saint

> began to sing, walking through the dormitory from one end to the other as if she were following a procession . . .
>
> All the women who heard it found the singing to be wonderful. It seemed to come from another world, for no one could understand the sounds or the words. It seemed as if the singing was completely consuming her, right to the marrow of her bones. When she reached the end of the dormitory, she would turn around and make her way to the other end. She did this countless times, coming and going,

[173] Hildegard of Bingen, "Letter 23," 79.

[174] Saucier, "Sweet Sound of Sanctity," 11. For more on music and the liturgy in relation to sound, see Woolgar 81-83. For more on music and performance in a female monastic setting, see Gerturd Jaron Lewis, "Music and Dancing in The Fourteenth-Century Sister-Books," in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas H. Bestuel, Janet Goebel, and William E. Pollard (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 159-169.

singing in turn, as if she were part of a procession. The singing was of such sweetness that she became quite languid . . .

All of them followed after her in procession, with lighted candles, accompanying her, full of joy and inexpressible consolation. The spiritual renewal that they all experienced, and the new feeling for God that they had in their hearts were so strong that they felt they were sharing in the delights of the heavenly court and were following with her in that wonderful procession that they believed she was seeing in heaven.

When they saw what she was doing, they all understood that great things had been revealed and made evident to her in her rapture, things concerning God's sublime majesty. For she was giving visible signs of it, showing with her right arm, in a remarkable way, that she had seen the sovereign power of God: when she stopped, she raised her arm as high as she could and made a circle around her head with wonderful solemnity, using the whole length of her arm to indicate the diadem of God's great magnificence. The respect and the authority that she was indicating by this grand gesture was so extraordinary that they were all frightened by it and felt a great respect for the Lord that she was representing to them.

Having seen the signs that she was making, they were firmly convinced that God, in the presence of all the saints, was giving a blessing to that house . . . She remained in her state of rapture until after the hour of matins.[175]

[175] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 63-64. "E pueis, ill si levet, e apres comenset a cantar, annant per dormidor, de l'un cap tro a l'autrè, tot en aissi con si seguis procession . . .

Whereas in the revelations to others discussed in the previous chapter Douceline served as an object of devotion through her stillness and silence, like a statue that invites contemplation on the divine but does not instruct one in the art of meditation, here she teaches others to access the divine through her voice and movement. That Douceline's song is a revelation granted to those around her is apparent in the description of her singing as otherworldly, beyond understanding, and all-consuming. In his fourteenth-century treatise on music, Jacques de Liège argued that *musica caelestis*, "independent of the material world, existed exclusively in the spiritual realm where angels and saints alike

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E era aquell cant meravillos a totas cellas que l'auzian, e ben mostrava que d'aquest mont non era; car neguna non podia entrendre aquell son, ni la verba. E semblava aquell cant que tota la begues e li susses las mezollas del cors. E cant era al som del dormidor, e illi si girava, e prennia aquell cors entro a l'autre som. E en aissi giret tantas vegadas que non si poiria dire, annant et tornant, cantant azordenadamens, tot en aissi cant s'illi fos en las procession. E era aquel cant de tan gran doussor que tota la languia . . .

E totas am procession seguian la apres, am ciri abrazat, e annavan amb ella, am tant de gauch e de consolacion, que non si poiria dire. E era tan grans aquell renovellament esperital que totas avian, e sentian de Dieu en lur cor una novella cauza, que semblant lur era qu'ellas sentissan en part l'alegrier d'aquella cort celestial, e seguissan ab ella aquella procession meravilloza que, segon que totas crezian, illi vezia el cel.

E adoncs, totas entenderon e perceupron a so qu'illi fazia, que grans cauza li era revelada e mostrada en aquell raubiment, de l'auteza e de la granneza de la majestat de Dieu. Car alcuns grans seinnhals en fazia, mostrant am lo bras drech, ab trop gran meravilla, l'auctoritat qu'illi vezia en Dieu. Car adoncs illi, cant si restancava, levava son bratz aitant aut cant podia, e menava lo en maniera de celcle sobre son cap, am gran auctoritat, meravillozamens, mostrant la diadema de la gran magnificencia de Dieu, que tota la longueza de son bras hi metia. E era tan grans aquilli reverencia, el gran auctroitat que mostrava e figurava fazent aquell gran signe, que totas n'eran pauzadas en gran temor, e en gran reverencia dell Seinnhor que lur reprezentava.

E crezeron certamens, per la prezenza de totz los santz, que Dieus dones benediccion sobr'aquella maizon, per los seinnhals qu'ill en fazia . . . En aquest raubiment estet, passada l'ora de matinas" (9.60-64).

glorified God with the most perfect sound."[176] Douceline transmits this heavenly music from the spiritual realm into the worldly, indicating the presence of the divine through this "significant sound."

The heavenly source of her music is particularly evident when we compare this event to her general attitude towards singing in the *Life*. Despite living in a religious community, Douceline presumably did not sing as a regular part of her daily routine, for she "said that a beguine was made for weeping, and not for singing" and she "did not want them [her daughters] to acquire skill in letters or to sing the office, or to have anything that would raise them too high."[177] And yet, Douceline was especially affected by song; her *Life* gives several examples of singing as a catalyst for her raptures, noting that "She could not listen to any singing in the church without being at once enraptured."[178] This sets precedence for the utility of song as an access point to the

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[176] Saucier, "Sweet Sound of Sanctity," 16-17. Jacques de Liège drew from Boethius and a sixth-century theory of singing angels found in Pseudo-Dionysian *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in writing his theoretical treatise on music, *Speculum musicae*. Boethius (c.477-524) described three types of music – "the music of the spheres" which "was produced by their rapid motion…or by the spirit blowing through them. Far from being soundless, this music is too loud to be perceived by human ears"; the music "understood as being the (unsounded) harmonious relationship of body and soul"; and "the music which is constituted in certain instruments." This last was the only Boethius thought audible by humans, and within it he included the human voice as "as much an instrument as any artificial musical instrument." Burnett, "Perceiving Sound," 71.

[177] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 33-34. "E dizia li Sancta que beguina era de plorar, e non de cantar" (3.8); "ni augessan sotileza de letras, ni cantessan l'ufici; ni volia aguessan neguna cauza per que trop s'eslevessan" (4.4).

[178] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 58-59. "Negun cant de gleiza non poudia auzir ni excoutar, que mantenent ill estava raubida" (9.45). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, even birdsong sends Douceline into rapture (9.19). This conflicted relationship with singing and music is not uncommon – in Book X, Chapter XXXIII of his *Confessions*, Augustine laments of his struggle to be moved by the words sung rather

divine, as well as clarifying that Douceline is here made to produce significant sound by God and not her own volition.

Of course, Douceline does not merely sing in this revelation – she performs. Some of her movements are meant to be observed rather than imitated. The sisters watch as she gives "visible signs" of "God's sublime majesty" such as miming "the diadem of God's great magnificence" through large, circular motions of her arm. This gesture clearly affects the sisters, frightening them with its authority. Through this visual showing of God combined with her celestial sound, Douceline serves almost like a choirbook in which "singers and celebrant assimilated their images along with the chant and texts of the liturgy."[179] Her heavenly singing focuses the devotional gaze of her viewers, and her movements contextualize the otherworldly music as it touches their ears.

As they listen to and watch Douceline, the beguines perform with her, "following after her in procession." The text emphasizes the repetitive movement of this process, describing how the holy woman traversed the dormitory "coming and going," walking back and forth "countless times." In her study on medieval thought, Mary Carruthers argues that monastic education is a type of "craft 'knowledge' which is learned, and indeed can only be learned, by the painstaking practical imitation and complete familiarization of exemplary masters' techniques and experiences . . . Monastic education

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than the beauty of song itself during services so as not to sin through "contentment of the flesh." Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999),140-141.

[179] Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly, "Sound and Image in the Middle Ages: Reflections on a Conjunction," in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015), 18.

is best understood . . . on this apprenticeship model."[180] Following along behind Douceline, the sisters emulate the master's experiences. Through imitating rather than simply observing, they achieve "spiritual renewal" and a "new feeling for God" that helps them share "in the delights of the heavenly court." More than meditating on a devotional object, the beguines become apprentices of Douceline's enraptured vision, learning to see and hear her as a revelation from God.

To fully understand the instructional function of this revelation to others, we must also consider the liturgical framework. Douceline enters this rapture on the eve of the Ascension of Christ, a feast day that celebrates the rising of Christ into heaven through "a procession of torches and banners symbolizing Christ's journey to the Mount of Olives and entry to heaven, the extinguishing of the Paschal Candle, and an all-night vigil." This ritual "affirms that Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes believers into the heavenly kingdom so that members of his Body may live in the hope of one day being with him forever."[181] Douceline's performative rapture the night before this feast serves as a preview of the Ascension Day activities. Like Christ before his believers, Douceline precedes the sisters in "that wonderful procession that they believed she was seeing in heaven." The beguines, carrying lighted candles, journey after her in an all-night vigil (for Douceline's rapture lasts "until after the hour of matins" and it seems unlikely anyone was sleeping through her celestial parade around the dormitory). It is an

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[180] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 1-2.

[181] J. Gordon Melton, James A. Beverly, Christopher Buck, and Constance A. Jones, eds., *Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations*, vol.1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), 45.

instructive revelation – by imitating Douceline in her performance, the beguines train spiritually for the Ascension feast, learning the manner in which they should strive to see and hear the Lord the following day.

We see this type of instructional revelation to others on another occasion, when Douceline, in ecstasy in the church of the Friars Minor in Hyeres, is "lifted high in body and soul" and "began to sing excitedly and with joy . . . Then all the friars responded together to what she had sung, abandoning the antiphony and showing the spiritual elation they were all feeling. The Saint then entered the friars' choir, singing fervently of the assumption of Our Lady. And the friars joined her in what she was singing, with inexpressible consolation."[182] It is again significant that Douceline is not accompanied by heavenly music but is instead the source of this music. Listening to Douceline, the friars hear the divine, and they, like the beguines, imitate the holy woman as apprentices learning from a master, switching from their liturgical performance of the antiphony to join in Douceline's song. In his study of sound and music, Woolgar describes the emphasis monastics placed on harmony in sound, stating it was "necessary for the singers to sing together in consonance and sweet harmony, to stir listeners the better to the

[182] *The Life of Saint Douceline*, 66. "E doncs li sancta maire . . . am gran eslevament e de cor e de cors, comenset a cantar, e dire ardentmens e alegra . . . E doncs li fraire responderon li tut, prennent so qu'ill dizia, e laisseron l'antifena, am meravillos alegreir d'esperit que tut avian. E puies, ill s'en intret per ins lo cor dels fraires, cantant am gran fervor del puiament de Nostra Donna. E li fraire cantavan ab ella tot so qu'illi dizia, am tant de consolacion que non si poiria dire" (9.69-70). It is worth noting that Douceline, while in rapture, enters the friars' choir; the role of revelations to others in providing access to spaces women were not usually permitted will be discussed in the following chapter.

devotion of God."[183] By joining Douceline in harmony, the friars become part of a celestial choir, and as Douceline sings with joy, so the friars experience spiritual elation. Douceline (and thus her voice) is of the highest spiritual quality, and through following her example in song, the friars learn to reach the divine, for as Hildegard of Bingen argued, "through the form and quality of the instruments [including the voice] . . . those who hear might be taught."

At this point, I return to Elizabeth of Spalbeek, who like Douceline instructed others in her community through sound and performance. Elizabeth's *Life* is unusual as a hagiographical text because it lacks the expected details of the holy woman's pious youth, her realization of her divine calling and subsequent entrance into a religious life, and her death, posthumous miracles, etc.[184] Instead, it offers what Walter Simons calls a "contemporary report" on her stigmata and Passion-driven routines.[185] Philip of Clairvaux composed the *vita* after traveling to Herkenrode to witness Elizabeth's

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[183] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 81.

[184] Elizabeth of Spalbeek seems to have had a very active spiritual network and been known for her prophetic abilities, which led to her involvement in a thirteenth-century court case between the French Queen Marie of Brabant and the king's chamberlain Pierre de la Broce. As this case occurred about ten years after Philip of Clairvaux composed the *Life*, it's no surprise it was not included, but omission of her networks and any details of her life outside of her canonical performances is highly unusual. For more on Elizabeth outside of Philip's text, see Jesse Njus, "The Politics of Mysticism: Elisabeth of Spalbeek in Context," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (2008): 285-317, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/stable/20618488.

[185] Walter Simons, "Reading a Saint's Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the *Vitae* of Thirteenth-Century Beguines," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 10.

devotional performances, stories of which he at first "gaf no credens."[186] Observing the holy woman with his own eyes brought him to belief, and he set about re-counting these miracles.

Beginning with an account of her stigmatic wounds, Philip relates how Elizabeth enacts the stages of the Passion each day in conjunction with the seven canonical hours, from matins to compline. He describes how she is unmovable in rapture, how she twists her body to show Christ bound or crucified, and how she physically enacts the various players in the Passion, from beaten Christ to his torturers to Mary and John the Evangelist mourning his death. He also recounts Elizabeth's sounds, telling how she replaces the singing of psalms with the music made by slapping her body with strokes that "may be herde acordaunte sowne and cleer."[187] These blows "settith her flesche for an harpe, and hir chekys for a tymber, and ioy for a sawtry, and hir handys and fyngers for a wrast (that is an instrument of organ songe)."[188]

Unsurprisingly, given its unique nature and evident popularity (at least ten medieval Latin copies plus the Middle English transcription still exist today), Elizabeth's *Life* has received much scholarly attention, particularly in connection with guided

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[186] Philip of Clairvaux, "The Middle English Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek," in Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège*: *A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), p. 28, II.21. I have chosen to continue using the Middle English edition of Elizabeth's *Life* because I am interested in how it places her *Life* in the context of instructional devotional texts also translated into Middle English such as *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, as discussed below.

[187] Philip of Clairvaux, "Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p. 30, III.71.

[188] Philip of Clairvaux, "Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p. 32, III.115-117.

meditation and medieval performative practices such as *imitatio Christi*.[189] Thus I will not allot much space here to detailing Elizabeth's raptures or the considerable amount we can learn from them about mystical performance and movement in medieval monastic culture. However, I do want to briefly discuss Elizabeth as an example of a devotional object in motion, representative of this stage between a holy person as stationary devotional object (such as the levitating Douceline) and the holy person who consciously teaches others to see (as we will discuss later in this chapter).

If Douceline is a choirbook, offering visual accompaniment to celestial music, Elizabeth of Spalbeek is a meditation manual, providing instructions and guidelines for the imagining of divine subjects through what Barbara Newman calls "visionary scripts."[190] Texts such as the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Nicholas Love's early fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the Pseudo-Bonaventurian

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[189] See Simons, "Reading a Saint's Body," 10, and Brown, *Three Women of Liège*, 13-14 for more on the transmission of Elizabeth's *vita*. For discussions of performativity in the *Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek*, see Brown, 191-218; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 115-124; Simons; Sarah Macmillan, "Phenomenal Pain: Embodying the Passion in the *Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek*," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 8 no. 1 (2017): 102-119, doi:10.1057/pmed.2014.5; Elliot Visconsi, "'She Represents the Person of Our Lord': The Performance of Mysticism in the *Vita* of Elisabeth of Spalbeek and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 76-89, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zr190q5; Susan Rodgers and Joanna E. Ziegler, "Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Trance Dance of Faith: A Performance Theory Interpretation from Anthropological and Art Historical Perspectives," in *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, ed. Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 299-355.; Jesse Njus, "What did it mean to act in the Middle Ages?: Elisabeth of Spalbeek and 'Imitatio Christi,'" *Theatre Journal* 63, no. 1 (2011): 1–21. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41307502.

