

THE *VITAE* OF BODLEIAN LIBRARY MS DOUCE 114

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## Abstract

Bodleian Library MS Douce 114 contains the unique copy of four Middle English texts, translations of Latin *vitae*, all describing Continental women saints whose unusual forms of devotion set them apart from the often more sober atmosphere of late-medieval English spirituality in which the texts appeared. The texts first attracted scholarly notice following the publication of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the subsequent interest in the lives of the Continental women mystics whom Kempe resembled far more than her own English contemporaries; however, the texts have yet to be examined in any detail. This study investigates both the physical production of the translation and the context of book production in which the manuscript appeared, as well as the ideological context and controversies which would have informed the reading and reception of the texts.

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## Introduction

When, early in the fifteenth century, a visiting friar of considerable reputation arrived in King's Lynn, Norfolk, he was forewarned by the priest of St James' parish about the unusual behaviour of one of the local residents. The individual, Margery Kempe, daughter of Lynn's former mayor, had earned some local notoriety for her unusual devotion, and specifically, for her fits of loud weeping in response to any mention of Christ's passion. These outbursts had so far been patiently tolerated by the parish priest as well as the parishioners, and he instructed the visiting friar to do likewise. During his first sermon in Lynn, the friar voiced no objection when Margery began to sob loudly, but he afterwards excluded her from attending any church in which he was preaching, despite attempts by local clergy and lay supporters of Kempe to persuade him otherwise.

The resulting tension between the friar, on the one hand, and Kempe's friends and supporters, on the other, reached an impasse on St James' Day, 1420, when the friar preached a pulpit-pounding sermon against Kempe, making thinly-veiled threats against those who persisted in supporting her: 'Yyf I here any mor thes matyrs rehersyd,' the

friar warned, 'I schal so smytyn the nayl on the hed . . . that it schal schamyn alle hyr mayntenowyr's'. At that, many of Kempe's friends withdrew their support and friendship, capitulating instead to the friar's reputation. Even the priest who would later serve as Margery's amanuensis and help produce the book of her life and revelations was momentarily dissuaded from endorsing her unusual form of devotion.

He did, of course, later regret his decision and returned to Margery's support, but only after discovering ample precedent for Margery's ecstatic weeping. The account of his change of mind, preserved in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, lists several books of contemporary devotion mentioning the gift of tears, the first of which is the *vita* of Marie of Oignies (d.1213). The anecdote that Margery's priest relates from the *vita* is in many ways strikingly parallel to Kempe's own experiences, and it is this similarity, as well as the ecclesiastical sanction already given to Marie's form of devotion, that seems to have persuaded Margery's priest to put his own reputation at stake rather than withdraw his support. Like Margery, Marie of Oignies was excluded by a clergyman because of her loud weeping. In Marie's case, however, the priest was himself later so overwhelmed during the gospel reading that he soaked his vestments with tears, and thus was forced to admit the authenticity of Marie's special grace. It is this miraculous precedent that for Margery's amanuensis serves as his primary justification for accepting Margery's experiences as equally valid.<sup>1</sup>

The similarities between Kempe's spirituality and that of Marie of Oignies, and indeed that of a number of continental women mystics, are numerous, and comparisons with continental saints have been a staple of Kempe studies ever since Hope Emily Allen's preface and notes for the EETS edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* first called attention

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<sup>1</sup> The story of Margery's conflict with the friar, and her priest's crisis of loyalties, is related in Ch. 61-62 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Quotations are from the edition by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (OS 212, London: EETS, 1940).

to the 'accumulation of coincidental commonplaces' shared by Kempe and a number of continental holy women.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Douce 114, the manuscript preserving the unique copy of the Middle English translation of Marie of Oignies's life, together with the *vitae* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek (d.1274) and Christina *Mirabilis* (d.1224) and a letter concerning Catherine of Siena (d.1380), has since been often cited in discussions of Kempe. Even works produced for non-specialists, such as the introduction to B.A.Windeatt's translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, have since included allusions to Douce 114, in this case citing the volume as 'a collection which in itself suggests the kind of reading that some of Margery's advisors would draw upon'.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite the frequent allusions made to Douce 114 in the context of Kempe studies, few have yet examined the manuscript itself in any depth. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Marie-Élisabeth Henneau lament this oversight in their introduction to a recent collection of essays discussing the influence of women mystics of the Low Countries: 'Yet for what are arguably the most important texts concerning the women of Liège and English vernacular culture, there currently exists no edition later than that to be found in

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<sup>2</sup> Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.lv. Summaries of the parallels between Marie of Oignies and Margery Kempe can also be found in Barry Windeatt's useful introduction to his translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.19-20; in Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.120-21; and in Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.31-34. One particular similarity, Marie of Oignies' Candlemas vision, is discussed more extensively by Carolyne Larrington in 'Representing the Presentation: The Candlemas Vision and Marie d'Oignies' Role in its Dissemination' in Juliette Dor *et al.*, eds., *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality* (Hull: Brepols, 1999), p. 195-214. Other comparisons of Margery Kempe to continental women mystics can be found in Julia Bolton Holloway, 'Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England' in Sarah J. McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1992), p.203-21; Alexandra Barratt, 'Margery Kempe and the King's Daughter of Hungary' in McEntire, *Margery Kempe*, p.189-201; Susan Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman' in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Woodbridge: D.S.Brewer, 1984), p.150-68; Janette Dillon, 'Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition' in Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1996), p.115-40.

<sup>3</sup> Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.20

a scholarly journal of 1886 [sic] and very few studies'.<sup>4</sup> The collection of essays on the women of Liège, edited by Wogan-Browne and Henneau, goes some way toward correcting the imbalance, containing valuable articles on Christina *Mirabilis* and Marie of Oignies.<sup>5</sup> None of the articles, however, deals specifically with the Middle-English translations of the *vitae* found in Douce 114, nor with the reception of these texts within the context of late-medieval English spirituality.

Moreover, Wogan-Browne and Henneau's description of the manuscript as 'the fifteenth-century Middle English versions of the *vitae* of Marie of Oignies, Christina *Mirabilis*, and Elizabeth of Spalbeek, grouped together with a translation of the German mystic Henry Suso's *Horologium* and prepared for an unidentified English woman by her chaplain' is perhaps unfortunate. First, by omitting the letter concerning the life of Catherine of Siena from its list of contents, it gives the impression that the manuscript is concerned solely with the *vitae* of saints associated with the Liège Beguines. Instead, the inclusion in Douce 114 of a letter describing the life of Catherine of Siena indicates a different principle of organisation, one that I suggest is based principally on thematic similarities rather than geographic or historical associations. Second, and more seriously, the statement is based on the misunderstanding that the *vitae* were 'prepared for an unidentified English woman by her chaplain'. A statement to that effect *is* found in Douce 114, but it is in the prologue to Suso's *Horologium*, not the four *vitae*, and this prologue is not unique to Douce 114, but occurs independently of the *vitae* in at least five other manuscript copies of the *Horologium*.<sup>6</sup> It was apparently copied into Douce 114 from another source and has no direct bearing on the intended readership of the other

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<sup>4</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Marie-Élisabeth Henneau, 'Liège, the Medieval "Woman Question", and the Question of Medieval Women' in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*. p.16

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Newman, 'Devout Women and Demoniacs in the World of Thomas of Cantimpré', in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*, p.35-60, and Carolyne Larrington, 'Representing the Presentation', p.195-214

<sup>6</sup> See vol 9, pt 13, item 80 in J. Burke Severs and Albert E. Hartung, eds. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500* (New Haven, CN: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967-1998)



texts with which it is bound or the volume as a whole. While it may perhaps be the case that the manuscript was in fact prepared for an English nun or laywoman, this particular line cannot directly prove such a conclusion.

The one study of Douce 114 cited by Wogan-Browne and Henneau, Patricia Deery Kurtz's 'Mary of Oignies, Christine the Marvelous, and Medieval Heresy', is more helpful with regard to the manuscript's textual background.<sup>7</sup> In addition to listing the extant Latin manuscripts of English provenance containing the *vitae* translated in Douce 114, Kurtz provides further evidence concerning the relationship between the *vitae* and the English Carthusians by calling attention to a possible Latin manuscript source owned by John Blacman, the chaplain of Henry VI and a later associate of the Carthusian house at Witham.<sup>8</sup> Kurtz's main thesis, however, requires some qualification. Her argument that 'interest in the texts of the *vitae* of Marie and Christina in late 14th- and 15th-century England may have been at least partly inspired by the anti-heretical themes and the emphasis on orthodox values found in them' is provocative in that it provides a reason why a translation of these texts may have been undertaken.<sup>9</sup> It is valuable, however, to qualify her statement with the observation that the English interest in these women appears to have been, at best, limited. These saints certainly never achieved the cult-following afforded to the more established women saints such as the virgin-martyrs

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Deery Kurtz, 'Mary of Oignies, Christine the Marvelous, and Medieval Heresy', *Mystics Quarterly* 14 (1988): 186-96

<sup>8</sup> Kurtz briefly describes one Latin text, Oxford St John's College MS 182, ascribed to Witham Carthusian John Blacman and containing the lives of Marie of Oignies, Christina *Mirabilis*, and Elizabeth of Spalbeek among others. She furthermore lists the following: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 138 (Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, c14); Cambridge, Jesus College MS 24 (Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, c14); Durham, Durham Cathedral Library MS B.IV.39 (Fragment of the life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, c15); London, British Library MS Harley 4725 (life of Marie of Oignies, c13-14); Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 240 (Lives of Marie of Oignies, Christina *Mirabilis*, and Elizabeth of Spalbeek, c14); and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 694 (Fragment of the life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, c13-14). Kurtz also refers to a medieval booklist describing the contents of the Augustinian Priory at Thurgarton, Notts., edited by Ramona Bressie in 'MS Sloane 3548, Folio 15', *Modern Language Notes* 54 (1939): 246-56. Among the titles listed in that folio appears the following: 'Vita trium virginum. scilicet. Elizabeth. cristine. et Marie Oegenes. Littere quedem de vita sancte Katerine de Senys in vno quaterno', where 'in vno quaterno' has been struck through.

<sup>9</sup> Kurtz, 'Mary of Oignies', p.195

Katherine of Alexandria or Margaret of Antioch, or even more recent saints like the thirteenth-century Zita, all of whom were frequently represented in the visual art of the period.<sup>10</sup> Nor did their lives and revelations—except, arguably, Catherine of Siena's—ever achieve the literary circulation afforded to the writings of other women mystics such as Bridget of Sweden or Mechtild of Hackeborn.

Furthermore, Kurtz's assessment of the 'anti-heretical themes' present in the *vitae* of Douce 114 is restricted almost entirely to their usefulness as anti-Cathar documents. Focusing specifically on Marie of Oignies and Christina *Mirabilis*, Kurtz describes these *vitae* as refuting in particular the tenets of Cathar dualism. The 'emphasis on demonic powers foiled' found in the life of Marie of Oignies is a response, according to Kurtz, to the 'inordinate power' accredited to the 'forces of evil' by Cathar belief. Similarly, the attribution of evil, in the life of Christina *Mirabilis*, to creation's rejection of a benevolent creator is read as a response to the Cathar position that evil was intrinsically inherent in the material world. Kurtz's suggestion has some merit: Marie of Oignies' hagiographer James of Vitry did actively preach against the Cathars, and it is thus not unlikely that he framed his narrative as an alternative but orthodox model for women's piety.<sup>11</sup> The appearance, however, of these *vitae* in fifteenth-century England can hardly be attributed to their anti-Cathar leanings, since the Cathar heresy had long been extinguished and had, in any case, never extended across the Channel. If these texts were in any way valued among the English for their anti-heretical potential, it was as a refutation of Lollard claims, not Cathar. Kurtz's comments on the texts' reinforcement of the value of the Eucharist, questioned by both Cathar and Lollard heretics, are thus more relevant when

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the representation of women saints in English parish churches, see Eamon Duffy, 'Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England' in W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds. *Women in the Church* (London: Basil Blackwood, 1990), p.175-96. There does exist one late example of Catherine of Siena on a 1528 screen at Horsham St Faith, where Catherine appears with Bridget of Sweden and others, described in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1992), p.167

<sup>11</sup> Kurtz, 'Mary of Oignies', p.188-89

considering the appearance of these *vitae* in fifteenth-century England. Unfortunately, she does not pursue this line of argument, which seems to me much more promising and will be taken up as the basis of a later chapter.

Kurtz's study does, however, suggest some important questions: What was the agenda of those who translated these texts into the vernacular? And, as a corollary, how were these texts being read and received? These issues, moreover, suggest several more basic problems that must first be addressed: Who translated these texts, and for whom were they translated? The first question, that of the manuscript's provenance is fairly straightforward. An inscription in the manuscript identifies it as belonging to the Carthusians of Beauvale Priory in Nottinghamshire. This, along with the clear indication by the translator that his text was prepared in a monastic setting and the existence of a possible Latin source in Carthusian ownership (the aforementioned manuscript of John Blacman), makes it probable that the translation was the work of an English Carthusian, likely one of those living at Beauvale.

The Carthusians generally seem to have played a significant role in the transmission of vernacular devotional texts in late-medieval England. The order was largely solitary and contemplative, and this characteristic differentiated them from other, more active orders. Unlike the Benedictines, the Carthusians spent much of their day in private cells, singing only matins and the nocturnal portion of the office in common, devoting the remainder of their time to private contemplation. Also unlike the Benedictines, the Carthusians took no active role in preaching; instead, the Carthusians copied and bound books, an activity which both substituted for the oral preaching which their vows of silence made impossible as well as provided manual labour as a diversion from the mental and spiritual strain of contemplation. The Charterhouses themselves appear to have maintained significant libraries, and their books circulated between the houses for copying and

correction. Unfortunately, no complete catalogue of any English Charterhouse has survived, but a few surviving lists of gifts made to English Charterhouses and some receipts of books borrowed from one Charterhouse by another are still extant, and these give some insight into the kinds of books that were circulated among the Carthusians.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, in the booklists appear a number of works concerning continental women mystics. A list of books acquired by Witham Charterhouse in the last half of the fifteenth century, for example, contains among others the *Revelations* of German visionary Elizabeth of Schönau and the *Book of Special Grace* written by Low-Country mystic Mechthild of Hackeborn, and texts attributed to Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, and the English mystic Richard Rolle.<sup>13</sup> A later list of books borrowed from the House of the Salutation by Carthusian John Whetham just prior to the Act of Succession in 1534 also mentions a volume of Bridget's writings as well as the *Revelations* of mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg.<sup>14</sup>

The English charterhouses, and Beauvale specifically, seem also to have played an important role in a literary community of important laywomen who acquired and passed on books of contemporary spirituality. One laywoman, in particular, was known to have had a special relationship with Beauvale. In 1393, Elizabeth de Stapleton, together with her sister Sybyl de Ryther, granted Beauvale an annual 40s. each to establish a chantry and maintain two monks to pray for the souls of their father, Beauvale benefactor William de Aldeburgh, and mother, Elizabeth.<sup>15</sup> In 1448, Elizabeth's daughter-in-law, Agnes de Stapleton, willed sums of money to each of the English charterhouses, as well

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<sup>12</sup> The lists are printed in E.M. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London: SPCK, 1930), which still remains the standard work on the English Carthusians. More information, specifically on their transmission of devotional writings, can be found in Michael G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 225-40.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusian Order*, p.321

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.329

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160

as a number of books, among them *The Prick of Conscience* and *The Chastising of God's Children*.<sup>16</sup> These books may well have been obtained originally from the Carthusians, and returned to serve as exemplars for further copying.

Elizabeth de Stapleton moreover appears to have been only one member of a network of important families who both supported the English charterhouses and owned and deeded volumes of spiritual writings. Robert de Roos de Ingmanthorp, friend of Bryan Stapleton, Elizabeth's husband, and executor for William de Aldeburgh, Elizabeth's father, left behind a number of books in his 1392 testament: to his son Thomas, a psalter; his wife Johanna, a French *Veteribus Historus*; to Elizabeth de Stapleton, a French *Sydrak*; and to his daughter Alianore, a bible, a French psalter, and a French *Legendam Sanctorum*.<sup>17</sup> Alianore, in turn, left sums to each of the seven English charterhouses, and to others, she left a number of books, including the first book of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and her 'Maulde buke', which is likely Mechtild of Hackeborn's *Book of Ghostly Grace*.<sup>18</sup>

Combining such information about the book ownership of the English Carthusians' benefactors with the extant lists of Carthusian book holdings suggests that at least some of these volumes were obtained through the Carthusians. It also suggests the possibility that Douce 114 was prepared with a particular lay benefactress in mind. Unfortunately, the internal evidence provided by the translator himself offers little help in determining whether the manuscript was, in fact, produced for a devout laywoman, women religious, secular clergy, or even the Carthusians themselves. According to the translator's

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<sup>16</sup> Hilary M.Carey, 'Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England', *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1987): 361-81, p.377

<sup>17</sup> James Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills Registered at York Vol. I.* (Surtees Society 4, 1836), p.178

<sup>18</sup> Felicity Riddy, "'Women talking about the things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture' in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.108

epilogue, he produced his translation by direct order of his prior, but if the prior had a specific recipient for the text in mind, the translator seems not to have been aware of the recipient's identity, for he addresses no particular individual either by name or anonymous title, such as the 'dear ghostly sister' that had by this time become a commonplace in late-medieval devotional writings for women. The translator seems instead to have anticipated, first of all, an audience of both men and women, and secondly, an audience of varying education, potentially including Latin-literate clerics. The translator addresses his audience as 'alle men and wymmen þat in happe rediþ or heriþ þis englyshe' and he furthermore requests 'lettird men and clerkes, if þey endeyne to see þes bokes, þat þey wol be favorabil and benigne reders or herers of þis englyshe' (195).<sup>19</sup> Such an all-encompassing description may, on one hand, suggest the possibility that he did not believe himself to be preparing a translation for a specific individual or group, but rather, a speculatively prepared translation that would serve as an exemplar for further copying and distribution if the need arose.

On the other hand, the translator's anticipation that his work would achieve a broad readership does not completely rule out the possibility that he did, in fact, have a specific person in mind. Writings prepared for particular benefactors often found themselves transmitted more broadly; some, in fact, were prepared with this expressed purpose. The author of an English life of Jerome prepared for the duchess of Clarence makes this clear: 'Wherfore I desire þat hit shulde lyke 3oure ladyshype first to rede hit and to doo

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<sup>19</sup> All quotes from the Douce 114 *vita*e are taken from C. Horstmann's transcriptions, 'Prosalegenden: Die Legenden des ms. Douce 114', *Anglia* 8 (1885): 102-196. Quotes from the text of the *Orologium Sapientiae*, bound with the *vita*e, are taken from Horstmann's 'Orologium Sapientiae', *Anglia* 10 (1888): 323-389. The page numbers here refer to those editions. I have silently made changes to capitalisation and punctuation for the sake of readability, and in all Middle English texts here quoted, I have expanded ampersands and regularized the occurrence of *u* and *v*, *i* and *j*, throughout, according to modern practice. I have also spot checked Horstmann's edition against the original MS and noted no obvious discrepancies.

copye hit for 3oure self and syth to latte other rede hit and copye hit whoso wyl'.<sup>20</sup> This author not only appears to recognise that the text he has prepared for a specific individual may reach a broader readership, but, in fact, explicitly encourages its further transmission. The anticipation, then, by the translator of the four *vitae* that his text would be well copied and read is not incompatible with the suggestion that his translation was originally prepared for a specific reader. His comments are ultimately inconclusive but minimally suggest the intent of a broader circulation than the texts in the end actually achieved.

The translator's comments about his texts' contents, or more precisely, his lack thereof, similarly suggest little about the purpose he intended for his work. The only concern he expresses regards his own shortcomings as a translator, but he says nothing about anything controversial in the texts themselves. He self-effacingly, and perhaps, conventionally, refers to himself in the prologue as 'but symple-letterd', and again, in the epilogue, refers to 'his owne sympilnesse and unkonyng' (107, 195). The translator further makes clear that he did commence his translation of his own accord, but out of obedience to his prior, who requested it (195-96). These comments suggest an attempt to pacify any who might find the work suspect. However, the specific objections the translator anticipates have nothing to do with the work's content, but with his ability to render accurately his base text into English. This insecurity may, in turn, suggest a deeper concern about the inability of English itself to convey a Latin text accurately, the common objection against vernacular theology in the wake of the Lollard heresy.

Yet, unfortunately, the translator's comments do not offer any information on how he regarded the contents of the *vitae*. This omission is surprising, and worth investigating,

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<sup>20</sup> A.I. Doyle, 'Publication by members of religious orders', in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, Eds., *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.116.

especially given the unusual nature of the translated texts, which include often graphic and disturbing extremes of self-mortification. Of course, it is unlikely that the translator intended these women as models for imitation. As Caroline Walker Bynum explains:

Medieval hagiographers pointed out repeatedly that saints are not even primarily 'models' for ordinary mortals; the saints are far too dangerous for that. Like Christ himself, they could not and should not be imitated in their full extravagance and power. Rather (so their admirers say), they should be loved, venerated, and meditated upon as moments in which the other that is God breaks through into the mundane world, saturating it with meaning.<sup>21</sup>

James of Vitry makes comments to similar effect in the life of Marie of Oignies when he counsels his readers, 'that atte wee rede sum seyntes have done by famylyer and homly counseyle of the holy gost, wee shalle rathere mervaile thanne folowe' (136). Yet, despite such caveats, the behaviours attributed to such exceptional ascetics were in fact sometimes imitated by people of less-than-balanced piety, as arguably in the case of Margery Kempe. This seems, of course, the obvious danger of making these texts available in the vernacular and thus elusive of strict clerical controls. Admittedly, Margery Kempe was a rarity, and the majority of those who encountered the *vitae* of continental women mystics like these do not appear to have imitated them in the manner of Margery Kempe. They were, instead, reading them for devotional purposes.

However, the often-disturbing kinds of activities attributed to the women described in Douce 114, in particular, make even devotional use provocative. The first of the four *vitae*, for example, Philip of Clairvaux's life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, describes in often

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<sup>21</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (London: University of California Press, 1987), p.7



disturbing detail the daily routine of self-torture Elizabeth practised in imitation of the sufferings of Christ. Every day, at each of the seven hours of prayer, Elizabeth bodily reproduced the passion of Christ from arrest to burial through successive bouts of self-mortification. At matins, Elisabeth forcibly dragged herself about by her own garments representing Christ's arrest; at prime, she paced back and forth feigning the binding of her hands behind her back, in token of Christ's being bound and taken to trial; at terce, she affected a posture as though she were bound to a pillar, suggesting Christ's flagellation; and at sext, nones, and evensong, she adopted a cruciform pose, reenacting Christ's crucifixion until the final hour of compline. This entire course of events was punctuated by rounds of Elisabeth's gouging her own eyes, smiting her head against the ground, and striking herself about the head and breast, which Philip describes only once while noting that such behaviour was repeated at each of the seven hours.

Elizabeth is also noteworthy as likely being the first person after St Francis of Assisi reportedly to bear the stigmata.<sup>22</sup> And not only was she, as Francis, said to bleed from the five wounds of Christ, but also from the eyes, fingertips, and brow, thus re-enacting in every detail how her contemporaries imagined the sufferings of Christ. For the devotional reader, Elizabeth provided a contemporary, and distinctively female, embodiment of Christ's Passion. In the Latin version of the life, in a passage that the English translator omits, possibly because of a faulty Latin original, Philip of Clairvaux describes the role of women in spreading the gospel, arguing that whereas men are permitted to do so by preaching and teaching, women have recourse to the visual and physical embodiment of Christ. In Elizabeth's case, the graphic descriptions of her self-torment point at every stage to their Christological antecedent, and it is in this capacity that the text would have realised its devotional potential for fifteenth-century English

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<sup>22</sup> W. Simons and J.E. Zeigler, 'Phenomenal Religion in the Thirteenth Century and its Image: Elizabeth of Spalbeek and the Passion Cult' in Sheils, *Women and the Church*, p.118

readers. Similarly, Philip's description of Elizabeth's ecstatic reactions to the receiving of the host would have encouraged devotion to the Eucharist at a time when the real presence was being actively challenged.

Less obvious, however, is the devotional use of Thomas de Cantimpré's life of Christina *Mirabilis*, or 'þe meruelous' as the translator has rendered the Latin cognomen. The unusual character of this life is apparent from the beginning, where Thomas describes Christina's death, resuscitation, and subsequent ascension to the rafters of the church. Later, according to Thomas, after the attending priest has coaxed Christina down from the rafters, she relates the vision of purgatory she experienced while dead, in which she is commissioned to return to the world of the living and suffer on behalf of the souls imprisoned in purgatory, while miraculously escaping physical harm herself.

Christina then flees into the wilderness where she lives up among the boughs of trees and is fed from the miraculous issue of her own breasts. She subsequently begins fulfilling the commission she received while dead by enduring a number of self-imposed inflictions: She casts herself into ovens and boiling cauldrons, wades in icy rivers, hangs herself from gallows, antagonises vicious dogs, and runs through briars and thorn bushes, all without suffering permanent physical harm. Additionally, she endures the humiliation of being captured and bound by her siblings who understandably considered her demon-possessed.

Her self-mortifying behaviours later abate slightly after the religious of her town gathered to pray that the miracles displayed through Christina be tempered, yet she thereafter continues to experience a number of revelations and precognitions. She is granted the supernatural understanding of Latin and holy writ, the discernment of hidden intentions, and the prescience of various calamities. And curiously, Christina is also said to possess

supernatural knowledge concerning what items of clothing God intended her to have, items which Christina took forcibly if the owner refused to relinquish them. Christina's final days are spent praying and mourning human lechery. However, her second death also proves to be temporary: At the supplication of one of the nuns attending her death, Christina briefly returns to life and blesses those in attendance before finally and permanently expiring.

Whereas Elizabeth of Spalbeek's *vita* can be satisfactorily explained as a dramatic embodiment of Christ's passion, Christina's is more puzzling. As Barbara Newman has argued, the interpretation of Christina's life as an illustration, an exemplum, of vicarious suffering does not 'fully account for the strangeness of Christina's actions or the widespread and persistent consensus that she was mad'.<sup>23</sup> Newman suggests, rather, that what exists in this *vita* is 'an otherwise motley collection of *mirabilia*' fitted into a 'coherent *exemplum*' by 'Thomas' recasting legendary material concerning Christina into 'the conventional literary form of a visit to purgatory and paradise'.<sup>24</sup> Christina's sufferings recall not so much the suffering of Christ in this case, but instead anticipate the future sufferings of the impenitent soul, and thus encourage penance in expectation of coming judgement, as Thomas Cantimpré explains:

Take heed þerfore, þou reder, how mykel wee be bounden, þat see Cristyn have suffryd so many turmentys not for hir-selfe but for hir nei3hbores, and wee dreed to do penauns for oure-selfe and for oure synnes. Certeynly, þat daye schalle come, and shal not tarye, þat wee wolde fulfayne assaye to doo moor þanne þees, if spase of penauns were gifen to hem þat aske, and if þey myghte turne agayne to do þe tymes þat þey sette not by before . . . Wakþ þerfore, for

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<sup>23</sup> Newman, 'Devout Women', p.51-52

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.54

3ee knowiþ neiþere þe oure ne þe daye whan 3oure lorde shalle come. And what ellis cryed Cristyn in alle hir lyfe but do penauns, and men to be redy ilkan oure? Þat taughte she wiþ many woordes, wiþ weymentynges, wiþ weepynges, and moor wiþ ensaumpil of lyfe þanne wee have witen bi writyngge or tellynge.

(134)

This is a different moral to that of Elizabeth's *vita*, but both demonstrate the ability of hagiographers to draw creative conclusions from what otherwise appear to be confused or even disturbing narratives. Such conclusions have the effect of shaping these narratives into impetuses for increased devotion and penitence.

There remains, however, the dangerous potential that these women's lives may be adopted instead as model for imitation, as may have been the case with Margery Kempe and Marie of Oignies. The life of Marie of Oignies, here described by James of Vitry, has received more critical attention than Douce 114's other *vitae*, due primarily to references to Marie in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the numerous parallels with Margery's life. Marie's vow of chastity, ecstatic weeping, and distinctive white garments are only a few of the similarities that suggest the influence of Marie, or the Beguine movement she inspired, on Margery's devotional peculiarities. Marie's spirituality was more conventional than Elizabeth's and less fantastic than Christina's but was nevertheless odd enough to provoke her hagiographer's frequent caveats. Her ascetic practice of wearing a sharp cord bound tightly around her, for example, leads James to offer the injunction not to follow in kind: 'lat þe discrete reder take hede', James warns, 'þat privilege of a fewe makiþ not a comun lawe' (136).

According to James, Marie's parents, hoping to temper her precocious childhood devotion, married her at the age of fourteen. Marie's husband, however, was later

inspired through her prayers to live chastely with his wife that she might better serve God. Marie's subsequent devotion took the form of ecstatic weeping and abstemious fasting, as well as often disturbing feats of asceticism. On one occasion, when she was forced by illness to partake of meat and wine, her resultant guilt led to a visionary episode in which she beheld a burning seraph and began to cut away portions of her own flesh, which afterwards she shamefacedly buried to avoid detection. Her more frequent visionary experiences, however, were less dramatic: Marie, loathing the loss of her time to sleep, frequently spent her nights engaged in prayer, during which she recurrently heard the songs of angels. On other occasions, she experienced similarly conventional visions of devils and angels, saints, and suffering souls.