[190] Barbara Newman, "What did it Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 25, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20463162.

Meditationes Vitae Christi, vividly described "the ymage of criſtes incarnacioun, paſſioun, and reſurreccioun: ſo that a ſymple ſoule that kan not thenke bot bodies or bodily thinges mowe haue ſomwhat accordynge unto his affeccioun wherwith he may fede and ſtire his deuocious . . . [through] deuoute ymaginaciouns."[191] Affective meditations on the Passion in particular offered "richly emotional, script-like texts that ask their readers to imagine themselves present at scenes of Christ's suffering and to perform compassion for that suffering victim in a private drama of the heart."[192] Through her daily performances of this suffering, Elizabeth takes on the role of affective devotional text, demonstrating for the souls around her how they should visualize and imaginatively experience Christ's ultimate sacrifice. The translation of her *Life* into Middle English underscores its potential as an edifying meditational work.

In his analysis of Elizabeth's *Life*, Simons argues that "reading her movements 'correctly' . . . required a privileged interpreter, the hagiographer."[193] However, I find that the educational framing of the text and the structure of her revelations actually stress that the holy woman's performances were accessible to all her viewers, that their purpose was to be readable by her community. Philip of Clairvaux explicitly states that Elizabeth has an instructional purpose, describing her as a maiden "in whom oure mercyful Lorde

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[191] Nicholas Love, *Nicholas Love's* Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 9.

[192] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Mediation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1. McNamer discusses Love's *Mirror* along with several other devotional texts intended to teach prayer/meditation.
[193] Simons, "Reading a Saint's Body," 19.

hath schewed merueilous miracles of his blissed Passyone that *maye stir alle Cristen pepil to deuocyonce*."[194] He continues to emphasize her performances as intended for an audience, using phrases such as "sche figured vnto vs" that underscore his position as part of a group given this revelation.[195] The compiler of the Middle English *Life* echoes the educational benefits of the text, prefacing their translation with the statement that it has been "turnyd oute of Latyn to the worschep of God and edificacyone of deuoute soulless that are not leeryd in Latyn tunge."[196]

Structurally, Elizabeth's raptures mirror those features of meditations that make them accessible to even "simple souls." Her ecstasies come at regular intervals, following the canonical hours that punctuate the monastic day. They break down the Passion story through what David Herman calls "chunking," a narrative process "by which intelligent agents segment the stream of experience into units that are bounded, classifiable, and thus more readily recognized and remembered."[197] Philip then maintains this framework of narrative chunks through which the Lord "schewed merueilous miracles" by titling each chapter for the unit it relates ("What she doth for the oure of matynes," "prime," "teers," etc.). This rhetorical structure, or *ductus*, guides the movement of those who observe Elizabeth and those who later read or hear her *Life* through Christ's suffering, showing

[194] Philip of Clairvaux, "Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p. 28, II.17-19. Italics mine.

[195] Philip of Clairvaux, "Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p. 42, VII.324.

[196] Philip of Clairvaux, "Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p. 27, I.5-7

[197] David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 232-33.

them where to pause for deeper meditation on God.[198] Whereas in her meditation on the Passion Lutgard of Aywières is a devotional object facilitating reflection on the divine, through physically and repetitively acting out the Passion Elizabeth is a composition teaching others the building blocks of celestial contact.

Although we are not told how witnessing Elizabeth's raptures affects those who view her (apart from Philip's conversion from doubt), we can speculate about the power of her performance as a revelation to others. In her study of devotional plays in the Middle Ages, Jill Stevenson comments that plays have the power to "transform us . . . [to] do something *to* us. Their performances certainly leave traces in our minds, but, more remarkably, they embed themselves inside our bodies."[199] For medieval viewers of religious drama, "performance literacy linger[ed] in the body after the live encounter as a cognitive pattern for devotional seeing and understanding to be applied in other contexts."[200] Elizabeth's performance certainly seems like one that would linger. Between the repetition of her raptures, the physical representations of the different characters involved in the Passion, and the rhythmic sounds as she beats her own body, she provides (or rather, God provides through her) the "energizing devices to put [the mind] in gear and to keep it interested and on track, by arousing emotions of fear or

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[198] Carruthers describes *ductus* as "the movement within and through a work's various parts . . . the way that a composition guides a person to its various goals." She argues for the utility of the concept of *ductus* in understanding how medieval meditations were composed and experienced. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 77-81 and 117-118.

[199] Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

[200] Stevenson, *Performance*, 43.

delight, anger, wonder and awe."[201] As a "verbal and visual representation" of the divine experience, Elizabeth is a revelation to others, "exist[ing] to be perceived, stored in one's memory, reflected upon and then used at the appropriate time."[202]

2. Do You See What I See? Mutual Revelation in the *Life of Ida of Nivelles*

So far in this dissertation, I have focused on revelations to others that involve bodily witnessing of a holy person in rapture. But others could also receive spiritual revelations from God, and these visions frequently include and/or are mutually experienced by the holy person in an instructional capacity.[203] For an example of mutual revelations, I turn to Ida of Nivelles (1199-1231), whose *Life* includes shared visionary experiences.

Ida, born in the town of Nivelles in present-day Belgium, joined a local beguinage at the age of nine and the Cisctercian convent at La Remée (the sister house of Villers Abbey) at sixteen. Notable features of her *Life* include her devotion to the Eucharist, her familiarity with the Holy Spirit and Holy Trinity, her compassion for those seeking God, and her *meticulosa scrupulositas* (which Martinus Cawley describes as a "delicacy of conscience…[which] indicated a vigorously health, thoroughly authentic intellectual

[201] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 117. For a study of the sounds/music of the body in pain, see Chapter 5, "The Musical Body in Pain: Passion, Percussion, and Melody in Thirteenth-Century Religious Practice" in Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*.

[202] Mark Cruse, "Matter and Meaning," 51.

[203] The differences between physical and spiritual vision and its significance in revelations is discussed at length in chapter four.

life").[204] Her *Life*, written by Goswin of Bossut shortly after her death, narrates several instances of others having visions of Ida and of Ida witnessing these revelations.[205]

In one such account, Goswin tells of a priest— "a religious enough and God-loving man"—who has heard of Ida's favor with the Lord but doubts the truth of these claims. He visits her to determine her holiness, but Ida, aware of his doubts "thanks to her ever-familiar spirit of the Lord," says little to him on any of his trips to La Ramèe. After his third visit, the priest celebrates mass "in the hope that this ambivalence might be removed from his heart." During the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest sees Ida's face and hears the Lord say:

> 'Behold, son: just as I now show you Ida's outward face, so shall I show you her inward state. Thus will you acknowledge that my beloved Ida is like a fountain

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[204] Martinus Cawley, "Ida of Nivelles: Cistercian Nun," in *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women*, vol. 3, book 1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series 113 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995), 311. For more on Ida, see also Martinus Cawley, introduction to *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), 8-12; and Barbara Newman, "Goswin of Villers and the Visionary Network," preface to *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), xxxvi-xl.

[205] Not much is known about Goswin beyond that he was a cantor at the Cistercian abbey of Villers in the thirteenth-century, and that he wrote the *Lives* of three local saints: Ida of Nivelles, as well as Arnulf of Villers (d.1228) and Abundus of Huy (c.1189-1239). Villers is located in the Low Countries (modern day Belgium), about 60 miles west of Liège. For more on thirteenth-century Villers and Goswin of Bossut, see Newman, "Goswin of Villers" and Martinus Cawley, introduction to *Send Me God*.

> issuing ceaselessly from the earth, so that . . . whoever come to her weighed down and confined by any kind of sorrow and trouble can draw from her and obtain for themselves whatever consoling relief they need. And all of this by no means diminishes the grace of devotion within her but rather increases it, and cumulatively so.'

The vision brings the priest "a more abundant measure of grace than he had been used to. His *soul*, however, *refused to be consoled* (Ps. 76.3) unless he could shortly see again the face shown him at the altar." Upon seeing Ida again, the priest:

> dropped to the floor, *destitute of bodily strength, beside himself in mind* (Dan. 10.8-17; Acts 11.5; *Niv* 20d) and raptured aloft to heaven. And Ida, on seeing this, likewise perceived him as if glorified in soul and body, and she too was instantly *estranged* from her bodily senses (II Mac 5.17) and raptured aloft to heaven, where both now mutually beheld one another and celebrated *festivity together* (Ps. 75.11).
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> He, after a space, returned from that sweet slumber into which he had dozed from the first taste of that heavenly sweetness, being absorbed, as it were, into God. But now, as he bade farewell to all present and said he was leaving, those seated around put the question why he had not spoken to Ida. He replied: 'I did speak to her and spoke to my heart's content, though only in the honey-laden whisper used in heaven by the souls of the saints.' Having thus experienced Ida's abundance of heavenly grace, in which he had earlier disbelieved, he now *set out on his way rejoicing* (Acts 8.39). Shortly afterwards Ida too awoke from her most restful sleep of love, and she too was questioned by those sitting around why

she had not spoken to the man of God, who had come simply out of a holy love for her. She gave the same reply: 'I did speak to him, quite as much as I pleased, up in heaven above!'[206]

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[206] Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée*, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), 72-74. All provided translations of the *Life of Ida* are by Martinus Cawley unless otherwise noted. The italics and liturgical references are original to Cawley's translation. The Latin text provided in the footnotes is from Goswin of Bossut, *Vita B. Idae de Nivellis*, in *Quinque prudentes virgines: sive B. Beatricis de Nazareth, B. Aleydis de Scharenbecka, B. Idae de Nivellis, B. Idae de Lovanio, B. Idae de Leuuis*, ed. Crisóstomo Henriquez (Antwerp: Apud Ioannem Cnobbaert, 1630), 199-297, https://books.google.com/books?id=OB4lpj0yaQgC&vq=Ida%2026&pg=PA198#v=twopage&q&f=false. Crawley notes that Henriquez omits sections from Ida's *Life* (Crawley, xx). Through cross-checking Henriquez's text with the omissions list in Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum Bibliothecae regiae Bruxellensis (Goswin of Bossut, *De Beata Ida De Rameia Virgine, Appendix ad cod. 8609-20,* in *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum bibliothecae regiae Bruxellensis* (Brussels, 1889), 2:222-26. https://archive.org/details/cataloguscodicu00belggoog/page/n240), I have determined the passage quoted here does not contain omissions, save for the last paragraph which I address further in footnote 215 below. "Sacerdos quidam vir Religioſus ac timens Deum" (263); "Ida autem per ſpiritum diuinum hoc agnoſcens" (264); "vt huiuſmodi ambiguitas à corde eius amouererur" (264); "*Ecce fili, quemadmodum oſtendo tibi faciem Ida exteriorem ſic oſtendam tibi ſtatim eius interiorem, vt cognoſcas Idam dilectam meam eſſe quaſi fontem de terra iugiter emanantem . . . ad quam quicumque venerint, cuiuſcumque grauati anguſtia doloris & tribulationis, haurient ab ipſa & impetrabunt leuamen omnimodaeconſolationis, nec tamen in ea minuitur ſed augetur vſque ad cumulum gratia deuotionis*" (264); "multis in poſterum diebus copioſiorem ſolito gratiam à Domino conſecutus eſt. Et cùm renueret conſolari anima eius, niſi in proximo videret eam, cuius facies ei oftenſa fuerat in altari" (265); "Statimque ſolo procumbens viribus corporis deſtitus & in exceſſu mentis factus in caelù raptus eſt. Quo viſo CHRISTI ancilla cùm ſimili modo eum quaſi anima & corpore glorificatum attenderet, repentè & ipſa à corporeis alienate ſenſibus rapta eſt ſurſum adinuicé celebrauerunt. Cumque poſt aliquam moram ille ab illo dulci ſomnoad ſe reuerſus eſſet, ac valefacto his qui aderant abire ſe diceret; interrogates eſt à circumſe dentibus, quare anciallae CHRISTI minimè locutus fuiſſet. Reſpondit: ego ad libitum meum ei locutus ſum, quemadmodum animae ſanctorum ſurſum in coelis ad inuicem loqui conſueuerunt. Et ſic expertus in ancilla CHRISTI coeleſtis abundantiam ſuauitatis, quam anteà minimè crediderat, gaudens diſceſſit. Virgo autem Domini poſt paululumà quietiſſimo amoris ſomno euigilans interrogata eſt, quare

The miracle of the doubter, in which one doubts a holy person as the Apostle Thomas discredited the resurrection of Christ until he had seen and touched the risen Lord with his own eyes and hands (John 20:24-29), was a popular trope in medieval hagiographical texts and images. After all, doubters required more convincing than those who already believed in the saint's holy favor. Such conversions subsequently held power as marvels in their own right, on top of whichever phenomenon resulted in their transformation to believer.[207] In the case of Ida's doubting priest, his uncertainty in the holy woman is allowed to build, increasing the need for a powerfully convincing miracle. He visits her at La Ramèe three times before the Lord grants him a revelation of Ida's devotion, and even this is not enough to provide him solace in his soul. Instead, he must seek her out a fourth time and speak with her in mutual revelation before his heart is content.

Significantly, even though the priest so staunchly doubts Ida, he wants to have faith. He is not a hopelessly corrupt sinner, but rather "a religious enough and God-loving man" who hopes "this ambivalence [towards Ida] might be removed from his heart." This openness to belief serves two purposes. It emphasizes the honesty of his doubt, as he does not lack conviction in the holy woman out of stubbornness or refusal to acknowledge her divine favor. It also establishes that the priest is worthy of, and able to receive, a

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viro Dei qui ob ſanctum eius amorem illuc aduenerat, minimè locuta fuiſſet? Quae ſimili modo reſpondens: ego inquit, quantum mihi placuit ſurſum in caeleſtibus ei locuta ſum" (265-66).

[207] For more on doubters of miracles, see Laura Cleaver, "'Almost Every Miracle is Open to Carping': Doubts, Relics, Reliquaries and Images of Saints in the Long 12th Century," *JBBA* 167 (2014): 51-69, doi: 10.1179/0068128814Z.00000000025.

revelation of his own. Jessica Barr notes in her study of medieval vision and dream texts that in order for one to receive and comprehend visionary knowledge, a number of prerequisites had to be met: "First, the visionary or dreamer must be properly motivated by a love for God; second, the visionary or dreamer's will must be directed by that love and, therefore, in accord with the divine will; and third, the visionary or dreamer's cognitive faculties must be driven by his or her rightly motivated will."[208] The priest's love for God directs his desire to believe in Ida, and he is consequently able to not only see her face during mass, but to be "raptured aloft to heaven" along with the saint. He receives and understands these revelations to others because he is open to God.

As for Ida, her part in this account showcases the diversity of roles visionaries could play in revelations to others. In the priest's first vision, Ida is herself a revelation granted by the Lord. This initiates with Ida's inaction during the priest's visits. Aware of his doubts, she does not try to convince him of her familiarity with God. While we are told Ida knows of the priest's concerns "thanks to her ever-familiar spirit of the Lord," it is not clear if she was divinely instructed to remain indifferent. Regardless, seeing the holy woman is not enough to grant the doubting priest divine access—she here is not cast as a devotional object like Lutgard or Douceline in the previous chapter. Rather, active instruction from the Lord is required to inspire the doubting man. Christ provides this through the vision of Ida's face during the Eucharistic Prayer, accompanied by the assurance that "his beloved" is a ceaseless, self-replenishing fountain of comfort for any

[208] Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 9.

in need of such support. That this occurs during the Eucharistic emphasizes Ida as a revelation given to the priest, just as Christ gives up himself for ocular and aural consumption through the host and accompanying liturgy. Ida becomes a furthering offering of the body of the Lord, not only to the priest but to any in need of solace. This revelation teaches the priest to approach Ida not just as a proof of holiness, but as a source of divine consolation. It prepares him to experience the second revelation.

In this second revelation, Ida is more than devotional object, more than an access point for divine meditation. She is a conscious participant in divine vision, as well as provider of divine comfort. When the priest and Ida gaze on each other and are rapt up to heaven, they enter what Alicia Spencer-Hall terms a "mystical vision space."[209] This space is private to the two of them (and presumably whichever divine presence joins them there). There, they "mutually beheld one another and celebrated" together. As they come out of the sleep of their rapture, their accounts mirror each other's: when questioned as to why they had not conversed with the other, both respond that they had spoken as much as they desired. The priest thus does not benefit only from gazing on Ida as on a devotional object, but from subsequently speaking with her in the divine space they communally access.

Despite this mutuality, it does seem that the priest gains more from their shared vision than Ida. While Ida acknowledges speaking to the priest in heaven during "her most restful sleep of love," the priest sets out "rejoicing" with a heart contented by "Ida's

[209] Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens*, 232. For more on visions as social spaces, see Spencer-Hall's chapter "My Avatar, My Soul: When Mystics Log On" (193-242), as well as chapter five below.

abundance of heavenly grace." The priest has not only seen and heard Ida but tasted the sweetness of heaven through her and the "honey-laden whisper used in heaven by the souls of the saints." As a sense, taste was considered a form of touch. Aquinas explains that "the tasteable is something tangible, i.e. discerned by touch," and furthermore that "all that is tasteable is either actually liquid already, like wine, or is potentially liquid, like things taken as food. Hence the necessity of saliva in the mouth; being very liquid it moistens the palate, so that what is eaten may be liquefied and its savour perceived."[210] Taste was also linked with the Eucharist as a spiritual experiencing of the sweetness of the divine.[211] Ida's own Eucharistic visions, such as one in which she sees the host as the Christ Child, are peppered with terminology of sweetness and honey.[212] The pair of revelations given to the priest thus seem to walk him through the experience of the Eucharist through Ida. In the first revelation, he sees the face of Ida as one would see the host, and he is told she is a fountain from which he may draw consolation. In the second revelation, he is rapt up with Ida, able to taste the sweetness of the divine as his senses have been moistened by the waters of Ida's heavenly grace. As medieval parents might rub honey on the gums of their babies to kindle their sense of taste, so the Lord through

[210] Aquinas, *De Anima*, II.XX.501-508.

[211] For more on taste and the Eucharist, see Hale, "'Taste and See.'"

[212] Goswin of Bossut, *Life of Ida*, 63-64. For more on Ida's Eucharistic devotion, see Claire Boudreau, "'With Desire Have I Desired': Ida of Nivelles' Love for the Eucharist," in *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women*, vol. 3, book 1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series 113 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995), 323-344.

this pair of revelations instructs the priest in the tasting of the divine through Ida's grace.[213]

In her discussion of male religious having visions of Ida, Spencer-Hall remarks that these men "do not meaningfully interact with her in vision space."[214] I do not think this is always the case, especially in the second revelation granted the doubting priest. While being enraptured along with him may not have been as sweetly Eucharistic an experience for Ida as it was for the priest, it provided her opportunity to speak with him and console his soul. For the priest, the revelations are specifically framed as instructional, helping him access the divine in a manner he may not have achieved without Ida's grace.[215] Although we do not know what Ida and the priest spoke of in their mutual vision space, Ida is presented as a master to an apprentice, someone who knows the craft of accessing God and assists her student in his own work towards the divine.

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[213] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 109.

[214] Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens*, 233.

[215] In his translation of this section of the *Life of Ida*, Crawley concludes the chapter as follows: "*Blessed*, therefore, *is God in his gifts, and holy in all his* revelations. He both removed this scruple and doubt from his servant's heart, for him to believe in Ida's holy and religious devotion, and he wondrously revealed to him the edifying wonders of the grace that was hers" (74). This section is not included in Henriquez's translation. However, Crawley titles this chapter "A Doubting Priest Comes to Belief in Ida," compared to Henriquez's "The priest, who did not believe in the amazing and abundant grace of God in her, learned how perfect she was through revelation" ("De ſacerdote qui mirabilem & copioſam Dei gratiam non credens eſſe in ea, per reuelationem didicit quantae perfectionis eſſet") (263). Whether the version of this statement falls at the start or end of the chapter, there persists a clear emphasis on these revelations as "edifying" experiences through which the doubting priest "learned."

3. "For the edification of our hearers": Visionary Coaching in the Works of Goswin of Bossut

In the revelations to others discussed above, the holy person is an instructional device utilized by God to actively teach communities how to access the divine. Although there is an element of intentionality to the holy persons' actions (Caciola points out that Elizabeth continues to perform her meditations in a public space rather than in seclusion, and Ida chooses not to enlighten the priest before his first vision), the overall message is that these raptures still occur through God.[216] Other revelations to others, such as that at the start of this chapter in which Lutgard advises the nun to recognize the divine in her vision, are accompanied by deliberate, purposeful instruction from the holy person that is also shared with the audience of the text. It is to this type of coached revelation that we turn in this last section, through close readings of two further episodes in the works of Goswin of Bossut.

Our first revelation for discussion comes from the *Life of Abundus*. From his *vita*, the role of Abundus of Huy (c.1189-1239) at Villers is not completely clear, although Cawley speculates he was a confessor based on his extensive participation in the community.[217] His *Life* is characterized by a strong Marian devotion, with many of his visions indicating his favor with the Virgin. This was recognized by those at Villers, and

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[216] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 117. The *Life of Douceline* frequently mentions Douceline's irritation at being witnessed while in ecstasy, and Philip of Clairvaux specifies that Elizabeth's raptures "come not of hir strengthe bot of a priue virtue of God" ("Middle English Life of Elizabeth," p.30, III.60-63).

[217] Cawley, introduction to *Send Me God*, 19. For more on Abundus, see Cawley, introduction to *Send Me God*, 18-20 and Newman, "Goswin of Villers," xliii-xlv.

others sought out Abundus for assistance establishing their own relationships with the divine Mother.

We see this visionary coaching relationship in Goswin's account of Abundus and the lay brother Baldwin. Baldwin, struggling with "the discomforts *of the flesh* involved in the vigils, fasts, and other outward observances of the Order," is considering leaving the monastery when he becomes friends with Abundus. The holy man consoles the younger brother, tells him of his revelations, and offers kind words and prayers to help Baldwin remain resilient in his ascetic journey.[218]

Knowing of Abundus' love for the Virgin, Baldwin pleads with him to "'obtain for me from that warm and kindly consoler of yours that she deign to appear to me, deign for the sake of her unutterable sweetness and of your own good prayers.'" Abundus consents, and later, "when Baldwin was keeping a night time vigil, with *Ave Maria*, the angelic salutation, ever on his lips, the holy Virgin appeared to him, taking a visible form. He well knew it was God's mother and, since all he had asked had been that he see her, the mere sight of her now sufficed to console him."[219] This visionary experience remains

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[218] Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Abundus, Monk of Villers*. In *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, translated by Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), 241. All provided translations of the *Life of Abundus* are by Martinus Cawley unless otherwise noted. The italics and liturgical references are original to Cawley's translation. The Latin text provided in the footnotes is from Goswin of Bossut, *Vita Abundi*, in "De Vita Van Abundus Van Hoei," transcribed and with intro. by A. M. Frenken, *Cîteaux* 10 (1959): 5-33. "Inter vigilias enim et jejunia ceterasque ordinis observantias, molestias carnis exterius egre ferebatis" (30).

[219] Goswin of Bossut, *Life of Abundus*, 242. "'impetra michi a benignissima consolatrice tua, ut propter ineffabilem suam dulcedinem et orationes tuas michi dignetur apparere'";

with Baldwin. He becomes "drenched with the tears of devotion" during his private prayers, and during the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, Baldwin is so touched by the sermon that he weeps publicly: "*tears were bursting* from his eyes and he could not *hold them back* (Gen. 43.30-31). Fittingly did one so given to saluting the mother of salvation now receive from heaven so sustaining a grace!"[220]

This revelatory account recalls once again Carruthers's suggestion that "monastic education is best understood . . . [on an] apprenticeship model."[221] Like the sisters and brothers who imitate the enraptured Douceline in song and procession, apprentices to the master, so Baldwin seeks knowledge of the divine through Abundus. However, Abundus himself is not the revelation granted another, as Douceline, Elizabeth, and Ida are given to their communities as instructional models for reaching the divine. Rather, Abundus is a deliberate teacher. He helps Baldwin become "properly motivated" and directed by love for God by giving him solace when the younger man feels the sting of temptation or harshness of daily monastic life.[222] He also prepares Baldwin to receive revelations by

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"Sanctissima namque virgo postmodum predicto converso nocte quadam vigilanti et salutationem angelicam, scilicet Ave Maria, in ore habenti, visibiliter apparuit. Ille autem, sciens esse Dei genitricem, qui solum ejus aspectum desideraverat, solo ejus in tantum confortatus est" (31).

[220] Goswin of Bossut, *Life of Abundus*, 242-243. "et in soliloquiis suis interdum ex devotione lacrimis perfunderetur"; "quia ereumpebant ab oculis ejus lacrime et non poterat se continere. Merito quidem gratie subsidium celitus accipiebat, qui salutis matrem frequenter salutare consueverat" (31).

[221] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 2.

[222] Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 9.

speaking to him of his own visions, providing the "complete familiarization of exemplary masters' techniques and experiences" necessary for "craft mastery."[223]

In her comparison of visionary and medieval dream vision texts, Jessica Barr proposes that dream vision narratives such as *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* "have the capacity to show us . . . hapless and misguided dreamers whose paths to visionary knowing are troubled and confused, but who nonetheless persist in their efforts to understand their visions."[224] These texts, she argues, show us dreamers "led to a certain point by education and reason—but then revelation takes over to impart a different kind of knowledge to the dreamer. The revelatory dream's most significant moment comes when the various voices of instruction give way to an experience that is expected to profoundly transform the dreamer."[225] I think in revelations to others like Baldwin's, we also see this story of a troubled dreamer who eventually persists in visionary understanding first through education and reason and then through revelation. As Will in *Piers Plowman* is mainly absorbed in "seeking and desiring," so too is Baldwin, strengthened by his education from Abundus, in requesting Abundus' help to achieve a Marian revelation of his own. Upon receiving this vision, Baldwin is indeed transformed, and is enabled to use this "new knowledge to increase in his or her love for God and to disseminate the revealed message."[226] His revelation of the Virgin through the assistance

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[223] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 2.

[224] Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 121.

[225] Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 24-25.

[226] Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 152.

of Abundus results in Baldwin's receiving the gift of tears, and when he weeps in public he himself becomes a representation of divine presence to those around him. It is significant that the last line of this visionary account – "Fittingly did one so given to saluting the mother of salvation now receive from heaven so sustaining a grace!"—could as easily be said of Baldwin or Abundus. Through his revelatory experience coached by Abundus, Baldwin joins the holy man as one worthy of divine access.

In other revelations grounded in visionary coaching, it is the audience of the saint's life that is explicitly placed in the position of revelation receiver rather than (or in addition to) the "other" in the text. To consider such a revelation, we turn to Goswin's *Life of Arnulf of Villers*. Arnulf (d.1228) was a lay brother at Villers, where he became known for his extreme self-flagellation paradoxically combined with his tendency to burst into uncontrollable laughter. Cawley notes that permissions to observe such extreme penance was rarely granted in early-thirteenth century Villers, with only a handful of brothers allowed to wear hair shirts or fast excessively.[227] Accordingly, Goswin prefaces the *Life* with a caution that other should not attempt such austerity: "We can grant that our God Almighty sometimes achieves in one or other servant of his, things singularly wonderful and wonderfully singular, things scarcely to be found in others. Nevertheless, such things do not set a precedent to make *the privileges of a few a norm for the many*."[228] The revelation to another quoted below sidesteps this issue of Arnulf's

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[227] Cawley, introduction to *Send Me God*, 13. For more on Arnulf, see Cawley 12-18; Newman, "Goswin of Villers," xl-xliii; Brian Patrick McGuire, "Self-Denial and Self-Assertion in Arnulf of Villers," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 28 (1998): 241-250.

[228] Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers*, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of*

suitability for imitation by instead focusing on the "other" as the visionary role model while Arnulf and Goswin-as-narrator offer instruction to both the other and the audience.

In this revelatory account, Goswin relates Arnulf's vision of an unnamed monk of Villers being transported to heaven by Christ and the Virgin. He begins with an emphasis on the educative nature of the revelation:

> We now offer something *for the edification of our hearers* (RB 38.12, 42.3, 47.3), which occurred at Villers and is worth the telling. On the Assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary, *at the beginning of vigils* (Lam. 2.19), when the monks were solemnly singing that jubilant song, the invitatory antiphon *Ave Maria*, along with its psalm, *Venite exultemus* (Ps. 94), one of them, while singing along with the rest, began directing upward his heart's affection. So emphatically was he drawn aloft by grace, that he felt he was putting himself almost bodily into the presence of our glorious Lord and Saviour and of his most blessed mother. Upon being afforded this heavenly comfort for his inner soul, he felt called to entrust himself to the Lord's mercy, and so he experienced the hope that he too would yet be crowned by the Lord in heaven, crowned, not for any merits of his

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Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut, trans. Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), 125-126, Pref. I.1. All provided translations of the *Life of Arnulf* are by Martinus Cawley. The italics and liturgical references are original to Cawley's translation. The Latin text provided in the footnotes is from the *Vita Arnulfus* accessed through The Acta Sanctorum Database. "Sed licet Deus noster omnipotens, quandoque in aliquo servorum suorum operetur quædam singulariter mirabilia & mirabiliter singularia, quæ in multis aliis inveniri non possunt; non tamen ideo fit consequens, ut privilegia paucorum faciant legem commune" (Praefatio 2)

own, but in accord with the Lord's unspeakable goodness. Each time the invitatory antiphon was repeated, he sang along right joyfully, humbly sharing the sublime company of the king and queen on high, and feeling his holy devotion stir anew and grow greater yet.

Meanwhile Arnulf was also in church and he too saw the saving Lord and his venerable mother. There they were, standing beside the monk, and as he sang along with a smile, they girded him about with a very beautiful belt, picked him up by the arms, right and left, and lifted him to sublime heights, far above the earth. And Arnulf, still at his prayers and letting his gaze follow as the monk went his way, now cried out: 'My brother, my brother, yet again and for sure, I shall see you!' (compare IV Kings 2.12) But the monk, still in those blessed hands of the king and queen, was wafted up to the constellations and could be seen by him no longer.