Her physical feats, on the other hand, are even more extraordinary: When Marie was told, for example, of the arrival of visitors come from afar to see her, the sorrow of diverting herself from her normal devotions induced her to vomit up great quantities of blood. On yet another occasion, Marie had to be restrained from cutting off the soles of her own feet after having had to pass through a sinful town. Such severity eventually took its toll. Only after Marie's death at thirty-six, when her body was being prepared for burial, was the full extent of her asceticism made clear. Her self-inflicted wounds were discovered and the rigors of her excessive fasting made plain: The bones of her back are said to have been visible through her stomach as through a linen cloth.

It is, however, an unfair representation of James of Vitry's narrative to single out only these more remarkable feats. James' depiction of Marie is by no means restricted to her acts of outward asceticism and visionary ecstasies. He instead complements the first book of his account, which he describes as containing 'þoos thinges þat pertene to þe outwarde man', with a second book describing 'more inwarde and more sotil þinges', which James further divides according to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, describing

how each was especially present in Marie's behaviour. Unlike the previous two *vitae*, which at the end read like *exempla* with clearly stated moral conclusions, Marie's is woven into a discourse on virtue generally, but in both cases, the final emphasis, which ultimately shapes the narratives' interpretation, is on moral rather than physical imitation.

This is not necessarily true of Stephen of Siena's brief letter concerning Catherine of Siena, a document of a noticeably more learned and conservative character than the previous *vitae*, but one that does not attempt the kind of moral conclusion found in the others, arguably because the letter does not follow the structure of a more formal *vita*. Stephen, one-time prior of the Grand Chartreuse, composed the letter to a Venetian friar, Thomas Anthony of Siena, in response to doubts regarding the veracity of Catherine's miracles and, consequently, the propriety of celebrating her feast day. The letter was thus not prepared for devotional purposes, as were the preceding texts. Stephen's descriptions of Catherine's odder practices do nevertheless bear a telling resemblance to the others. During Catherine's ecstatic ravishings, she became physically stiff and insensible, so much so that one doubter's attempts at pricking her feet with a needle failed to wake her. Moreover, she was seen at times to levitate physically during her ecstatic experiences, a feat Stephen claims to have personally witnessed. She was also seen to observe unusual eating habits, refusing meat, wine, and eggs, and subsisting primarily on mouldy cheese, the juice of grapes, and the heads and tails of eels. And despite such meagre provisions, she made a practice of inducing vomiting after meals, so violently, in fact, that she was seen to cough forth blood. Since such incidents were recounted by Stephen primarily to refute accusations made against Catherine that her miracles and fasting were feigned, they are not integrated by Stephen into a broader devotional and moral context. Yet, perhaps because all the previous *vitae* contained clear moralising conclusions, this letter would likely have been read in the same way by those

encountering the English collection present in Douce 114, even without the conclusion being explicitly stated, forming with the others a more-or-less seamless discourse on women's devotion and moral behaviour.

In any case, there is much in these *vitae* that would lend itself to a reader of quieter devotion than that actually depicted. What principally interests me, then, and what I intend to investigate, is the transformation of such aberrant and unusual devotional behaviour as depicted in the *vitae* of Douce 114 into the quiet literary devotion typical of the bulk of laypeople who read these works, particularly in the context of the English reception of these works. The main intent, therefore, of my study is to locate these texts within the cultural and literary context in which they were translated, copied, and read in fifteenth-century England. In doing so, I hope not only to provide a better understanding of how these *vitae* may have been read, but to suggest possibilities for further interpretation and research with regard to the larger body of works by and regarding Continental women saints that were then circulating in England.

Among these, the two who received perhaps the widest circulation, through various translations, redactions, and excerpts of the texts concerning them, were Mechtild of Hackeborne and Bridget of Sweden, both of whom share important similarities with the women described in Douce 114. The first of the two, German mystic Mechtild of Hackeborn (1241-99), was a visionary of the Cistercian convent at Helfta in Saxony. The Helfta convent was a centre for mystical pursuits, claiming also two other important women mystics who, together with Mechtild of Hackeborn, formed a community of visionary and literary activity. Mechtild of Magdeburg (1217-82) was born to an aristocratic family but chose instead to live a religious life, first as a Beguine and later as a Dominican tertiary, before finally retiring to the convent at Helfta in 1285. She initially recorded her own mystical experiences in Low German under the direction of

Dominican theologian Henry of Halle, but dictated the last of her books to the nuns of Helfta. Her completed work, translated by Henry into Latin as *Lux divinitatis fluens in corda veritatis*, circulated throughout Southern Germany and Switzerland, and may have exerted some influence on the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Gertrude the Great (d.1301), another of the Helfta mystics, entered the convent at five years of age, where she learned to read and write Latin with unusual skill. Gertrude produced an account of her own mystical experiences in her *Legatus divinae pietatis*, as well as a treatise on the spiritual life.<sup>25</sup>

However, the work that would become best known in England was Gertrude's account of Mechtild of Hackeborn's visions, the *Liber spiritualis gratiae*, which circulated Europe in both a longer seven-book version and a shorter five-book version, as well as numerous shorter excerpts. The shorter five-book version was translated into English as 'The Booke of Gostlye Grace' in the fourteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The complete text of Mechtild's 'Booke' is extant in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, one of which belonged to Richard III and his wife, Anne of Warwick.<sup>27</sup> The writings of Mechtild also circulated in a number of extracts, including two independent versions of 'words 'owre lorde God seyde to Seynte Mawde'.<sup>28</sup> Mechtild's writings also proved useful for those producing more substantial compilations. An anonymous fifteenth-century Carthusian of Sheen Priory drew upon the *Liber specialis gratie*, as well as Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, for his *Speculum devotorum*, a series of meditations on the life of Christ produced for a

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<sup>25</sup> My account of the Helfta mystics is based on p.167-72 of Valerie M. Lagorio's 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics: An Introduction' in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984), p.161-93.

<sup>26</sup> Alexandra Barratt, ed., *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 49-60.

<sup>27</sup> Bodleian Library 2103 (Bodley 220), ff 1a-101a; BL Egerton 2006, ff 1a-212a. Edited by T.A. Halligan, *The Book of Ghostly Grace* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1979). See *Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, vol 9 pt 23 item 65.

<sup>28</sup> BL Lansdowne 379, ff 52b-53a; BL Sloane 982, ff 60b, 133b; Camb Univ Libr Dd.14.26, ff 45a-46a; BL Harley 4012, ff 77b-78b; Coughton Court (Throckmorton), f 5a-b. See *Manual, ibid.* and P.S. Joliffe, *A Checklist of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), I.31.



religious woman.<sup>29</sup> Material from Mechtild also appears in the fifteenth-century compilation *Disce mori*, an extensive compendium assembled for a 'Dame Alice' by an anonymous priest, probably of Syon abbey.<sup>30</sup> The popularity of Mechtild's book is further attested by its appearance among books mentioned in bequests, such as the 'Maulde book' mentioned in the 1438 testament of Alienora de Roos.<sup>31</sup> A 'boke of Saint Matilde' is found also among bequests made in the 1495 testament of Cecily Neville, duchess of York.<sup>32</sup>

But more popular, by far, were those writings associated with the mystic Bridget of Sweden (1303-73), whose cult were spread not only by the patronage of aristocratic laywomen, but also by the Brigittine monastery of Syon, founded by Henry V in 1415. A woman of diverse accomplishments, Bridget of Sweden was not only wife to the governor of Nericia from the age of fourteen and the mother of eight children, but an active campaigner for moral reform among the Swedish court. However, it was not until Bridget was widowed in 1344 that she entered into her greatest role as mystic and visionary. Among Bridget's revelations was the command to found a new religious order, the Order of St Saviour, consisting of double-monasteries each comprising sixty nuns and twenty-five priests and lay brethren. Bridget travelled to Rome in 1349 to seek papal approval for her new order, and remained to advocate the return of the papacy to Rome from Avignon, where it had been since 1304. Bridget, however, was largely unsuccessful in achieving the latter of her two missions: besides the brief return of Urban V to Rome from 1367 to 1370, Bridget did not see the return of the papacy in her lifetime. She did, however, successfully establish the Brigittine order, the Order of St

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<sup>29</sup> Camb Univ Libr Gg.1.6, ff 6b-144a. See *Manual*, vol 9 pt 23 item 63.

<sup>30</sup> Bodleian 1123 (Laud misc 99), ff 1b-257b; Jesus Coll Oxford 39, ff 1a-645a; Hopton Hall (Chandos-Pole-Gell) (Fragment). See *Manual*, vol 7 pt 20 item 11

<sup>31</sup> James Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York Vol. II* (Surtees Society 30, 1855), p.65

<sup>32</sup> John Gough Nicholas and John Bruce, eds., *Wills from Doctor's Commons* (Westminster: Camden Society, 1863), p.3

Saviour, thereby becoming the first woman to found a religious order. In 1373, Bridget died, but she left behind a reputation for holiness that resulted in her canonisation shortly after in 1391. She moreover left behind a substantial collection of her *Revelations*, which were integrated into numerous vernacular English treatises besides being translated and copied in their entirety.<sup>33</sup>

Bridget's canonisation was advocated largely by the man who served from 1369 as her confessor and the collaborator of her revelations, Bishop of Jaen, Alphonse of Pecha. But also important in the support of Bridget's canonisation was the Norwich monk, Adam Easton, who left for Rome in 1369, and served as proctor at the Curia for the English Benedictines from 1373. In 1385, he became embroiled in controversies surrounding the Great Schism and suffered imprisonment and torture, having been one of those suspected of conspiracy against Urban VI. After Easton was reinstated in 1389, he wrote vigorously in defence of St Bridget's order, claiming that he had been aided by her intercession during the tortures he suffered while imprisoned. Bridget's rule had by that time come under suspicion largely because of Bridget's claim that it was dictated to her by Christ and moreover because of the mere fact of her being the first woman to establish a monastic rule. In a 1390 treatise comprising some forty-one articles, Easton vigorously wrote in defence of Bridget's rule, specifically refuting claims of the rule's heterodoxy and flawed style.<sup>34</sup>

But whether Easton played a direct role in the importation of Bridget's writing into England is uncertain; in any case, Easton's enthusiasm for St Bridget foreshadowed the later English cult that would arise in the fifteenth century. Even before Bridget's death

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<sup>33</sup> Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics', p.181-84, and Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p. 84-85

<sup>34</sup> W.A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p.175-181

in 1373, Latin copies of her *vita* were circulating in England, and with the 1406 marriage of Philippa, daughter of Henry IV, to Eric XIII of Sweden, the knowledge of Sweden's famed visionary became widespread. However, it was Henry V's founding of the Brigittine house of Syon at Twickenham (later moved to Isleworth) that proved most important, for the foundation would become a prolific centre for the promotion of Bridget's cult and also, through numerous bequests of books, a major repository for copies of her *vita* and her written revelations.<sup>35</sup>

Bridget's chief work, the *Liber celestis*, comprising some seven-hundred revelations, was translated in its entirety into two independent English versions, each extant in a single fifteenth-century manuscript.<sup>36</sup> However, Bridget's *Revelations* received much wider transmission through numerous excerpts circulated both on their own as well as integrated into longer compilations.<sup>37</sup> Works that incorporated material from the

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<sup>35</sup> W.P. Cumming, ed., *The Revelations of St Birgitta* (London: EETS, 1929), p.xxix-xxx. See also, Vincent Gillespie, *Syon Abbey Library Catalogue*. Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues Vol 9 (London: The British Library, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> BL Cotton Julius F.ii, ff 19a-254b (An extract has been edited in D. Pezzini, 'The Twelf Poyntes: versioni di un trattato brigidino nel Quattrocento inglese', *Aevum* 62 (1988): 286-301); BL Cotton Claudius B.i., ff 1a-245a (Edited by R. Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden* (Oxford: EETS, 1987)). Both these MSS also include the *Life of St Bridget*. See *Manual*, vol 9 pt 23 item 76

<sup>37</sup> *Material from Revelations I.i-iii, II.xxiv-xxvi, and I.xi, xxx and II.xv*: Bodleian 11907 (Rawlinson C.41), ff 2a-43b (Edited in D. Pezzini, 'Wordis of Christ to hys spowse: una compilazione di testi brigidini in un manoscritto del secolo xv' *Aevum* 66 (1992):345-360); Princeton Univ Libr Deposit 1397 (Edited in Cummings, *The Revelations of St Birgitta*)

*Material from 'Sermo Angelicus' and Revelations I.xxxi, I.vii, I.xx, II.xvi*: Camb Univ Libr Hh.1.11, ff 128a-132b (Also in the MS are the *Revelations of Elizabeth of Hungary* and William Flete's *Remedies Against Temptation*. The MS is described in E. Colledge and N Chadwick, 'Remedies Against Temptations: The English Version of William Flete', *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 5 (1968): 201-240; Lambeth Palace 432, ff 76a-83a (Discussed in V.M. O'Mara, 'An Unknown ME Translation of a Brigittine Work', *Notes and Queries* 36 (1989): 162-64)

*Revelations VI.lxv*: Bodleian 2322 (Bodley 423), ff 150a-156b; Camb Univ Libr Ii.6.40, ff 58b-74a; Magdalene Camb, Pepys 2125, ff 51a-58a; BL Arundel 197, ff 38b-46b

*Revelations II.xvi*: BL Addit 37790, ff 236b (Edited in Pezzini, 'The Twelf Poyntes'); BL Arundel 197, ff 46b-47b (Edited in Pezzini, 'The Twelf Poyntes')

*Other Versions of Revelations II.xvi*: Taunton Mus Horae, ff 1a-2a (Edited in Pezzini, 'The Twelf Poyntes'); Bodleian 1999 (Bodley 131), f 131a-b (Edited in Pezzini, 'The Twelf Poyntes')

*Revelations VII.v*: Harley 6615, ff 104a-109b (Edited in D. Pezzini, 'How Resoun Schal be Kepe of þe Soule: Una Traduzione del Quattrocento Inglese Dalle Rivelazioni di S Brigida di Svezia', *Aevum* 60 (1986): 253-281); Arundel 286, ff 15b-19b (Edited in Pezzini, 'How Resoun')

*Revelations VI.lxiv*: Royal 17.C.xviii, f 132b

*Revelations X.iv*: Camb Univ Addit 3042, ff 109a-111a

See *Manual*, vol 9 pt 23 item 76

Revelations included *Contemplations of the Love and Dread of God*, William Flete's *De remediis, Pore Caitiff*, and the *Speculum devotorum*.<sup>38</sup> Several chapters from Bridget's revelations appear also in Symon Wynter's *Life of Jerome*, prepared for Margaret, Duchess of Clarence, aunt of Margaret Beaufort.<sup>39</sup> And Bridget's declaration supporting the English claim to the French throne proved particularly popular in the context of the Hundred Years War and was paraphrased by Thomas Hoccleve in his *Regimen of Princes*.<sup>40</sup> That Bridget's works experienced something of a vogue in late-medieval England seems beyond dispute.

Bridget's popularity is further attested by the composition of English works about her, as well as by works falsely ascribed to her authorship. Of the former are extant three different English prose *vitae*, as well as the record of another *vita* being penned and translated into English for the nuns and monks at Syon Monastery by Thomas Gascoigne, chancellor of Oxford from 1434 to 1439.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, there remains the *Salutacio sancte Brigitte* composed by the poet John Audelay sometime shortly after 1426. Audelay was a chantry priest for Richard Lestrange, Lord of Knockin, and at the time he composed his poetry, both blind and deaf and resident as a chaplain at Haghmond Abbey.<sup>42</sup> His poems are an eclectic mixture, largely on conventional devotional subjects, such as the Passion or the Annunciation, but also extending to contemporary politics, such as his *De rege nostro Henrico Sexto*, or topics of local interest, such as his poem on St

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<sup>38</sup> *Contemplations of the Love and Dread of God* is extant in some thirty MSS; Flete's *De Remediis* in fourteen MSS, in three different versions; and *Pore Caitiff* in thirty complete copies and numerous excerpts.

<sup>39</sup> See *Manual*, vol 2 pt 5 item 140

<sup>40</sup> Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics', p.183

<sup>41</sup> Cumming, *The Revelations*, p.xxx. Claudius B.I, ff 2-4 and Julius F.II, f 254, both contain short prose lives. A third version was printed by Pynson in 1516. None of these appears to be the life attributed to Gascoigne.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Bennett, 'John Audley: Some New Evidence on his Life and Work', *Chaucer Review* 16 (1982): 344-355

Winifred, whose relics were enshrined in nearby Shrewsbury.<sup>43</sup> His poem on St Bridget is framed as a salutation, and recounts the major events of her life as well as the founding of Syon by Henry V. The salutation describes Bridget's convincing her husband that they should become Franciscan tertiaries; her renunciation of courtly luxuries for asceticism; her visions of the Virgin Mother and of Christ; and her journey to Rome to receive papal confirmation for her order. The work ends with a description of Syon's founding, along with a request for prayer for the soul of Henry V, words of praise for the Brigittines at Syon, and a prayer for the prosperity of the young king, Henry VI. Audelay's description of the Brigittines —there was, according to Audelay, 'neuer a holeer order'—is obvious hyperbole, but his comments at least illustrate the high esteem in which Bridget's order was held by their contemporaries.

A prayer, falsely ascribed to Bridget, that frequently appeared in *horae* of the late-middle ages further attests to the strength of the saint's reputation and the authority lent to a text by its association with her name. The prayer, which Eamon Duffy has described as 'certainly the most distinctive, and probably the most popular, of all prayers in late medieval England', was associated early with St Bridget but was more likely of English provenance, originating probably with either the prolific devotional circle associated with the Yorkshire hermitages or the work of the English Brigittines.<sup>44</sup> The Latin text of the *Fifteen Oes* appeared both in continental and Latin *horae* of the fifteenth century, but was particularly popular in England, where numerous English translations and adaptations also appeared, both in verse and prose.<sup>45</sup> Lydgate produced his own versification, and

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<sup>43</sup> Ella Keats Whiting, ed., *The Poems of John Audelay* (London: EETS, 1931), p.xiv-xx

<sup>44</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.249.

<sup>45</sup> Two different English versions are in print, a prose translation from Natl Libr Australia MS Clifford 2, edited by Charity Meier-Ewert, 'A Middle English Version of the *Fifteen Oes*', *Modern Philology* 68 (1971): 355-36, and a verse rendition from Bodleian MS Addit. B.66, edited by John C. Hirsh, 'A Middle English Metrical Version of *The Fifteen Oes* from Bodleian Library MS ADD.B.66', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 98-114. Three MSS containing a verse version beginning similarly to Clifford 2 are listed in Carleton Brown, *A Register of Middle English Religious and*

Caxton printed yet another translation in 1491.<sup>46</sup> The poem itself, a eloquent meditation on the Passion of Christ with roots both in Patristic theology and the mystical tradition exemplified by Richard Rolle,<sup>47</sup> was likely composed about the same time as Bridget was writing her *Revelations*, but the style of the *Oes* is unlike Bridget's, and the ascription is therefore unlikely.<sup>48</sup> The association of the *Oes* with Bridget in fact originates in an apocryphal legend of a recluse who asked to know the exact number of wounds Christ endured during his Passion. Christ revealed to her that if she recited fifteen *Pater nosters* and fifteen *Ave marias* a day for the course of a year, she would fulfil the number of his wounds. He further revealed to her the prayer of the *Fifteen Oes*, promising whomever recited the prayer daily for the course of a year the deliverance of fifteen kinsmen from purgatory and the maintenance of fifteen living kin in a state of grace. The petitioner would moreover receive the visitation of Christ and his Mother at the hour of their death, as well as a number of other extraordinary pardons and blessings.<sup>49</sup> The anonymous recluse's interest in the wounds of Christ is likely what led to the misidentification of this poem with the Swedish saint, who was a seminal influence in promoting the cult of devotion to the five wounds of Christ. Yet, regardless of its authenticity, the poem proved immensely popular and added momentum to Bridget's cult more generally. In fact, the later English reformers had to speak forcibly against the *Fifteen Oes*, a fact which itself illustrates the popularity the saint had obtained. Because of

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*Didactic Verse* (Oxford: Bibliographical Society, 1916-1920), no.1519; Bodleian 6777 (MS Ashmole 189), f 110a; Bodleian 14526, (MS Rawlinson poet.32) f. 169b; and Phillips 8820, Art. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Caxton's is listed as no. 20195 in *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640* (London, 1926). Lydgate's version is listed in Brown, *Religious and Didactic Verse*, no.1464, and is extant in five MSS: Bodleian 798 (MS Laud Misc. 683), f. 1a; Bodleian 11914 (MS Rawl. C. 48), f. 111b; Jesus Camb 56 (Q.G.8), f. 65b; BL Harley 2255, f. 104a; BL Addit. 29729, f. 11a, f. 287a (beg imp).

<sup>47</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.250

<sup>48</sup> Meier-Ewert, 'A Middle English Version', p.356

<sup>49</sup> The story is recounted in Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.254-55. Duffy also notes English translations in the following MSS: Bodleian Tanner MS 407, ff 42a-43b; and Lyell MS 30, ff 42a-43b. He cites also a Latin version in Camb Univ Libr MS li.vi.43, ff 100a-103b. The poem beginning 'A holy womman that hight seynt Bryde / couetid to knowe the woundys wyde' (Brown no.34) recounts the same legend and is found in BL Sloane 3548, f 118b. It is printed in Cumming, *The Revelations*, p.xxxviii.

the indulgences associated with the *Fifteen Oes*, the poem begin to disappear abruptly from primers after the principles of the Reformation began to take hold in England. One 1534 primer, for example, explicitly condemns 'soche prayers as be saynte Brigittes and other lyke, whiche great promyses and perdons haue falsely aduanced'.<sup>50</sup> Such criticisms demonstrate that Bridget's popularity in England endured well into the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century.

The transmission of Bridget's works in English seem to have been particularly aided by the interest of pious laywomen in acquiring English translations of the *Revelations*, and of the writings of continental women mystics more generally. Cecily of York, whose ownership of a copy of Mechtild's work has already been mentioned, demonstrates well the influence that could result from the devotion of an influential aristocrat. The account of her daily routine demonstrates the importance the writings of continental women mystics could play in the devotion of the aristocratic pious laywoman:

She useth to arise at seven of the clock, and hath ready her chaplain to say with her matins of the day and matins of Our Lady; and when she is full ready, she hath a low Mass in her chamber, and after Mass she taketh somewhat to recreate nature; and so goeth to the chapel, hearing the divine service and two low Masses; from thence to dinner, during the time whereof she hath a reading of holy matter, either Hilton of Active and Contemplative Life, Bonaventure *De infancia salvatoris*, the Golden Legend, St Maud [Mechtild of Hackeborn], St Katherine of Siena, or the Revelations of St Brigit.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cited in Meier-Ewert, 'A Middle English Version', p.355. *A Prymer in Englyshe, with Certeyn Prayers & Godly Meditations* (W. Marshall, 1534), no. 15986 in the *Short-Title Catalogue*.

<sup>51</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, p.254

Furthermore, that one of Cecily's granddaughters was named after Bridget, and that another entered the Brigittine convent at Syon, demonstrates that her devotion to the saint extended beyond the merely literary.<sup>52</sup> Cecily was moreover not the only aristocratic woman interested in Bridget's writings. The '*libro compilato in lingua Anglica de Revelationibus Sanctae Brigidae*', for example, mentioned in the 1468 inventory of Elizabeth, widow of William Sywardby, is only one instance of Bridget's books being found among women's possessions and bequests in the fifteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

Of those women described in Douce 114, only the popularity of Catherine of Siena approaches that of Bridget. Catherine of Siena was in many ways considered Bridget's successor. A Dominican tertiary from the age of sixteen, Catherine epitomised the late-medieval ideal of the mixed life, combining well both contemplative mysticism and active involvement in moral reform. Unlike Bridget of Sweden, Catherine refused to marry, devoting herself to contemplation and the care of the poor and infirm. Her sanctity, together with her reforming zeal, attracted to her a substantial following of disciples, both lay and religious. Among them were her confessor, Raymond of Capua, who composed Catherine's *vita*, and the English Augustinian friar, William Flete, whose *De remediis contra temptationes* appeared in at least three Middle English translations in numerous manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> Together with her *brigata*, as her followers came to be known, Catherine fervently advocated the return of the papacy to Rome and the reformation of the Dominican order until she died in 1380.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Doctors' Commons*, p.3

<sup>53</sup> James Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York Vol. III* (Surtees Society 45, 1864), p.161

<sup>54</sup> *Manual*, vol 9 pt 23 item 75

<sup>55</sup> Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics', p.184-191, and Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p.95-96



Despite being only thirty-three at the time of her death, Catherine nevertheless produced an impressive body of writings, including her prolific correspondence and numerous prayers. Catherine's *Il Dialogo*, supposedly dictated to her followers during an ecstatic trance, was translated into Middle English as *The Orcherd of Syon* for the nuns at Syon Abbey in the fifteenth century. The complete Middle English text is extant in three manuscripts, and excerpts from the *Dialogo* have survived in several others.<sup>56</sup> One particular extract from the work, entitled *Clenesse of Sowle*, survives in three separate translations in numerous manuscripts.<sup>57</sup> And while there is no extant Middle English life of Catherine apart from Stephen of Siena's brief letter, there is some evidence of a more extensive version circulating in fifteenth-century England: Catherine's *vita* is mentioned, for example, among Cecily Neville's daily readings, and a copy of the life was subsequently bequeathed to her daughter Bridget.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, the other women of Douce 114 do not appear to have achieved the following among the English afforded to Catherine. Besides the *vitae* preserved in Douce 114, only a handful of explicit references to the others appear in Middle English texts. The fifteenth-century translation of Arnold of Liège's *Alphabetum narrationum* recounts a number of James of Vitry's anecdotes, including several about Marie of Oignies and one

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<sup>56</sup> *Complete Text*: St John's Camb C.25 (James 75), ff. 3b-173b; BL Harley 3432, ff. 2a-192a; Pierpont Morgan Libr 162, ff. 1a-182a; New York Publ Libr, Spencer, Eng. 1519.

*Extracts*: Univ Coll Oxford 14, ff. 57b-59a; John Rylands Libr Latin 395, f. 90b.

See *Manual*, vol 9 pt 23 item 74. *The Orcherd of Syon* has been edited by P. Hodgson and G. Liegey in *The Orcherd of Syon* (London: EETS, 1966).

<sup>57</sup> *Version A*: BL Sloane 982, f. 60b

*Version B*: Bodl 12143 (Rawl C.285), f. 61a-b (Edited in C. Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church and his Followers* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895)); Camb Univ Ff.5.40, f. 117b

*Version C*: Bodl 1999 (Bodley 131), f. 131a; Trinity Camb 336 (B.14.53), ff. 140b-141a; BL Arundel 197, f. 10a; BL Royal 18.A.x, f. 10a-b; Chetham's Hospital Manchester acc.6690, f. 130a-b

*The Passage Also Appears as Part of a Longer Abstract in*: BL Harley 2409, ff. 71a-72b

See *Manual* vol 7 pt 20 item 139.

<sup>58</sup> *Doctors' Commons*, p.23-24

concerning Christina *Mirabilis*.<sup>59</sup> A brief mention of Marie of Oignies' ministry to the sick also appears in *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and other English translations and adaptations of the *Somme le roi*.<sup>60</sup>

The extent, however, to which devout readers in fifteenth-century England were familiar with the women whose *vitae* are translated in Douce 114 is nonetheless difficult to determine from these few extant texts. Apart from the reference to Marie of Oignies in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, there is little obvious evidence to indicate whether and how these *vitae* were being read. In the following study, I will investigate what evidence does exist concerning the textual transmission and translation of these *vitae*, examine some ways in which these texts could have been read and received, and offer some suggestions regarding the Carthusians' motives in making these texts available in the vernacular to lay readers.

In chapter two, I will be describing the context in which the manuscript was physically produced. As the sole extant manuscript for which there is reasonable evidence to assume its production at the priory of Beauvale, Douce 114 comprises an important piece of evidence concerning book production at a religious foundation about which little is known. The role of the Carthusians in the production of vernacular religious texts is well documented, but the extent to which Beauvale itself contributed to the order's work in England has so far been unclear. I will first, in order to contextualise the

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<sup>59</sup> The English *Alphabetum narrationum* is preserved in only one MS of northern provenance, BL Addit 25719, ff. 1a-184a (Edited in Mary MacLeod Banks, *An Alphabet of Tales*, (London: EETS, 1904-1905)). The tales concerning Marie of Oignies are nos. 21, 145, 248, 427, 424, 1088, 1089, 1160, and 1278. The tale concerning Christina *Mirabilis* is no. 1106. See also *Manual* vol 9 pt 24 item 216.