On that same Assumption Day, the monk obtained permission to speak with Arnulf, though quite unaware of the latter's having had this vision of himself the previous night. While they were thus *conversing together* (IV Kings ibid.), Arnulf dissolved, as he so often did, into laughter, and the monk was left wondering why there should be such laughter for no apparent cause. Then Arnulf told him how, during vigils the previous night, he had seen one of the monks visited in choir by the Virgin Mother and her Son and taken up to heaven in their holy hands. Hearing this, the other asked him to tell the monk's name and the moment that he was thus taken aloft. Arnulf was at first unwilling to answer that

question but eventually yielded to his importunate queries and declared that he was himself the monk and that the invitatory was the moment when it happened. . . . We, therefore, who *profess holy service* to the Lord (RB 5.3), should strive to follow the example of this monk, and, when *standing at the psalmody* (RB 19.7) we should strive *to understand* the psalms we are uttering (Ps. 31 title) and to sing in a human manner and not as with the voice of birds. For blackbirds and parrots and crows and other winged fowl are often taught by people to utter sounds they are ignorant of; whereas to sing knowingly is a gift the divine will grants to human nature, the same gift that the psalmist is commending when he says: *I shall sing and I shall understand* (Ps. 100.1-2). . . So let us keep our heart well guarded while applying ourselves to divine praise, and when we are bodily in choir, let our mind not be wandering abroad. Indeed, as the philosopher says: *Anyone who is everywhere, is really nowhere*. The first proof of a recollected mind is the ability to sit down and stay put; for it belongs to a sickly mind to be tossing about, running hither and yon, restless for variety of scenery. Yes, even while we linger bodily on earth, let us dwell mentally with the Lord in heaven, so that *where our treasure is, there may our heart be too* (Matt. 6.21).[229]

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[229] Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers*, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. First published 2003 by Brepols Publishers (Turnhout, Belgium)), 181-82, II.15. All provided translations of the *Life of Arnulf* are by Martinus Cawley. The italics and liturgical references are original to Cawley's translation. The Latin text provided in the footnotes is from the *Vita Arnulfus* accessed through The Acta Sanctorum Database. "[In vigilia Assumptionis B. M.] Contigit in eodem monasterio quoddam [relatione dignum,] quod, ad ædificationem audientium, in medium proferemus. In

I have quoted this account at length because it includes many of the forms of learning to see we have discussed in this chapter and offers them to the audience for their

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Assumptione beatissimæ Virginis Mariæ, cum in principio vigiliarum [jubilatorium illud carmen, scilicet] Invitatorium, Ave Maria, & Psalmus Venite exultemus, solenniter a Monachis cantaretur; Monachus quidam, cum ceteris cantantibus & ipse cantans, cœpit cordis sui affectum, [secundum quod a gratia trahebatur,] sursum dirigere; & ante gloriosum Domini Salvatoris & benedictæ Matris suæ conspectum, se tamquam [præsentialiter vel] corporaliter præsentaret. Et cum sic interius in anima sua cælitus confortaretur, [videt Monachum devote psallentem,] de misericordia Domini confidens, se in cælestibus a Domino, non pro meritis suis, sed secundum ineffabilem bonitatem ipsius, speravit esse coronandum. Quotiescumque autem Invitatorium repetebatur, toties, [eo cum gaudio cantante, & in sublimibus Regi ac Reginæ humiliter assistente,] sancta mentis ejus devotio [renovata] augmentabatur. Interea vir Domini Arnulfus, qui erat in ecclesia, vidit Dominum Salvatorem & venerabilem ejus Genitricem, juxta Monachum illum stantes: qui eum [zona quadam pulcherrima circumcingentes, dextra lævaque assumptum, cantantem atque ridentem,] in sublime extulerunt a terra. Cumque vir beatus orando prosequeretur intueri sic abeuntem, & diceret; Frater mi, Frater mi, adhuc certo videbo te; ille, [beatis Regis & Reginæ manibus] sursum evectus ad sidera, ab ipso ultra videri non potuit.

Monachus autem eodem die Assumptionis, [accepta licentia, [a Christo & Deipara in cælum ferri;]] locutus est viro Dei; cum tamen ignoraret, ipsum de se [nocte præterita] visionem vidisse. Cumque ad invicem sermocinarentur; vir Dei, [sicut aliquoties consueverat,] solutus est in risum, ita ut Monachus miraretur, cur [quasi sine causa] rideret. Tunc vir beatus dixit ei, quia nocte præterita, cum Vigiliæ agerentur, vidisset unum de Monachis, a Virgine matre & a Filio ejus in choro visitatum, eorumque sanctis manibus quasi ad cælestia delatum. Quibus ille auditis, cum Monachi nomen, & horam [qua hoc modo sursum delatus est,] sibi propalari expeteret; vir Domini petentem statim exaudire noluit: ad extremum tamen, petentis improbitati satisfaciens, Monachum eumdem ipsum fuisse, atque infra cantum Invitatorii id ei contigisse, declaravit . . . [Nos igitur, qui sanctum Domini servitium professi sumus, [quod Auctor vertit] exemplo Monachi hujus, cum stamus ad psallendum, psallendo intelligere studeamus quæ proferimus, ut humano more, non quasi avium voce cantemus. Nam & merulæ, & psittaci, & corvi, & hujusmodi volucres sæpe ab hominibus docentur sonare quod nesciunt: scienter autem cantare, naturæ hominis divina voluntate concessum est: quod & Psalmista commendat, dicens; Psallam & intelligam . . . Servemus igitur omni custodia cor nostrum, laudibus insistendo divinis; ne cum corpore sumus in choro, mente foris vagemur: quia, secundum Philosophum, nusquam est qui ubique est. Primum itaque argumentum compositæ mentis est, posse considere & fixum morari: nam ægri animi est, ista jactatio, discurrere & locorum varietatibus inquietari. Proinde, corpore degentes in terra, mente cum Domino in cælis habitemus; ut ubi thesaurus noster est, ibi sit & cor nostrum]" (II.XV).

edification. First, the revelatory experiences of both the unnamed monk and Arnulf are liturgically framed by the Assumption of the Virgin, drawing the focus of all parties towards heaven. Sight plays a role in these encounters of course, particularly through the upwards directional emphasis. Medieval theologians such as Jacques de Vitry stressed the need to direct one's gaze upwards in the physical direction of God during prayer, to provide one the best chance of establishing mutual gaze with God.[230] For Arnulf, and the audience of his *Life*, this is underscored through the image of the monk lifted "to sublime heights." Arnulf's gaze, following the monk until he is "wafted up to the constellations," directs our attention heavenward. Even more so than sight, hearing is key to the various revelations occurring in this section of text. It is specifically while singing that the monk is surrounded by (and senses) the divine company of the Lord and Virgin, and their presence only increases the joy and devotion in his song. It is through conversation that the monk hears of Arnulf's vision of him carried to heaven.

Perhaps due to his position as cantor, the person responsible for organizing and creating liturgical texts and celebrations, Goswin's *Lives* are distinctive for being "as attentive to lyrical prose and scriptural allusions as to lively anecdotes displaying the virtues of his subjects."[231] It is therefore unsurprising that Arnulf's *Life* not only

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[230] Carolyn Muessig, "'Can't Take My Eyes Off of You.' Mutual Gazing Between the Divine and Humanity in Late Medieval Preaching" in *Optics, Ethics, and Art in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Looking into Peter of Limoges's* Moral Treatise on the Eye, ed. Herbert L. Kessler, Richard G. Newhauser, and Arthur J. Russell, Text, Image, Context: Studies in Medieval Manuscript Illumination 5, Studies and Texts 209 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018), 18-20.

[231] Anna de Bakker, "A Life in Hours: Goswin of Bossut's Office for Arnulf of Villers," in *Medieval Cantors and Their Craft: Music, Liturgy, and the Shaping of History, 800-1500*, ed. Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, A. B. Kraebel, and Margot E. Fassler (Woodbridge,

emphasizes this account as aurally experienced, but uses it to instruct others in appropriately accessing the divine through song. Goswin begins the section by labeling it an offering "for the edification of our hearers," and his end-of-passage explication clarifies he is addressing those "who profess holy service to the Lord." As Mark Cruse notes in his discussion of the senses in medieval romance manuscripts, this "direct discourse . . . collapses the distance between narrative and audience" and encourages "mutual perception [which can] form a sense of community" and "induce a social touch that made people aware of others' presence and of their participation in a group."[232] The text thus draws attention to its audience as an assembly who not only hears the *Life* together but will also be "bodily in choir" together, producing and listening to each other's sounds for God. Goswin's passage imploring the text's hearers to sing as humans (with understanding) and not as birds (in ignorant mimicry) is concerned with helping the religious reach the divine with the same success as the monk through controlling the intention behind their voices.[233]

Significantly, Arnulf is not the object of devotion nor revelation to the other in this account. As mentioned above, Arnulf was not a prime figure for imitation—the monastics of Villers did not want a bunch of Arnulf copycats, with his austere self-

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UK: York Medieval Press, 2017), 326 de Bakker, 326. Goswin also composed an office for Arnulf of Villers, transforming the hagiographical text into a musical format for liturgical use. For more on this office, see de Bakker, 326-339.

[232] Cruse, "Matter and Meaning in Medieval Books," 48 and 54.

[233] This was a common concern with medieval religious singing – Woolgar notes medieval injunctions imploring monks to sing psalms "such a way that the mind was in harmony with the sound of the voice." Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 81.

punishment and his oddly timed laughter, on their hands. However, Arnulf does offer the "presence of an authoritative figure" for the monk's revelation that Barr notes is essential in dream vision texts: "Dante's Beatrice, Boethius' Lady Philosophy, and even Raison in *Le Roman de la rose* all assume this role, transmitting knowledge to the dreamer through demonstration and discourse . . . without the validation of the dream's merit that this figure's presence implies . . . the dreamer awakens without a clear understanding of its content."[234] The presence of Arnulf is necessary then for the monk to fully comprehend the revelation he received while singing, to recognize that his "[feeling] he was putting himself almost bodily into the presence of our glorious Lord" was in fact his sensing of the divine's definite presence. Those listening to Arnulf's *Life* are subsequently encouraged to imitate this other monk rather than Arnulf. They are instructed on the significance of this revelation to another both through Arnulf and through Goswin, and it becomes a revelation to them as well.

In his study of narratives and storytelling, David Herman remarks that "narratives support the sequencing of behaviors not only by providing protocols for communication but also by modeling in storyworlds what, how, where, and when a particular course of action can or should be pursued. This action-modeling function can accrue to storyworlds no matter what their modality status, whether fictional, actual, or indeterminate." Revelations to others can serve this action-modeling function, teaching those in holy persons' communities the guidelines for divine communication and action. While most of the revelations to others discussed in this chapter are not framed with such a blatant

[234] Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 184.

educational message as that of the singing monk in the *Life of Arnulf*, they all hold the potential to teach those reading or listening to their texts. From processioning and singing with Douceline to watching and hearing Elizabeth's Passion to being consoled through mutual visions with Ida to learning to see the divine through coaching from Abundus or Arnulf, these revelations suggest that if those that see or hear or are taught by visionaries can learn to access the divine through these encounters, then so can those who correctly receive the message through their hagiographical texts.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEEING WOMEN IN MALE SPACES

Although I touched briefly on the problematic implications revelations to others could have for women when they shape them as devotional objects in chapter two, I have overall not been focused on gender in this project. Mainly this is because revelations to others often would serve a similar function regardless of the holy person's gender – joining a male saint in his holy procession and song would offer instruction for divine access to his followers the same as it does for Douceline's. Some revelations to others, however, do operate differently when they involve a woman rather than a male holy person. This chapter offers a case study of one such gender divergence, considering how revelations to others grant holy women access to traditionally masculine spaces through close readings of revelations from the *Lives* of Birgitta of Sweden and Christina of Markyate in conversation with Doreen Massey's theory of co-constructed space.

1. Co-Constructed Space

In her theoretical work *For Space*, Doreen Massey makes three propositions about space. First, space is "the product of interrelations . . . [it is] constituted through interactions." Second, space is a sphere of "coexisting heterogeneity" in which "distinct trajectories coexist." It is a sphere of continuous, diverse possibilities. Third, space is "always under construction . . .it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished, never closed." She suggests that "we could imagine space as a simultaneity of

stories-so-far" and argues that "identities/entities, the relations 'between' them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive."[235]

Massey illustrates her theory on co-constitutive space with the story of a massive rock found along the Elbe river in Hamburg, Germany. The boulder, which had migrated from the north via ice flow thousands of years ago, became a popular attraction and then a symbol used "to urge a reimaging of the city as open." A poster, featuring the rock labeled as "Hamburger's Oldest Immigrant," was created to encourage both German citizens and immigrants to see Hamburg as a "gateway to the world." Massey describes this as "an attempt to urge an understanding of this place as permeable, to provoke a living of place as a constellation of trajectories, both 'natural' and 'cultural', where if even the rocks are on the move the question must be posed as to what can be claimed as belonging . . . the rock speaks of openness and migrants and lays down the challenge of the possibility of living together." She further defines the poster as "an active agent in that refiguring, reconstituting Hamburgers' story of their past in order to provoke a reimagination of the nature of the present."[236] In the discussion below, we will see how revelations to others can, like this poster, serve as active agents reconfiguring spaces in the *Lives* of Birgitta and Christina.

2. "Why does that lady settle here?": Refiguring Space in the *Life of Birgitta of Sweden*

In her preface to a translation of the saint's life, Marguerite Tjader Harris introduces Birgitta of Sweden (c.1303-1373) as "a major personality" of the latter Middle

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[235] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 9-10.

[236] Massey, *For Space*, 149-150.

Ages.[237] It is an apt description—the widowed holy woman founded the Order of the Most Holy Savior (the Brigittines), recorded her revelations (some which were highly influential, such as her visions of the Nativity and Purgatory), traveled extensively, and involved herself in secular and papal politics.[238] Her *Life*, compiled in Latin after her death by her confessors Prior Peter and Master Peter, records several revelations to others that both authorize Birgitta and benefit those who see her.

Two such revelations are granted to a lay brother at the Cistercian monastery in Alvastra, in tandem with a revelation given to Birgitta. Birgitta receives her vision shortly after the death of her husband while they are staying in the area of the monastery of Alvastra. At this point, the Lord gives Birgitta permission to remain, declaring: "'So I, the God of all, who am above all rules, permit you to reside at the present time near the monastery—not to abolish the Rule, nor to introduce a new custom, but rather to display my wonderful work in a holy place.'" One of the monks at Alvastra, a lay brother named Gerekin, is not pleased that Birgitta is allowed to reside at the monastery. Of notable spiritual grace himself (he "almost continually saw the nine choirs of angels" during his prayers and "at the elevation of the Body of Christ, he merited frequently to see Christ in the appearance of a child"), Gerekin

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[237] Marguerite Tjader Harris, preface to *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris, trans. Albert Ryle Kezel. *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 1.

[238] For a detailed overview of Birgitta's life and revelations, see Bridget Morris, introduction to *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xvii-40.

> wondered in his heart and said: 'Why does that lady settle here in a monastery of monks, introducing a new custom against our Rule?' Then this same brother was caught up in an ecstasy of mind and clearly heard a voice saying to him: 'Do not wonder. This woman is a friend of God; and she has come in order that at the foot of this mountain she may gather flowers from which all people, even overseas and beyond the world's ends, shall receive medicine.'