<sup>60</sup> The complete *Book of Vice and Virtues* is extant in three MSS, BL Addit 17013, ff. 2a-85b; BL Addit 22283, ff. 92a-115b; Henry E Huntington HM 147, ff. 1a-113b. The *Book* has been edited by W. Nelson Francis, *The Book of Vice and Virtues* (London: EETS, 1942); the reference to Marie of Oignies appears on p.207. A number of other English versions and excerpts of the *Somme le roi* are extant, as well as several works derived from the *Somme le roi*, and the textual relations are complex. The reference to Marie is absent from the earliest English version, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, but appears in an unedited verse translation, the *Speculum vitae* of William of Nassyngton. See *Manual* vol 7 pt 20 items 4-9

production of the Douce 114 manuscript, survey the available evidence for the general role of the Carthusian order in the production of vernacular religious texts and examine how the texts translated in Douce 114 relate more broadly to the works that are known to have been circulated by the English Carthusians. Then I will investigate, largely through an examination of book ownership evidenced by the testaments of Beauvale's lay patrons, the network of individuals who were likely the beneficiaries of the priory's book production. And finally, I will be looking at the evidence internal to the manuscript to investigate issues regarding the physical translation of the texts from their Latin exemplars.

In chapter three, I provide a detailed survey of the *vitae* themselves. After a brief look at the origin of the women's movement in the context of which these women rose to notoriety, I will look at the individual *vitae* and examine how the original authors' careful composition created texts that could at once inspire their readers to virtue but dissuade them from following those more unusual aspects of the women's devotional practice whose imitation was less desirable.

In chapter four, I will be looking at one possible motive for the Beauvale Carthusians' decision to make these unusual texts available in the vernacular to lay readers, namely the potential of the Douce 114 *vitae* to reinforce orthodox belief in the face of the Lollard heresy. Although the original Latin *vitae* long predated the outbreak of Lollardy in England, there is much in the texts that reinforces beliefs denied by the Lollards and which may have encouraged their translation into vernacular English in the fifteenth century. The Lollard controversy struck at the heart of late medieval spirituality by attacking the belief in Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist. The miracles and visions related to the sacrament of the altar, found throughout the four *vitae*, would have lent support to the traditional view, and the *vitae* would have thus provided a suitable

companion to the discourse on the Eucharist found in Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, an English translation of which comprises the second half of Douce 114. Marie of Oignies, whose life provides the most abundant examples of miracles related to the Eucharist, boasted among her other preternatural talents the ability to distinguish consecrated hosts from unconsecrated. She also is said to have experienced a number of visions related to the consecration: Once, during the elevation, Marie saw not the host but the Christ child himself suspended between the priest's hands and a host of angels descending about the altar. Her devotion to the sacrament furthermore extended to her asking of the priest permission to gaze upon the chalice after the conclusion of the Mass.

Such events related to the Eucharist may have been viewed as helping reinforce traditional views of the Eucharist in the light of the Lollard heresy, which was doubtless viewed as a greater danger than religious enthusiasm. When Margery Kempe, for example, was questioned by the Abbot of Leicester and his canons, the chief objective seems to have been ascertaining first her view of the sacrament.<sup>61</sup> Although her eccentricities were nevertheless viewed with a suspicious eye, confirming the orthodoxy of her opinion of the Eucharist took priority. Similarly, the support lent the orthodox view by the Eucharistic miracles described in Douce 114 may have outweighed any reservations about the extreme forms of devotion related in the *vitae*.

In my final chapter, I will be discussing the *vitae* in the broader context of late-medieval writings that are likewise concerned with idiosyncratic and singular religious practices, in particular, those that deal with the theme of how to distinguish counterfeit religious experiences from the genuine. Rosalynn Voaden has elsewhere suggested that the literature of *discretio spirituum*, texts which articulate guidelines by which true visions could be distinguished from false, established a particular discourse, 'a system of knowledge

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<sup>61</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe* Book I Chapter 48, p114 of Meech's edition

which develops its own vocabulary, modes of expression, and means of assessment'.<sup>62</sup> The relative success of a visionary, according to Voaden, depended on her ability to successfully navigate and adopt that discourse. I hope to elaborate upon Voaden's suggestion by examining whether the *vitae* of Douce 114 conformed to the definitions of acceptable devotional practices established by contemporary writers. In order to describe specifically the instruction that may have been available to those who read the vernacular *vitae* contained in Douce 114, I will focus on those works that were also available in the vernacular, both those treatises originally composed in English, such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*. Through looking at these texts, I hope to locate the Douce 114 *vitae* within the various spiritual trends that comprised the landscape of late-medieval English devotion.

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<sup>62</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, 'Women's Words, Men's Language: *Discretio Spirituum* as Discourse in the Writing of Medieval Women' in Roger Ellis and Rene Tixier, eds., *The Medieval Translator*, Vol. 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), p. 64-83

### Literary Production at Beauvale Priory

When the Carthusian house at Beauvale, Nottinghamshire, was founded in 1301, there existed only two other houses of the Carthusian order in the whole of England, and both of these were located in the southwest, in the county of Somerset. Beauvale was the first house of the order to be erected in some sixty-five years, and the only house then north of the Thames, but it was certainly not the last in either regard. From 1377 to 1430, a further six English Charterhouses would be constructed: two along the Thames, one at London and the other at Sheen in Surrey; three more forming with Beauvale a vague line through the English Midlands from Coventry, to Axholme in Lincolnshire, and then northwards across the Humber to Kingston-upon-Hull; and yet another further still north, at Mount Grace in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

For a number of reasons, these twenty-three years yielded a flurry of activity among the English Carthusians. At a time when monastic foundations were being increasingly criticised for declining zeal and increasing worldliness, the Carthusian order seems to have accelerated its activities, not only with regard to the founding of new houses, but also with regard to the production of devotional materials suitable for their own spiritual needs as well as the needs of an increasing body of literate laypeople interested in acquiring quality devotional texts. This copying of books was an integral part of

Carthusian life: *The Customs of Guigo I*, which regulated every detail of Carthusian life, had reasoned that through the production of books, the monks could preach with their hands what their vows prohibited from their mouths. This sometimes meant the translation and compilation of vernacular materials, as was the case with Nicholas Love, prior of Mount Grace in the early-fifteenth century, whose well-received compilation, *The Mirrour of the Life of Christ*, figured prominently in the efforts of the English church to counter with its own vernacular instruction the heterodox writings of the Lollard heresy. But more often, the making of books comprised merely the copying and correction of texts, and the Carthusians appear to have maintained a considerable network of book circulation among the order's nine English foundations for precisely this purpose.<sup>63</sup>

There is unfortunately no complete extant catalogue of an English Carthusian library, despite an ordinance from the Carthusian General Chapter that each priory maintain a record of its book holdings to be read out annually to the brethren.<sup>64</sup> What is known of the English Carthusian libraries has been gathered largely from the extant manuscripts attributed to Carthusian ownership, together with the handful of receipts for books lent and borrowed among the Charterhouses. These records, though hardly a substitute for a more comprehensive catalogue, nevertheless reveal something of the Carthusians' literary interests, which differed appreciably from those of the larger orders. These differences reflect in part the degree to which the aims of the Carthusians differed from other monastics: Unlike the Benedictines, for example, the Carthusians spent much of their day in private cells, singing only matins and the nocturnal portion of the office in common,

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<sup>63</sup> Although greatly expanded by more recent work, Thompson's *The Carthusian Order* remains the most comprehensive single work on the history of the order in England. Particularly important is chapter nine, 'English Carthusian Libraries', which prints the extant catalogues and book receipts referred to throughout this chapter. Other important studies related to Carthusian book production are Michael G. Sargent's 'Transmission by the English Carthusians' and Roger Lovatt's 'The Library of John Blacman and Contemporary Carthusian Spirituality', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992): 195-230.

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusians Order*, p.313

devoting the remainder of their time to private contemplation. As a primarily contemplative order, the Carthusians preferred writings that helped them better understand the mystical life that they endeavoured to enter, rather than those works that elucidated for them the finer points of theology. Their libraries indeed reflect this crucial difference, and suggest in general that the Carthusians preferred the practical to the theoretical, the affective to the merely intellectual.

Moreover, they appear to have been more attentive to the trends of vernacular spirituality, both in England and on the Continent, and in many cases may be reckoned as trendsetters in their own right. The requirement of the English Charterhouses to send representatives annually to attend the General Chapter at the Grand Chartreuse—however infrequent such delegations may have been in practice—nevertheless gave opportunity for the English Carthusians to import, translate, and circulate devotional texts then current on the Continent, such as the works of Henry Suso and Jan van Ruysbroeck, which were translated and reworked into several English vernacular compilations. Similarly, volumes of the *vitae* and revelations of continental women mystics, such as Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, Elizabeth of Schönau, and Mechtild of Hackeborne, appear alongside the volumes of insular mystics, Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton. This is not to say that the Carthusians showed no interest in the kinds of traditional authors found most often among the libraries of the larger orders—they too had their Augustines and their Anselms—but as a primarily contemplative order, their interests lay largely elsewhere, in those works that explored the phenomena of religious experience, the mystic states that they sought to explore.

That these distinctive interests were held among the English Carthusians is indeed fortunate for scholars of late-medieval vernacular English religious writings: The Carthusians were in some cases single-handedly responsible for the preservation of key



Middle-English texts. The sole surviving copy of *The Book of Margery Kempe* as well as the unique MS of the shorter version of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* are both of Carthusian provenance, the former from Mount Grace and the latter from Sheen. Moreover, much of Walter Hilton's work was preserved largely due to Carthusian efforts, as well as not a few MSS of Richard Rolle's writings. Several Middle-English translations of continental Latin and vernacular texts were also preserved solely by the efforts of the Carthusian monks, including of course the subject of this study, the Beguine *vitae* translated in Douce 114.

The proliferation of the English Charterhouses in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century and their increased production of vernacular religious texts correspond also to an increased interest in the order from both other monastics and devout laypeople. Gifts to the English Charterhouses became increasingly popular among testamental bequests by aristocrats and the newly literate middle-class, and the Charterhouses likewise proved a popular option for not a few secular clerks who wanted to retire from public life or for monks of other houses who desired the stricter discipline of the Carthusian order. The Carthusians were fortunate also to be the recipients of royal favour and patronage: The house at Sheen, one of the most prolific producers of texts among the nine English foundations, was the personal project of Henry V, who established the house on the north side of his own manor and made the Charterhouse the frequent recipient of his patronage.

However, despite the seeming popularity of the English Carthusians and the fecundity of their manuscript production, there remain nonetheless large, unresolved gaps in our knowledge of the Carthusian role in the production and transmission of literary manuscripts. This is particularly true of those more rural houses which, like Beauvale, were at some distance from major ecclesiastical centres. As I explain here shortly, much

of our information about the Carthusians' role in the transmission of late-medieval devotional manuscripts comes from two of the Charterhouses in particular, the houses at London and Sheen. Information about the other houses, particularly in terms of extant manuscripts, is sadly lacking, and any claims about the role of these other foundations in devotional manuscript production must be carefully weighed against the strength of the available evidence.

### Beauvale Charterhouse and Douce 114

The evidence for the Charterhouse at Beauvale is particularly scant: The inscription in Bodleian Library MS Douce 114, 'Iste liber est domus Belle Vallis ordinis Cartusiensis in Comitatu Notyngham', identifies the manuscript as what may be the only extant vernacular volume produced by this priory of fourteen monks located in the rural outskirts of Nottingham.<sup>65</sup> Yet despite this lack of hard evidence for extensive manuscript production at Beauvale, rather sizeable claims have been made for its literary output. Jonathan Hughes, for example, has cited Beauvale together with the Yorkshire charterhouse, Mount Grace, as 'especially important centres for studying and transcribing religious literature', and has mentioned Beauvale specifically as a likely 'centre for the study of Rolle's works'.<sup>66</sup> There is, however, little direct evidence that Beauvale was either of the two things Hughes claims: While there exist for the charterhouses at Sheen

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<sup>65</sup> The manuscript is parchment, 22cm x 16cm, with 15cm x 10cm writing-space and 32 lines per page. It comprises 150 leaves. Capitals are in blue, decorated with red flourishing, and paraps are in alternating blue and red. Signatures appear in black or blue and are partially trimmed; catchwords are black in red scrolls. Chapter titles and Latin text are inked in red. There appear to be two hands. The first hand includes all of the *vitae sanctae* and the beginning of the *Horologium sapientiae*, but breaks off abruptly in the middle of the eighth line on the first folio of the text, f.90r. A second hand takes over, but the first hand resumes on f.109. The binding is nineteenth-century with flyleaves of marbled paper. Indications of ownership include the inscriptions *Iste liber est domus Belle Vallis ordinis Cartusiensis in comitatu Notyngham* and 'John Wells 1776'. A individual by the name of John Wells is recorded as Sheriff of Nottingham from 1772-73, but whether this is the same individual is by uncertain.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988), p.109, 217.

and London substantial libraries of extant manuscripts, the evidence for Beauvale's library is a mere two volumes, and one of the two, the *Incendium amoris* cited by Hughes as evidence of Beauvale's interest in Rolle, appears to have been transcribed elsewhere and later donated to the priory.<sup>67</sup>

Douce 114 then is especially important, besides what it may reflect of contemporary devotional tastes, as our only indication, apart from external evidence, of what was being copied and produced among the Carthusian monks at Beauvale. It may also prove an important contribution to reconstructing a picture of the broader literary activities of religious houses in Nottinghamshire in the later middle ages, a subject on which much work remains to be done. Describing the monastic production of vernacular devotional literature in and around Nottinghamshire is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the scarcity of extant manuscripts that can be confidently traced to Nottinghamshire religious houses.

Catalogues of monastic libraries, while useful for describing a house's holdings of Latin texts, are less useful for determining the production and possession of vernacular manuscripts. In lists where vernacular English texts might be expected to appear, they are often absent or only briefly referenced. It appears that book collections were still viewed by the religious with a prejudice toward the Latin, but this seems reasonable: the bulk of vernacular religious texts in the fifteenth century were translations or compilations of translated passages. A Latin text could always be translated to yield a vernacular copy, but a vernacular text could hardly yield its precise original. Thus the

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<sup>67</sup> The MS appears to have been donated to the priory by Carthusian Christopher Braystones, who died at Beauvale in 1475. Braystones was formerly chaplain to the Bishop of Hereford, Thomas Spofforth and a monk at St Mary's, York, where the MS was more likely transcribed. An indulgence granted by Spofforth to the reader of the book appears in the MS, as well as in a copy of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* also associated with Braystones (MS Lincoln Cathedral 228). See Michael Sargent, 'Transmission by the English Carthusians', p.232-33.

Latin was doubly useful, both for the Latin-literate religious and—through translation—the vernacular devotional reader. The omission then of vernacular volumes is disappointing but unsurprising. Moreover, these lists of Latin volumes are not to be entirely disregarded in the study of vernacular devotional texts, as they in some cases provide valuable information about the transmission of the Latin texts upon which the vernacular translations are based. In the specific case of Douce 114, this is especially true, as will be later demonstrated.

*Ex libris* inscriptions are perhaps the most useful identifiers, but again, for Nottinghamshire they are woefully scarce. Among the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts Ker attributes to Nottinghamshire monasteries by *ex libris*, only two contain anything substantial in the vernacular: one a collection of Latin sermons with English passages, and the other, the texts contained in Douce 114. *Ex libris* statements are further limited in that they indicate only the possession of a MS by a religious house, not necessarily the production. On the other hand, tracing manuscripts to Nottinghamshire by language yields a number of devotional vernacular manuscripts possibly associated with the county, but this too is problematic. Little prohibited scribes from settling far from the region of their home dialect, and thus language is inconclusive. One cannot thus assume the association of a MS with a particular region based solely on dialect, nor can one determine through the language alone whether a manuscript was produced by the members of a religious house or by secular or private scribes. In the specific case of Douce 114, the language is not in fact that of Nottinghamshire. The two scribes who contributed to the production of the manuscript wrote in the dialects of Rutland and Oxfordshire.<sup>68</sup> This, however, is not inconsistent with a Nottinghamshire origin, as Beauvale would have been the Carthusian house closest to Rutland and not unreasonably

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<sup>68</sup> Angus McIntosh, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), Vol.3

distant from Oxfordshire, but the language alone is not wholly conclusive. Scribal hands present another possible evidence. However, with so few manuscripts whose provenance can be confidently determined from the start, what can be learned by identifying common hands is thereby limited.

Any assessment, then, of the production of vernacular manuscripts by Nottinghamshire religious houses will necessarily be based upon a certain amount of speculation. Nevertheless, I suggest that it is still possible to piece together a working model that accounts for what evidence remains and to suggest possibilities that, although not entirely conclusive, are nevertheless useful for beginning to think about the production and transmission of vernacular religious texts in this little-studied region. It is not the purpose of the present work to describe the transmission of devotional texts in Nottinghamshire generally, as much as to examine what may be gleaned specifically from Douce 114 and from the work of the Beauvale Carthusians. I do hope, however, that this small piece may someday prove useful in building a broader picture of monastic manuscript production in Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands more generally.

All these caveats do, of course, bring into question whether Douce 114 itself can be confidently said to have been produced at Beauvale, rather than donated to the library from elsewhere. The *ex libris* identifies the manuscript as part of Beauvale's collection, but there is no identifiable scribe to whom we can credit the work. The translation is not in Nottinghamshire dialect, which suggests that if it was produced at Beauvale, the two scribes responsible for the manuscript were not originally from the region. Nevertheless, I believe it probable that the work was not only transcribed but in fact translated at Beauvale priory, and it is the intent of the present chapter to gather the evidence in support of such a scenario and to suggest some possible implications.

## The Charterhouses at Sheen and London

First, however, it may prove useful to examine what is known of the better-documented foundations at Sheen and London to form a basis for comparison, and to suggest some possible reasons for the scarcity of manuscripts recorded for the house at Beauvale.

The Sheen Charterhouse's singular relationship with the Bridgettine sisters at Syon resulted in a prolific output of vernacular texts, and devotional manuscripts seemed to have passed freely between the two houses.<sup>69</sup> Sheen was fortunate in this regard to have had the two ingredients essential to the production of devotional vernacular writings: skilled scribes and scholars, and a readership eager for English-language devotional material. The well-documented spiritual friendship formed by Sheen Carthusian James Grenhalgh and Syon nun Joanna Sewell demonstrates well how such literary exchanges could have functioned.<sup>70</sup> However, the case of Sheen is an unusual one: first, because the charterhouse was twinned, perhaps not in an official sense, but certainly in popular thought, with the double monastery Syon not long after its foundation;<sup>71</sup> and second, because the popularity of the house as a royal foundation and a subject of royal patronage attracted brethren of education unusual among the more provincial charterhouses.

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<sup>69</sup> Michael G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians', p.228

<sup>70</sup> Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.86-89. See also, Michael Sargent, *James Grenhalgh as Textual Critic, Analecta Cartusiana* no 85 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1984).

<sup>71</sup> Vincent Gillespie points out the common error—popularised by Shakespeare in his *Henry V*—that Sheen and Syon were founded by Henry V as twin foundations; they did not, however, come to face each other across the Thames until well after Henry's death. Nonetheless, they were commonly associated with one another by contemporary chroniclers. See 'Dial M for Mystic: Mystical Texts in the Library of Syon Abbey and the Spirituality of the Syon Brethren' in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition, England, Ireland and Wales: Exeter Symposium VI* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), p.241-68. Margery Kempe makes a similar error when she mistakenly refers to Syon as 'Schene' in *Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, Ch.10.

The library at Sheen is represented by about two dozen extant volumes, similar in number only to the London Charterhouse and far exceeding the number of extant manuscripts associated with the other charterhouses.<sup>72</sup> The number of volumes, though doubtless representing only a fraction of those originally held by Sheen, is nonetheless testament to Sheen's prolific literary output. But perhaps also, the compliance of Sheen's prior at the dissolution may have meant fewer volumes were destroyed or lost from their library. The other charterhouses, such as Beauvale, which suffered the martyrdom of her prior before surrendering, may not have had the fortune to preserve their libraries to the same degree. In any case, when dealing with so few volumes, the preservation of any given number may simply be the result of historical accident, and it is somewhat difficult to build any sort of comparison based merely on numbers of extant manuscripts.

For the London Charterhouse are recorded a similar number of extant volumes,<sup>73</sup> but medieval receipts further describing the contents of the house's library suggest its more substantial size. The receipts, printed in Thompson's *English Carthusians*, describe books taken from London to another charterhouse, presumably to serve as exemplars for further copying. The existence of these receipts suggests that the London Charterhouse may have served as the central library for the English Carthusians, from which visiting monks might take such volumes as their own house desired for copying and further study. A fourteenth-century receipt lists over two-dozen volumes taken from London to the charterhouse at Hull, including a number of vernacular volumes: *The Chastysynge of Goddes Chyldrun*, *The Pylgrymoche of Somle*, *Speculum vitae Christi*, two English pieces by Richard Rolle, and a meditation of Augustine in English, among others. Another, much

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<sup>72</sup> N.R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964) and the *Supplement to the Second Edition* (1987) identify twenty manuscripts and thirteen printed volumes associated with Sheen.

<sup>73</sup> For the London Charterhouse, Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, lists twenty-four manuscripts and a five printed volumes.

later receipt, dated 1500, lists an additional fourteen Latin volumes taken from London to the charterhouse at Coventry. A third, dated 1519, of items taken to Mount Grace, lists over a dozen volumes, mostly liturgical. And still another, written just before the Act of Succession, lists another nine, including a volume of St Bridget's work and another of the revelations of Mechtild von Hackeborn, both of which were increasingly appearing in vernacular compilations.

Both of these houses, then, had distinct reasons for maintaining extensive book-holdings in their libraries: the Sheen Charterhouse, because it became a major source of devotional texts for the well-regarded Bridgettine house at Syon, and the London Charterhouse, because its library served as the centre for the whole of the Carthusian order in England. Once we move outside of the Thames valley, however, the numbers of extant manuscripts attributable to Carthusian ownership drops considerably. Witham, the oldest of the English houses, is their nearest rival for extant library holdings with sixteen manuscripts, though only half of these are from the period with which I am here concerned, and of these, none is in the vernacular. The situation is even more dire elsewhere: Mount Grace, a mere nine manuscripts; Hinton, six; Coventry, four. From Axholme, we have only the dubious ascription of a copy of the Carthusian *Statuta*, and of Kingston's library nothing remains at all but a few printed works produced on the Continent.

As one might expect, the numbers of extant volumes to some extent reflects the relative financial endowment of each house: The *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the 1535 valuation of English monasteries prepared in anticipation of their suppression, reveals that the income of the London Charterhouse dwarfed that of the other English Charterhouses at over £2,300 p.a. Sheen came the closest at £962. Among the other seven, only Mount Grace had an income exceeding £300. The others' income amounted to about a tenth of



London's, and it is perhaps this comparative poverty that is reflected in the paucity of extant manuscripts. Certainly, the materials needed for book production were not cheap, and these smaller houses may have had to be rather conservative about what books they chose to copy for themselves or others.

### **The Library of John Blacman**

Before I move on to a discussion of the evidence for manuscript production specifically at Beauvale, it may first be useful to look at one last, major body of evidence concerning the transmission of devotional texts among the English charterhouses, a body of evidence I hope to prove will shed light directly on the transmission of the texts in Douce 114.

John Blacman, biographer of Henry VI and a Carthusian *redittus*—one who takes up the religious life but retains his personal property and the right to leave the order with good reason—at Witham from about 1465, owned what has been called 'the largest and most comprehensive collection of devotional and mystical writings known to have been owned by any individual in late medieval England'.<sup>74</sup> The evidence for Blacman's extensive library is found partly among a handful of extant volumes in which ownership is attributed to Blacman, but mainly through the extensive and detailed extant list describing the books Blacman donated to Witham Priory from his personal collection. This list is especially helpful, as Roger Lovatt points out, because it provides complete contents rather than simple titles for a number of the volumes listed, and also because it

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<sup>74</sup> Roger Lovatt, 'The Library of John Blacman'. In addition to the aforementioned, Lovatt has written extensively on John Blacman elsewhere, including 'John Blacman: Biographer of Henry VI', in R.H.C. Davies and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, eds., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 415-444; and 'A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited' in Tony Pollard, ed. *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), p. 172-190.

is not in fact a single list but two: the first describing books acquired early in his career, while a fellow at Oxford and later at Eton, and the second describing books acquired by Blacman toward the end of his life during his association with Witham Priory. The volumes mentioned in this second list were probably acquired largely through Blacman's Carthusian contacts and thus represent the kinds of volumes that were then circulating between the English charterhouses.

The similarity of the contents of this second list with the contents of Douce 114 is striking. Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, the fifth and final work bound in Douce 114, appears in the list, as do the *Revelaciones* of continental women mystics Elizabeth of Schönau, Mechtild of Hackeborn, and Catherine of Siena.<sup>75</sup> Most significant however for the present study is the appearance of what appears in Blacman's list as *Fragmenta Collecta*, and remains extant as St John's College, Oxford, MS 182. The title, *Fragmenta Collecta*, is derived from the opening words of James of Vitry's life of Marie of Oignies, the first work appearing in a volume that also contains the Latin *vitae* of Christina *Mirabilis* and Elizabeth of Spalbeek among a number of other short works.

The specific implications for the occurrence of this work in Blacman's list will be considered in greater detail later as part of a possible model for the circulation of these *vitae* among the English Carthusians. But minimally, Blacman's compilation suggests that interest in these *vitae* was not limited to Beauvale alone, however uncommon these texts may have nonetheless been.

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<sup>75</sup> Blacman's copy of the *Horologium*, in his own hand and bearing the mark of Witham's ownership, is still extant, Lambeth Palace MS. 436.

## Beauvale and Local Patronage

Unfortunately, for Beauvale, we have neither extensive booklists such as those left by John Blacman testifying to his gifts to Witham Priory nor the numbers of extant volumes associated with London and Sheen. Information about Beauvale's role in the transmission of devotional texts, both among the English Charterhouses and to the lay public, is particularly scant. And so far, little research has been done detailing the role of the Beauvale Carthusians in the production of vernacular devotional texts in the English Midlands.

One possible source of evidence for manuscript production lies in examining the correspondences between testamentary bequests made to particular houses and the ownership of devotional volumes by the testators. Of course, this sort of speculation is not without its flaws. The concurrence in the same testament of financial bequests to particular religious house and bequests of devotional books to individuals does not necessarily imply, of course, that the books originated at the named house. The books may have come into the hands of a testator from numerous sources, including lay or secular scribes. Indeed, a manuscript mentioned in a testament may well have been received by the testator as a previous gift or bequest and may not represent a new production at all. This situation is complicated further by the fact that rarely is a single house the sole beneficiary of testamentary bequests. Where Beauvale occurs in testaments, for example, it often does so among other houses, both Carthusian and otherwise. What does emerge from these various testamentary records, however, is an identifiable network of religious houses and private owners.

Moreover, I think it possible to build specifically a case for two details in particular concerning Beauvale's financial supporters: first, that Beauvale was well regarded among

a certain network of important families both local and elsewhere, and secondly, that these families included among their numbers several avid readers of devotional works. These two facts may perhaps form the basis of some interesting speculations, even if those speculations may not be solidly proved.

From its foundation, Beauvale was the recipient of significant financial support, although it was never what might be called an affluent house. Among Beauvale's earliest patrons was Sir William Aldeburgh, who granted the monks in 1362 a tract of land, called 'le haye of Willey', within Sherwood Forest and adjoining the grounds of the priory, for £10 annual rent paid to the Exchequer. William, for 'the special affection and true devotion in God which he had for the very holy religion of the foresaid prior and convent', and because he felt the monks could not well continue in God's service with their meagre endowment, granted the land as pasture for the priory's animals. In exchange, he expected for the welfare of his soul, that of his wife and relations, and of his 'most noble lord, Lord Edward Balliol, the illustrious king of Scotland', a share in all masses, hours, prayers, and vigils conducted by the monks of the priory. At Edward Balliol's request, the £10 rent due the Exchequer was also later remitted.<sup>76</sup>

William did not, however, leave any provision for Beauvale in his own testament. Bequests of xx s. were made for each of the four orders of Friars in York, but none for Beauvale, perhaps because the land he had previously granted was sufficient for the Priory's needs during his own lifetime.<sup>77</sup> It was left to William's heir, daughter Elizabeth Stapleton, to ensure that her father's affection for Beauvale would be honoured and his support maintained. Thus, after William's decease in 1391, Elizabeth Stapleton, wife of Sir Brian Stapleton II, became the principal benefactress of the priory, establishing with

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<sup>76</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusian Order*, p.159-160. The grant is recorded in the Beauvale Chartulary, British Library Add. MS. 6060, compiled by Richard Wartre, prior in 1486.