The brother then has a second vision in which "he heard in spirit: 'This is the woman who, coming from the ends of the earth, shall give countless nations wisdom to drink.'"[239]

In chapter two, I discussed medieval theories of how sight works, focusing on extramission, intromission, devotional gaze, and vision as a form of touch. Most of the revelations to others we have examined so far have involved these physical forms of

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[239] Prior Peter and Master Peter, *The Life of Blessed Birgitta*, in *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris, trans. Albert Ryle Kezel. *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), chap. 30-31, p. 79-80. Latin text is from *Vita b. Brigide prioris Petri et magistri Petri*. In *Acta et processes canonizacionis beate Birgitte, efer cod. A14 Holm., cod Ottob. Lat. 90 o. cod. Harl. 612*, ed. Isak Gustaf Alfred Collijn (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1924), 82. "sic ego Deus omnium, qui sum super omnes regulas, permitto tibi residere ad tempus presens prope monasterium, non ut dissoluam regulam nec vt consuetudinem nouam adducam, sed magis ut opus meum mirabile in sancto loco ostendatur"; "quod nouem choros angelorum in oracione quasi continue vidit et in eleuacione corporis Christi Christum in cpecie puerili crebro cernere merebatur"; "admiratur in corde suo et dixit: 'Cur ista domina sedet hic in monasterio monachorum contra regulam nostrum inducens nouam consuetudinem?' Tunc raptus idem frater in quodam mentis excess, audiuit clare vocem sibi dicentem: 'Noli mirari, hec est amica Dei et ad hoc venit, vt sub monte isto flores colligate, de quibus omnes eciam ultra mare et fines mundi recipient medicinam'"; "tunc audiuit in spiritu: 'Hec est mulier, que a finibus terre veniens propinabit inumerabilibus gentibus sapienciam.'"

sight: community members access the divine through gazing on the bodies of holy persons or learn to see through observing their performances. However, the soul and mind were also pathways to revelation, and medieval theologians were consequently concerned with differing methods of visionary knowing. Whether a revelation was received bodily, spiritually, or intellectually could indicate the worthiness of the recipient and the reliability of the message. This discernment of spirits (judging the source and truth of revelations) was frequently based on Augustine's theories of vision hierarchy as laid out in Book XII of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. In this text, Augustine distinguishes among three types of visions—bodily or corporeal (seen with the eyes), spiritual (seen by the soul), and intellectual (understood by the mind). He explains that these types of visions have a hierarchical relationship: bodily visions are inferior to spiritual because the spirit can see without the eyes, and spiritual visions are inferior to intellectual because the intellectual vision requires no senses and cannot be deceived.[240]

Levels of vision are of great concern in the various texts surrounding Birgitta. Her *Life* clarifies that Birgitta's first revelations were made to her "while she was caught up from her bodily senses in ecstasy and visions, either spiritual or imaginary, with the coming of a vision or a supernatural and divine illumination of her intellect, for she saw

[240] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2., trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 12.6.15 and 12.11.22-25. For a thorough history of medieval discernment of spirits, see Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

and heard spiritual things and felt them in her spirit."[241] Through specifying that Birgitta received her revelations spiritually and intellectually rather than bodily, these various texts establish her authority as a visionary. The spiritual and intellectual nature of her revelations is also emphasized in Alfonso of Jaèn's *Epistola solitarii ad reges*. Alfonso, who edited Birgitta's revelations and served as her spiritual advisor, wrote this treatise using Augustine's hierarchy of vision "to support and authorize Bridget by instructing his readers . . . in the fine art of *discretio spirituum*."[242]

This language of spiritual revelation is echoed in the revelations granted to Gerekin. The *Life* makes it clear that the lay brother already holds divine favor with the Lord, describing his regular visions of angels and the Christ Child as signs of his spiritual aptitude. When Gerekin is then "caught up in an ecstasy of mind and clearly heard a voice" in response to his concerns about Birgitta, this revelation holds greater authorizing power than a bodily revelation granted one unaccustomed to visionary experiences. Gerekin has practice with divine access—he would presumably be aware if the "clearly heard voice" came from a source other than God. His revelations also help legitimize

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[241] Prior Peter and Master Peter, *Life of Blessed Birgitta*, chap. 27, p. 78. "sed vigilando in oracione corpore manente viuo in vigore suo, sed rapta a sensibus corporalibus in extasi et in visione spirituali seu ymaginaria, accedente visione sue supernaturali diuina illustracione intellectuali, nam vidit et audiuit spiritualia et ea spiritu senciebat" (81).

[242] Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 1999), 42. For more on Alfonso of Jaèn, Birgitta of Sweden, and the discernment of spirits, see chapters two and three in Voaden, *God's Words*; Anderson, *Discernment of Spirits*, 126-138; and F. Thomas Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination: Visionary Authorship in the Early Manuscripts of the Revelations of Birgitta of Sweden," *Speculum* 93, no. 4 (October 2018): 1102–50, doi:10.1086/699224.

Birgitta's own revelation, proving that she has indeed received permission to stay on at Alvastra from the highest of religious authorities.

As revelations to another, however, these two visions/auditions do more than authorize; they provide comfort and reassurance to Gerekin in an unfamiliar and concerning situation. While it is not completely clear what Birgitta staying at or near the monastery entails, it presumably at least permits her access to the sacraments and confession.[243] Female monastics were reliant on men for these religious services, while male monastics could, and did in many cases, lead women-free lives.[244] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg notes that there was a sacredness to monastic space that went beyond "the 'divine' ordering" – "sacred space was seen as a type of privileged, efficacious space set apart from that which was profane or desacralized."[245] Women, with their weaker minds and sexually provocative bodies, posed the threat of polluting these spaces.[246] Allowing Birgitta access to their sacred space threatened the traditions of Alvastra and the

[243] Prior Peter, one of her hagiographers, was sub-prior at Alvastra and likely served as one of her confessors. Morris, introduction to *Revelations*, 13-14.

[244] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Gender, Celibacy, and Proscriptions of Sacred Space: Symbol and Practice," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 193.

[245] Schulenburg, "Sacred Space," 186.

[246] A. J. Minnis, "*De impedimento sexus*: Women's Bodies and Medieval Impediments to Female Ordination," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge, UK: York Medieval Press, 1997), 122-125. The threat women posed to religious masculine space was taken very seriously – Schulenburg provides several examples of women punished (by both human and saintly forces) for trying to "defy this sacred boundary" ("Sacred Space," 188-192).

Cistercian order, and the Lord is careful to specify to both the holy woman and Gerekin that she does not come to change the status quo. Birgitta is an exception, not a change, to the Rule. Her presence at the monastery is meant to showcase God's "wonderful work" and to nurture all people. She is presented in feminine fashion as something to be tasted and consumed, offering the floral medicine of her revelations and the unending drink of her wisdom that flows from the earth.[247]

Nevertheless, for all the reassurances that Birgitta is not being allowed to stay at Alvastra in order to introduce a new custom, Birgitta and Gerekin's revelations work, like the poster in Massey's story of the Hamburg boulder, as active agents that "la[y] down the challenge of the possibility of living together." At the same time they function to ease the lay brother's mind, they "provoke a reimagination of the nature of the present," reconstructing the monastery as a space that not only welcomes but benefits from a woman's presence. They also foreshadow Birgitta's later revelation in which the Lord directs her to establish a new monastery, one that should contain a residence for men and one for women, separated by a "sturdy wall . . . for the sake of caution and because of the devil's cunning."[248] This double monastery format, featuring men and women living separately together, would become distinctive of the Brigittine Order in a time when double houses were rare.[249] Thus these revelations to others that mirror revelations to

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[247] I am reminded of the doubting priest's revelation of Ida as a fountain of consolation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

[248] *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, translated by Denis Searby, Vol 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. I.18, pp. 81-82.

[249] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 36-39.

Birgitta push for the production of a new monastic space, of which Birgitta, Gerekin, the Lord, and these revelations, among others, are co-constitutive. Their interactions set Birgitta on the trajectory for a place that recognizes and nourishes both male and female spiritual power.

3. "For it was no dream": Bilocation in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*

Even within a monastery that permitted women access, however, some spaces such as the altar or men's bedrooms were so sacred or off-limits that physical female presence within them was unthinkable. Revelations to others in the form of bilocation hold the potential for women to sidestep regulations, providing them access to reconstitute and gain some of the power associated with these male spaces.

Bilocation is a less common trope in saints' lives than levitation. The most famous medieval example is the thirteenth-century St. Anthony of Padua, who bilocated during mass in the Cathedral of Montpellier to a nearby monastery where he had promised to sing at the same time. Examples can also be found in the *Lives* of St. Francis and St. Nicholas. Definitions of what bilocation involves vary, but most basically the bilocating person must be living (else it is an apparition) and the viewing person(s) must be awake and seeing with their bodily eyes (else it is a dream or vision).[250] As a

[250] *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* defines bilocation as the temporary movement of the "double," "the etheric counterpart of the physical body . . . about space in comparative freedom and appear[ing] in various degrees of density to others. The belief in the existence of the double, or astral body, is ancient." There seems to be debate about how solid a body must appear to count as bilocated, what the body must be able to do, and the extent to which the intention of the bilocating person matters. I have not found medieval guidelines or definitions for what qualifies as bilocation, and bilocation is not commonly discussed in modern scholarship on medieval miracles or hagiography. "Double," in *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, ed. J.

revelation to others, bilocation falls somewhere between physically witnessed miracles like gazing on the levitating Lutgard or Passion-performing Elizabeth, and revelations received through dreams or ecstasies like those that reassure Gerekin. The premise of bilocation is that the holy person is present in two places simultaneously through the grace of God.

In the *Life* of Christina of Markyate (c.1096-c.1155), we can see how bilocation can center women in traditionally male spaces. Christina's *Life*, composed by an anonymous monk of St. Albans in her later life or shortly after her death, divides easily into three acts.[251] The first tells of Christina's religious calling, life with her unsympathetic, abusive parents, and her escape from an arranged marriage. Next, the *Life* narrates Christina's years living in tightly enclosed or remote spaces in order to evade discovery by her family. The last section narrates Christina's life as prioress of Markyate and her gossip-ridden spiritual friendship with Geoffrey de Gorran (d. 1146), the abbot of St. Albans.[252] It is in this last section that we find two accounts of bilocation, both concerning the relationship between Geoffrey and Christina.

Gordon Melton, et al., 5th ed., vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Research Incorporated, 2001), 438-439.

[251] Proposed dates of composition range from 1140-1150 (Rachel M. Koopmans, "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51, no. 4 (2000): 695) to 1155-1166 (C. H. Talbot, introduction to *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1998), 10).

[252] For a discussion of Christina's relationship with Geoffrey, see C. Stephen Jaegar, "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (New York: Routledge, 2005), 99-115.

The first of these bilocation miracles occurs when the abbot, whom Christina and the text refers to as "her beloved," is

> sitting awake on his bed in the early hours of the morning and thinking about certain things that would be useful, and as he turned his eyes this way and that, he saw clearly (for it was no dream), he saw clearly, I say, the handmaid of Christ near his head like one anxious to see how he bore himself towards God in his innermost thoughts: he saw her but could not speak with her. However, filled with surprise and joy, he spent the rest of the night with profit.

That morning Geoffrey sends his relative, a nun called Lettice, to tell Christina "'that her anxiety for me is obvious. For as I lay awake, I saw her visiting me last night' (and he mentioned the place, time, and hour)." When Lettice tries to speak, Christina stops her and orders her own sister Margaret to "'Tell me in Lettice's hearing what I mentioned to you early this morning about that dream.'" Margaret replies:

> 'You said for certain that last night at such a place and hour his daughter had been to see him…And you added that if such a thing had happened in the time of blessed Gregory he would have preserved it for posterity, even though it was a small thing. I said it was not small but something marvelous and worthy to be remembered by those who come after us.' On hearing this the aforementioned Lettice was greatly edified and glorified God in His saints: 'This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes'. [253]

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[253] *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse,* ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1998), 153-155. All translations from this edition unless otherwise noted. The Latin text provided is from Talbot's edition as well. "Accidit iterum eundem dilectum suum in antelucano vigilanter lecto suo sedere et

Christina is here presented to Geoffrey as what Augustine calls "an image of the body produced in the spirit."[254] The text insists that Christina's appearance "was no dream," and supports this with clarifications that Geoffrey is awake and his eyes are open. Yet, there are also clear indications that she is not physically there: though he can see her, he cannot speak to Christina; Christina's continued corporeal presence in her

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quibusdam profuturis intendere. Circumducens itaque oculorum orbes vidit inquam eandem ancillam Christi. suo assistentem capiti simile sollicite qualiter se erga [Deum] in suis haberet secretis: vidit [illam] inter notas sed verbum cum illa nullum conferre poterat. Stupore tamen perfusus et gaudio. noctem reliquam magnum habuit emolumentam. Mane facto cum surrexisset advoraci fecit quandam parentem suam Leticiam nominee die ipso ad virginis heremum profecturam. Erat autem et ipsa sanctimonialem ducens vitam. Vade inquid. et dic dilecte domine tue. quia manifesta est sollicitudo sua de me. Vere enim quia vigilando vidi. quod <h>ac nocte visitaverit me. Locumque tempus et horam annexuit. Estimabat enim hoc Christinam latere. Adveniens Leticia illa Christi virgini mandatum cepit iniunctum exsolvere. Ad primum itaque verbum. ne amplius respondit illa. Mandansque sororem beate memorie virginem .M. voluit enim eam vocare ne forte suspicioni esset Leticie: precepit ei. Dic inquiens audiente Leticia quid ego tibi primo diluculo. De illo intimavi somnio. Et illa. Dixisti domina. inquid pro certo <h>ac nocte. tali loco et hora. ad eum visendum sua venerit puella…Et adiunxit. quod si tale quid in tempore beati Gregorii accidisset: mandasset illud memorie. quamvis res parva sit et memoria parum digna. Respondique non parum quid esse. sed mirabilee: posteriaque memorabile. Audiens hec prefata Leticia. edificata plurimum Deum glorificavit in sanctis: A Domino factum est istud et est mirabile in oculis nostris."

[254] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 12.12.25. Augustine states that when, awake and in control of our bodily senses, "we experience a corporeal vision, we distinguish between this vision [and spiritual vision] . . . [W]e distinguish the bodies which we see and which are present to our senses, so that we have no doubt that these are bodies and that the others are images of bodies [as remembered or imagined objects]. But it may sometimes be that by an excessive application of thought, or by the influence of some disorder (as happens to those who are delirious with fever), or by the agency of some other spirit, whether good or evil, the images of bodies are produced in the spirit just as if bodies were present to the senses of the body, though the attention of the soul may meanwhile remain alert even in the bodily senses. In this case images of bodies are seen appearing in the spirit, and real bodies are perceived through the eyes. The result is that at the same time one man who is present will be seen with the eyes and another who is absent will be seen in the spirit as if with the eyes."

own chamber is verified by her reporting her dream to Margaret; and, most obviously, it would be completely inappropriate for Christina to set bodily foot in the bedchamber of an abbot. She can, however, visit him there spiritually through bilocation, which provides her a stronger presence in the chamber than if Geoffrey had merely dreamed it.

The Life of Christina overall shows a close attention to Augustinian hierarchies of vision much like we observed in the *Life of Birgitta,* as well as concern with the potential for dreams to deceive. Before he realizes Christina's divine favor, for example, Geoffrey advises her "not to put her trust in dreams."[255] On another occasion, Christina is described as "rapt in ecstasy and s[eeing] things that the Holy Spirit showed her . . . these visions were not imaginary or dreams: she saw them with the true intuition enjoyed by the mystics."[256] In this case of bilocation, however, that Geoffrey sees Christina while he is awake emphasizes the veracity of Christina's visit, as it means Geoffrey was not likely deceived and did not imagine it. Christina's dream and Geoffrey's witnessing of her watching over him thus authenticate each other.[257]

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[255] *Life of Christina of Markyate*, 137. "Ille pro sompnio mandatum reputans commotus intumuit. ac ne sompniis crederet ancilla Christi remandavit."

[256] *Life of Christina of Markyate*, 171. "quia sepius inter colloquendum rapiebatur in exstasim. Videbatque que sibi videnda sanctus monstrabat spiritus . . . Neque enim phantastice erant visions iste sive per sompnium. Sed vero intuit cernebantur ab ea. illo scilicet quo spirituals frui merentur oculi." This passage strongly echoes Augustine's statement in *Literal Meaning of Genesis* that when "the mind is completely carried off and turned away from the senses of the body, then there is rather the state called ecstasy. Then any bodies that are present are not seen at all, though the eyes may be wide open; and no sounds at all are heard. The whole soul is intent upon images of bodies present to spiritual vision" (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 12.12.25).