<sup>77</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia I*, p.152

her sister Sybyl de Ryther a chantry at Beauvale and two monks to pray especially for her father and mother, and to say *Placebo* and *Dirige* and a mass of requiem on the anniversary of their deaths. To thus include outsiders in their martyrology and to keep the anniversary of their deaths was against Carthusian custom, but Beauvale's prior, on account of the 'great and notable' sums which Elizabeth and Sybyl paid towards the relief of the charterhouse, was compelled to break with tradition.<sup>78</sup>

Few additional details are known about the chantry at Beauvale. A chantry founded at the Carthusian house at Hull through the benefaction of Hull burgess John Colthorpe and his wife Alice comprised simply an existing cell dedicated to the purpose and a monk chaplain to celebrate divine service specially for them. The monk, in this case, appears to have been one already among their number.<sup>79</sup> The Stapletons' benefaction, on the other hand, appears to have been sufficient for Beauvale to support an additional two monks beyond the twelve for whom the priory was founded, an addition that would presumably involve the expansion of the monastery to accommodate the new residents. However, apart from a certain John Aston, mentioned in the calendar of patent rolls for 1398 as 'warden of the chantry at Beauvale', there is no further record of the monks appointed to the Beauvale chantry.<sup>80</sup>

Elizabeth's daughter-in-law, Agnes, wife of Sir Brian Stapleton III and herself the heir of Sir John Godard, also contributed later to the support of Beauvale and the English Charterhouses, bequeathing to each house xxiiij s. iiiij d. in her 1448 testament. Agnes, who probably took up a solitary or religious life after the death of her husband in 1417, seems also to have been an avid collector of devotional books, a number of which are

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<sup>78</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusian Order*, p.160, 161; Patent Roll, 17 Richard II, pt.1, m.9

<sup>79</sup> K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p.132-133

<sup>80</sup> Patent Rolls May 8, 1398.

mentioned among her bequests to various Yorkshire nunneries. To the abbesses of Denny, she gave a 'librum de Frensshe'; the nuns at Sinningthwaite, a Bonaventure; the nuns at Arthington, *The Prick of Conscience*; the nuns at Esholt, *The Chastising of God's Children*; and to the nuns at Nun Monkton, *Vice and Virtues*. Moreover, she left among her bequests to various family members, a book of prayers, a psalter, another 'librum de Frensshe', a primer, and a French *Vitae sanctorum*.<sup>81</sup>

Others associated with the Aldeburghs and Stapletons also appear to have collected devotional and religious volumes. Robert de Roos, friend of Bryan Stapleton, Elizabeth's husband, and executor for William de Aldeburgh, Elizabeth's father, bequeathed a number of volumes in his 1392 testament to friends and relatives: to his son Thomas, a psalter; his wife Johanna, a French *Veteribus Historus*; to Elizabeth Stapleton, a French *Sydrak*; and to his daughter Alianore, a bible, a French psalter, and a French *Legendam Sanctorum*.<sup>82</sup> His daughter Alianore, who appears to have taken up the religious life, unmarried at her death and buried at the Convent of the BVM near the Carthusian house at Mount Grace, also acquired a number of devotional volumes named in her 1438 testament. To her nephew Robert she gave a Psalter; to her nephew's wife, *Librum primum magistri Walteri*, a volume of Walter Hilton's work; to her great nephew Robert, *Librum de passione domini*; to his wife, *Librum de credo in deum*; to Isabel de Roos, *Primarium de sancto spiritu*; and to Johanna Courtenay, her 'Maulde book', likely the *Revelaciones* of Mechtild of Hackeborn. Additionally, Alianore bequeathed sums of money to each house of the English Carthusians.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> J.W. Clay, ed., *North Country Wills: Being abstracts of wills relating to the counties of York, Nottingham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmorland at Somerset House and Lambeth Palace* (Durham: Surtees Society, 1908-1912), p.48f

<sup>82</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia I*, p.178

<sup>83</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia II*, p.65

The Willoughbys of Wollaton seem, like the Aldeburghs, to have fostered a family tradition of bequests made to the charterhouse at Beauvale, beginning with Sir Hugh Willoughby's 1443 testament. Hugh's special affection for the Carthusian order is demonstrated not only in his gift of xx s. each to the charterhouses at London, Witham, and Beauvale, but also in his instruction that each receive from him a letter of fraternity that he might be included among the monk's prayers and masses. Hugh's eldest son, Richard Willoughby, left no heirs, and the bulk of his estate was divided among bequests to religious foundations by his 1469 testament. To St Leonard's, the parish church at Wollaton, was left a notable collection of mass and devotional books, carefully listed in Richard's testament with second folios. Among the volumes bequeathed are a Gradual, a Processional, a Hymnal, a history entitled *Crede michi*, another called *A Py*, a Missal newly-made for Richard himself, and a portable Breviary formerly belonging to a certain William Husse. He moreover made a number of financial bequests to religious foundations at Lenton, Leicester, Newstead, and Broadholme, and to the Carmelite and Franciscan friars of Nottingham. His largest bequest, however, at double the next largest bequest, given to Lenton Abbey, was the xl s. granted to Beauvale priory.<sup>84</sup>

It seems, given the recurrence of Beauvale in such testamentary bequests, that the Charterhouse was not isolated from the surrounding community, and indeed, seems to have fostered a relationship with the testators that they viewed as significant enough to merit being remembered in their bequests. The extent of this relationship, of course, remains largely unknown. The priory was never, compared to London and Sheen, or even to Mount Grace in Yorkshire, a particularly wealthy one, but it is clear that on at least one occasion, the chantry established for William Aldeburgh, the priory made concessions with regard to its traditions in order to maintain itself financially. One can

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<sup>84</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia III*, p.170ff.

similarly imagine the priory producing small, relatively inexpensive volumes to be given—in hope their generosity might someday be remembered—to lay patrons by the priory's converses, who served as mediators between the monks and the outside world in matters of secular business. But of this, there is unfortunately no direct evidence.

### **The Transmission of the Beguine Saints' *Vitae***

It is clear, then, that although there has been identified little direct evidence of book production specifically at Beauvale, the Charterhouse was nevertheless at the center of a considerable network of literate and devout lay patrons, several of whom evinced interest in material similar to that contained in Douce 114. Furthermore, there is some evidence that Beauvale may have been actively involved in transmitting the Latin version of these saints' *vitae* to other monastic foundations, and the translation of these texts, if indeed done at Beauvale, may represent another facet of Beauvale's attempts to promote these saints' cults.

Although Douce 114 is the only extant copy of these particular *vitae* in English translation, the Latin versions are extant in several insular manuscripts.<sup>85</sup> Oxford, St John's College, MS 182, mentioned already in connection with John Blacman, is particularly important because of its clear association with the English Carthusians. It is evident from the extant booklists that Blacman, already in possession of a substantial library of devotional and theological works from his time at Oxford, was able to use his association with Witham to further increase the extent of his book holdings. Moreover, it

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<sup>85</sup> Patricia Deery Kurtz lists the following: four MSS containing the *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 138 (14C); Cambridge, Jesus College MS 24 (14C); Durham Cathedral Library MS B.IV.39 (15C fragment); and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 694 (13 or 14C fragment); one containing the *vita* of Marie of Oignies: London, BL MS Harley 4725 (13 or 14C); and two containing the *vitae* of Marie, Elizabeth, and Christina *Mirabilis*: Oxford, St John's College MS 182 (c.1463-1474) and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 240 (14C, only excerpts from Marie's).



appears that the St John's MS was acquired during the later period when Blacman was among the Witham Carthusians.

Of course, it is not certain that Witham's copy was in turn acquired from Beauvale, but there certainly were opportunities for such an exchange. The prior of Beauvale, as provincial visitor for the Carthusian order in England, was often required to travel to other Charterhouses, and these visits may have facilitated the kind of book circulation elsewhere evidenced by extant loan receipts. In 1427, for example, the prior of Beauvale was ordered to Witham to attend the installation of a new prior.<sup>86</sup> This is long before Blacman came to Witham around 1465, but perhaps it was during this or a similar visit that a copy of the Latin text of the Beguine *vitae* may have been acquired by Witham through Beauvale's prior and then later copied and added to Blacman's collection after he became associated with the order.

The suggestion that Beauvale was engaged in actively transmitting these *vitae* is furthermore strengthened by their appearing in the collection of another monastery also associated with Beauvale. This fifteenth-century catalogue, bound in British Library MS Sloane 3548 and printed by Ramona Bressie, was not originally identified with any particular religious house.<sup>87</sup> In her inspection, Bressie found 'no inscription or other external evidence of [the MS's] history', but suggested, based on the titles themselves, a house of the Benedictine order in or near Northampton. However, a later examination of the MS under ultraviolet light revealed a faded inscription identifying the MS as belonging to the Augustinian canons at Thurgarton, Notts.<sup>88</sup> Thurgarton, although important not only as one of the larger Nottinghamshire religious houses but also

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<sup>86</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusian Order*, p.303

<sup>87</sup> Bressie, 'MS Sloane 3548, Folio 158'

<sup>88</sup> T. Webber and A.G. Watson, eds. *Libraries of the Augustinian Canons* (London : British Library, 1998).

because of its associations with mystic and author Walter Hilton, has nevertheless few extant volumes that can be confidently ascribed to its ownership. Ker's *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* lists only two: one, an astronomical text, and the other, some Latin verses on the seven deadly sins.<sup>89</sup> The identification of the Sloane list with the Augustinians at Thurgarton thus provides important information about the house's library, and it reveals among other things a particular interest in the *revelaciones* of continental women mystics, among them the revelations of Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. But more important to the present study is an entry describing texts identical to those in Douce 114: The entry describes a *vita trium virginum scilicet Elizabeth Cristine et Marie Oegenes*, followed by a *littere quedam de vita sancta Katerine de Senys*, and several other works. The order of the works in this volume is identical to that of the English translation in Douce 114, and this may suggest an even closer relation between the lost Thurgarton text and Douce 114, than between John Blacman's volume and the same.

The presence of the Latin *vitae* in the collection at Thurgarton together with the similar English translation at Beauvale implies that there may have been some exchange of books between the two Nottinghamshire houses. Moreover, Beauvale has been indirectly linked with Thurgarton through the author and mystic, Walter Hilton, whose *De utilitate ordinis Carthusienses* praised the devotion of the Carthusian order. The tract was occasioned by the interest of a certain Adam Horsley, former baron of the Exchequer, in entering a religious order. Horsley later entered the priory at Beauvale following Hilton's commendation of the order. Some actually appear to have incorrectly held the opinion that Hilton himself was a Carthusian, although there exists no evidence that he was ever formally associated with the order.<sup>90</sup> But perhaps Hilton's familiarity with the Carthusians at Beauvale was more than a mere casual interest, and the appearance of the

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<sup>89</sup> London, Royal College of Physicians, 358; Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.4

<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *The Carthusian Order*, p.164

aforementioned *vitae* reflects his or others' efforts to forge relations between the two houses.

This relationship between the Beauvale Carthusians and the Thurgarton Augustinians was not the only one the Charterhouse had with foundations outside its own order. Beauvale nurtured relationships with other religious orders in the Midlands: In 1422, for example, the Prior of Beauvale agreed with Brother John de Bedysdale, prior provincial of the Derbyshire Dominicans, that there should be an intercommunication of prayers and devotions between the Dominicans there and the Carthusians at Beauvale.<sup>91</sup> What books were shared, if any, is unknown, but the existence of such relationships may require some rethinking of the Carthusian's role in literary transmission, a study which so far has largely concentrated on transmission within the order itself.

For the present study, however, it is sufficient to note the fair probability that the volume listed in the Thurgarton catalogue was related to the Latin text used by Douce 114's translators. To explain this observation combined with the occurrence of the same texts in the library of John Blacman and the production at Beauvale of an English translation, I suggest the following as the most likely series of events in the texts' importation and subsequent transmission: The Latin text may first have been acquired on the Continent by the prior of Beauvale when he fulfilled his obligation to attend the general chapter. Beauvale may have then made some effort to promote the cults of the Beguine saints by distributing copies of the Latin *vitae* both to other local monasteries, such as Thurgarton, and to other Charterhouses, such as Witham, from whence Blacman later acquired his copy. The translation into English of the *vitae*, extant in Douce 114, may furthermore reflect Beauvale's effort to promote their cult among their devout lay patrons.

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<sup>91</sup> William Page, ed., *Victoria History of the County of Nottinghamshire*, vol 2 (Folkestone: University of London, 1970), p.140-41

## The Translation of the Douce 114 *Vitae*

In 'De Apologe of the compilour' that opens the Douce 114 *vitae*, the translator makes a brief statement explaining his method of translation, describing how a literal word-for-word rendering would be both difficult and undesirable:

As seint Jerom þe holy doctour seiþ in a bibil þat he made, hit is harde to turne a language into a noþer worde for worde, but oftentimes hit byhoueþ to leve and take diverse wordes þat are propur to on tunge and not to a noþer. Wherefore þis englysche þat folowþ heere is turnyd oute of latyn, to þe worschep of god and edificacyone of devoute soules þat are not leeryd in latyn tunge, and þerfore þe wryter, þat is but symple-letterd, neiþer can ne purposis to folowe þe wordes, but unneþis and wiþ harde þe sens, neiþer puttynge to nor doynge away any clauses þat schulde chaunge þe substaunce of þe story, but oþere-while levyng legeauns and auctorites of holy writte, þat wolde be ful dymme to undirstande, if þey were turnyd in to englyshe with-oute more declarynge of glose. (107)

The translator's expressed method, then, includes both the omission and addition of material, 'to leve and take diverse wordes', in order to preserve the sense of the original without sacrificing or altering the meaning. However, as Samuel Workman has argued, the translator's digressions from the style of his original are minimal, and this prologue may be more a convention than an accurate explanation of the translational method.<sup>92</sup>

Nonetheless, the translator's inclusion of this 'apologe', and the apprehension about translational method that this prologue suggests, may also imply a concern about the

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<sup>92</sup> Samuel K. Workman, *Fifteenth Century Translation as an Influence on English Prose* (New York: Octagon, 1972), p.74ff.

suitability of making Latin religious texts available in the vernacular, and specifically, the scriptural quotations which the original *vitae* contained. This is a particular issue of concern given the restrictions placed on vernacular translation by the fifteenth-century legislation meant to arrest the spread of the Lollard heresy, which was principally spread through vernacular texts. The possibility that the counteroffensive against Lollardy was a conscious influence on the decision to make these specific *vitae* available in the vernacular is taken up as the basis of a later chapter, but here, I wish to examine some of the more concrete and specific decisions made by the translator as a means of examining the language of Douce 114, and exploring what these decisions can tell us about the manuscript, the translator's methodology, and his perception of the vernacular itself as a medium for religious instruction and literary expression.

The allusion here in the prologue to Jerome's comments on the difficulties of translation serves most obviously as an explanation of the compiler's expressed means of translation, however poorly it may reflect his method in fact. But also, the fact of Jerome's translating the Scriptures into what was for him a vernacular tongue was well known and often iterated among the orthodox advocates of vernacular translation in those years before the debate was largely silenced by Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions*. Thus, Trevisa, in his 1387 *Dialogue Between the Lord and the Clerk*, invoked the example of Jerome in response to the assertion that 'the Latyn is bothe gode and fayre, therefore hit nedith not to have an Englysshe translacioun':

For if this resoun were ought worth, by syche maner arguyng me myght preve that the thre score and ten [translators of the Septuagint], and Aquila, Symachus, Theodocioun and Origenes were lewdeliche occupied whanne they translated holy writ out of Ebru into Grue, and also that Seynt Jerom was lewdeliche occupied whan he translated holy write out of Ebru into Latyn—for

the Ebru is bothe gode and fayre and iwrite by inspiracioun of the Holy Ghost.  
And alle these for her translaciouns bith highliche ypreysed of al Holy  
Chyrche.<sup>93</sup>

The invocation of Jerome's authority for the act of vernacular translation was still iterated after Arundel's legislation, although its tone becomes moderated; Jerome's comments on the difficulties of translation, the foreground for any implied justification of the translational act itself. The prologue of *The Mirror of Our Lady*, an English translation for the nuns at Syon of the Bridgettine Office said to have been dictated to St Bridget by way of divine revelation, echoes many of the anxieties voiced by the translator of the Douce 114 *vita*:

Yt is not lyght for every man to drawe eny longe thyng from Latyn into oure  
Englyshe tongue. For there ys many wordes in Latyn that we have no propre  
Englyssh accordyng to therto, and then suche wordes muste be turnyd as the  
sentence may beste be understandyd. And thefore, though I laboure to kepe  
bothe the wordes and the sentence in this boke as farre as oure language wyll  
well assente, yet some tyme I folowe the sentence and not the wordes as the  
mater asketh. There is also many wordes that have dyverse understandynges,  
and some tyme they ar taken in one wyse, some tyme in an other, and som tyme  
they may be taken in dyverse wyse in one reson or clause. Dyverse wordes also  
in dyverse scryptures ar set and understonde some tyme other wyse then  
auctoures of gramer tell or speke of.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al*, eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p.133

<sup>94</sup> Wogan-Browne, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p.260-261

The similarity to the principles of translation attributed to Jerome by the translator of the Douce 114 *vitae* are obvious, and the *Mirror* translator also appeals to Jerome's example in order to deflect criticism: 'I am not wiser than Seint Hierome,' he suggests, 'that in the drawyng of Holy Scripture from other langage in to Latyn sayth how he was compellyd at eche boke to answeere to the bakbytinge of them that depraved hys labour'.<sup>95</sup> But unlike Trevisa, the allusion is more timid, foregrounded as it is in an apology for the translator's method rather than a justification of the act of translation itself.

At the end of the Douce 114 *vitae*, the translator closes his work with another 'apologetik', requesting that allowances be made for any shortcomings of his translation and asking that readers not be 'ouer-capcyous ne curyous in ful many clauses and variauns of stile'. Here he reveals his anticipation that his primary audience will include both 'men and wymmen', as both readers and listeners of his text. Furthermore, the translator makes special appeal to 'lettird men and clerkes, if þey endeyne to see þes bokes', that they would 'be favorabil and benigne reders or herers' and 'forgif hym [any] defautes' that the translator may have made in producing his translation (195). The contrast he implies here between the two groups suggests that the unlettered were anticipated as his primary audience, and educated clergy only as secondary. Nonetheless, his appeal to educated readers to be forbearing toward his translation again reinforces the suggestion that the translator himself was aware of the dubious status of vernacular translation. He is careful in this regard to point out that his project was undertaken only in obedience to his prior: '[He] durst not haue presumed to take sicke a labour on hand', the translator's apology claims, 'but if his sovereyn hadde bidden hym, whome he myghte not ageyne-seye', thus deflecting any possible criticism of his translating the work into the vernacular (195-196).

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<sup>95</sup> Wogan-Browne, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p.261

The prologue's reference to 'legeauns and auctorites of holy writte, þat wolde be ful dymme to undirstande' similarly reflects the translator's perception of his intended readership as primarily comprising those without formal theological education. He moreover makes the recognition that the difference between Latin-educated readers and those able to read only in the vernacular was more than a simple barrier of language, and his translation must therefore take into account also the difference in learning that such a distinction implies. At several points, passages laden with scriptural or patristic references, where the citations themselves would be difficult to remove from the passage without greatly affecting the content, are omitted entirely, such as James of Vitry's prologue to the *vita* of Marie of Oignies. Elsewhere, individual scriptural quotations are frequently omitted, though the translator's practice in this regard is not entirely consistent.

In some cases, the translator appears to have simplified references that he may have thought confusing to a lay reader. The phrase *circa partes illas officium visitationis exercens*, for example, 'exercising the duty of visitation around those parts', is translated more explicitly with the time clause, 'what-tyme þat I visityd howses of myn ordre in þat cuntrey' (107). Elsewhere, the phrase *maxillas Leviathan* is simply rendered 'þe chekys of þe fende' (144), an explanatory gloss is elsewhere added defining a 'seraphyn' as 'a brennyng aungel' (140), and the names of prayers are named by the incipit more familiar to lay readers: *Orationem dominicam* as 'pater noster' (144) and *Virginis salutationem angelicam* as 'ave maria' (142). Such subtle divergences from his source again suggest the translator's attention to the needs of the lay target audience and to what he likely perceived as the limitations of their theological knowledge.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The editions of the Latin texts quoted here are 'Vita Elizabeth Sanctimonialis in Erkenrode', *Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicorum Bibliothecae Regiae* (Brussels, 1886), p.362-78; 'Vita S.



Other variations from a word-to-word rendering are less obviously related to the translator's concerns with his target audience and may reflect either a concern about the ability of English itself to successfully render his Latin original or elsewhere may indicate the translator's desire to create something of greater literary quality than a plain, literal translation.

One of the more frequent and regular methods employed in Douce 114 is the translation of a single Latin term with two English near-synonyms in a compound construction. This occurs frequently throughout the manuscript; only rarely is the opposite true, that is, collapsing two Latin words into one English term. This occurs frequently for adjectives—For *claustris*, for example, 'closed and stoken' (124); *miserabilis*, 'miserabil and wrecchyd' (127); *otiosum*, 'unoccupied or ydel' (145); *pomposae*, 'ful of pompe and pryde' (147); *fortior*, 'stronge and myghty' (149)—but also for nouns—For *angulo*, 'corners and hyrnes' (119); *miseris*, 'synners and wrecches' (126); *meritum*, 'meryte and mede' (145); *virtutem*, 'vertue and strengthe' (146); *loquacitatis*, 'eloquacite and iangelynge' (148); *membra*, 'lymes and membres' (149)—as well as other constructions—For *dolores tabescens*, 'waxen febil and feynte' (124); *domino gratiarum actiones reddidit*, 'panked god of his grete grace and goodnesse' (144); and *mira oris gratia*, 'wonder grace of cheer and speche' (126).

Some of the translator's expansions are necessary ones, reflecting real limitations of the English lexicon to render particular Latin words. This is certainly the case, for example, where the translator renders the Latin *parentibus* as '[of] fadir and moder', since the Latin loanword *parent* had only begun to appear in English and was probably not yet widespread. In most cases, however, these alterations do not seem to contribute substantially to the meaning of the text, but seem instead to be an attempt to effect the

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Christinae Mirabilis Virg.', *Acta Sanctorum*, July v.5 (1868), p.650-660; 'De B. Maria Oigniacensi', *Acta Sanctorum*, June v.4 (1707), p.630-666; 'Epistola Domni Stephani de Gestis et Virtutibus S. Catharinae', *Acta Sanctorum*, April v.3 (1881), p. 961-967

so-called doublet style, popular among both translated materials and original compositions of the period<sup>97</sup>. Other such elaborations on the Latin text can be attributed to the compiler's use of stock idiomatic phrases, for example, his translation of *tota rigida* as 'alle-starke as a stok' (115), *creatori* as 'hym þat alle made of noghte' (119), or *ad domum remeavit* as 'went home ageyne saufe and sounde' (145).

But, perhaps most interestingly, the translator sometimes takes liberties with his text, not to make the translation more explicit or comprehensible, but rather as an attempt to adopt a more literary prose style. One of the more frequently evidenced rhetorical devices occurs where the translator effects a sort of *chiasmus* through syntactical manipulation of his source text, often augmented by the use of alliterating sounds. For example, from the *vita* of Christina *Mirabilis*:

Et si modo non vis; postea tamen non dolebis ablatum et tunc proderit tibi,  
quod modo non prodest.

'3if þou wylte not now, hereafter þou shalte not repente, and *thanne* shal it *profit*  
þee þat *profetis now* no-thinge.' (125)

The translator has purposefully moved *now* after the verb in order to bring the repetition of the verb *profit* into closer proximity and establish a chiasmic word order with the two time indicators and verbs. Later in the same *vita*, the translator evidences the same rhetorical device twice in the same sentence through the repetition of words and alliteration of initial consonants:

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<sup>97</sup> On the doublet style, see N.F. Blake's 'Late Medieval Prose' in W.F. Bolton, ed., *Sphere History of Literature in the English Language Vol 1: The Middle Ages* (London: Sphere Books, 1970), p.371-405

Novi, inquit, quem laudat. Non sum ego, sed laudat caelestem Dominum suum,  
qui pulchritudinum creator est, et pulcherrimus omnium.

'3ee, quod þe Eriþ [Earþ], I woot whome she preyseþ. Hit am not I; she *louweþ hir  
beuently lorde*, þat is *feyrest of alle* and maker of *feirnesse*.' (130)

While this is nonetheless a fairly literal translation, the translator chooses here to translate the first occurrence of *laudat* with the translator's more common 'preyseþ', but the second with 'louweþ'. Although both words carry the same meaning here, the choice of 'louweþ' seems a deliberate decision to forgo the parallelism of the original in order to support the alliteration. Again, from the life of Christina *Mirabilis*, we find another example:

Licet vos parum reputetis perditionem eius, non tamen ita parum anima illus  
constitit Christo.

'þof 3ee rekke but *litol* of *hir losse*, neuerþeles *hir soule* cost not Criste so *litol*.' (127)

Here, the translator has rearranged the syntactic elements of the original in order to facilitate the chiasmic arrangement of the two occurrences of the word *litol* and the parallel noun phrases *hir losse* and *hir soule*.

The *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek provides another example of the translator's syntactic rearrangements for rhetorical effect:

Prohibuit linguam suam a malo et labia sua ne loquerentur dolum, ita de ore  
ipsius nec saliva nec spitum, nec de naribus eius aliqua emunctionis materia aut  
humor aliquis emanavit.

'She forbedith her tunge from yvel, and hir lippys þat they speke no gyle; soo þat *fro hir mouþe* comeþ neiþer spotel ne spittyngē nor no *maner of moisture* or *mater of unclennes fro hir nese-pirles*.' (118)

Here, the translator again effects a similar device twice. The first clause follows the Latin fairly closely, but the second rearranges the syntax in order to arrange the phrases *fro hir mouþe* and *fro hir nese-pirles* in juxtaposition to the phrases *maner of moisture* and *mater of unclennes*, with an additional word-play on the similarities of *maner* and *mater*.

One further example should be sufficient to show that these examples of rhetorical phrasing are not accidental to the translation, but essential to the translator's method, this time from the *vita* of Marie of Oignies, in which she says concerning her gift of tears:

Dum per violentiam non extorquentur, sed sponte a Domino propinantur.

'Þey are not oute-wrongen with laboure and vyolens, but helde *oute graciously* and *gyfen of oure* lorde.' (138)

Here, we see not only evidence of the doublet style, 'laboure and vyolens' for *violentiam*, and a certain amount of word-play with 'oute-wronge', 'oute', and 'oure', but also the use of alliterating sounds in a chiastic relationship with 'oute graciously and given of oure'. Note also that here the translator has had to expand liberally the phrase *sponte a Domino propinantur* in order to create the effect.

The translator elsewhere similarly uses devices of repetition and alliteration in order to produce a more poetic and rhythmic prose. In the *vita* of Marie of Oignies, for example, the translator renders the sentence *Illa vero subridens, facto Crucis signo eum recedere compellebat*, 'Smiling, she drove him back with the sign of the cross', with the loose but alliterative

paraphrase, 'And she smyllynge blessyd hir and garte þat grysely goost go his gate' (145). Such alliteration is frequent though sporadic, and while the translator obviously made no attempt to produce a consistent alliterative prose throughout his text, the frequency of alliterating phrases is nonetheless telling of his attempt to produce something more than a plain unornamented translation.

There are a number of other notable and obvious examples of the translator's attempt at alliteration: 'for hir gaye girdille a rope, for swete savour stynke, and for crisped coloryd here a balled hede' (145), for example, or 'this wise womman wiste wele þat our lorde hadde putte penauns to þe first fadir' (147). Elsewhere, in the *vita* of Christina *Mirabilis*, the translator renders the words *per silvas atque condensa spinarum* with the alliterating phrase 'thurgh buskes and brerys and þikke þornes' (123).

The translator uses various techniques in order to construct sentences around the use of parallel phrasing. One such technique involves the introduction of sound-play through the word choices the translator makes in order to translate the Latin of his source text. In the *vita* of Christina *Mirabilis*, for example, the translator renders the words *fundite* and *contineat* in the clauses *lachrymas fundite, ne contineat in ira misericordias sua* with the assonating verbs, 'helden' and 'holden': 'heelde oute teres, leste hee holde his mercyes in wrap'. The effect is to emphasise the parallel structure of 'heelde oute teres' and 'holde his mercyes'. Similarly, in the same passage, the translator translates the words *orationem* and *roga* using the same root to similar effect: For *curre ad orationem velociter, et roga dominum*, he translates, 'renne swiftly to prayer and praye our lorde' (127).

In some cases, the translator's attempts at parallel constructions require him to modify the syntax and supply words not in the original in order to achieve the effect. From the *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek:

Ex praedictis igitur apparet quod novo et inaudito modo simul et semel in se personam exhibet Domini patientis et persecutoris seu carnificis saevientis: personam Domini, dum patitur; persecutoris, dum pulsat, trahit, aut percutit aut minatur.

'Perfore it semith þat in a newe and vnherde manere sche schewith in her-selfe boþ þe persone of Criste suffrynge and *þe persone* of þe enemye turmentynge: she representiþ þe persone of oure lorde while sche suffres, and the enmyes *persone* while sche puttis, drawes, smytes, or þretys'. (109)

Here the translator has supplied the word 'persone' where the original has only *persecutoris* in order to produce parallel *cola*. He has also collapsed the phrase *carnificis saevientis* into the single word 'turmentynge' to stand in parallel with the 'suffrynge' of the previous phrase.

Similarly, in the *vita* of Christina *Mirabilis*, the translator again demonstrates an effort to construct parallel phrases from the syntax of his original:

Ecce per importunitatem adjurationis tuae sanum reduxi virum tuum, sed scito nunc quod non diu tamen eius praesentia laetaberis.

"'Loo", quod she, "I have broghte þy husbande safe ageyne by importunite *of thy preyers*; but wit þou wele þat þou shalte not have joye longe *of his presence*". (127)

The translator here moves the phrase *per importunitatem adjurationis tuae* to the end of the *cola* in order that it might parallel the *eius praesentia* of the second. Note also that the translator has passed up other possible and arguably more obvious renderings of *eius*

*praesentia laetaberis*—'rejoice in his presence', perhaps, or 'enjoy his presence'—in order to allow him to construct parallel prepositional phrases.

In addition to evidence of the translator's attempt at introducing something of his own style into his rendering of the Douce *vitae* are also indications of his either misreading his source text or else working from a corrupt original. Such errors are comparatively rare, but do occur at several points throughout the manuscript. For example, in the translation of the *vita* of Marie of Oignies, he writes, 'Wherfore as an ermyte ... she restyd allonly in oure lorde' (148). James of Vitry's work, however, reads *quasi emerita*, 'as a reward', which the translator has either incorrectly misread as *quasi eremita*, 'as a hermit' or else has correctly translated a scribal error preserved in his exemplar. Elsewhere the translator renders *dum mendicaret*, 'while begging', as 'while she eet' (152), again either misreading *manducaret* or else translating a flaw in his original.

Other errors that occur in the Douce 114 *vitae* can be attributed to the misreading of a previous English copy rather than translational errors or a corrupt Latin text. The text of Douce 114 has, for example, the translation 'chere herte' for the Latin *corde sincero* (184), suggesting a copyist misread 'clere heart' in an earlier English copy. Similarly, for *visitatio bonorum familiaritasque*, the manuscript has 'visitacyone et homblynes of gode folke' (149), where the previous English copy likely had the more accurate 'homlynes'. These errors may well have occurred in the initial transcription from the translator's draft, but they also suggest the possibility of other intermediate copies that no longer remain extant.

If the latter is true, the already difficult task of locating the manuscript's dialect becomes even more complex. Angus McIntosh's work on Middle English dialect places the

English of the Douce 114 *vitae* in the Rutland area<sup>98</sup>, but the translator himself admits to having a mixed dialect, apologising for his 'unsuyng of englyshe as umwhile soþeren, oþere-while norþen'. Unfortunately, he offers no explanation; indeed, he explicitly avoids comment—'þe cause why nedip not to be tolde'—and I can only offer a few speculations on the reasons behind the translator's statement and its implication for an analysis of the language employed in the Douce 114 *vitae*. Some examples of distinctly northern forms are evidenced in the manuscript, but are nevertheless rare. A single example of a present participle in *-ande* in the phrase 'and other oures folowande' (112), the appearance of the word *kirke* alongside the more familiar alternative *chirche*, the appearance of both *at* and *atte*, and some variation between the *-s* and *-ep* forms of the 3rd-person present singular are all that remain to suggest the 'variauns' for which the translator expresses concern.

For the most part, however, the manuscript appears to conform to the Central Midlands dialect that had in the fifteenth century become the literary standard.<sup>99</sup> Michael G. Sargent's introduction to the most popular Carthusian text of the time, Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, points out that the base manuscripts of Love's work conform to the Central Midlands standard rather than the Northern dialect with which he would have been most likely associated. Northern dialectal characteristics, in those manuscripts in which they occur, appear to have been redactions superimposed upon the base text, rather than having been original to the language.<sup>100</sup> It is possible, then, that the translator was making a conscious attempt to render his translation in the dialect familiar to the largest portion of his potential audience, and the few items of Northern dialect for

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<sup>98</sup> McIntosh, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*

<sup>99</sup> The use of the Central Midlands dialect as literary standard is further discussed in M.L. Samuels, 'Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology', *English Studies* 44 (1963): 81-94

<sup>100</sup> Michael G. Sargent, ed., *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the blessed life of Jesus Christ : a critical edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional mss 6578 and 6686* (New York: Garland, 1992), p.lxiv



which he makes apology represent lapses in his attempt to produce the English of the written standard. Moreover, it remains a possibility that subsequent copyists may have made an attempt to revise his text, eliminating the irregularities of the translator's self-admittedly eclectic dialect. Without further extant manuscript evidence, it remains difficult to elaborate further on the translator's dialect.

### The Beguine Movement and the Women of Douce 114

The earliest Beguine communities first arose in the diocese of Liège between 1170 and 1210, and in the course of the thirteenth century, developed from the spontaneous spiritual impulses of isolated women into more or less established and regulated communities that sought to balance the contemplative life with the performance of active works and service. The life of the Beguine was a novel departure from the more traditional paths reserved for religious women: rather than being subject to communal claustration as nuns or living in isolation as anchoresses, Beguines continued their involvement in the secular world. They did not relinquish ownership of private property or the possibility of marriage, and they continued to practice their trades as a necessary part of the mixed life which they pursued. The Beguines took no permanent vows, adopted no uniform rule, and lived outside the traditional cloister, initially in the homes of their families and later in independent communities, often within urban areas.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The Beguine movement is most thoroughly detailed in Ernest W. McDonnell's expansive study, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969). Brenda Bolton's 'Mulieres Sanctae', *Studies in Church History* 10 (1973):77-95 and 'Vitae matrum: A Further Aspect of the *Frauenfrage*', *Studies in Church History Subsidia* 1 (1978): 253-73 further detail the lives of the luminaries of the movement and the reasons for its rise. More recently, the influence of the Liège Beguines has been the subject of a collection of essays edited by Juliette Dor *et al*, *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*.

The etymology of the term *Beguine* itself was the subject of some disagreement among contemporaries and later writers. The term has been argued to have derived from the name of Lambert de Bèguë, a preacher influential in the early development of the movement, or else to have arisen initially as a description of the women followers of various heterodox preachers (*al-bigensis* from the Albigensian heretics) and later applied indiscriminately to women pursuing the new form of quasi-religious life.<sup>102</sup> As Wogan-Browne and Henneau suggest, this very ambiguity expresses well the difficulties the Beguine movement faced in trying to negotiate the precarious balance between pursuing novel expressions of the devout life and the dangers of ecclesiastical censure and accusations of heterodox practice.<sup>103</sup> Why so many women in the late-twelfth and thirteenth century were suddenly inspired to take such a controversial and liminal existence, adopting aspects of the religious life without the security of formal inclusion in a religious community, is similarly subject to debate.

The origins of the Beguine movement seems partly attributable to the limited provision for women who aspired to the religious life. Whatever the reasons for the sudden revival of piety among the women of Liège, existing nunneries proved insufficient to accommodate their numbers.<sup>104</sup> The popularity, for example, of Cistercian convents in the diocese of Liège quickly outstripped the order's ability to provide both places and support for the increasing number of women who wished to take up the religious life. Although both the Cistercian and Premonstratensian orders had begun religious houses for women from the twelfth century, there nonetheless remained a disparity between men and women with regard to the provision made for those who desired the religious life; moreover, the male orders became increasingly reluctant to accept the burden of

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<sup>102</sup> McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p.430-38

<sup>103</sup> Wogan-Browne and Henneau, 'Liège', p.6

<sup>104</sup> McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards*, p.4

establishing further female houses. As Wogan-Browne and Henneau argue, 'since nunneries were much more strictly enclosed than male houses and since women could not be priests or hear confession, self-sufficiency was denied to women religious in both the administrative and the spiritual aspects of their lives, and their affiliation was often perceived as a burden by male orders'.<sup>105</sup>

The order soon began to resent the burden of providing care and support for the increasing number of Cistercian nuns, and there were additional fears that the relationship between the male and female members of the order needed to be more strictly regulated. Thus the general chapter began to withdraw its support from the order's convents: In 1213, the number of nuns allowed at each convent was limited, strict claustration was enforced, and the order's regulations were tightened with regard to visitors and opportunities for confession. In 1228, the general chapter forbade any new attachments of nunneries to the order and ended its provision of visitation and pastoral care to existing nunneries. If nunneries could support themselves financially, they could continue to exist, and new foundations could continue to be founded albeit without the support of the male houses.<sup>106</sup> Despite these obstacles, many Cistercian convents did manage to continue, but opportunities for women to enter the religious life quickly became too few for the growing interest among the women of Liège.

Other orders, such as the Premonstratensians, grew similarly reluctant to persist with shouldering the responsibility for extending pastoral care to female religious communities, and the decision at the fourth Lateran council in 1215 made impossible the rise of any new order willing to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of support from existing orders. On the other hand, heretical sects were happy to accept women among

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<sup>105</sup> Wogan-Browne and Henneau, 'Liège', p.4

<sup>106</sup> Bolton, '*Mulieres Sanctae*', p.79

their ranks, and this created a substantial challenge for the church itself, the question of how to meet the demand for women's participation in the religious life, thus preventing them from falling prey to unorthodox sects, without making unpopular demands on the existing orthodox orders. As Brenda Bolton, explains:

Women could not, however, under any circumstance, be allowed to regulate their own forms of religious life. In the view of the church, the only possible role for them was one of attachment to existing male orders. But these orders did not want them and were reluctant to provide pastoral care and administrative oversight. So the importance of a male protector to advance and secure their interests and, possibly, to ward off accusations of heresy, was increased for these communities of pious women.<sup>107</sup>

It was thus thought impossible for there to be a religious life for women that did not involve supervision by male clergy. Yet, for male monastics, extending pastoral care to female religious communities was, at best, seen as a distraction; at worst, it was viewed as an invitation to spiritual ruin. The popular belief in female wantonness made the relationship between a woman religious and the male pastor seem a precarious one, and increasingly few were willing to endanger their spiritual well-being or ecclesiastical career. The church, then, was caught between the growing demand for religious provision for women, the reluctance of male monastics to accept responsibility for their supervision, and the willingness of heretical sects to accept women among their ranks. The Beguine life, then, appeared at a propitious time for women's spirituality, offering an alternative spiritual life that navigated the territory between the increasingly inaccessible life of the nun, the attractiveness of heterodox sects that offered women more freedom in spiritual expression, and the secular life that failed to meet their spiritual needs.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.80

Those who chose to follow the middle life between the religious and the secular received much encouragement from the resurgent interest in the *vita apostolica* and its radically different conceptualisation of the religious life. Monastic communities had long identified with the lifestyle of the primitive church, with its practice of communal prayer and common ownership of goods. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this traditional association of monasticism with the true *vita apostolica* was increasingly brought into dispute by those who insisted that the active aspects of preaching and evangelization, central in the careers of the apostles themselves, were also an integral part of any life which aspired to call itself *apostolic*. This shift from the introspective and insular life of the cloister to more active expressions of spirituality came to include not only preaching but also—and particularly in the case of women, for whom preaching was forbidden—acts of active service toward the sick and the poor.<sup>108</sup>

The shifting emphasis on active service in the conceptualization of the *vita apostolica* proved to be a boon to those laywomen who wanted to abandon the secular life but found themselves excluded by the church's increasingly limited provision for their formal inclusion in religious communities. It also provided a justification for the mixed life of contemplation and active service among those who found a life of manual labour or mendicancy more appealing than the strict clausuration that had previously been the only option for women wanting to adopt the religious life.

Many of the early Beguines were affluent women who sought to express the *vita apostolica* through lives of piety, simplicity, and charitable works. As the *vitae* of Douce 114 demonstrate well, there was no single, universal pattern to the Beguine life. Although

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<sup>108</sup> A survey of the nascent interest in the *vita apostolica* can be found in the first chapter of Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200-1350* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). The role of the fraternal orders in developing the idea, and the controversies it raised, are covered in greater length in Penn R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Marie of Oignies was the first Beguine, and in many ways the model for those who would follow after, the lifestyles of the *mulieres sanctae* described in Douce 114 demonstrate that women's spirituality in the diocese of Liège could take a number of forms: Elizabeth of Spalbeek, although extraordinary in her devotional practice, lived within an enclosure built for her by her cousin, and the lifestyle Thomas Cantimpré attributes to Christina the Astonishing is extraordinary in nearly every way. Certainly, no other Beguine is known to have dwelt in treetops and church towers.

Nonetheless, it has become customary to classify the various patterns of Beguine life into four chronological stages in the development of the movement: There were at first those women who lived in their own homes or that of their families while observing vows of chastity and often serving the community in some charitable capacity. These *beguinae singulariter* identified themselves with a formal religious institution either by rendering voluntary services to the monastic house or else donating a part of their property, but they retained their own homes and trades, as well as the possibility of marriage.

Later, as the movement gained momentum, Beguines lived together in groups of up to sixty or seventy women in houses, or *beguinages*, which remained under the spiritual jurisdiction of the local parish priest and submitted themselves to the authority of a grand mistress. These *beguinae disciplinatae* emulated the daily practices of the nunnery, but were still involved in the life of the parish and continued to perform ordinary labour. It was for this particular stage of the Beguine community that James of Vitry sought papal recognition in 1216, when he argued successfully that these communities did not constitute a new order as prohibited by the 1215 decision against *religiones novae*, but nonetheless comprised a valuable spiritual community that should be permitted by the church, albeit within strict controls.

As larger communities of women began to develop around the establishment of hospitals or other charitable establishments which these women served, the movement began to garner increased approbation among the ecclesiastical establishment, which culminated in the creation of a formal rule and the recognition of the Beguines as an indirectly-recognised order which fell outside the prohibition of 1215.

Finally, larger groups of several hundred *beguinae clausae* occupied walled enclosures, towns-within-towns, constituting their own *curtes*. To these groups ecclesiastical authorities granted the status of autonomous parishes, and secular authorities conferred certain *privilegia beguinalia*, including exemption from taxes. Nonetheless, there continued to exist throughout the development of the beguinage those *beguinae singulater* living outside of established Beguine communities, although these were increasingly subject to scrutiny and ecclesiastical disapproval.<sup>109</sup>

In the fourteenth century, the rise of heterodox opinions associated with the Free Spirit heresy and the multiplication of itinerant and mendicant Beguines brought the movement as a whole into disrepute. In legislating against these heterodox elements, ecclesiastical authorities often failed to distinguish between heretical and mendicant Beguines and those reputable Beguine communities that held themselves aloof from heresy and laboured for their maintenance. Alternating attempts to suppress the Beguine movement and rehabilitate reputable Beguine communities eventually sapped the movement's zeal. Although isolated Beguine poorhouses continued to exist in post-

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<sup>109</sup> These stages were first identified by L.J.M Philippen, *De Begijnhoven, Oorsprong, geschiedenis, in richting* (Antwerp: n.p., 1918), p.40-126. Here I have used the summaries provided by McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p.32 and Ernest McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p.5-6



medieval Europe, the already waning momentum of the movement had been all but spent by the close of the fourteenth century.<sup>110</sup>

The most enduring inheritance of the Beguine movement then, by the time the Beguine *vitae* were translated in Douce 114 in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, was not the Beguine lifestyle as such, but the reputation for devotion and zeal attributed to a few of the luminaries of the spiritual revival, those who had previously inspired so many women of Northern Europe to seek a life characterised by concentrated spiritual service. It is doubtless the case that the fame of devout women like Marie of Oignies had attracted others toward a life of renunciation and service, even long before her hagiographer, James of Vitry, had committed her life to writing, and it is likely that the Carthusian who translated her life into vernacular English saw a similar potential for inspiring contemporary laypersons toward a life of increased spiritual zeal after the model of the mixed life then being promoted among the English lay devout.

### **Elizabeth of Spalbeek**

Although the role of the *mulier sancta* in thirteenth-century Europe was not an uncontroversial one, it was also one of surprising influence and power. Indeed, it was this potential for religious and political influence that was by turns both a cause for the suspicion of women's spirituality as well as a justification for encouraging its growth. The reputation of an individual woman's sanctity could bring suspicion and clerical scrutiny, but could also elevate her to a place of significant local and national influence.

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<sup>110</sup> The conflicts between the extraregular Beguine movement and its critics, which ultimately led to the movement's decline, are explored in detail as the subject of part six of McDonnell's *Beguines and Beghards*, p.477-574.

The women of Douce 114, in particular, with their singular devotional practices and ostensibly questionable sanity seem unlikely candidates for such privileged positions. But in these unusual practices, where modern readers may see the evidence of behavioural disorder and mental illness, the contemporary witness observed a different set of signs, ripe not with psychological reference, but with all the religious allusion so well reinforced by verbal, literary, and visual modes of instruction. The narratives by which the culture made sense of the aberrant, as the Douce 114 *vitae* demonstrate, proved inseparable from the broader cultural narratives of God's self-revelation in the physical world and the ongoing spiritual struggle for the soul of man.

The pretence of scepticism affected by several of the Douce 114 hagiographers should not be read as a sort of incredulity with regard to the miraculous. These were devout men for whom the existence of the supernatural was integral to their worldview. Their challenge was attempting to determine how these unusual events fitted the accepted narrative, whether to affirm them as a part of the pattern of God's revelation or to condemn them as a cautionary example of the human proclivity toward spiritual deception.

Philip of Clairvaux's life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek provides among the Douce 114 *vitae* one of the better illustrations of the role of the male hagiographer in producing from these unusual devotional practices a narrative acceptable enough to justify the holy woman's singular habits. Elizabeth herself is silent in drawing the parallels between her practices and the Passion of Christ, the parallels that once elucidated transform her behaviour from mere ritual self-torment into a sort of sacred pantomime. These connections are left to Philip to elucidate and describe, who interweaves the narrative of Elizabeth's devotion with that of the Passion itself.

During his 1267 visitation of the Cistercian abbey at Herkenrode, the Abbot Philip of Clairvaux was first informed concerning the young woman living there in the diocese of Liège who had been visited with numerous miracles expressing the Passion of Christ and stirring the local people to devotion. Initially, according to Philip's own account, he was sceptical about the marvels attributed to Elizabeth until he was able to verify them firsthand. After his being subsequently convinced, however, his investigation became her *vita*, and Elizabeth's fame eventually attracted even the attention of King Philip III of France, who later sent representatives to seek her advice concerning politics within his own court.<sup>111</sup>

The bulk of Elizabeth's *vita*, nonetheless, does not deal with singular incidents or anecdotal examples of her piety expressed in encounters with the secular world; hers, more so than the other *vitae* described in Douce 114, is a life of private enclosure and repetitive devotion. This seems more a pragmatic consequence of her limited mobility than an enforced act of claustration: According to Philip's description, Elizabeth suffered from some unspecified infirmity which rendered her unable to move under her own power, and Elizabeth's cousin, the abbot of St Trond, had consequently taken her under his care and built her a chapel from which she could observe the mass in the adjoining church.

Her piety, then, lay not in acts of service, but in her being a conduit for the expression of the miraculous, for the ecstasies of spiritual rapture in which she would overcome the limitations of her bodily weakness. Philip describes how Elizabeth, empowered by divine strength, demonstrated feats of superhuman power and resilience in a dramatic re-enactment of the Passion of Christ, an embodiment that was the staple of her devotional routine.

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<sup>111</sup> Simons and Ziegler, 'Elisabeth of Spalbeek and the Passion Cult', p.117

Elizabeth's re-enactment, described at length by Philip in the *vita*, was associated with the liturgical hours and mirrored the literary and visual depictions of Christ's Passion from arrest to crucifixion. Philip describes how Elizabeth would rise at midnight 'merveylously stronge to suffre labour and peyne, þat was byfore in body weyke and unmyghty' (108) to begin a routine of self-affliction, striking herself upon the head and neck, dragging herself forcibly about by her hair and clothes, gouging at her eyes, and striking her head against the ground.<sup>112</sup> Philip is explicitly aware that her representation is a singular one, which he describes as a 'newe and unherde manere' of expressing the suffering Christ, and his role in recording her unusual behaviour comprises as much a justification and defence of her devotion as it does a plain description of her acts.

To defend Elizabeth's sanctity, Philip not only invokes the defences typical of women's *vitae*—affirmations of her modesty in behaviour and dress, her sexual chastity, her asceticism with regard to diet, her devotion to the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist—but also consistently reaffirms the supernatural and mimetic nature of her devotion, emphasising in particular her inability to perform those acts under her own strength and explicitly linking them to the scriptural descriptions of Christ's Passion, as well as to more conventional and well-precedented expressions of worship. Thus, her violent self-torture is transformed by Philip's description from mere self-flagellation into a musical act of worship:

And in steed of salmes, þis newe tymbrer settiþ her flesche for an harpe, and hir chekys for a tymber, and joy for a sawtry, and hir handys and fyngers for a wrast—þat is an instrument of organ-songe—and so with a newe maner of syngynge sche folowith forþ wakynges of þe secunde nocturne.... (109)

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<sup>112</sup> I have chosen in this chapter, for ease of readability, to quote the Middle English translation rather than the original Latin *vitae*. In none of the quotes does the meaning of the passage differ in substance from the original apart from the points of style discussed in chapter two.

Although Elizabeth's behaviour is undeniably unusual, part of Philip's strategy in justifying what would clearly be seen as extraordinary if not frankly peculiar, is to *refamiliarize* Elizabeth's acts by relating them to more conventional forms of devotion and to the religious imagery with which the faithful were already intimately familiar. For the latter, Philip provides through scriptural allusion the events in the Passion of Christ which he believes Elizabeth's acts are meant to illustrate:

After þat, soþly, as for lessuns, sche makith a bigynnyng of oure lordys passyone, how he was taken and with a feerful cruelte drawn. Þan it is to se how sche takith her owne cloþes byfore her breste with her right hande and drawith hir-selfe to the righte syde, and þanne with her lefte hande to þe lefte syde; and oþere-while sche berith over hir-selfe euen forwarde dyvers tymes, as sche were drawn with vyolens, as men do with þefes and mensleers þat are pullyd and luggyd ful vyolently wip oþere mennes handes; representyng oure lorde Jhesu wordes þat hee seyde to hym: '3ee come to take me as a þefe with swerdys and battys'. (108)

The foregoing passage illustrates Philip's use of scriptural proof-text to provide a narrative coherence to Elizabeth's unusual display.

Elsewhere in the Middle English translation, the translator's apparent decision to omit the scriptural references, probably because the translator was wary of including biblical texts in his vernacular translation, masks somewhat Philip's attempts to parallel Elizabeth's devotion with the Passion of Christ. The English version thus makes the justification for Elizabeth's behaviour lie largely on the generalized sense of Christ's suffering rather than specific and concrete allusion. For the English translator, for whom presumably the question of Elizabeth's sanctity had already been established, defending

Elizabeth's behaviour is a concern secondary to the text's devotional potential and for its evocation of the miraculous. For Philip, however, concerned immediately with the vindication of Elizabeth's conduct, these proof texts are an essential part of rewriting and locating her behaviour within established devotional and scriptural traditions. In some cases, the parallels seem self-evident; elsewhere, they are more strained:

And anoon after sche stretchys oute her ri3hte arme and makip a fiste of her hand, and lokip grymly, braunysshynge hir fiste, and makes feerful tokens and bekenynges with eyen and handys, as a body þat were wroop and angry. And after þat anoon sche smitith her-selfe upon the cheke, so strongly, þat alle hir body bowith to þat party ageyns þe ground for hevynesse of the stroke; þan sche smytes hir-selfe in þe nodel of the hede by-hynde, now bitwix þe schuldurs, now in the necke; and þanne sche noseles downe forwarde and wonderly crokes her body and dasches her heed to the erthe. Also opere-while sche takith vyolently hir heer, þat is aboute her forhede but short, and smitith þe grounde with hir heed wiþ a mervaylous draughte, and hir feet un-meyd. (108-109)

Philip goes on to describe how Elizabeth would tear at her cheeks and gouge at her eyes with her own fingers, 'as sche wolde grave hem oute or bore hem in', and so Philip concludes, 'it semith þat in a newe and unherde manere sche schewith in her-selfe boop þe persone of Criste suffrynge and þe persone of þe enmye turmentynge: she presentip þe persone of oure lorde while sche suffres, and the enmyes persone while sche puttis, drawes, smytes, or þretys' (108-109).

For this display, the Latin here cites as justification only Isaiah 50:6, *Corpus meum dedi percutientibus et genas meas vellentibus*, 'I gave my back for striking, my cheeks for plucking', and Job 16:9-10, *Collegit furorem suum in me, et comminans mihi infremuit contra me dentibus suis*,

*Hostis meus terribilibus oculis me intuitus est. Aperuerunt super me ora sua, exprobrantes percusserunt maxillam meam: satiati sunt poenis meis*, 'He gathered his fury against me, and threatening me, gnashed his teeth. My enemy has looked upon me with frightful eyes. They gaped at me, and reproaching me, struck my jaw, and were satisfied with my punishment'. Those details not specifically addressed by scriptural allusion—the dashing of her head to the ground, the gouging of eyes and pulling of hair—are thus described as representing in a more general and imaginative sense various aspects of 'Criste suffrynge'.

In Philip's favour, though, as he attempted to rationalise Elizabeth's behaviour as a mimetic representation of the Passion, was an increasingly pervasive set of symbolic and allegorical associations that would have supported the overt physicality of Elizabeth's displays. Although 'newe and unherde', as Philip describes it, Elizabeth's performance makes sense in light of the contemporary association of women with *physicality*, and by extension, the suffering *humanity* of Christ.

Caroline Walker Bynum has explored at length the analogies in late medieval theology that suggested that 'woman is to man as matter is to spirit':

Thus *woman* or *the feminine* symbolizes the physical, lustful, material, appetitive part of human nature, whereas *man* symbolizes the spiritual, rational, or mental ... Ancient scientists had argued frequently that at conception, woman contributes the stuff (or physical nature) of the foetus, man the soul or form. Patristic exegetes had regularly seen woman (or Eve) as representing the appetites, man (or Adam) as representing soul or intellect.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.262

Although this association was used by male theologians in the denigration of women's 'fleshly weakness', it also appears to have been taken up unconsciously by medieval women mystics who redeemed the notion of woman's fleshliness by further associating themselves with the physical, incarnate humanity of Christ. Whereas men expressed Christ *qua* God through the intellectual activity of preaching and teaching, holy women could express Christ *qua* man through their very physical identification with his suffering humanity. As Bynum explains, 'both men and women ... may at some almost unconscious level have felt that woman's suffering was her way of fusing with Christ because Christ's suffering flesh was "woman"'.<sup>114</sup>

These analogies had been presented in the previous century in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, who had explicitly advanced the opinion that 'man signifies the divinity of the Son of God, and woman his humanity', who argued from an idea rooted in a fundamental implication of the virgin birth: Christ having no human father must have derived his fleshly nature directly from Mary. In a sense, the fleshly humanity whose suffering redeemed the world was *female* flesh.<sup>115</sup>

This gendered interpretation of Christ's humanity was furthermore evident in the imagery associated with the church, which as far back as the apostolic writings had been deemed alternately 'the body of Christ' or 'the bride of Christ', raising again the association of Christ's physical body with womanhood. Bynum notes this analogy in the works of Hildegard of Bingen: '[T]he parallel woman-humanity-Christ is enhanced by

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.261

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.263ff. This *feminization* of Christ is also evident in the 'mother Jesus' image which Bynum further explores in *Holy Feast* and at greater length in *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).



Hildegard's sense that Christ's body is also *ecclesia* ("church"—a feminine noun invariably symbolized iconographically by a female figure).<sup>116</sup>

Philip of Clairvaux, in his effort to defend and rationalize the spiritual practice of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, explicitly invokes this association in his conclusion to her *vita*:

Wherefore this virgyne, whos lyfe is alle mirakil, 3e moor-over alle hir-selfe is but myrakil, as hit schewiþ by the aboven writyngge, figures and expounes not allonly Chryste, but Cryste crucified, in hir body, and also þe figuratif body of Cryste, þat is holy chirche. Loo, in þe distinxione of oures she representys þe custome of holy chirche, ordeynid by god, as Davyd seith: 'Seven tymes on the daye, lorde, I seyde lovyngge to þe'. In woundes and peynes she affermiþ þe feith of þe passyone, in joye and myrþe after peyne gladnes of þe resurrexyone, in ravishyngge þe ascencyone, in rodynges of hir revelacyouns and spirtual lyfe she figurith þe sendyngge of þe holy goost, and of þe sacremente of þe auter and of confessyon, and þen of desyres of alle mennes salvacyone, and of sorowe of unkyndenes and dampnacyone of mankynde. (118)

So, again, Philip refamiliarizes Elizabeth's unusual behaviour by invoking the powerful metaphorical motifs already a part of the cultural symbology and discourse, describing her practices as illustrating both the literal body of Christ in its suffering and the figurative body of Christ as manifest in the church. Any instinctive aversion on the part of the reader to the strange nature of Elizabeth's devotion is blunted by its association here with the universal practices of the church and with the familiar set of images associated with the keystone events of redemptive history: the Passion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, the Church Age, and the final Judgement.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.264

This, however, comprises only one part of Philip's strategy in defending Elizabeth's sanctity. He must, of course, confirm that Elizabeth's manifestations affirm orthodox belief, and this, as we have seen, is accomplished by relating her behaviour to the accepted beliefs and practices of orthodoxy, to the scriptures and the traditions of the church. But he must affirm also that Elizabeth's manifestations are not feigned, the pretentious singularities of an overambitious spirituality. Both of these are essential: a supernatural manifestation incompatible with orthodoxy could only be demonic, but an asceticism might nonetheless spring from prideful self-promotion rather than genuine divine inspiration, regardless of how compatible with orthodoxy it may be.