[257] For more on medieval concepts of dreams and their relation to vision theory, see Michael E. Goodich, "*Vidi in Somnium*: The Uses of Dream and Vision in the Miracle," in *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of the Miracle,* 100-116.

This bilocation miracle is also a revelation to others. Margaret recognizes it as "marvelous and worthy to be remembered" and Lettice is "greatly edified." For Geoffrey, the revelation has parallels to the Song of Songs and the peace to be found in the bedroom of the King. Mary Carruthers notes the history of associating the bedchamber with restlessness and thought, and we see this in Geoffrey's siting awake in bed "thinking about certain things that would be useful."[258] Carruthers also points out the connection made by theologists like Bernard of Clairvaux between thinking in bed and the descriptions of the bedchamber in the Song of Songs as a place of contemplation.[259] Here, one is jubilant in the presence of the Bridegroom, "safe from the call and concern of the greedy senses, from the pangs of care, the guilt of sin and the obsessive fancies of the imagination."[260] Upon seeing Christina in his bedchamber, Geoffrey experiences such jubilation, and he is able to spend "the rest of the night with profit." Whether this means he slept, contemplated productively, or some combination therein is not specified, but

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(Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 100-116; and Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[258] Carruthers point out that Cicero and Quintilian assume "that a person needing to compose might choose to go to bed," and discusses how "this tradition of retiring to a small room or recess for the concentrated memory work involved in composing carried on in both early Christian worship and in monasticism." Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 179.

[259] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 176.

[260] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs,* trans. Killian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), Sermon 23.16.

regardless the holy woman's appearance benefits him as one profits from time in the chamber of the Lord.

This revelation is also empowering for Christina in ways beyond authenticating her divine favor, particularly set in contrast with other incidences in which Christina is alone in a bedchamber with a man. Up to this point, the "stories-so-far" of the bedchamber, at least when involving men, have been hostile. Early in the *Life*, a young Christina is nearly raped by a devil-driven bishop who takes her into his chamber after her drunken parents have gone to bed.[261] Subsequently, Christina manages to escape three unwelcome attempts by her husband Burthred to consummate their marriage, each beginning with Burthred entering Christina's bedchamber.[262] When Christina bilocates into Geoffrey's bedchamber, the space takes a different trajectory. Bringing him comfort like Christ does the bride, Christina's interactions with the abbot reconstruct the bedroom into a space of power for the holy woman. This bedroom is not one where she is physically endangered by a male presence, but where she can safely, as a spiritual being, guide her beloved in his own communion with the divine.

Unsurprisingly, this close relationship between Christina and Geoffrey stirred false claims of an inappropriate bond between the two. This gossip is countered in the *Life* by a second bilocation miracle, this time to Simon of the monastery at Bermondsey. Simon is "a true monk, living up to the meaning of his name…. [who] had great respect for the virgin just mentioned [Christina]: he cultivated her friendship, and spoke

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[261] *Life of Christina of Markyate*, 41-43.

[262] *Life of Christina of Markyate*, 51-55.

affectionately of her." Although he defends the Christina against the rumors, Simon also asks God to show him the truth.

> For this reason he afflicted his body with fasting, his mind with watching and tears: he slept on the bare ground and would accept no consolation until he received some answer from the Lord . . . God therefore wished to put an end to his troubles and to show him, as a lover of the truth, the true state of affairs; and so one day whilst the same venerable man Simon was at the altar celebrating Mass, mindful of his prayer, he saw, with surprise, Christina standing near the altar. He was astonished at this for the virgin could not have come out of the cell and it was hardly possible that any woman would be allowed to approach the altar.[263] Not without amazement he awaited the issue. Then she said: 'Thou mayest be sure that my flesh is free from corruption.' And when she had said this she vanished. Filled with gladness and hardly able to contain himself for joy, [Simon] . . . sent a message to Abbot Geoffrey through that same monk telling him what he had seen, what he had heard, and what he knew about the case of Christina. And as that monk was one of those who slandered her, the Lord in His kindness and justice

[263] What is meant by "for the virgin could not have come out of the cell" is not completely clear. This perhaps refers to idea of enclosure, but Christina was not enclosed in the sense of an anchoress. Her *Life* mentions that she travels outside the hermitage (140-141). Examining several records of enclosure, however, Sarah Salih draws the conclusion that "active enclosure does not, in practice, mean that nuns are never to leave their house, but that the conditions of their leaving are to be carefully regulated." Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 143 (see pages 136-165 for more on enclosure). As Markyate is approximately 40 miles from Bermondsey, for Christina to suddenly physically appear at the church (let alone the altar) is unlikely. Such a lengthy trip would involve planning and regulations.

had arranged that through this message he should become aware of what he ought to feel about Christina.[264]

As with Christina's appearance in Geoffrey's bedchamber, her bilocation to the altar at Berdmondsey is a spiritual revelation experienced as though with the bodily senses. Simon's astonishment at seeing Christina "for the virgin could not have come out of the cell and it was hardly possible that any woman would be allowed to approach the altar" suggests she has a corporeal appearance, for Simon at least momentarily believes her to be bodily present (else he would not be so surprised). However, that he then "awaited the issue" indicates realization that Christina is not corporeally there – this phrasing shows acknowledgement that this body before him is a revelation with a message to deliver unto him.

The narrative frame of this bilocation further shapes it as a revelation to Simon. It is a revelation Simon has prepared himself to receive through meditation and bodily discipline. It is a revelation given to Simon in recognition of these efforts, for God not

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[264] *Life of Christina of Markyate*, 175-177. "vir vite venerabilis vere monachus et nominis sui certam gerens ethimoloogiam Simon . . . Hic virginem prefatam multo colebat studio. diligebat affectu. predicabat amore . . . Corpus ob hoc ieiuniis macerabat. Animam vigiliis affligebat <et> fletibus. pavimento decumbebat. consolari nesciens donec responsum susciperet a Domino . . . Volens itaque Deus et ipsius labori finem imponere et veritatis amico quod verum erate pandere. quadam die dum idem vir venerandus Simon altari astans missam celebraret sue postulacionis non immemor. mirum dictu ipsam Cristinam videt altario consistere. Obstupefactus in hoc: neque enim virgo cellam egredi. sed nec [ad] altare illud mulier quelibet facile [vale]bat admitti: non multa sine admiracione rei prestolabatur extim. Cum illa. Scias inquid carnem meam omnis corrupcionis immune. Et hiis dictis evanuit. Ille vero animo gestiens et tantum Gaudium vix mente concipiens [Simon] . . . Quid viderit. quid audierit. quid super Cristine causa certum habuerit. abbati Gaufrido per eundem mandare monachum curavit. Pie et iuste disponente Domino. ut quia monachus ille unus erat ex oblocutoribus. in hoc mandato condisceret quid de Cristina sentire deberet."

only wants to show the truth about Christina, but to "put an end to [Simon's] troubles." It is also a revelation that brings Simon great joy, and that he is able to disseminate to others, helping to reveal the truth about Christina through recounting "what he had seen" and "what he had heard."

Simon and the other doubting monk are not the only ones to benefit from this revelation to others. Like her bilocation into Geoffrey's bedchamber, Christina's appearance at the altar gives her space in a place where women should not be. Women, who were not ordained and not perceived as physically or mentally capable of preaching, had no place at the medieval altar.[265] This was a space used to "demarcate and reinforce the hierarchical ordering of society, to define and clarify social roles and relations, to maintain prevailing patterns of privilege or advantage, and to regulate social behavior."[266] Christina standing at the altar and confirming her own virginity, even in bilocated form, allows her access to these "fundamental statements of power, authority, and privilege" represented by the altar as traditionally male.[267] It shows that this place is permeable and can be reimagined as one in which the holy woman belongs. Furthermore, in Christina's case being present in the abbot's bedchamber and at the altar at Berdmondsey through these bilocation miracles not only provides revelations to others, but is demonstrative, as

[265] Minnis, "*De impedimento sexus*."

[266] Schulenburg, "Sacred Space," 185.

[267] Schulenburg, "Sacred Space," 185.

I've argued in my article on Christina's genderfluidity, of Christina's power to "resist the policing binaries of gendered spaces and religious virginity."[268]

Schulenberg notes, in her discussion of women being punished for entering forbidden monastic spaces, that she has not found "parallel cases of alleged spiritual deprivations for men or male attempts to break into convents to worship or to venerate relics found in female monastic churches."[269] This is also the case for revelations granted to others of living holy men. While Birgitta and Christina have much to gain by entering a male space, whether physically or through bilocation, male monastics have much to lose. The bodily presence of a living saint in a nun's bedchamber, for example, risks accusations of lechery with no trade off in spiritual power.

In their introduction to *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, and Einat Klafter describe 'place' as "where we are allowed to be, and not allowed to be, who we are. Knowing your place—reading the boundaries imposed by class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion—does not necessarily mean accepting your place, nor staying in it. There are places that were designed for us, and those that were not, and yet we sometimes enter them regardless and thus carve out a space for ourselves."[270] For medieval holy women, revelations to others are not only an

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[268] Meghan L. Nestel, "A Space of Her Own: Genderfluidity and Negotiation in The Life of Christina of Markyate," *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 55, no. 1 (2019), 133.

[269] Schulenburg, "Sacred Space," 193.

[270] Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, and Einat Klafter, intro to *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, ed. Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, and Einat Klafter (London: School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2019), 6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9b2tw8.7.

instrument through which they (and God) help those in their communities access the divine, but in some cases a pathway for entering and carving out new spaces of spiritual power. In the examples discussed in this chapter, revelations to others, and the women they relocate, are co-constitutive in the continuous refiguring of those places they do(not) belong.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMUNITIES OF VISIONARIES

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the holy women and men at the forefront of medieval hagiographical and visionary texts were by no means the only persons accessing the divine through revelations. Studying revelations to others in these texts reveals rich communities of religious seeking and experiencing God through visual, auditory, and haptic interactions, sometimes with or through the holy persons and sometimes directly from the divine. In this final chapter, I want to pause on this concept, considering what revelations to others can tell us about holy persons as not set apart, but as nodes in a shifting landscape of visionary communities. To do so, I return to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) as a concept to help us disentangle revelations to others as part of "a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies."[271]

1. Communities of Visionaries as Actor-Networks

Before discussing objects as actors, mediators, and intermediaries in *Reassembling the Social*, Latour defines 'social' and theorizes about group formation and sources of action as components of Actor-Network-Theory. Similarly to Massey's understanding of spaces as constantly in flux, Latour sees the social as continually shifting. He defines the social "not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling."[272] The focus of ANT is on this movement, on the following of actors

[271] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 44.

[272] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 7.

(both human and object) as they "*do something*."[273] The "network" in Actor-Network-Theory then is not "any durable substance but is the trace left behind by some moving agent."[274] In order to be visible, networks must be continually retraced and renewed, marking out the connections actors make between each other: "you have 'to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish."[275]

It is only by "following the actors," then, that we are able to recognize social groups, as groups do not exist "without a rather large retinue of group makers, group talkers, and group holders."[276] Latour clarifies that social groups are not permanent or ostensive. They are not "like mugs and cats and chairs that can be pointed at by the index finger" and they do not "remai[n] there, whatever happens to the index of the onlooker."[277] Rather, social groups are performative, "made by the various ways and manners in which they are said to exist . . . [and] need[ing] to be constantly kept up by some group-making effort."[278] As performative objects, they must keep being created by

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[273] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 128.

[274] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 132.

[275] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 12.

[276] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 33.

[277] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 35, 37.

[278] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 35.

actors, as "the object of a performative definition vanishe[s] when it is no longer performed—or if it stays, then it means that *other* actors have taken over the relay."[279] This lack of group permeance, this constant forming and changing and remaking, invites us to ask, "When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present?"[280] For Latour, the use of "actor" in Actor-Network-Theory stresses this need for questioning and recognition of the "uncertainty about the origin of the action":

> To use the word 'actor,' means that it's never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on stage is never alone in acting . . . the very word actor directs our attention to a complete dislocation of the action, warning us that it is not a coherent, controlled, well-rounded, and clean-edged affair. By definition, action is *dislocated*. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated.[281]

As a devotional object, a teacher of divine access, and/or a co-constructor of divine space, a holy person as we have so far been discussing them (as the protagonist, so to speak, of a hagiographical text) is just one actor within a group of people who share their pursuit of divine favor. Revelations to others are just one of the "means necessary to ceaselessly upkeep the[se] groups."[282] These groups or communities are constantly shifting, reassembling, changing who is and is not included, how to and not to access

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[279] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 37-38.

[280] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 43.

[281] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46.

[282] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 35.

God, and where that access is and is not located. Though it may seem, by virtue of their centeredness in their *Lives*, that holy persons are a "privileged locus in the social domain where action is 'concrete,'" revelations to others suggest they are not in fact the continual locus of action in their groups. Rather, as Latour states, "action is dislocal . . . it is distributed, variegated, multiple," and revelations to others help us trace its flow throughout communities of visionaries.[283]

2. "Endless Number of Mediators": Revelations to Others Within and Beyond Villers

While it is certainly possible that undiscovered hagiographical texts singled out additional individuals at Villers, these are not needed to recognize that the grouping of "holy persons" connected to this community was not limited to Arnulf, Abundus, and Ida. Though Goswin of Bossut does not indicate whether these three visionaries had revelations of each other, their *Lives* nevertheless speak to a flourishing community of persons seeking and achieving communication with the divine at, around, and beyond Villers.

This community is evident from the revelations to others discussed above in chapter three, but before revisiting these examples I want to refresh our memories of Latour's definitions for "mediator" and "intermediary." Mediators instigate change. Like Lutgard's blood-sprinkled hair cut from her body, they "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry."[284] Intermediaries, on the other hand, hold meaning without transforming it, like Lutgard's body once the priest's

[283] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 60.

[284] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 39.

devotional gaze has moved to her shorn lock. The boundary between mediator and intermediary is fluid, with persons and objects moving between being influencers and passive carriers.

Returning to Villers, if we "follow the actor" of the doubting priest through his revelations concerning Ida, we see how many mediators are involved in his becoming one of Ida's believers. The priest is spurred to visit Ida by "the many who made much of her" and "a Cistercian abbess [who] urged him to pay Ida a visit" (all part of those supporting Ida and involved in upkeeping this group).[285] His path to faith is further mediated by the mass during which he sees Ida's face, the Lord's voice, Ida's bodily presence that sends him into mutual rapture, and those at Villers who inquire why he did not speak to Ida as he comes out of his ecstasy. Each of these are actors assembling the priest into their communities – the group of Ida's believers, the group of those granted divine favor, the group of those who are learning to see. They show us that while Ida may be the focus of her believers, she is not the "privileged locus" of the divine – the action of accessing God is "distributed, variegated, multiple" amongst these groups and mediators.

In the *Lives* of Arnulf and Abundus, we see others at Villers entering groups of the divinely favored through their revelations. The monk who is spiritually carried to heaven while singing the hours of the Assumption of the Virgin and Baldwin, who sees Mary after requesting help from Abundus, access the divine through mediation from the

[285] Goswin of Bossut, *Life of Ida*, 72. "à multis laudabiliter magnificabatur"; "admonitus à quadam Abbatiſſa ordinis noſtri, vt ipſam viſitatet" (264).

liturgy and the visionaries. They become actors in the shifting group of "holy persons" seeking to know God.

Goswin's *Lives* also show how revelations to others "upkeep the[se] groups" by distributing action beyond the physical community of Villers. In the *Life of Arnulf*, for instance, a "devout woman" who runs a hostel in Paris (approximately 200 miles from Villers), "having heard the fame of Arnulf's wondrous *conversation*, wished to see his face and to have a chance to speak with him." The woman, named Theophania, sends a cleric to Arnulf "so that by his mouth she could graciously greet Arnulf and ask him to implore the Lord to bestow on her a copious share of heavenly grace." Arnulf, upon "hear[ing] this from the messenger's mouth," is delighted and requests the cleric return and "'pass on from my lips the heartfelt wish for her fullest eternal welfare and then, as my message for her, inform her that on such and such a day she will have from the heavenly Lord such an overflow of grace as she has never had in her whole life.'" The messenger returns to Theophania who, upon hearing his words, is filled with joy and desire for this grace. On the named day, she is indeed overcome by the spirit of the Lord while at prayer, so powerfully that "all her entrails were jolted, and, *just as wax melts before the fire* (Ps. 67.3), so was *her soul* totally *liquefied* (Cant. 5.6) and poured out into the embraces of her Beloved."

> After experiencing the divine in this manner
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> over and over again, this handmaid of Christ, sent Arnulf greetings in the Lord, by means both of the cleric already mentioned or of many others too, sending him at the same time her thanks for his sufferings and prayers. She also publicized and commanded his merits and virtues to all and sundry, praising and magnifying in

him the Lord his Saviour, who had enriched him with the privilege of so copious a grace. If any are in ambiguity as to the truth of the foregoing let them, if at a distance, send the venerable woman a messenger, or, if on the spot, let them interrogate her for themselves. She is still alive and is in the city of Paris to this day, and from her they can l[earn] for themselves the truth of this matter.[286]

In this account, we are again presented with the "*endless* number of mediators" seen through ANT.[287] We can trace actions not only between the matron of Paris and Arnulf, but amongst those from whom Theophania learns of Arnulf, the spirit of the Lord, the cleric and "many others" by whom Theophania sends messages to Arnulf, and all to whom Theophania spreads the truth of Arnulf's grace. As gatekeepers of words, mouths and lips are emphasized as mediators as well—Theophania sends the cleric "so

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[286] Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Arnulf*, 183-184. "Quædam mulier religiosa, [Magistra Hospitalis, quod est secus majorem ecclesiam B. Mariæ Parisiis, Theophania nomine, [A Religiosa Parisiensi,]] audita fama mirabilis conversationis viri Dei, desideravit videre [faciem ipsius,] & optatum ipsius adipisci colloquium"; "gratiose salutans eum ore ipsius, & mandans ei quatenus copiosum gratiæ cælestis munus sibi a Domino impertiri flagitaret"; "Quæ cum ab ore nuntii audisset vir magnificus"; "ad religiosam Dominam, quæ misit te ad me; & primitus ei a corde & ab ore meo reporta salutis æternæ plenitudinem; deinde subinferens, annuntia ei ex me, quia die illa; [die, inquam, illa] quam ei designo, tantam cælitus a Domino consequetur gratiæ affluentiam, quantam in omni vita sua non habitura est"; "cujus potenti virtute concussa sunt omnia viscera ejus; & sicut fluit cera a facie ignis, sic tota liquefacta est anima illius, & transfusa in amplexus Dilecti sui"; "Tandem igitur ancilla Christi, tam per Clericum illum [quem prædiximus,] quam per alios multos, salutans & resalutans in Domino virum Dei, gratias ei rependit de orationum ipsius suffragio; [annuntians omnibus & commendans merita & virtutes ejus, laudans & magnificans in ipso Dominum Salvatorem, qui eum ditavit tam copiosæ gratiæ privilegio. Siquis forte ambigat, utrum quæ præmissa sunt, vera fuerint, an non; vel absens mandet, vel præsens interroget venerabilem feminam, quæ usque ad diem hanc in urbe Parisiensi superstes est, & ab illa poterit rei gestæ cognoscere veritatem]" (II.XVI).

[287] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 40.

that *by his mouth* she could graciously greet Arnulf," Arnulf hears her words "from the messenger's mouth," and he instructs the messenger to "'pass on from my lips'" his instructions to the woman in Paris. The physicality of the mouth as a mediator of these messages reflects the power of voice and speech as previously discussed in chapter three. Presumably Theophania could have sent a written message (even if unable to write herself) to the holy man at Villers, but she insists on a medium that transforms the words into objects that touch Arnulf via proxy.

Latour, using an example of the mutual push-and-pull of puppeteers and puppets, claims that "when a force manipulates another, it does not mean that it is a cause generating effects; it can also be an occasion for other things to start acting."[288] Although Latour is focused here on the relationship between persons and inanimate objects, we can see this "occasion for other things to start acting" in this account of the matron from Paris. Theophania, through the messenger's mouth, is the occasion for Arnulf to send God hundreds of miles to someone he has never bodily met. Arnulf is the occasion for the Lord to liquify Theophania's soul. This revelation to Theophania is the occasion for her to join the community of those who can testify for Arnulf. As hostess of a hostel hundreds of miles from Villers, Theophania is not whom we would normally picture if asked to describe a "holy person" of this medieval religious community. Yet through her own action of seeking divine access through Arnulf, and through the actions of a multitude of mediators, she is brought into this grouping. She demonstrates the performative nature of group-making – if one pointed at Villers and said, "there are the

[288] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 60.

people in divine favor," they would miss other ways and places in which this grouping exists.

3. "What makes all of us do the same thing at the same time?": Communal Revelations and Writing the Books of Thirteenth-Century Helfta

From Villers, we move about 400 miles east and fifty years forward to the late thirteenth-century German community of Helfta. Here we find an extensive collection of texts centered on three visionaries.[289] Revelations to others in some of these manuscripts help us trace the networks connecting these holy persons to each other and to the social group of divine accessors which they make, maintain, and draw support from.

The monastery of St. Mary's, founded at Mansfeld in 1229, moved to Helfta in 1258.[290] Already home to Mechtild of Hackeborn (c.1241-1298), the convent was joined three years later by four-year old Gertrude, who would become known as Gertrude the Great (1256-c.1302).[291] Around 1270, beguine visionary Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1207-c.1282) also came to Helfta, where she completed the seventh book of her

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[289] This period at Helfta produced "well over one thousand pages of Latin text" according to Bernard McGinn. Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 269. Caroline Walker Bynum states this is "the largest single body of women's mystical writing in the period." While I have not read anything to contradict this, I am not sure if this still holds true based on manuscripts discovered since the 1980s. Bynum, "Women Mystics," 174.

[290] Alexandra Barratt and Debra L. Stoudt, "Gertrude the Great of Helfta," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 454.

[291] Not to be confused with Gertrude of Hackeborn, Mechtild of Hackeborn's older sister and Abbess of Helfta from 1251 until her death in 1291. Through the remainder of this paper, "Gertrude" will refer to Gertrude the Great. Any references to Abbess Gertrude will be specified.

revelations text, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Mechthild of Magdeburg's work, a self-record of her visions, does not contain revelations to others and will not be part of our discussion in this chapter, but its influence on the nuns at Helfta is evident in their own texts.[292]

The revelations of Mechtild of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great, recorded in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace and The Herald of Divine Love* respectively, tell us a fair amount about the thirteenth-century community at Helfta and have been well-studied by medievalists. Scholars including Caroline Walker Bynum, Anna Harrison, Margarete Hubrath, and Rosalynn Voaden have commented on the knowledge of community events, the roles of these two women within the convent, the upholding and challenging of gender norms, the images of daily life, and the sense of community at Helfta that we gain from working with these texts.[293] Harrison in particular notes that it "makes sense to turn to the Helfta literature with an eye to what it can disclose to us about the multitude of

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[292] Barbara Newman, intro to *Mechthild of Hackeborn and the Nuns of Helfta:* The Book of Special Grace, trans. Barbara Newman, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017), loc. 491 and loc. 616-626 of 6288, Kindle.

[293] See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of the Nuns of Helfta," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 170-262; Anna Harrison, "'I Am Wholly Your Own': Liturgical Piety and Community among the Nuns of Helfta," *Church History* 78.3 (September 2009): 549-583: Harrison, "'What Treasure is in this Book?'"; Anna Harrison, "Sense of Community Among the Nuns of Helfta," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007, ProQuest (3249088), http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/docview/304858746?accountid=4485; Margarete Hubrath, "The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 11 (1999): 234-44; and Rosalynn Voaden, "All Girls Together: Community, Gender and Vision at Helfta," in *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 72-91.

individual sisters who populate the revelations, proffer the prayers, receive and offer the teachings and dispense the advice that fill these composite works—and to mine them for what they convey purposefully about the whole of the Helfta household."[294] However, in general revelations to others in these works have not been as frequently remarked on as the visions of the holy persons themselves.

Mechtild of Hackeborn's work, *The Booke of Gostlye Grace,* was begun in 1291 by "two persones" who took up the work through the "inspiracion of God." [295] Citing friendship with Mechtild and stylistic and event similarities to her own book, scholars have frequently suggested Gertrude the Great as one of the two authors of *The Booke of Gostlye Grace.*[296] Others have pointed this out as a problematic assumption. Laura Grimes, for example, suggests that the style of *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* has many more similarities to the sections of *The Herald of Divine Love* that were not personally

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[294] Harrison, "'What Treasure is in this Book?,'" 106.

[295] Theresa A. Halligan, ed., *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1979), 5.14. *The Book of Gostlye Grace is a Middle English adaptation of the Latin Liber specialis gratiae (Book of Special Grace), likely copied in the north Midlands around 1450 (Halligan, p. 22). My reasoning for using this translation is largely the practically of access. The closest to a critical Latin edition of the Liber specialis gratiae is the 1877 Paquelin volume. As Newman observes in the introduction to her translation of the Latin Booke, this volume is difficult to access outside of Dutch and German academic libraries (Newman,* intro to *Mechthild*, loc. 983 of 6288). I thus follow many of my scholarly predecessors in relying on the Middle English translation for access to the *Booke*. I have compared the Middle English account of the revelation discussed in this chapter to Newman's recent translation of the Latin texts and have found few differences between them. Thus, I am comfortable using the Middle English version to study this revelation.

[296] For example, see *Newman,* intro to *Mechthild*, loc. 429 and 662 of 6288.

written by Gertrude.[297] Because the scope of my present study has not allowed me to thoroughly explore Gertrude as a writer of Mechtild's work, I will not be referring to her as such in this chapter.

Gertrude the Great did, however, write book two ("The Memorial of the Abundance of Divine Sweetness") of *The Herald of Divine Love*, a work she began in 1289, eight years after she began having visions. The author/scribe of the other four books is unknown, though in modern scholarship she is generally referred to as "Sister N."[298] When Sister N. wrote these books and the extent of Gertrude's involvement is also uncertain. Alexandra Barratt and Debra Stoudt suggest book one and books three through five were written after Gertrude's death, based on the assertion in the *Herald's* "Prologue" that the second part was finished about twenty years after the second book.[299] However, the "Prologue" also provides evidence that Gertrude was alive during and involved in some of the creation of these books, as it contains a revelation in which the Lord provides Gertrude with reassurance that the book must be written and shared and instructs her how the book is to be divided. This suggests Gertrude played some role in

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[297] Laura Marie Grimes, "Theology as Conversation: Gertrud of Helfta and Her Sisters as Readers of Augustine," PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004, ProQuest (3166486), 15, http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/docview/305137515?accountid=4485.

[298] For more about the authorship of the *Herald*, see Balázs J. Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's Legatus divinae pietatis," in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 103-130, as well as Alexandra Barratt, intro. to *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindess* by Gertrude the Great of Helfta, trans. by Alexandra Barratt, book four, Cistercian Fathers Series 85 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), xiv-xvi.

[299] Barratt and Stoudt, "Gertrude the Great of Helfta," 456.

the development of the other books in her work, even if just to pass on the message concerning how the work should be organized.

As this brief discussion of authorship has indicated, there is a real need to "be judicious about tagging this or that devotion, teaching, or revelation to Mechtild's person or to Gertrude's."[300] Both *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* and *The Herald of Divine Love* clearly present themselves as works of a community, of a grouping of religious who trace a network between themselves and God at least partially through revelations to others. Revelations to others are replete through these works, especially the *Herald,* and while many of these are heavily focused on authenticating the visionaries, several function like those we have already discussed, not only authorizing the holy persons but providing the seerers and hearers with divine access of their own.[301] For example, a pair of parallel revelations to others extolling Mechtild and Gertrude's divine qualities offer instruction for the lifestyle and devotion needed to achieve union with Christ through entrance to his

[300] Harrison, "What Treasure is in this Book?," 92.

[301] For example, the *Herald* contains two chapters, "The Second Testimony" and "In Revelations to Others, The Lord Gives Clear Proof of the Truth of Hers," that specifically frame revelations to others as authenticating accounts. The *Herald* also features a handful of revelations in which Mechtild of Hackeborn is told of Gertrude's worthiness by the Lord (see 1.16 for the most extensive of these), but while these speak to the holy women as supportive of each other they are much more focused on authenticating Gertrude than on indicating how Mechtild benefits from these revelations. (Revelations to others in which prominent holy persons see other prominent holy persons are not uncommon. For instance, Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Marie d'Oignes see each other in rapture and Ida of Nivelles and Beatrice of Nazareth have revelations confirming each others' favor with the Lord. For an intriguing take on such revelations that draws connections to modern day virtual reality, see Spencer-Hall's chapter "My Avatar, My Soul: When Mystics Log On.")

heart.[302] The revelations to others I want to focus on here, however, are those concerning the creation of Mechtild and Gertrude's books. Occasionally throughout this dissertation, I've touched on how the edifying value of revelations to others in hagiographical and visionary texts are clearly proffered to the text's audience, such as when Goswin of Bossut expounds on what the Villers community can learn from Arnulf's vision of the singing monk raised to heaven. In the case of the Helfta texts, not only do they contain many revelations to others that speak to an actor-network group of divine seekers, but they are themselves presented as revelations to others that can teach us to achieve our spiritual desires.

In the fifth book of *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*, almost immediately after Mechtild expresses concerns about the worthiness of her book to Christ, one of the writers recounts a dream had three years prior. Prefaced with a reminder that the book "come verrelye of God," the account tells how the writer saw Mechtild taking communion. Leaving communion, the holy woman begins to sing the Parable of Talents, stating the Lord has given her five talents, and she has "wonne ouere þat oþere fyve." Then, asking "'Who wille haffe of þe honye of heuenly Ierusalem?,'" Mechtild offers a honeycomb to the sisters around her and a piece of bread to the writer. As the nun holds the bread, it grows into a full loaf pierced "withyn ande withowte" with honeycomb so

[302] *See The Booke of Gostlye Grace, 5.18 and The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, 1.3. Both of these accounts are reminiscent of the Sacred Heart; for more on the Sacred Heart in the visionary works of Helfta, see Voaden, "All Girls."

that honey drips "in so moche plenteuosnes ande hanundance þat itt wette alle here lappe ande so ranne forth ande moystede alle the erth abowte þem." The vision concludes with the statement "Tharefore þis booke worthelye hadde [&] hath þe name þe Booke of Spyrytualle Grace þat suche a thynge was schewede in the fygour of swa swete a lykoure."[303]

This revelation to the nun allows us to trace the action of accessing the divine as it dislocates from Mechtild, multiplying amongst the other sisters through the mediator of the book as represented by the bread and honey. The Lord provides spiritual nourishment through Mechtild; the Lord, Mechtild, and the writer(s) of the *Booke* distribute this to the sisters and to the community as a whole, creating a spiritually "moystede" space for both Mechtild and her sisters to thrive.