Philip's defence of Elizabeth's practices as the product of supernatural manifestation rather than natural effort will be explored more fully in a later chapter, where I address how Philip's defence of Elizabeth could have been read by the English readers of Douce 114—a generation for whom the belief in the miraculous in the everyday sacraments of the church had been shaken—as a reaffirmation of God's willingness to manifest himself in base and humble matter. But for Philip's immediate purposes, the miraculous nature of Elizabeth's devotional practice was an essential part of defending her sanctity from accusations of spiritual pretence.

As already mentioned, Philip makes a point of noting that Elizabeth was normally unable to move under her own volition, and he affirms that Elizabeth's infirmity had been manifest and observed since early childhood. Besides constituting, according to Philip, an 'unfaylabil preef of hool and clene virginite', Elizabeth's proven 'febilnesse' is presented as conclusive evidence that her mimetic displays 'come not of hir strengthe, but of a prive vertue of god'. To Philip, Elizabeth's 'lyfe is alle mirakil'; the supernatural, an inseparable part of her devotion insofar as none of it would ordinarily be possible in light of her physical infirmity. And this ongoing manifestation of the supernatural, together

with Philip's interpretation of her behaviour in a way that renders it compatible with orthodox forms of thought and devotion, comprises Philip's successful defence of her life and practice.

Philip could, in some cases, be accused of being overly credulous: When the wounds of Christ appear in Elizabeth's flesh, he never, apparently, considers the possibility that her wounds were self-inflicted, despite her observed predilection for self-harm. Marie of Oignies was known to have wounded herself volitionally, and Bridget of Sweden would later be described as inflicting herself with burns corresponding to the wounds of Christ,<sup>117</sup> and as Bernard McGinn points out, self-inflicted stigmata were not unknown, although the reaction to them to them was mixed: Several self-stigmatics were revered as holy, but at least one, an Englishman who crucified himself around 1222, was immured as a heretic.<sup>118</sup>

However, the assumption that Elizabeth's wounds were spontaneous and supernatural fits the narrative that Philip has already laboured to construct, this idea of the bodily manifestation of the Christ in the body of a physically immobile virgin. And just like Elizabeth's clockwork re-enactment of the Passion, the routine appearance of the stigmata on the day of the week on which Christ was crucified affirms again the divine-empowerment behind Elizabeth's devotional behaviour. The supernatural nature of the manifestation is moreover affirmed, not only by the timing of Elizabeth's spontaneous bleeding, but also by the bodily location of the wounds and the composition of the blood itself, as Philip describes:

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<sup>117</sup> R. Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden* (Oxford: EETS, 1987), p.3

<sup>118</sup> McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p.60

Also y and my felawes, boop abbotes and monkes, atte mydnyghte, and sum opere oures also, sawe blode comynge oute at hir eyen, and dropped doune and dyed þe linnyn garment þat sche was cladde wiþ overest. Also wee sawe blood sprynge oute often atte þe woundes of hir handys and of hir feet and oute of hir syde on a fridaye atte noon. Wee sawe blode not allynges rede, but as it were mengyd wiþ water, rennyng oute þorowe an hool of hir coot, made aboute þe pappe; and þe wollen cloth þat satte next hir flesche, was defuyled wiþ þe same blode, not alloonly þe uttir cloþe þat toucheþ þe maydens flesche, þat is to saye handes, feet and syde, sprenkelyd and dyed with blood, but also hir pappys were alle defuyled wiþ blode rennyng fro hir eyen. And also opere-while blode ranne oute at hir fynger endys, bytwix þe nayles and the flesche, and þan happely felle in þe persone ofoure lorde Jhesu for angwyshe and peynful bindynge of his armes and handes. (114)

The blood and water, the wounds in hands, feet, and breast, the timing of the manifestations all, of course, allude to the traditional representations of the suffering Christ reinforced by the whole body of imaginative descriptions in devotional literature and renderings in the visual arts.<sup>119</sup> And this final and authoritatively miraculous representation is what vindicates with finality Elizabeth's odd form of devotion as more than playacting or affectation, but as an embodiment of the miraculous itself, and by extension, a representation of the suffering humanity of Christ as expressed in his body, the church.

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<sup>119</sup> The placement of Elizabeth's wound 'aboute the pappe', for example, is particularly interesting insofar as it relates to those parallels in the visual arts of Christ's offering the blood of his wound with the Virgin's offering the milk of her breast as spiritual sustenance. This tradition is elucidated at further length in Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.269ff.

It is precisely *because* of Elizabeth's bodily weakness that she is able to manifest fully the nature of Christ without suspicion of fraud or pretension. And it is this emphasis on Elizabeth's effective passivity that also limits the possibility that the readers of the text will seek to emulate Elizabeth's self-torture. If this sort of devotional habit can only exist legitimately in the absence of the natural ability or inclination to perform it, then any consciously volitional effort to imitate the behaviour is automatically suspect. So in addition to justifying Elizabeth's behaviour, Philip's emphasis on her passive relationship to her practice lends itself toward instilling a certain self-censorship in the reader: The ability to imitate Elizabeth's behaviour is itself a reason to eschew imitation.

The tension arising from praising the unusual behaviour of the saints while attempting to limit the possibility of inspiring others to imitation is implicit throughout the *vitae* compiled in Douce 114; and in one of the *vitae*, it is made explicit. In the *vita* of Marie of Oignies, her hagiographer, James of Vitry, specifically advises his readers not to imitate Marie's behaviour. Describing her asceticism, James writes:

I seye not þis, preisyng þe exces, but tellyng þe fervoure. In þis and many oþer þat she wroghte by privelege of grace, lat þe discrete reder take hede þat privelege of a fewe makip not a comun lawe. Folowe wee hir vertues; (þe werkes of hir vertues) wiþ-outen specyale privelege folowe maye wee not.

This idea of 'specyale privelege', made explicit by James of Vitry, is implied here also by the recurrent emphasis on Elizabeth's passivity, which, in a way, is also her particular virtue. Insofar as Marie's spirituality, as we shall see, is much more an active one, James must include his explicit warning; but insofar as Elizabeth's unique form of devotion depends upon her being a passive vessel for the expression of the divine, imitation need not be an explicit concern. Imitating Elizabeth's virtue of passivity itself precludes active imitation.

### **Christina *Mirabilis***

Whereas Elizabeth's behaviour, apart from the few undeniably supernatural phenomena, was naturally impossible only *for her*, given the nature of her infirmity; the behaviour of Christina *Mirabilis* was impossible *for anyone*, given its overtly supernatural character and the circumstances of its origin. But like Elizabeth's life, Christina's was a living illustration of Christian belief, in this case, an illustration of the suffering associated with the penitent souls imprisoned in the purgatorial state.

Christina's hagiographer, Thomas Cantimpré, did not have the advantage enjoyed by Philip of Clairvaux, of being an eyewitness to the events described in the *vita*, but instead based his descriptions on the testimony of those living in St Trond, where Christina spent most of her life, and who claimed to have witnessed the extraordinary circumstances surrounding her life (and multiple deaths).

Thomas himself was born around 1200 near Brussels, and entered the Augustinian abbey at Cantimpré around the age of seventeen. An encounter with the mystic Lutgard of Aywières in 1230 inspired his interest in the practices of contemporary women mystics, and he subsequently joined the Dominicans in 1232 and began a career committing their lives to writing and promoting their teachings.<sup>120</sup> His interest specifically in Christina *Mirabilis*, the 'marvellous' or 'astonishing', began that same year after he read an allusion to the woman's remarkable story in James of Vitry's prologue to the life of Marie of Oignies.

'I sawe an opere womman', seiþ hee, þat is to sey þis Cristyn mervelous, 'aboute wham oure lorde wrou3te so merveilously þat, whan sche hadde liggen longe

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<sup>120</sup> McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p.160ff.

deed, she lyved ageyne, or she were beryd; and sche hadde graunte of god þat sche livynge in body, shulde suffre purgatorye in þis worlde. After þat longe tyme she was wondirful turmented of oure lorde, þat oþer-while she walowed in fire, sumtyme in wynter she abode longe in frosen water and yce; also oþer-while she lete as she wolde goo into deed mens graves. Atte þe last, after hir penauns, she lyved in so mykel pees and deserved so mykel grace of god, þat sche was ravished in spirite and ledde soules of þe deed unto purgatorye and þurgh purgatory to hevne, with-outen any sore of hir-selfe'. (119)

Thomas' more detailed account of Christina's life was written about eight years after her death in 1224 in St Trond, where she was also born in 1150. According to his account, he reconstructed the details of Christina's life from the eye-witness accounts of those who were resident in the town during the events of Christina's life. Thomas was keenly aware that the events he describes, incredible even by the standards of contemporary accounts, stretched the limits of credibility.

I, sooply, unworþy frere of þe ordir of prechours, for edifynge of þe reders and specially to þe lovyng of god have writen wiþ symple worde, and I am certayne and syker of þat at was me told. Nor I sey 'certeyne and syker' with-oute cause, sen I have so many witnessys in mykel þat I have writen, as were þan in þe towne of seint Trudous, þat hadde witte and resone. Nor þese things were not done in corners and hynes, but openly amonge the pepil; nor it is not so longe goon þat þey are forgotten, for hit is no moor but eight 3ere syþen sche dyed, what I wrote hir lyfe. Certeynly, oþere þinges þat no man myghte knowe but sche, I herde allonly of hem þe whiche affermyd þat hire-selfe tolde to hem with hir owne mouþe. And wite hee wel þat redith this, þat I leved to siche witesse þat wolde not goo fro þe soþe, þof þey schulde lose her heedes. Wee

knowleche with-outen doute, and soop hit is, þat oure tellynge passith alle mannes undurstondynge and witte, as siche thinges þat maye not be done by commun cours of nature or kynde. Neipeles they be possibil to hym þat alle maad of noghte; nor I wolde no weyes have taken upon me to write, but if worschepful James byshope hadde boren witnesse byfore of þis same virgynes lyfe. (119)

Thomas thus pre-empts objections to his account by affirming that it is derived from firsthand observation and that the events described were performed openly, recent in time, and associated with a verifiable geographical location. This was not a *vita* from the ancient past and exotic locales, but in place and among eyewitnesses that were still accessible to the hagiographer's enquiries.

Any remaining doubts about the verity of the events, based on their extraordinary nature, is countered by attributing such reservations offhandedly to 'mannes undurstondynge and witte' and pointing out the contradiction between believing in a omnipotent God who 'alle maad of noghte' and a God incapable of creating the kinds of miracles that Thomas goes on to describe. Of course, this skirts the question, not of whether God is capable of such miracles, but of whether he actually *did* the miracles described in the *vita*, but one imagines that the cumulative case Thomas here builds was enough to lay to rest any overt doubt.

As a final apologetic for his account, Thomas here again defers to 'worschepful James byshope', to James of Vitry's own brief account of Christina's life, and thus associates himself with the authority of his older contemporary.



The life itself of Christina is an extended, living illustration of the suffering of the souls in purgatory, on behalf of whom, we are told, Christina endured the torments which she inflicted upon herself, and by extension, an exaggerated illustration of the act of penitence required to avoid such future purgatorial suffering. Such is the conclusion with which Thomas ends his account:

Take heed þerfore, þou reder, how mykel wee be bounden, þat see Cristyn have suffryd so many turmentys not for hir-selfe but for hir nei3hboures, and wee dreed to do penauns for oure-selfe and for oure synnes. Certeynly, þat daye schalle come, and shal not tarye, þat wee wolde fulfayne assaye to doo moor þanne þees, if spase of penauns were gifen to hem þat aske, and if þey myghte turne agayne to do þe tymes þat þey sette not by before ... Wakiþ þerfore, for 3ee knowiþ neiþere þe oure ne þe daye whan 3oure lorde shalle come. And what ellis cryed Cristyn in alle hir lyfe but do penauns, and men to be redy ilkan oure? (133-34)

So whereas the significance of Elizabeth of Spalbeek's suffering lies in the inspiration of her illustrating the redemptive suffering of Christ, Christina's lies in her inspiring through her illustration the suffering of the impenitent in the future state. Neither are meant per se as examples of normative Christian behaviour—both are, in effect, given special dispensations to behave as they do—but Christina's behaviour is at least meant to inspire penitent acts of the more usual sort.

Christina's special commission to suffer on behalf of purgatorial souls originates in a singular experience in which she accepted, in a vision of the afterlife, a divine commission to return to life and suffer on behalf of the suffering souls she had witnessed firsthand while dead.

The *vita* of Christina is unique in that it essentially begins with her death. Thomas provides a few details regarding her life prior to her apocalyptic vision and the supernatural events which followed, but they are of a vague and generic sort, nothing to suggest the extraordinary happenings that would later transpire. We learn without further elaboration how she was 'goten and borne of honest fadir and moder' and subsequently orphaned at a young age, how the oldest and middle sisters devoted themselves to religious and domestic lives respectively, and how to Christina fell the lot of caring for the family's livestock, 'to kepe hir bestes on þe felde þat wente to pasture.' Thomas gives some indication that her spiritual development began there:

And forþe-with Christes comferte was not fro Christyn, þat was putte to þe lower and fouller offys; but oure lorde gaf hir grace of inwarde swetnes and visityd hir ful often with privetis of hevene. She was unknowen to alle men; but to god alone, the pryveer sche was, þe more was sche knowen. (120)

Still, this vague, bucolic description of Christina's early life gives little indication of what follows after the crisis of Christina's death and subsequent ministry. Caroline Walker Bynum describes, referring to a quantitative study published by Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M Bell in *Saints and Sinners: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom*, how '[c]risis and decisive change were more significant motifs in male than in female *vitae* throughout the later Middle Ages'. She moreover explains how 'male saints were more likely to undergo abrupt adolescent conversions, renunciation of wealth, power, marriage, and sexuality'. Bynum attributes this difference 'in part because medieval men had more power than women to determine the shape of their lives'.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.24

In a sense, the *vita* of Christina is an exception to this pattern: While nonetheless pious in her younger years, the changes which she adopts after her death and resuscitation are anything but a gradual increase of her earlier piety and represent a moment of transformational crisis, one in fact that dwarfs in degree those found among male mystics such as Francis of Assisi or the later English mystic Richard Rolle, for both of whom adolescent conversion experiences produced precipitous life changes and the adoption of unconventional religious lives.

On the other hand, Bynum's suggestion that the increased frequency of crisis conversions in the *vitae* of male saints is in part related to their comparatively greater freedom to enact radical changes of lifestyle is nonetheless maintained. The radical changes Christina experiences were not motivated by religious fervour that grew organically from within, motivated by internal mystical experiences and enacted by conventional means within the freedoms allowed her. Rather, they were radically enacted from without, by explicit divine agency accompanied with supernatural phenomena that helped her transcend any cultural or social restrictions that under normal circumstances would have compelled her to find more conventional means for the expression of her mystical transformation.

The transcendental nature of the miracle that was Christina's life implicitly places her life and actions outside the scope of anything that might have been considered normative, an example for other devout women to follow. Christina's was indisputably a special commission, one that represents a distinct and overtly supernatural break from the idealized but unremarkable image of her earlier life.

In this sense, the *vita* of Christina is unique in that it begins in earnest, not with her life, but with her death: After the brief description of Christina's early life and upbringing,

Thomas describes, 'after this of inwarde exercise of contemplacyone she wex seek in bodily myghte, and dyed' (120), and with this, the devout but otherwise unremarkable and briefly described life of Christina would seem to have come to an end. It is only an obvious act of divine intervention that transforms an otherwise uneventful life into a subject for inspiration and marvel:

Pen þe deed body was leyde forþe and þe lyche doon of hir sistres and frendes, and on þe morne was borne to kirke. And while þe masse was in doynge for hir soule, sodeynly þe body sterid and roos up in þe bere, and anoon lifte up as a bridde, stei3h in to þe beemes of þe kyrke. Pen alle þat þere were, fledde, and hir sister alone bode stille with drede. And she abode in þe kyrke-roufe unmoved, tille þe messe was doon. þen sche was conjoured of the preste of þe chirche and constreyned to come doun. Sooply, as sum suppos, þe soteltee of hir spirite loþed þe taste and savoure of mennes bodyes. Penne she wente anoon hoom ageyne wiþ her sustres, and eet hir meet. (120)

The details here already suggest that we are not to suppose this a simple case of resuscitation, but something more profoundly transformational; Christina has not been merely raised to life, but transformed into something, while still recognizably human, nonetheless having properties not normally associated with the mundane human form. She is not a mere ghost or spirit—the inclusion of the seemingly trivial detail that she 'eet hir meet' demonstrates her physical humanity—but the event of her resuscitation is nonetheless clearly supernatural: the levitation of her physical form, the newly acquired 'soteltee' of her spirit that loathes 'þe taste and savoure of mennes bodyes', suggests something doubtless superhuman.

The subsequent activities of Christina's life suggest numerous similarities to contemporary accounts of demoniacs, including here the necessity for her to be 'conjoured of the preste' and 'constreyned to come doun'. Indeed, throughout her life, as recorded in her *vita*, family and neighbours mistook her for being possessed. As Barbara Newman suggests, 'By thirteenth-century standards, the evidence would appear to be at least as strong on their side as on his. Indeed, rather than asking why so many of Christina's neighbors mistook this holy woman for a demoniac, we might just as well ask why Thomas of Cantimpré took the risk of representing the village lunatic as a saint'.<sup>122</sup>

The answer, as Newman and others have suggested, lies in what Thomas' account relates next, the otherworldly vision recounted by Christina in which she asserts her divine mission to suffer on behalf of the souls in purgatory and which reaffirms the reality of the transitive state:<sup>123</sup>

Anoon, quod she, as I was deed, mynistris of light, goddes aungels, toke my soule and ladde me into a looply place ful of mennes soulles, and þe peynes þat I sawe in þat place, were so greate and so cruel, þat no tunge maye telle. And, sooply, þere sawe I many deed þe whiche I knewe byfore alve. I, forsoop, havynge compassyone and grete pite of þoos wrecched soulles, asked what maner place þat was — y þoghte þat hit was helle. And my leders answeyrd to me, at þat place was purgatorye, in þe whiche þey þat hadde ben synners in her lyfe suffred worþy peynes for her mysdedis.

Christina is from there led forth to hell, where she recognizes several individuals whom she knew while still alive, and finally to the throne of God:

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<sup>122</sup> Barbara Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum* 73 (1998): 733-770

<sup>123</sup> See also Robert Sweetman, 'Christine of Saint-Trond's Preaching Apostolate: Thomas of Cantimpré's Hagiographical Method Revisited', *Vox Benedictina* 9 (1992): 67-97.

And whan I sawe oure lorde gladsum and wele apayed to me-warde, þen was I odly mery, þinkyng þat I schulde abyde þere fro þat tyme forþe evermore. Þanne oure lorde anon answerid to my desyre: 'For certeyne, my swetyng, quod he, þou haste be wiþ me heer; but now I putte to þe choys of two þinges: þat is to seye, wheþer þou has lever dwelle stille with me now, or turne ageyne to þy body, þere to suffre peynes of an undeedly soule by a deedly body wiþ-ouen harme of hit-selfe, and to delyvere wiþ þy peynes alle þos soules of þe whiche þou haddest pite in þe place of purgatorye, and also with ensauple of þy peyne and lyfe stir men to repentauns and penauns and to forsake her synnes and be trewly turnyd to me; and after alle this is doon, þen þou schalte come ageyne to me wiþ many medys'. And I answeyrd with-ouen doutyng þat I wolde turne ageyne to þe body undir þat condicyone þat was put unto me. (120-121)

This description, the only recorded instance of Christina's providing in her own words a justification for her behaviour, establishes the pastoral significance of what is a lengthy exemplum on the practice of penitent living in anticipation of the future state. As Newman points out, 'Being a woman, Christina cannot teach verbally, but like ... other *mulieres sanctae* who wished to share the glamor of preaching, she can and does teach by example'.<sup>124</sup> This theme is a consistent one throughout the Douce 114 *vitae*, and goes some way toward explaining the consistently visual and mimetic nature of these women's behaviours as an alternative expression of spirituality that could not be uncontroversially manifest through their participation in verbal instruction.

To Thomas of Cantimpré, Philip of Clairvaux, and the other hagiographers who recorded the lives of these *mulieres*, these illustrations, not explicitly didactic in

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<sup>124</sup> Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit', p.765

themselves, had a value of their own, communicating spiritual truths to an audience for whom the affective and the marvellous provided inspiration that could not be realized solely by more overt instruction.

Even more so than that of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, the behaviour of Christina *Mirabilis* is of such a nature that imitation by the reader of the *vita* is hardly possible without supernatural aid, so the fear of imitation is not a major preoccupation of the author. Of the main three *vitae* of the Douce 114 MS, the only one that includes an explicit instruction to its readers not to imitate the described behaviours is that of Marie of Oignies, who while still unusual in her asceticism is arguably the tamest of the three women described in the MS. While that observation proves nothing in itself, the absence of any explicit instructions in either of the two *vitae* suggests little concern about the possibility of imitation. These were miraculous acts made possible in both cases only through a divine empowerment; they were behaviours that neither could have been taken up by these women under their own power or should be imitated by their admirers without divine dispensation.

In the case of Christina *Mirabilis*, it is clear that her post-resuscitation life was of a qualitatively different kind, that she was in some manner physically transformed by her experience. She could no longer endure living among others, fleeing to the wilderness with a 'wonder loþinge' for the corruption of humankind, where she lived 'as bryddes doon, in trees' (121). Thomas relates how her body had become so 'sotil and lighte' that she 'wente into hy3e thynges and as a bredde hengyed in ful smale twigges of trees', praying in treetops and towers, where she might be 'allone fro alle folke' and 'fynde riste of hir spirite'. And Christina's manner of prayer, as Thomas describes it, also suggests a fundamentally transformed physical nature:

And efte-sone whan she prayed and goddes grace of contemplacyone come to hir, euen as she were made hote and chaufed, alle hir membrys were closed togedir on a lumpe, nor þere myghte no thinge be perceyued of hir but allonly a rownde gobet. And after þat spirituel felynge whan þe actuel felynges come to hir kynde ageyne, in þe maner of an urchyn þe lumped body 3ode to þe owne shappe, and strekyd oute the membrys þat were firste stoken undir an unlikely mater and forme. (123)

Like Elizabeth's daily transformation from physical infirmity to supernatural strength, the physical change experienced by Christina places the whole of the narrative, and the acts described, outside the scope of what could reasonably be considered acts to be emulated. The penitential acts attributed to Christina at length through the narrative—when she threw herself 'into hoot-brennyng ovenes' or 'keste hir-selfe in to houge fyres and grete' (122); when she dwelt for days in icy rivers; when she 'bowed hir leggyes and armes in whelis in þe which þeves were wonte to have her iewesse' or 'hengyd hir-selfe up wip a gnare amonge honged þeves' (122-23); when she provoked the dogs of St Trond to pursue her 'through buskes and brerys and þikke þornes' (123), all without any apparent harm to her own person—are related to be marvelled at, to stir the heart with foreboding of the torments that await the impenitent and inspire conventional acts of penitence that, unlike these, are available to all without Christina's unique calling.

Nonetheless, according to Thomas' retelling of her life, Christina's singular mission was not immediately recognized by her contemporaries: it was popularly thought that Christina was possessed, 'ful of fendes', for which reason her sisters sought to constrain her activities and contracted 'a ful wicked and ful strange man' to capture and bind her. As Barbara Newman has pointed out, Christina's resemblance to contemporary tales of demonic possession indeed would have given much credence to the suggestion that her



behaviour was diabolical rather than divine in origin.<sup>125</sup> The *vita* describes how the man captured Christina, only after having broken her leg, and bound her in a cellar with iron chains. Christina, however, eluded captivity when her chains were miraculously loosed, and she escaped the cellar by putting through a wall with a stone from the cellar floor and a feat of supernatural strength (123-24).

She is subsequently captured a second time, bound in wood fetters by her sisters, and fed 'as a dogge with a litel breed and watir alone'. Her shoulders, chaffing against her restraints, 'festird', and she grew 'febil and feynte and myghte not ete hir brede'. But in a miraculous occurrence 'never harde heer-byfore', Christina's virgin breasts produced a healing salve with which she both 'saverd hir brede' and anointed her wounds. With this miracle, her friends and sisters were convinced of the divine nature of her calling, and resolved not to strive against God's will, 'preiynge forgifnes of the wronge þat þey hadde done to hir'. Nonetheless, the religious men and women of St Trond prayed that God might moderate Christina's miracles 'after þe comun state of men', 'dredynge leste þat huge wonderynge of merveylles shulde passe mannys witte and turne beestly mydnes of men in to wikkyd wirkyng' (124). Soon thereafter, Christina plunged herself into the baptismal font in the Church at Wellen, and found her aversion to 'þe taste of men' thereby tempered (125).

Her subsequent activities were still unconventional, but she was henceforth able to dwell among humanity, living from alms and proclaiming forgiveness to those who took pity upon her estate. Her latter ministry was largely a prophetic one: Thomas describes how Christina predicted famine, knew miraculously of the loss of Jerusalem to the pagans, and detected secret apostasy among the religious. And although Thomas is clear to point out that Christina deferred to the clergy on questions of religion, 'seyynge þat hit byfelle to

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

clerkys to expoune holy writte', she possessed the supernatural ability to understand written Latin 'þof sche never knewe lettir syþen she was borne' (129).

By the time of her death, Christina had become respected and revered by the religious of St Trond. When she died alone at the convent of St Katherine, a nun Beatrice lamented her passing and conjured her to return to answer her inquiries, only to have Christina come yet again to life and admonish her for calling her back from the sight of Christ: 'O Beatrys, why hast þou dissesid me? Why haste þou callid me ageyn? Now was I ledde to the sighte of Cryste! But now, sustir myne, what þou wolte, faste aske, and I beseeke þe late me go ageyne to þat at I have coveytid so longe'. And after having answered Beatrice's questions (which Thomas does not himself disclose), Christina, who 'þe þridde tyme was experte of dethe', again passed away in the company of the nuns of the abbey (133).

As I have already quoted at length, the conclusion with which Thomas concludes the *vita* of Christina comprises a general call to acts of penitence in anticipation of death and the future state. Both this *vita* and the preceding one act as vivid illustrations that transport the imagery they represent from a prosaic, distant *other* into the contemporary and visually engaging. Elizabeth's suffering makes immediate and graphic the suffering of the Christ in ways that parallel other contemporary works that encouraged devotional readers to actively participate in visualizing the life of Christ, taking it from the realm of merely verbal description into one which was more apt to produce an affective, emotional spiritual response. Likewise, the suffering of Christina, represented not in an otherworldly state but in the present physical world and subject to the eyewitness observation which Thomas emphasises, effects a devotional weight that the otherworldly vision itself could not as effectively accomplish.

## Marie of Oignies

The longest of the three main *vitae* translated in Douce 114, the life of Marie of Oignies, in contrast to that of Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Christina *Mirabilis*, exerted an influence commensurate with the space there devoted to recording her life and devotion. Of the three, Marie is the only one for whom substantial evidence exists beyond Douce 114 and extant copies of English provenance of her Latin *vita*, that she was known to any degree among the fifteenth-century English: namely the anecdotal accounts in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, allusions to her in the *exemplum* literature drawing upon the writings of her hagiographer James of Vitry, and some English adaptations of the *Somme du Roi*.

This relative abundance of English allusions is in a large degree related to Marie of Oignies' popularity on the Continent relative to the previous Douce 114 saints and the successful promotion of her cult by James of Vitry, but also to the ease with which her life was especially useful for excerpting *exemplum* material. Whereas the *vitae* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Christina *Mirabilis* each revolve around the central miraculous form of devotion that typified their lives—Elizabeth, her mimetic re-enactment of the Passion; Christina, her vicarious suffering on behalf of the dead—Marie's life is more varied, both in the basic nature of her religious calling and in the style in which James records it.

The first book of her *vita* describes primarily her outward devotion, arranged by the various roles and activities through which Marie demonstrated her piety: first as a child, then a wife; her behaviour toward her spouse and relations; her various devotional activities, her gift of tears, love of confession, penance, prayer, fasting; and her basic habits regarding sleep, dress, manual labour, and modest living (134-35). The second book of her *vita* describes primarily her inward piety, arranged by James according to the 'sevene gyftys of the holy goste': 'þe spirite of goddes drede', 'of pite', 'of connyng', 'of

strengþe', 'of counselle', 'of undirstondynge', and 'of wisdom' (150). This arrangement lent itself well to the sort of episodic *exempla* recorded in the collections compiled for use in clerical preaching, and as a recorder of preaching *exempla* himself, James likely chose this method of organization with the intent of excerpting from Marie's *vita* for use in his own sermon material.

The success of both Marie of Oignies' cult and James of Vitry's preaching career were destined to become inseparably interrelated. His promotion of her *vita* would secure her place in history and establish the credibility of the Beguine movement, and conversely, James would later credit Marie with his skill in preaching and the success of his ecclesiastical career. During his education at Paris, James had become disillusioned with the path of ecclesiastical preferment which he observed others in Paris undertake. Attracted by the then nascent Beguine movement in the Low Countries and by Marie's reputation, James abandoned his studies before having attained ordination, and moved to Oignies around the year 1208, where he found in Marie the inspiration to continue pursuing his spiritual calling.<sup>126</sup>

By this time, Marie of Oignies's spiritual reputation was already well known locally and had attained some notoriety abroad. Her ministry both in Oignies and previously in Williambroux had established her as the centre of a community of women renouncing wealth and marriage for the pious life. According to James' account, Marie was born in Nivelles to wealthy parentage, but nonetheless rejected the comforts of wealth, rebuffing their attempts at providing her 'delycate garmentis', and demonstrating an early interest in the religious life. James describes her following in secret the male religious of the

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<sup>126</sup> McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, p.34; Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.147

community, setting 'her fete in þe steppes of þe converses or monkes', and wondering after the nature of their professions.

James further implies that her parents did not take her early religious leanings seriously, 'lawghynge and scornynge þe mayden' and asking, 'what-maner womman schalle oure doghter be?' (135). There is no indication whether Marie's parents ever considered the possibility of entering their daughter into the religious life. The comparison of the *vitae* of male and female saints suggests that parents were more reluctant to accept the prospect of a daughter's entering a religious vocation than they were regarding a son's.<sup>127</sup> And as I have noted, provision for women religious was relatively less available than for men, and the fact that Marie's childhood fascination with the religious life was specifically inspired by her observations of male religious, rather than female, further reiterates the comparatively smaller visibility of the latter orders and foreshadows Marie's mature attempts to live the religious life apart from the strict claustration enjoined upon those women with a formal religious vocation.

If the prospect of a religious vocation was ever considered for Marie by her parents, the idea had been discarded by the time she was married at the age of fourteen. According to James' account, Marie's early marriage was for her a turning point characterized by excesses of religious fervour and asceticism:

So þanne she, remeved fro fadir and modir, was kyndelyd into soo passynge fervour and wiþ so grete fightynge chastysed hir body and broghte hit undirneth, þat often whan she hadde travailed with hir owne handes mykel parte of þe nyghte, after labour she was ful longe in hir prayers; and þat opere

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<sup>127</sup> Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.46

dele of þe nyghte, as often as hit was leeveful to hir, she slepte but litel, and þat upon a fewe lattys, þe whiche she hadde prively hidde atte hir beddes feet. And for she hadde not openly power of hir owne body, she bare prively under hir smok a fulle sharpe corde with þe whiche she was girdid ful harde. I seye not þis, prisynge þe exces, but tellynge þe fervoure. (135-136)

As Caroline Walker Bynum points out, tales of virgin saints like St Cecelia, who maintained their virginity even in marriage and despite hardship, presented an ideal which conflicted with the more normative behaviour expected of the dutiful wife.<sup>128</sup> Asceticism like that attributed here to Marie can be read as an attempt at asserting control over one's own body, in a situation where such control in other parts of her life has been otherwise denied her.

Marie's marriage was fortuitous at least in that she was married to a spouse willing to accommodate her spiritual interests. According to James' account, her husband John, as a result of Marie's prayers, was inspired to free Marie from her marital obligations in order that she might dedicate herself to spiritual devotion. John was also persuaded to join in her altruism, 'to gyve alle þat hee hadd for Crystes love to pore men' (136), and to assist her in serving the leper colony outside Nivelles (137). This aspect of Marie's ministry, her persuasion of her husband to chastity and charity and their dedication to serving the infirm, was perhaps her most enduring legacy, as William of Nassington's *Speculum vitae*, adapting the French *Somme le roi*, related in crudely composed couplets:

Men tellen of a lady þat hight  
Mary d'Organ þat lyved right  
and was an holy woman and wif.

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<sup>128</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.223

Sche turned hir lord to good lif.  
 Þei bothe left al þat þei had,  
 As sche conseyled hir lord and bad,  
 And put hem bothe as men telles  
 To serve seke men þat were meselles,  
 Þorou<sup>3</sup> whiche servyse þat þei had soght  
 To perfite lif þei were bothe brought.  
 Þen come a voyce to hir on þe nyght  
 And seide to hir þese wordes right:  
 'þi lord þat hath be felaw wiþ þe,  
 To serve seke men so meke wold be  
 Schal be wiþ þe þi felaw evene  
 In þe hegh kyngdam of hevene.<sup>129</sup>

This visionary experience, as James reports, was verification of Marie and her husband's voluntary abstinence, a promise that their 'blessed kynde of martirdome in fyre not brennyng' would be well compensated in the afterlife (136).

By the time James of Vitry first met Marie around 1208, she had relocated to a cell in Oignies at the Augustinian priory of St Nicholas. Through her ministry in Williambroux, Marie had obtained substantial notoriety and could 'no lengir suffir mykel recours of men, þat come to hir often of devocyone' from the nearby town of Nivelles and had 'covetyd to gif hir-selfe to god allone'. Praying that she might find 'a covenabil place to hir purpos and persones þat mekely wolde agre hem to hir desyre', Marie had a revelation that she should relocate to Oignies, a place 'þat she sawe never byfore, siþen also þat for

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<sup>129</sup> University of Nottingham, Middleton Mi.Lm.9, f.127

newnesse and poverte of þe house unneþes was þan any mencyon þere-of amonge men' (175).

Her calling to Oignies was further confirmed by a vision of St Nicholas, patron of Oignies, who led her to the church there, where Marie understood by revelation that she would be buried in that place, which came to pass several years later, but not before her encounter with James of Vitry would secure her place in history and, in large part, that of the women's movement she inspired. Encouraged by Marie, James proceeded with obtaining his ordination and went on to preach in support of the crusade against the Albigensian heresy, which Marie herself had predicted in a prophetic vision.<sup>130</sup>

It was there that she first met the man who would become her mouthpiece after her death. James came to Marie disconcerted about his ineffective preaching and fear of failure. But Marie encouraged him with an 'apt parable' and encouraged him to receive his ordination. Marie, forbidden as a woman from preaching except by example or exhortation, found in James a mouthpiece to do what she could not:

And certeyne, wiþ many teerful sighes, wiþ many prayers and fastynges she askynge wiþ ful grete instauns, gat graunte of oure lorde, at he wolde recompens to hir in some oþere persone þe merit and offys of prechyng þat she myghte not get and do hir-selfe in deed, and þat oure lorde wolde gif hir o prechoure for a grete gifte. And god gaf hir hir askynge. And þof oure lorde pronounced wordes of prechyng by hym as by an Instrumente, þe holy womans lyfe wrought with-alle and wiþ prayers of hir gaf hym in travelle strengthe of body, ministryd worde, governyd his gates, and þurgh merite of his mayde gaf grace and fruyte in þe herers; for why, leste he shulde have ceced in

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<sup>130</sup> Bolton, *Mulieres sanctae*, p.82



labour of prechyng, she bysoghte for hym to oure lorde and to oure lady and seyde ilke a day a hunderd tymes *ave maria* as Martyne prayed while Hillary preched ... And sooply she commended ful devoutly to oure lorde hir prechour, whome she lafte alyve atte hir deþe. For whan she hadde lyved hirs, she loved hem to þe laste ende. (163-164)

The allusion here to St Martin of Tours is not incidental. Martin's support of St Hilary in his combating the errors of the Arian heretics may have provided for James a precedent for his own preaching against the Cathars, during which time James often felt that his life and ministry were preserved by Marie's prayers and sanctity even after her death.

Marie dwelt there in Oignies for several years before her passing in 1213, occupying a austere cell with only a bit of straw for her bed, but continuing to labour in prayer and devotion despite self-inflicted deprivations of sleep and comfort. After her death, James penned her *vita* as an example of orthodox female piety in opposition to that propagated among the Albigensians, and he went on to campaign for the recognition of the Beguine lifestyle and won verbal approval from Pope Honorius III for devout women to pursue the pious life in communal houses, thus establishing, at least informally, the Beguine life under the umbrella of orthodoxy.<sup>131</sup>

Marie's ministry differed substantially from those of the previous two *vitae* translated in Douce 114 in that hers was not primarily a solitary practice. Although both Elizabeth and Christina did at times minister to those near them through their prophetic insights, they were largely reclusive; the *vita* of Marie, on the other hand, shows her at the centre of a network of individuals who sought her council and benefited from her visionary experiences. When she attended the deathbed of a religious widow at Williambroux, she

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.84

saw a series of visions regarding the spiritual battle for her soul and the details of her fate after death. She saw the Virgin comforting the widow in her illness and a vision of demons and angels battling for the widow's soul. Noting that her soul passed from there into Purgatory, Marie discovered that the widow's husband had obtained some goods by guile and that the widow herself had received as guests men who 'hadde mykel spended in hir hous of wrange-goten goodes'. Praying with the widow's daughter, Marie was able to make restitution for the widow's wrongdoings and liberate her soul from Purgatory, a release again confirmed by a vision of the widow ascending to heaven (155-156). Elsewhere, Marie was able to help others troubled by their spiritual struggles with her prophetic abilities: Marie was able to help a 'holy 3onge woman' avoid spiritual temptation by revealing her thoughts by supernatural insight and warning her prophetically about future temptations (168).

On another occasion, Marie encouraged a Cistercian monk that 'hadde so grete zele and love of innocens and clenness, þof not after sciens, þat hee enforced and bisyed him wiþ fervour of spirite to come as to þe evenlik state of the firste fadir Adam' and tormented himself with extremes of asceticism, fasting, and deprivation of sleep. Troubled by 'þe myddaye fende' and his failures to attain the impossibility of spiritual perfection, he fell into despair, withdrawing himself even from the sacrament on days obligated by his order. The monk's abbot, perceiving 'þe sieknesse of his soule' brought him to consult Marie, whose virtues the abbot himself had 'felte by experiens in hymselfe'. Marie's prayers for the monk proved efficacious, and she witnessed 'litol blake stonys' fall from his mouth, the evidence that the monk's despair had been assuaged (160-161).

Although Marie's ministry was far more public than those detailed in the previous Douce 114 *vitae*, Marie's life shared with the others a number of important themes. Like the

others, her zeal for asceticism well beyond the norms even of the already austere religious life is well documented. Like Elizabeth who 'loped meet' and subsisted on a liquid diet by drinking only a few sips of milk each evening or sucking from her food only the 'sotil substauns' while rejecting 'þe gros mater' (118) and Christina who ate only the 'washynges of dyshes þat schulde be caste aweye' with 'brede of bran ful harde' (126) or when such meagre food was scarce the 'swete milke' of her own virgin breasts (121), Marie's diet was one unusual in its abstemiousness:

She 3ete onys and a litil in þe daye ... Wyne dranke she noon; she used no fleshe, and fishe 3eet she nevere, but selden smale fyshes; and she was sustenyd with frutes of trees, erbys, and potage. And longe tyme she 3eet ful blak brede and ful sharpe, þat dogges unneþis mi3t ete of, soo þat for over-mykel sharpnesse and hardnesse hir chaules were flayne wiþinne-forþ and blode come oute of þe woundes. But þinkyng of Crystes blode made hit swete to hir, and wiþ woundes of Criste her woundes were lokned, and þe sharpnesse of fulharde brede was swetned with softenes of hevenly brede. (140)

At other times, she fasted for long periods miraculously without ill effect: She went three years on a daily meal of bread and water, during which visions of angels and St John so filled her with spiritual desire that her physical appetite was curtailed despite the length of her fast and the meagre provisions of her diet (140-141).

It may have been such a period of fasting that ended Marie's life prematurely. Although, according to James, her passing was peaceful, 'never chaungynge for any sorowe of dep gladnesse of semelande or visage of joiynge', her body after death demonstrated the extent of her asceticism: 'For soþ, whan hir holy body shulde be washen in hir obyt, she was founden so smalle and lene þurgh infirmite and fastynges, þat þe rigge-bone of hir

bak was clungen to hir wombe, and as under a þynne lynnen cloþe þe bones of hir bak semyd undir þe litil skynne of hir bely' (183). Her preparation for burial also revealed other ascetic behaviours in addition to her other deprivations. As James describes:

For with fervour of spirite she, loþinge hir fleshe, cutte away greate gobettis and for shame hidde hem in þe erþe; and for she was enflaumed wiþ houge heet of love, she sawe on of Seraphyn, þat is a brennyng angel, standyng by hir in þis excesse of mynde. And whan hir body shulde be washen after she was deed, wymmen fonde þe places of woundes, and hadde mykel marvaile; but þey þat knew hir confessyone, wiste what it was. (140)

Elsewhere James relates how Marie would walk barefoot the two miles through the snow to the church at Oignies 'wiþ-outene any harme or hurt of hir-selfe'. Moreover, over a period of some forty days when she was particularly taken with religious zeal, Marie performed a 'mervelos and unharde offys of salutacyone' involving hundreds of genuflections and self-flagellation with 'a scharpe 3eed' that 'broghte aboundauntly blode oute of hir body' (142). In another anecdote, James describes how Marie, passing through Nivelles and supernaturally aware of the 'synnes and abhomynacyouns þat seculars done often in þat town' requested a knife and 'wolde have kitte þe skynne fro hir feet, for þat she hadde passed by places in þe whiche wreccyd men provoken her creature wiþ so many wronges' (163), and had to be prevented from self-harm.

James demonstrates, in his defence of Marie's behaviour, the anticipation that such excesses would not necessarily be received uncritically. He at one point makes explicit what appears implicitly in the other saints' *vitae* already examined: The idea that such behaviours were intended as objects of marvel rather than examples to be followed, what

Richard Kieckhefer has called the 'imitation-wonderment' theme found throughout much of the *vita* material describing saints' ecstatic and ascetic experiences.<sup>132</sup>

In þis and many oþer þat she wroghte by privelege of grace, lat þe discrete reader take hede þat privelege of a fewe makip not a comun lawe. Folowe wee hir vertues; þe werkes of hir vertues wiþ-outen specyall privelege folowe maye wee not ... And þerfore þat atte wee rede sum seyntes have done by famylyer and homly counseyle of the holy gost, wee shalle rapere mervaile þanne folowe (136).

Certainly, imitation of holy women did occur to some extent—as Bynum iterates, 'women often learned patterns of piety from one another'<sup>133</sup>—but attempting to imitate such behaviour required, at least, on the part of the imitator the presumption of some special grace, which made the aspirant ascetic woman open to potential criticism and required a life of otherwise exemplary virtue. The burden of establishing the reputation of sanctity necessary to justify one's devotional excesses likely discouraged many from pursuing the lifestyle of the visionary ascetic or, at least, allowing one's mystical experiences to become known.

Furthermore, a particular burden was born by the ascetic woman solely because of her gender. James, in describing Marie's practice of cutting her flesh, himself anticipated the potential criticisms that might be applied to Marie's excesses specifically because of her being a woman, and he thus attempts to refute them:

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.12-14

<sup>133</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.82

Þey þat worship and mervaile wormys wellynge oute of seint Symeouns  
woundes and seinte Antones fyre how he brent his fete, why wonder þey not in  
a freel kynde so grete strengthe of a womman, þat, woundyd with charite and  
quyckenyd wiþ Cristes woundys, sette not by þe woundes of hir owne body?  
(140)

By contrasting the 'freel kynde' of women with the power of charity and the inspiration of Christ's suffering, James displaces the emphasis on women's perceived frailty to the power of divine grace. It is not women's weakness that limits their ability to express the divine, but the power of God, which is presumably without limit in its ability to transform bodily weakness into supernatural strength.

As Bynum further notes, women's devotional excesses were sometimes criticized as being unsuitable for their sex. Francis of Assisi urged Clare to moderate her own fasting, and other authors such as Abelard and Suso, the latter himself no stranger to asceticism, taught that ascetic practices were less suitable for women given their frailty of nature. Although the asceticism of the Desert Fathers, such as Anthony and Simon Stylites to whom James of Vitry refers, were well respected, Suso for example taught that women should in particular refrain from imitating their practices, arguing that they should instead concentrate on 'crucifying [their] bad habits without detriment to [their] health'.<sup>134</sup>

Likewise, although he specifically justifies Marie's practice, James similarly notes in his advice to those without Marie's special grace that 'necessaryes are not to be wiþdrawen fro þe pore fleshe, but vices are to be refreyned' (136). The role of the hagiographer, in this regard, is especially difficult in that he must justify his subject's unusual practices while yet making them unavailable to potential imitators, and his comments, at once

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.85

agreeing with the critics of women's asceticism while justifying it in Marie's special case, reflect this particular tension.

### **Catherine of Siena**

The letter concerning Catherine of Siena, which concludes the portion of the Douce 114 manuscript relating the lives of Continental holy women, is the latest of the four texts, composed by Catherine's friend and follower, Stephen of Siena, the sometime prior of the Grande Chartreuse, and written in 1411, no more than a few decades before it was translated by the 'englishe compyloure' of Douce 114 and well before Catherine's canonisation in 1461. Unlike the three preceding texts, it is not a formal *vita*, but a brief epistle written to a Friar Thomas Anthony of Siena in support of Catherine's canonisation and to defend her against rumours impugning the sincerity of her ascetic practices and the veracity of her mystical experiences.

Although Catherine's ministry had nothing in common in time and place with the preceding Douce 114 *vitae*, she shared with them a life characterised by spiritual ecstasies, visionary experiences, and remarkable asceticism. Furthermore, as a Dominican tertiary, she shared with the others the pursuit of the mixed life, a life that balanced contemplative and active spirituality without submitting to a fixed religious rule. The inclusion in the Douce 114 manuscript of Stephen of Siena's letter defending Catherine's spiritual practice demonstrates that the compilation of the manuscript or its exemplar was based on thematic similarities rather than commonalities of time or place.

But unlike the others, Catherine was the only one to have been a writer in her own regard, and she was the only one whose reputation achieved widespread fame among English devotional readers: Catherine's principal work, *Il Dialogo*, was translated into

English and appears in whole or in part in five extant manuscripts and extracts were adapted into other works. The *Dialogo* appears to have been introduced into England by the Carthusian order, and the principal translation, entitled *The Orcherd of Syon*, was undertaken for the benefit of the Birgittine nuns at Syon Abbey.<sup>135</sup> There is no extant English translation of Catherine's full *vita*, but the book of her life is mentioned in the testament of Cecily Neville among the volumes bequeathed to her daughter Bridget.<sup>136</sup> This reference likely refers to an English translation of the extended legend penned by Raymond of Capua rather than the letter translated in Douce 114, but it is likely that the details of Catherine's life were better known in England than the single extant manuscript of Stephen's brief letter would indicate. Among the women described in Douce 114, Catherine was moreover the only one to have been represented in English visual art, albeit a late example, a 1528 screen at Horsham St Faith, where Catherine appears among Bridget of Sweden and other women saints.<sup>137</sup>

Like Marie of Oignies, Catherine's desire for the religious life developed at a young age, and she defied her parents' expectations that she would marry, ultimately experiencing a vision in which she attained a mystical marriage with Christ, pledging to him her virginity. A bout with smallpox at the age of seventeen left her permanently scarred, and prompted her parents to consider entering Catherine into the Dominican Third Order. The Dominican tertiaries, a lay order without a formal rule but under the supervision of the Dominican regulars, were not cloistered, and as such, were unwilling to admit a virgin member, but impressed by her maturity and persuaded by disfigurement, made Catherine the first virgin tertiary, a position she used to advocate publically for the return of the

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<sup>135</sup> Manual, vol. XXIII, p.3119-3120

<sup>136</sup> *Doctor's Commons*, p.23-24

<sup>137</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altar*, p.167



papacy to Rome and the reconciliation of Europe's warring factions before her death in 1380.<sup>138</sup>

Stephen of Siena's letter concerning Catherine of Siena is not a complete account of her life, but addresses a few key aspects of her spiritual practice that were questioned by her critics, aspects which bear thematic similarities to those already discussed in the context of the other Douce 114 *vita*: in particular, her dietary habits and her activity as a teacher and counsellor.

In regard to Catherine's diet, Stephen specifically addresses 'þe opinyone of summe men mysbyleevynge, þe whiche ful falsely detractyd hir and seyde, "þof she ete not openly, neverþeles she etys after-warde pryvely"'. Such gainsayers had reasons for doubt: Catherine, for a time, was 'sustenid wip-outen any materyalle mete, and abstenynge fro a drope of watir', subsisting solely on the sacrament, a miracle concerning which even Stephen admits, 'Ðat myghte I deme impossibil, but if I hadde sene hit wip myne e3yen'. Stephen goes on to describe the abstemiousness she generally demonstrated when not observing her fast:

Flesche, wyne, confeccionen, and egges she loþed gretly, but wymmen þat were wip hir, dighte unto hir comunly grene erbes, whan þey myghte any gette, or ellis oþere-while a mece of wortys wip oyle. Of an ele she eet allonly þe hede and þe tayle, but chese ete she noon, but if hit was wel olde and corrupte, and on same maner grapes and siche oþere. Neverþeles she ete not þese, but chewyd hem wip hir teþ, oþer-while wip brede, oþere-while withoute brede, soukyng þe iuse and spittyd oute every morsel of þe gros mater, soupyng ful often clere watir by hit-selfe.

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<sup>138</sup> Petroff, *Body and Soul*, p.17-19; Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics', p.184-191

Stephen describes also how he observed Catherine, after such a meagre meal, would induce vomiting with 'a stalke of fynel or an oþer þinge þat she put in to hir stomake', sometimes with such violence that 'quykke blode' would 'come oute of hir mouþ'. Similarly, whenever she consumed anything 'as mykel as a walnot', she would become ill until 'she hadde made þat avoydans of hir stomake' (191).

Stephen, observing her induced vomiting and noting that she received nothing of the benefit of the food which she later voided, questioned her as to why she bothered eating at all since what she consumed was brought 'oute ageyne with so grete difficulte, bitternesse, and peyne'. To which, she replied:

Ful dere sone, I have many consideracyons in þis takynge: oon is, for I have preyed god þat hee shulde punyshe me for þe synne of gloteny in þis lyfe, and þerfore I take with gode chere þis discipline þat god haþ graunted to me; and for I do my bisynesse to plesse many oþere men þat seme sclaudirde in me, whan I ete not, and þey seyde þat þe devel deceyved me, and also þat I ete as hit is grauntid to me. And also þere may be anoþere good consideracyone: for by þis bodily peyne þe soule is sumwhat turnyd ageyne to bodily strengþes. (192)

Catherine's hagiographer, Raymond of Capua, described in far greater detail Catherine's habits of diet and fasting, which is described at length elsewhere by Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>139</sup> There she notes that Catherine saw her own fasting not as asceticism but as a physical infirmity; yet despite Catherine's view of her own inedia as something other than a spiritual practice, she clearly developed an elaborate spiritual justification for her dietary habits, attributing her infirmity to a divinely granted preventative against sensual indulgence.

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<sup>139</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.165-180

Catherine was challenged by critics also in her public activities as a teacher and an advocate of reform. Her eloquence and persuasiveness in speaking before both Pope Gregory XI and Pope Urban VI far exceeded the degree of her education, attracting both admirers and critics. As Stephen describes:

She delyverid and expounyd alle holy writte so cleerly and so openly, þat allmen, were þey never so leryd or maistirs, as astonyed hadde wonder, and also þat semyd marvelous: mannes connyng defayled so in hir sighte as snowe or yce mekenesse whan þe sunne shynges most hoot. Many tymes she made ful quykke and spedful sermons wiþ a wondirful stille and enditynge ... alle wiþ grete marvel seiynge þat nevere man spake so. And, wiþouten doute, þis is no woman þat spekes, but þe holy goste, as hit proveþ ful openly. (192)

Stephen describes, in defending her teaching, an anecdote in which several prelates requested of Gregory XI that they be allowed to speak with her to determine 'wheþer þis Kateryn of Senys be so holy as men seiþ.' After having been allowed to obtain an audience with the virgin, the prelates assailed her with 'bitynge wordes and sharpe', asking how 'a vile litel womman' could presume to 'speke of so grete a mater wiþ oure lorde þe Pope', and enquiring about her ecstatic experiences and singular lifestyle (192-193). Her confessor, John, proceeded to answer for her, but was unable to satisfactorily answer her critics, and she was called upon to speak for herself. She replied with such eloquence, according to Stephen's account, that a rift developed among the three enquirers, between a Minorite archbishop who 'wolde not accepte umwhile wordes of þe holy virgyn' and the other two who, convinced by her replies, rebutted, 'What aske 3ee more of this mayden? Withouten doute, she shalle expoune these maters more openly and more pleynly þat evere wee have founden of any doctour, and she expressed clerely many moo fulle trewe tokens' (193).

Whereas all the Douce 114 *vitae* are at least in part a defence of the sanctity of the women they describe, Stephen's letter is explicitly so, a reply to 'a quarelle made at Venese in þe byshopes palyt anens þe halowynge of þe feste or commemoracyone of þe same virgyn, for many wole not leve atte þe vertues be trewe þat are trewly seyde of hir' (185). Although the other women described in Douce 114 had public ministries, some more so than others, Catherine was the only to have largely unmediated access to the highest authorities of the ecclesiastical establishment, and especially because of her being a woman, the burden of justifying her teaching role there was a formidable one.

Stephen, in attempting to do so, appeals to the common contemporary belief in women's incapacity to argue and teach effectively from holy writ combined with Catherine's conspicuous ability to exceed in eloquence and cunning even the abilities of her male contemporaries. He doesn't challenge the notion of women's comparative ineffectiveness, but rather reiterates it in order to prove that Catherine's teaching abilities were supernatural in origin, a particular divine grace: 'Wiþouten doute, þis is no woman þat spekes, but þe holy goste' (192). And by doing so, he places her outside the possibility of criticism based on her gender alone.

Such invocation of a supernatural explanation for the behaviour of holy women is, as we have seen throughout the Douce 114 *vitae*, an integral part in the defence of their singular callings. The two criticisms that might be levelled toward a singular devotional practice or habit of lifestyle were, on the one hand, that the action arose purely from self-effort, from one's own fleshly ambitions or the pursuit of mere appearances; on the other hand, and especially in the more extreme examples like those of Christina *Mirabilis*, that the abilities, where they *were* ostensibly supernatural, were achieved through demonic means.

Because of these two principal criticisms, the method of justifying the singularities of the holy woman involved making two implicit arguments: First, to argue that the acts were performed through a special grace, not as a result of self-effort, and second, to provide an explanation for the behavior that reaffirms Christian beliefs and virtues, thus negating any criticism that the acts were performed through demonic agency.

In the case of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Philip of Clairvaux describes how her physical infirmity would have made her mimetic performance of the Passion impossible under mundane circumstances and how her unusual performance reinforced and made visible the Passion as an object of devotional veneration. In the life of Christina *Mirabilis*, Thomas Cantimpré justifies the patently miraculous aspects of Christina's life by explaining how those miracles fit in with her vision of ameliorating the afflictions of those in purgatory through her own vicarious suffering. In the life of Marie of Oignies, James of Vitry uses a two-part organization for his work which describes in one part the miraculous acts attributed to Marie and in the second part the virtues born from her devotional acts. And here, in the letter concerning Catherine of Siena, Stephen of Siena defends Catherine's more controversial habits by arguing for their supernatural origin and providing, in large part in Catherine's own words, the spiritual motivation and fruit of those habits.

I have postponed describing one other major theme that unites the *vitae* recorded in Douce 114 in order to address it in depth in the following chapter, the common veneration all the women described here held for the sacraments and in particular for the Eucharist. The same argument used to argue for these women's sanctity can also be read backward into the text to defend the mystical and sacred nature of the Eucharistic host: Miraculous events described in the *vitae* associated with the receiving of the host confirm its supernatural nature, while the virtues born from participation in the sacrament (and

the aversion toward the sacrament by those out of grace) confirm its holiness. By thus reading into the texts such a defence of the Eucharistic host, the Douce 114 *vitae* take on new possibilities as a defence of the sacrament in the religious environment in which they were translated, one in which doctrines concerning the Eucharist were being actively disputed.

### Douce 114 and the Defence of Orthodoxy

One of the most formative occurrences in the religious history of late-medieval England was doubtless the challenges to orthodox belief created by the rise of the Lollard heresy and the ideological followers of John Wycliffe. It was a controversy that would have concerned the Carthusians at Beauvale both because the order, through its production of vernacular devotional texts, ministered directly to the lay population, among whom the heresy was particularly successful; and because geographically, Beauvale existed in close proximity to two of the most prolific centres for Lollard ideology.