The language of the revelation draws back to our discussion of taste as a form of touching the divine in chapter three. As previously noted, sweetness and honey were

[303] Halligan, *Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild*, 5.16. This honey-vision is the only vision by another from these Helfta texts that is consistently considered by scholars, although few remark on the significance of the visionary being other than Mechtild. Margarete Hubrath and Rosalynn Voaden, for example, conclude their articles with this vision as an example of the spiritual nurturing and nourishment Mechtild provides the Helfta community, but while Hubrath points out it is "interesting" this "happens in the hands of the writing sister," neither discusses the significance of this observation (Hubrath, "*Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work," 244 and Voaden, "All Girls," 86). Barbara Newman, assuming the author who receives the piece of bread is Gertrude the Great, posits that the loaf pierced with honey represents the *Herald*, and suggests the vision is about establishing Gertrude's authority rather than Mechtild's (Newman, "What Did It Mean," 24). I find this seems unlikely given the absence of reference to Gertrude and the emphasis placed on the truth and worthiness of Mechtild's book at both ends of the vision.

popular descriptions of experiencing the Eucharist and the word of God.[304] The imagery of bread and honey as a metaphor for the book of Mechtild's revelations also connects to the idea of eating the book in Ezekiel 3:2-4: "And I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that book/ And he said to me: Son of man, thy belly shall eat, and thy bowels shall be filled with this book, which I give thee, and I did eat it: and it was honey in my mouth/ And he said to me: Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and thou shalt speak my words to them." Mary Carruthers notes that in his gloss on this passage, Jerome (c.342-420) relates the consumption of the book to the formation of memory, claiming that "'when, by diligent meditation, we store away the book of the Lord in our memorial treasury, our belly is filled spiritually.'"[305] This revelation to another thus presents Mechtild's book as a transformative object through which the divine word enters your body and soul. It is a performative definition—the book is not an intermediary passively carrying meaning, but a mediator in the group-making effort of the Helfta community. Like honey dripping

[304] Sweetness, taste, and the Eucharist were part of our discussion of the doubting priest's revelation in Goswin's *Life of Ida*. Another example can be found in Jacques de Vitry's *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*: "Many people received the grace of devotion not only from her expression by looking at her but also they received a honey-tasting sweetness which overflowed to others from mutual conversations with her both spiritually in the heart and sensibly in the mouth. Let hard men and those who have come late to believing hear and grumble. Those who have experience in divine consolations such as these easily agree when they hear: 'Thy lips, my spouse, are a dropping honeycomb, honey and mild are under thy tongue' (Cant. 4, 11)." Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*, trans. and with an intro. by Margot H. King (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987), I.41, p.57.

[305] Jerome, *Commentarii in Hiezechielem i,* on Ez. 3:5, qtd. in Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53-54.

from bread, the words flow from the book, soaking into the community, sweetening and sustaining others who seek divine connection.

The writer's revelation of the *Booke of Gostlye Grace* as bread and honey also speaks to the community-building power of sensory experiences. Although I did not address them specifically as communal, we can see how this may work in previously discussed revelations such as the beguines watching Douceline pacing the dormitory and listening to her celestial song. When they follow her in procession, the sisters form a group of visionaries experiencing the divine in tandem, joined together through their senses of sight and sound. Taste offers this same potential for a unifying experience. Although the precise taste of something may vary by person, the general understanding of it as sweet or sour or savory or bitter tends to be mutual. Like listening to or singing the liturgy, eating (and tasting) also has a communal element, as meals were usually taken together in the refectory. The image of the sisters of Helfta tasting together the sweetness of Mechtild's *Booke* thus posits one answer to Latour's inquiry, "What makes all of us do the same thing at the same time?"[306] For these nuns, collectively savoring Mechtild's book in the anonymous writer's dream and coming to an understanding of the work as a revelation to Helfta as a whole is a group-making experience, indicating God's accessibility to more than just the living saints in their community.

The Herald of Divine Love also vividly presents Gertrude's book as a revelation to others experienced through multiple senses, both in revelations to Gertrude herself and in revelations involving Sister N. These revelations, found in the prologue and in the last

[306] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 44.

book of the *Herald,* frame the consumption of the book, reminding readers at the start and end that they are receiving a revelation from the Lord if they approach the book with the proper devotional spirit. In the prologue, Gertrude expresses concern on multiple occasions about the writing and reception of her book. The Lord responds:

> 'If anyone wishes to read this book with the devout intention of spiritual progress, I shall draw them so closely to me that they will read it as if my own hands were holding the book and I myself shall keep them company at the task. As when two people are reading the same page, so each is aware of the other's breath, so shall I draw in the breath of their longings . . . Moreover I shall breathe into him the breath of my divinity, which, through my Spirit, will create him anew within.'[307]

This imagery is repeated in book five, when Sister N. secretly carries the book to Communion in order to offer it to the Lord. As she does so,

> another person saw the Lord approaching her with great manifestations of love and joy, embracing her tenderly and saying: 'I will penetrate all the words in this

[307] Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love,* transcribed and translated excerpts in "Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's Legatus divinae pietatis" by Balázs J. Nemes, in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 123. Nemes notes he has consulted Winkworth's translation of the first three books of the *Herald,* which I have done as well. Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love,* trans. and ed. Margaret Winkworth, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993). All translations provide are by Nemes unless otherwise noted. Latin transciptions are from Nemes. "'Si quis cum devota intenione spiritualis profectus in hoc libro legere desideraverit, ipsum mihi attraham in tantum quod quasi inter manus meas leget in eo, et ego memetipsum illi in hoc opera sociabo, ut sicut fieri solet quando duo legentes in una pagina, unus alterius sentiat flatum, sic ego intraham flatum desideriorum ipsius . . . Insuper aspirabo ipsi afflatum meae divinitatis, quo ipse interius per spiritum meum renovetur'" (Prologue.2).

book which you have offered me with the sweetness of my divine love—and, penetrating them, make them fruitful—for they were truly written by the power of my spirit. And I will take whoever comes to me with a humble heart, desiring for love of my love to read this book, onto my lap and with my finger point out all specifically that is beneficial for him. And I will incline myself graciously towards him, so that, in the same way that someone who had been sated by both species of the Eucharist breathes onto the one who wishes to kiss him, I will breathe into the reader efficaciously with my divine breath to effect his soul's salvation.[308]

The *Herald of Divine Love* then concludes with a plea that

the eternal loving kindness of God join all this with that which is written here and makes it so fruitful for the readers' salvation that they may bring forth fruit a hundredfold and be found worthy to be written into the book of life. And meanwhile the simpler readers of this book, those who are not able by themselves to swim in the stream of divine grace, may at least travel by this vehicle and rejoice that they, too, may be led by the hand through their neighbour's gifts of

[308] Gertrude of Helfta, *Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Nemes, 128-129. "visus est ab alia persona Dominus, quasi ex incontinentia profusive amoris, cum ingenti gaudio in obviam ejus genua flectendo eam blande circumplecti, dicens: 'Ego dulcedine divini amoris mei penetrabo et penetrando fecundabo omnia verba libri hujus mihi modo oblate, immo verciter impulse spiritus mei conscripti. Et quicumque humiliato corde ad me veniens, amore amoris mei in eo legere voluerit, huic ego revera in sinu meo quasi digito proprio sigillatim quaeque sibi utilia demonstrabo, et insuper me ipsi tam dignanter acclinabo quod, quemadmodum quis diversis speciebus saturatus afflatus suo aspiraret se osculari volentem, sic ego ex afflatus divinitatis meae effectum animae suae salutarem ipsi efficaciter inspirabo'" (V.34).

> grace until finally they begin to taste, by reading, meditating and contemplating, how sweet the Lord is and how truly blessed he is that hopes in the Lord and throws all his care upon Him.[309]

These revelations, given to Gertrude, Sister N., and another who witnesses the Lord speaking to Sister N., describe the reception of the divine through the *Herald* as a full sensory experience. The imagery of sitting on the lap of Christ as he points out specific passages, of feeling and inhaling the Lord's breath, of tasting the divine sweetness of the word, of being sated by the Eucharist, of being embraced by God, invites the reader to be completely enveloped by the divine. By reading the book, one may touch, taste, see, and hear the Lord as Gertrude has done.

While Mechtild's book in the revelation above mediates, drawing the sisters together for a communally transformative experience, Gertrude's book is presented in these revelations as an intermediary. The focus is not on the book as actor, but as the book as passive carrier of the Lord's message, which one can read as though in the company of the divine. The closing passage emphasizes the idea that the book is not an actor itself so much as an intermediary for "*other* actors [to take] over the relay."[310] Gertrude will at some point physically vanish, but through her book the divine access she

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[309] Gertrude of Helfta, *Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Nemes, 130. "Quae tamen omnia incontinenissima Dei pietas cum universis hic scriptis ad salute egentium tam copiose faciat exuberare, quo, adaucto centuplicato fructu, in librum vitae scribe digni inveniantur. Et interim legentes in libello isto simpliciores, qui per se non sufficiunt nature in profluvio divinae pietatis, salem hoc vehiculo iter arripiant, et quasi manuductione beneficiorum proximi sui delectati, vacando lectionibus, meditationibus et contemplationibus, ipsi tandem gustare incipient quam dulcis est Dominus et quam revera beatus est qui sperans in eo totum cogitatum suum jactat in ipsum" (V.36).

[310] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 38.

offers her community can be continually shared. Latour states that part of group-making is that action can be "*other-taken*": "taken up by others and shared with the masses. It is mysteriously carried out and at the same time distributed to others. We are not alone in the world."[311] The end of the *Herald* presents the book as a tool for others to act. Those "who are not able by themselves to swim in the stream of divine grace, may at least travel by this vehicle . . . until finally they begin to taste, by reading, meditating and contemplating, how sweet the Lord is," and those who do have the "gifts of grace" may take these "simpler readers" by the hand and lead them on their journey to the divine.

As those partaking in the revelatory honeyed words of Mechtild's *Booke*, those reading Gertrude's *Herald* are most decidedly "not alone in the world." Moreover, Mechtild and Gertrude are not alone in their divine favor. Revelations to others, both in the form of dreams and visions and in the form of these books, make visible the networks through which communities of visionaries are assembled and sustained.

4. Dislocating the Saint: Revelations to Others and Collective Spirituality

Latour describes Actor-Network-Theory as a theory "about *how* to study things, or rather how *not* to study them—or rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves."[312] This dissertation has aimed to let the other actors involved in the networks of medieval hagiographical and visionary texts have this space to speak. When we dismiss revelations to others as merely authentications, as witness accounts of the divine preference for specific holy persons, we miss the opportunity to "retrace the many

[311] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 45.

[312] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 142.

different worlds actors are elaborating for one another."[313] Who is defined as a "visionary" or "holy person" is shifting and changing, and divine favor is not localized to saintly protagonists. The others in these communities, whether lay or religious, are also granted avenues for accessing the divine, and their revelations are central to comprehending the collaborative nature of medieval spirituality.

[313] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 49.

EPILOGUE

As I've been working on this project, I have been thinking a lot about how these concepts of revelations to others translate to our modern world, particularly in cultures where religions are not as collectively experienced as in the Middle Ages. My musings have taken up two themes: meditation and activism.

1. Meditation

I was raised Catholic and attended several years of religious education classes (CCD) as a child. When I was about ten, my teacher told us of her return to the church, which she had left as a teenager. Driving through the mountains during a particularly challenging time in her life, she had suddenly felt the need to pray, which she had not done in many years. As she prayed, she was engulfed with sensations of love and comfort. She experienced a renewing sense of peace and faith in God. In the weeks following her story, the teacher started ending each class with a meditation session. Inviting us to close our eyes, she led us through focusing on places in nature where we might feel peaceful—we imagined listening to waves on a beach, watching leaves ripple in the forest, and touching the cool pebbles on the shore of a lake. We breathed in and out in slow unison, becoming part of each other's soundscape. During one of these meditations, I abruptly sensed a presence behind me, as though someone was standing with their hands on my shoulders. I felt warm, safe, loved, and absolutely certain I had been joined by Christ.

While writing this dissertation, I've thought a lot about this time I was so confident I had accessed the divine. Whether I now believe I did or not is irrelevant—what interests me here is the process that led to this sensation. Though my ten-year-old

self did not realize it, my teacher was essential to this experience. Her account of her own revelation through prayer prefaced our meditation sessions. Her voice and imagery guided my body through my breath and directed my mental focus. She provided me a pathway to the divine, as well as a communal context for comprehending my experience. I did not come away from this meditation thinking I was specifically favored by the Lord, but rather aware that I had joined the group of people certain in their faith because of personal knowledge of God.

Taking this idea of learning to see out of a religious context, meditation and mindfulness are popular techniques in modern society for guiding the mind through management of the senses. The app *Headspace*, for example, has, as of early September 2019, been downloaded over 54 million times worldwide.[314] This program was developed by an Englishman who trained in meditation as a Buddhist monk for ten years after several traumatic events pushed him towards a life change. It features a plethora of guided meditations and several 10-day and 30-day courses intended to help you adopt meditation into your daily routine. What strikes me about this app is its emphasis on meditation as not only a tool to calm your mind, but to learn coping mechanisms (for sleeplessness, anxiety, pain management), social skills (negotiating conflict), and emotional qualities (the website claims "meditating with Headspace for three weeks may enhance compassionate behavior toward others").[315] The goal here is not divine access, as

[314] Sarah Dodds, "The Former Monk Who Runs a Meditation Firm," *BBC News*, September 2, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/business-49394848#share-tools.

[315] *Headspace*, 2019, https://www.headspace.com/.

it was for medieval religious meditating on devotional objects, but rather achieving revelations about yourself and building the mental tools to work towards change. Despite this interiority, meditation and mindfulness are presented, both in the app and in general, as teachable, communal experiences. With the right mindset, anyone can learn to meditate, joining the group of millions around the world who are also practicing this self-revelatory skill.

2. Activism

As I write this in the weeks following the 2019 Global Climate Strike, I am haunted by images of young activists fighting to save their world, our world, from its current destructive path. I see Xiye Bastida, a climate activist urging a return to indigenous practices of protecting the Earth, amongst a crowd of hundreds of thousands of protestors in Times Square. I hear Greta Thunberg, who a year ago sat on her own in a school strike for the climate outside of the Swedish parliament, now delivering an impassioned speech to the United Nations.

When we hear the term "visionary" today, this is who we think about. Someone with a driving purpose and vision of the future rather than someone receiving revelations from God. Yet, this understanding of "visionary" is not so different from the medieval. Visionaries demonstrate divine favor (modern = attention and assistance from authorities like the United Nations), an ability to be open to the divine (modern = an openness to new ideas), and a passion for a better place (medieval = heaven, modern = a world where climate change is slowed or reversed). Moreover, neither medieval holy persons nor modern visionaries exist in isolation. Revelations to others in medieval texts show the

collaborative nature of medieval spirituality. Texts created by modern activists urge others to join them in their visions for change.[316]

There is a tendency in historical and literary studies of medieval saints and visionaries to fixate on the "main characters." This tendency remains in modern visionary culture. Articles and news stories on Greta Thunberg are everywhere; there is much less focus on other leading activists and very little on those making up the crowds of millions who protested around the world. This matters because these "others" are us. We are not Thunberg, inspiring millions with our visions for change. But we can absorb her messages as revelations to us and join the fight. We are not the holy persons of medieval hagiographical texts. But, as readers, we can join with those who have revelations of these saints, both witnessing their divine piety and learning about our own spirituality.

[316] For example, the website for Fridays For Future, an organization encouraging weekly strikes for the climate, is headed by a banner image of Greta Thunberg. She stares determinedly out at the viewer, overlaying a second image of hundreds of students striking for the climate. Scrolling down the page, we find videos of Greta's speeches and of other climate activists, an invitation to contribute to a music video titled "Unity," advice and instructions for holding strikes, and links to join and share the movement. *#FridaysForFuture*, 2019, https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/.

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