The movement itself had begun in the English Midlands: Lutterworth in Leicestershire, the parish in which John Wycliffe served as rector, could be described as the birthplace of Lollard doctrine, and the region between Northampton and Leicester quickly became a hotbed of Lollard activity. While there is little Lollard activity recorded for Nottinghamshire itself where Douce 114 originated, it was nonetheless close to two of the main areas where the heresy thrived: Leicester, to the south, where a number of Wycliffe's earliest followers propagated his doctrines, and Coventry to the southwest, which became a nest of Lollard later in the fifteenth century as Leicester began to wane in importance for the movement. In looking at Leicester's earliest participation in the Lollard movement, we are fortunate enough that one of the principle chroniclers of early

Lollardy was himself a Leicestershire man. Henry Knighton composed his chronicle during the last quarter of the fourteenth century while at the abbey of St Mary-in-the-Meadows in Leicester, where Knighton was a canon. From his location, Knighton was able to observe the Lollard controversy from its earliest inception, when John Wycliffe began to preach his doctrines while rector of nearby Lutterworth.

The cast of characters Knighton describes as being among Wycliffe's earliest followers in and about Leicester is an unusual one indeed, men demonstrating the same religious enthusiasm that we might elsewhere attribute to orthodox mystics like Richard Rolle or Margery Kempe. Among these was William Swinderby, also known by his contemporaries as William the Hermit. Knighton disdainfully describes William as a man 'of inconstant life and morals,' who when he arrived in the town so infuriated the women there by preaching angrily against their vanity and lasciviousness that they were well prepared to take up stones against him and drive him from their town.<sup>140</sup> After this cold reception by the women of Leicester, William turned instead and perhaps more wisely toward a less confrontational vocation, retiring to a hermitage at some remove from the town, where he benefited from the patronage of the Duke of Lancaster. Here, William was able to establish a rapport with the pious locals who came to believe in his sanctity and took to bringing him donations in the wood where he resided. It is uncertain how long William Swinderby endeavoured in the eremitic life, but Knighton tells us that William soon grew weary of the poverty of his chosen vocation, but ashamed to return to the town he undertook instead to enter the abbey at Leicester, which for a time provided him with room and board.<sup>141</sup> From there, William took again to preaching, travelling the

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<sup>140</sup> G.H. Martin, ed. *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p.306; See also, James Crompton, 'Leicestershire Lollards', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 44 (1968): 11-44, p.19

<sup>141</sup> Martin, *Knighton's Chronicle*, p.308



countryside to visit nearby towns, among them Market Harborough, Hallaton, Loughborough, and Melton Mowbray.<sup>142</sup>

There is no indication that William Swinderby was at this time propagating Lollard doctrine, nor is it known whether he then had any proclivities toward Lollard belief. According to Knighton, who depicts Swinderby's taking up Lollard belief as part of his taste for spiritual novelties, Swinderby first turned toward anti-clerical preaching when he fell into the company of another religious enthusiast, William Smith, and it may have been Smith who swayed Swinderby toward Lollard opinion. Smith himself was a similarly odd character, whom Knighton describes as the subject of some unnamed physical deformity, who once spurned by a young woman he sought to marry, turned instead toward extravagant shows of holiness. Besides having taught himself to read and write, this Smith practiced a number of austerities, going about barefoot and rejecting the consumption of meat, the wearing of linen, the imbibing of alcohol, and the 'embraces of women'.<sup>143</sup> The two men began to congregate in the Chapel of St John the Baptist outside the town walls, and together with others they recruited to their sect, there was formed in the chapel the first school of Lollardy, where those holding Wycliffite opinions could hold their services and discuss their beliefs, a place Knighton unflatteringly calls a 'gingnasium malignorum dogmatum et errorum'.<sup>144</sup> It seems that despite their eccentricities these men, and their school outside the city walls, appear to have been rather successful in propagating Wycliffe's doctrines among Leicester's inhabitants. Knighton may have perhaps exaggerated the case when he said concerning the Lollard presence in Leicester, *in tantum multiplicata fuit quod vix duos uideres in uia, quin alter eorum discipulus Wychyffe fuerit*, 'it had multiplied to such a degree that you could hardly see two

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<sup>142</sup> Crompton, 'Leicestershire Lollards', p.19

<sup>143</sup> Martin, *Knighton's Chronicle*, p.292

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296

people in the street but that one would be a follower of Wycliffe'.<sup>145</sup> But the mere fact that he perceived the problem as being so widespread is in itself significant in terms of how local ecclesiastic officials viewed the extent of the heresy.

William Swinderby soon began to attract unwanted attention. He had preached against clerical excesses, persuading parishioners that they were not obliged to give tithes and offerings if their priest behaved inappropriately or was unlearned or unskilled in preaching and that those who continued to support unchaste priests financially were abetting their wicked deeds. Word of his anticlericalism soon reached the Bishop of Lincoln, who banned Swinderby from preaching in the chapel or any church in the diocese and prohibited, under pain of excommunication, any of the populace to listen to his teaching. The order merely increased Swinderby's zeal. Swinderby instead, finding a pair of millstones for sale in the street, made his pulpit there and continued to preach, and he now drew in twice the numbers he had previously attracted. This time, Swinderby was cited to appear before the bishop in Lincoln to answer charges of heresy.<sup>146</sup>

Swinderby was convicted and sentenced to the flames. Only through the intervention of the Duke of Lancaster, who had earlier served as patron to Swinderby, was his sentence commuted to the formal renunciation of his errors in all the churches in which he had formerly preached. Swinderby's recantation lists among his errors the belief that the sacraments are invalid if performed by a priest in mortal sin, that tithes are to be withdrawn from an unchaste priest, and that none living contrary to the law of God is a true priest.<sup>147</sup> After having done his penance and recantation, Swinderby returned to the chapel outside Leicester, where—according to Knighton—local support for him began

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.308

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.310-312

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.320-322

to decline now that he was forbidden from preaching. Swinderby apparently became despondent about his waning popularity. Smith and the others with whom Swinderby shared the chapel may have already been expelled following an incident in which Smith and a certain chaplain Richard Waytestathe outraged the pious locals by infamously hewing down a statue of St Catherine as fuel with which to stew their cabbage.<sup>148</sup> Swinderby, now alone and forbidden from preaching, covertly left Leicester for Coventry, where he preached for some time before attracting unwanted attention there and fleeing into the Welsh marches.

Unfortunately, Knighton's chronicle, one of the more interesting narratives on early Lollardy, breaks off abruptly in 1396, perhaps due to the author's death, and well before the significant events of the Oldcastle uprising. Insofar as my own survey of Lollardy here is meant only to provide a context for the reception of the saints' *vitae* in Douce 114, I will not rehearse here all the details of the Oldcastle rebellion, an event which has been adequately described elsewhere.<sup>149</sup> It may be useful, however, in constructing a picture of the local influence of Lollardy on Beauvale's environs in the English Midlands, to mention a few examples of local Lollardy that appeared in the wake of the 1414 uprising. Although Lollardy had political implications from the start, only with the Oldcastle rebellion were these implications realised, and the authorities redoubled their effort to root out the heresy.

The prosecutions that followed the rebellion uncovered a substantial Lollard presence across the Midlands. Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, in particular, seem to have provided Oldcastle significant support, and those who participated in the uprising moreover were doubtless only the bolder members of a more substantial heretical

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.296

<sup>149</sup> K.B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London: English Universities Press, 1952), Ch.6

community. The commission at Loughborough in 1414 heard testimony concerning treasonous uprisings in Leicester and Belton in Charnwood, but they also heard what must have been shocking disclosures concerning heretical utterances by Midlands residents not associated with the revolt, among them John Belgrave, who had asserted that there was never a pope from the time of St. Clement, and Ralph Friday, who had named Archbishop Arundel as chief of Antichrist's disciples.<sup>150</sup> For some time after Oldcastle's abortive attempt at revolution, rumours of his being sheltered in the English Midlands were rife, but little reliable evidence could be produced. Lollard bills appearing in Northampton in 1416 and a plot against the King during his stay at Kenilworth by an associate of Oldcastle's perhaps reflect Oldcastle's activities during his years of hiding.<sup>151</sup>

By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the focus of Midlands Lollardy had shifted toward Coventry, perhaps aided by William Swinderby's later activities there, as well as those of another preacher, John Grace, whose inflammatory sermons brought no small amount of attention to heretical activity in the town.<sup>152</sup> A number of charges of heresy were raised in the following years, and the prosecution of heresy in the Midlands eventually culminated in a personal inquiry by Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, who travelled to the Midlands in 1431 with the expressed purpose of rooting out and punishing the heretics who were then to blame for disturbances occurring there. This, and the several executions carried out that same year, must have been effective at driving the Coventry Lollards underground, for no new examples of Lollardy emerge until 1486, when Coventry again was demonstrated to be a centre for Lollard belief as nine more

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<sup>150</sup> John A.F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards 1414-1520* (London: Oxford Press, 1965), p.95

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100

citizens were brought to trial for disputing the veneration of images and holding unorthodox beliefs concerning the Eucharist.<sup>153</sup>

### **Douce 114 as Anti-Lollard Text**

Doubtless the Carthusians at Beauvale were familiar with the controversies that were arising around them and furthermore aware in a broad sense of the growing anxieties about the production of vernacular religious works. In his final comments on the *vitae* translated in Douce 114, the English translator makes a short statement expressing his own anxieties regarding the act of translating these texts into the vernacular. His comments are revealing on a number of levels, not the least of which are his expectation of having both 'men and wymmen' among his readership, the possibility that 'lettird men' might come across his volume, an apology for his 'unsuyng of englyshe' that combines both Northern and Southern forms, and so on. Each of these points is taken up elsewhere in this thesis. Here, however, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the translator's anxiety regarding vernacular translation may itself point to one possible understanding of how these *vitae* were used and understood in the context of the English fifteenth century. On the one hand, the translator's comments may seem largely conventional, a confession of his own simplicity as a pre-emptive defence against any who might find fault with his work. On the other hand, by this particular point in the fifteenth century, the act of translating religious texts into the vernacular had itself become a complicated and potentially hazardous affair, and the translator's comments likely reflect specific anxieties raised by the Lollard heresy concerning the act of translating texts into the vernacular.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p.104-105; George Townsend, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1965), p.133-135

In response to John Wycliffe's followers, who advocated among numerous other heterodox doctrines the necessity of having the Bible available to the laity in English, Archbishop Arundel, in his 1409 *Constitutions*, had forbidden the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular. This prohibition appears not only to have confounded efforts at Biblical translation, but encompassed even the translation of isolated passages of scripture contained within vernacular religious treatises.<sup>154</sup> Arundel's legislation seems to have raised more general concerns among the orthodox concerning the translation of extra-scriptural religious texts and caused original theological treatises composed in the vernacular, produced prolifically in the late-fourteenth century, to disappear almost entirely in the fifteenth. The *Constitutions* were, as Nicholas Watson describes them, 'one of the most draconian pieces of censorship in English history, going far beyond its ostensible aims of destroying the Lollard heresy and effectively attempting to curtail all sorts of theological thinking and writing in the vernacular'.<sup>155</sup> Vernacular works of religious instruction continued to be produced, but increasingly, these were translations of established devotional Latin texts rather than original compositions, and there are indications that orthodox translators had to become more circumspect regarding their work even when working from reputable sources. The 'apologetik of þis englishe compyloure' appended to the *vita* of Douce 114 is doubtless a reflection of this anxiety concerning the potential pitfalls of producing vernacular translations of religious works; the translator's claim to have only carried out his translation under orders of his prior, a reflection of his efforts to distance himself from any responsibility for the text he produced.

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<sup>154</sup> Anne Hudson, *Lollards and their Books* (London: Hambledon, 1985), p.147-49

<sup>155</sup> Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum* 70:4 (Oct 1995): 822-864, p. 826

In this chapter, however, I would like to explore the possibility that the effect of the Lollard controversy on the production and reception of this manuscript may extend far beyond a mere worry over the appropriateness of vernacular translation. In particular, I suggest that the selection of these particular materials for translation may have been influenced by the way in which they reinforce orthodox beliefs specifically denied by Wycliffe's followers, and that reading these *vitae* in the context of the Lollard controversy may offer some possible indications of how these texts were used and received.

The foundations of the Lollard movement, and those of the orthodox response to Lollard belief, originated in the world of academic theology, and the arguments of both sides were developed in Latin polemic. But when the ideas first formulated by Wycliffe began to take root among the laity, the methods of theological argument employed by Wycliffe's opponents ceased to be effective as the laity developed justifications of their own for the beliefs they had inherited from Wycliffe. This sort of 'vernacular logic' dispensed with the complex philosophical constructs that Wycliffe had used in formulating his own arguments and instead appealed to 'common-sense' explanations based on empirical understanding, anecdotal examples, and analogies to verifiable experience. Such reasoning operated on a level of discourse entirely different to that of scholastic debate and could not be easily countered with erudite Latinate language or complex theological argument. Reinforcing orthodox belief among the laity thus required something more immediately comprehensible, reasons framed in the kind of discourse similarly persuasive to those who lacked formal theological training.

Countering Lollard thought through the medium of vernacular religious instruction, however, was itself problematic. The chief difficulty with any such attempt was, as Hudson explains, 'that any answer to Wycliffite arguments that used English was potentially a means of spreading the notions it was designed to suppress, or arousing

interest in the minds of those as yet untouched by heretical preachers but susceptible to the populist attractions of many items in their programme.<sup>156</sup> The principal strategy enforced by the established church for countering the spread of the Lollard heresy was to err on the side of caution and suppress nearly all discussion of the theological issues that Lollardy had raised.

This strategy was not without its dissenters, and Watson alludes in this regard to the possibility of 'an "underground" fifteenth-century theological tradition, carried on mainly through the processes of translation and compilation'<sup>157</sup>. The only text, however, to be explicitly produced to counter Lollard opinion and also claim Arundel's expressed approval was the translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* produced by Nicholas Love, a Carthusian of the charterhouse at Mount Grace. The parallels and connections between Love's work and the texts of the Douce 114 MS will be considered in more detail at the end of this chapter. First, however, I would like to examine some of the specific theological issues raised by the Lollard heresy and explore the parallels found in the devotional material of the Douce 114 *vitae*, in order to investigate how the Lollard heresy may have affected the reading of these texts and the decision in the first place to make these texts available to vernacular readers.

I have suggested that the vernacular advocates of Lollardy went beyond the academic discussion initiated by Wycliffe in inventing their own justifications for their heterodox beliefs, and that these justifications often appealed to strategies and standards of proof that were often foreign to the type of justifications raised by both sides of the more academic debate. Lollard denials specifically concerning the nature of the Eucharistic host were perhaps the most prolific source of vernacular arguments both broad and

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<sup>156</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p.430-31

<sup>157</sup> Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', p.836



inventive against the orthodox position, and the Eucharistic controversy illustrates well the means by which Lollardy's heterodox opinions were justified among their lay advocates. Unlike Wycliffe's critique of the orthodox view of the Eucharist, centred as it was around the philosophic intricacies of accidents and substance, the objections voiced by most lay Lollards were more immediate and empirical, and almost without exception based upon misunderstandings of both Wycliffe's position and the position of orthodoxy. The crude understanding some held of transubstantiation inevitably led to seeming contradictions and inconsistencies that were exploited by Wycliffe's less sophisticated followers.

Wycliffe's own argument concerning the Eucharist departed from orthodoxy in asserting that the substance of the elements still remained after the consecration in addition to whatever sacramental change the act had effected. The orthodox view, on the other hand, held that only the accidental properties—the appearance—of bread and wine remained, but the substance of the elements had been changed into the body and blood of Christ. In other words, no material bread remained after the consecration. Wycliffe, however, found objectionable the idea that the accidental properties of a thing could exist without their corresponding substance and moreover that the substance of a thing could itself be annihilated, an act which he felt was against God's nature. Around these fundamental objections Wycliffe primarily framed his contentions. The subtlety of his argument, however, seems to have been lost on many Lollard lay-followers, who tended to reduce the Eucharist to a mere memorial, particularly so as vernacular Lollardy spread throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, many seem to have taken Wycliffe's position

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<sup>158</sup> Wycliffe's argument, and its cruder imitations, are discussed at length in Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p.281-290, and Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.324-334.

to imply that *only* material bread remain, without the act of consecration having effected any transformation whatsoever.

It is difficult to find any modern equivalent to the shock the devout must have felt when first this basic premise of late-medieval devotion was called into question. The importance of the sacrament can hardly be overestimated: The numerous festivals, fraternities, and rites that had arisen around the host and its associated cult testify overwhelmingly to its importance. The host itself was a powerful devotional focus, 'promising salvation through physical incorporation into Christ, or doom through the undeserving and the sinful proximity or reception of the sacrament'.<sup>159</sup> And perhaps most powerfully, at the inevitable moment of death, the host served as the *viaticum*, the final provision for the journey into the afterlife. The first rumblings among English laypersons that the miracle of the sacrament might be a sham, a deception of the priesthood to induce the simple to idolatry, must certainly have raised numerous fears and anxieties among the devout.

It is interesting then that lay followers of Wycliffe's doctrines should have taken up the Eucharistic controversy with such zeal. Even more interesting is their inventiveness in creating their own justifications for their denials when Wycliffe's rationale proved too opaque to the untrained to be easily comprehensible or persuasive. For this reason, the more conventional polemical defence of orthodoxy, even if it could reduce the complexity of the issues involved in Wycliffe's critique to a level comprehensible to the untrained, would nonetheless be irrelevant because the justifications being propagated by lay Lollards were of a different nature entirely, as the records of Lollard trials well demonstrates.

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<sup>159</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p.77

Margery Baxter, an outspoken proponent of heretical opinions in Norwich, was reported in her 1429 deposition to have made a number of provocative comments, including this novel argument concerning the Sacrament of the Altar:

For if every sacrament were God, and the very body of Christ, there should be an infinite number of gods, because that a thousand priests, and more, do every day make a thousand such gods, and afterwards eat them, and void them out again in places, where, if you will seek them, you may find many such gods. And, therefore, know for certainty, that by the grace of God it shall never be my god, because it is falsely and deceitfully ordained by the priests in the church, to induce the simple people to idolatry; for it is only material bread.<sup>160</sup>

Such logic must have had a certain appeal, avoiding as it does the erudite and forbidding terminology of academic theology, and invoking a certain unpretentious and homely reasoning. Some time later, in the diocese of Lincoln, a certain Francis Funge was accused of invoking a similar argument:

If the sacrament of the altar be very God and man, flesh and blood, in form of bread, as priests say that it is, then have we many gods; and in heaven there is but one God. And if there were a hundred houseled in one parish, and as many in another, then there must needs be more than one God.

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<sup>160</sup> Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments*, vol. 4, p.594-95. The Latin text of the deposition has been printed in Norman P. Tanner, *Heresy Trials in The Diocese of Norwich 1428-31* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), p.43ff.

To this argument, Francis adds an additional point, that Christ having suffered bodily when he was last in the hands of men would be loathe to allow himself to be thus delivered again!<sup>161</sup>

Some such arguments were clearly made in derision. Among the many charges made in 1431 against Nicholas Canon of Eye in Suffolk—including publicly mocking from behind a pillar of the church those parishioners doing reverence to the host on Corpus Christi day—was a report of his irreverent remark, 'if the sacrament of the altar be very God and very man . . . then may very God and very man be put in a small room,' to which Nicholas added the perhaps more-persuasive suggestion that the priests' receiving the Sacrament on Fridays violated prohibitions against eating meat, since consuming the host was, according to orthodox opinion, consuming the flesh of Christ.<sup>162</sup>

To these may be added scores of other arguments and remarks: Some arguments were clearly based on a misunderstanding of what transubstantiation according to orthodox opinion was meant to accomplish, and it seems likely that Wycliffe would have been embarrassed to see his own teachings thus defended: In 1488, Margery Goyt of Ashbourne remarked that if the host were actually the body of Christ, the priests could not so easily break it in fourths, the body of Christ having flesh and bones.<sup>163</sup> Clearly, some expected the consecrated host, if it was the true body of Christ, to have certain obvious and physical properties. Margery Goyt's expectation that the host should have flesh and bones is a crude example, but others proposed more sophisticated criteria for determining whether the host was what the church claimed. When Richard Vulford and Thomas Geffrey of the Diocese of Lincoln claimed that the host was mere bread, they offered the following experiment as proof:

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<sup>161</sup> Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p.233

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p.599

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, p.135

[Let] a mouse be put in the pix with the Host, and the mouse would eat it up. And for more proof they declared . . . that there were two priests in Essex, who put a mouse in the pix to a consecrated Host, and the mouse did eat it.<sup>164</sup>

Obviously, this kind of 'vernacular logic' operated on a different level of discourse entirely to that of scholastic debate and could not be easily countered with erudite Latinate language or complex theological constructions. Reinforcing orthodox belief among the laity thus required something more immediately comprehensible, arguments framed in the kind of discourse similarly persuasive to those who lacked formal theological training. Moreover, this was a growing problem that needed to be countered: Lollard denials of transubstantiation were enraging ecclesiastics by denying one of the powers uniquely reserved to the clergy as well as angering those pious laypeople for whom Eucharistic devotion was central. The problem needed to be dealt with, and it seemed no longer enough to command the laity simply to entrust all theological debate to the clergy. Certainly, the command to blind obedience was still reiterated in a number of vernacular writings, but others, perhaps more in touch with vernacular devotion, seemed to have realised that faith needed to be strengthened through a different and more relevant approach—by anecdotal tales, by *exempla* that demonstrated the miraculous nature of the host—in order to win back the minds of the lay devout. Preachers and writers did, of course, continue to urge belief in the orthodox view of the sacrament based on the authority of the church itself. At the same time, however, many seem to have realised that the mere assertion of the church's authority would not sate the curiosity or the doubts of those who had begun to look for more immediate and accessible proof.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., vol.4, p.230

One extant vernacular sermon on the passage, *Qui manducat hunc panem, vivet in eternum*, an Easter sermon dated at about the time of the Oldcastle rebellion, demonstrates the pattern that may have been typical of vernacular preaching on the Eucharist following the spread of the Lollard heresy among the laity. The writer, obviously aware of heterodox teachings to the contrary, sets forth to demonstrate the basic premise, 'ryght þe same body þat died on þe Crosse and þis day rose verry God and man, þe same bodie is on þe Sacrament on þe awtur in forme of brede'.<sup>165</sup> On one hand, he argues his case first by reiterating without embarrassment the need to place faith in the teachings of church authority. The above premise concerning the Eucharist is not for the unlearned to dispute, he argues; instead, such questions should be left to the discretion of trained clergy. To this end, he provides a material illustration: The graven side of the host, illustrated usually with a cross or some more elaborate design, signifies the learned clerk who was qualified to debate such matters; the plain side, the lewd lay-follower who should resolve himself to believe 'as holychurche techep'.<sup>166</sup> The latter ought simply to believe without the evidence of the senses, even as Christ praised those who *non viderunt et crediderunt*. The sermon here sets forth the unambiguous instruction, with the visual and symbolic reinforcement of the material host itself, that the lay-believer simply entrust himself to church authority.

And yet, the author does not merely stop with command, but feels it necessary to provide a more anecdotal proof in order to vindicate such unquestioning faith in church teaching. To this end, he provides 'in evidence þat þis brede is verry God and man' a tale from an unnamed chronicle, a story concerning a wager between a Christian and a Jew. This tale describes how a Jew, challenging the Christian's faith in the Sacrament, wagers

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<sup>165</sup> Woodburn O. Ross, ed. *Middle English Sermons Edited from British Museum MS. Royal 16 B. xxiii* (London: EETS, 1940), p.126

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127

twenty pounds that his dog will indiscriminately consume a consecrated host. The Christian attends mass and secretly procures a consecrated host; meanwhile, the Jew starves his hound, feeding him nothing but occasional obleys. On the appointed day, the Jew and the Christian meet to resolve the bet: The Jew casts before the dog several obleys, which the dog eats greedily, but when the consecrated host is cast before him, the hound attempts to flee the house. After having been fetched back again by his master, the dog then does reverence to the Sacrament 'on all iiij knees'. And finally, after a beating with his master's staff and an attempt to force-feed him the host, the dog seizes his master by the throat and strangles him. The moral of the story is easy enough to deduce: 'So be þis meracle þou may be stered to beleue þer-on in þat, þat an unresonable beeste so dud, þat never had techynge of holychurche. Be þe wiche proces þou may well see þat it is brede of liff'.<sup>167</sup> As an isolated illustration, such seemingly naïve anecdotal evidence might be easily disregarded were it not for the fact that Lollard heretics, such as Richard Vulford who proposed to his friend the experiment with a mouse in a pyx, were invoking like tales to the opposite effect.

The same sermon cycle preserves a number of similar stories: A woman receiving the Eucharist having only feigned repentance for some mortal sin is later strangled by the devil, for example. Another more elaborate tale has a group of Jews, typical antagonists in these sort of *exempla*, cutting the host out of a clerk's stomach, only to be struck blind by the host's radiant light. The host, then adopting the form of a small child, preaches briefly to the assembled crowd on the virtues of the Sacrament, and finally returns to its former state, completely healing the eviscerated clerk.<sup>168</sup> These sort of tales, often involving a Jew as the archetypal non-believer or else some unrepentant Christian, are

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.128-30

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.62-65

clear illustrations of the Sacrament's power and obvious warnings against any who do not make due reverence to the Eucharistic host.

Another notable example of such tales being incorporated into a didactic vernacular medium is the Corpus Christi drama, of which the Croxton Play of the Sacrament provides the best extant example.<sup>169</sup> In the Croxton play, a Jew and his followers obtain a consecrated host, and in an attempt to disprove the bodily presence, begin to assault the host by various means, piercing it with their daggers, nailing it to a pillar, boiling it in oil, and casting it in an oven. The host demonstrates its miraculous nature, as we would expect, first bleeding when pierced and finally tearing asunder the oven in which it is cast, obvious allusions to the crucifixion and resurrection. A final vision of the Man of Sorrows himself drives the Jews to repent of their deeds and convert to the Christian faith. The tale adapted here for dramatic presentation is a continental story, set in Aragon, but its applications to England's own Eucharistic desecrators could not have been ignored.

For these kinds of *exempla*, the fifteenth-century preacher would have had a number of valuable sources, collections of such tales in both Latin and the vernacular. And having already dealt with its own brand of anti-sacramental heresy, the Continent provided a ready store of anecdotes to draw upon, and these, combined with earlier collections produced domestically, comprised a formidable resource for the anti-Lollard preacher. One of the larger collections extant in the vernacular, a translation of Arnold of Liège's *Alphabetum Narrationum*, draws upon sources as diverse as Bede, Aesop, Isidore, Gregory, and the *Vitas Patrum*. The collection also includes over forty of James of Vitry's *exempla*, including one regarding the life of Christina *Mirabilis* and several concerning Marie of Oignies, both of whose complete *vitae* appear in Douce 114. One of the tales included in

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<sup>169</sup> Norman Davies, ed. *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: EETS, 1970)



the *Alphabetum Narrationum* specifically describes Marie's living without any sustenance but the Sacramental host.<sup>170</sup>

While I have located no direct evidence that the tales of Eucharist-related miracles related in Douce 114 were used to defend the orthodox view of the host, the use of Eucharistic miracles associated with women saints had at least one parallel in the Latin polemic produced in response to Wycliffe's opinions. Thomas Netter had used in his anti-Lollard treatise the example of a Norfolk mystic, Joan the Meatless, as proof of the true presence. According to Netter, Joan's miracles, which included living on the host alone like Marie and distinguishing between consecrated and unconsecrated bread, demonstrated the Eucharist's miraculous nature.<sup>171</sup> It is not improbable then, given this precedent for their polemic use and their ready availability in vernacular collections, that such tales were used in vernacular sermons composed to refute heterodox opinions on the Sacrament and perhaps also in the clergy's less formal pastoral dealings with those experiencing doubts with regard to the Eucharist.<sup>172</sup>

Reading the *vitae* of Douce 114 with the Lollard controversy in mind elicits numerous examples of how the controversy could have affected the reception of these texts, as well as been the basis for the Carthusians' motivation in making these texts available in the vernacular. This is particularly true with regard to the descriptions of Eucharistic devotion by the women of Douce 114 and the miracles and ecstatic spiritual experiences associated with their participation in the Eucharistic sacrament.

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<sup>170</sup> Banks, *Alphabet of Tales*, no. 145

<sup>171</sup> Bynum, *Holy Fast*, p.91

<sup>172</sup> Tales and *exempla* associated with the Eucharist are described at greater length in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p.108-29.

The life and miracles of Elizabeth of Spalbeek revolved almost in their entirety around the liturgical hours, and culminated in the celebration of the Mass itself. Elizabeth's was an unusual sort of spirituality, comprising ecstasies that expressed themselves in very physical displays, which themselves were often characterised by graphic acts of self-violence. She was also unusual insofar as her displays of ecstatic spirituality were themselves the miracles that validated her practice: the physical feats attributed to Elizabeth's spiritual rapture are superhuman by anyone's standards, but were even more extraordinary insofar as Elizabeth, when not taken up in ecstasy, was unable even to walk without assistance, having been the victim of some unnamed physical infirmity. Her hagiographer, Philip of Clairvaux carefully notes, substantiating his claim with reference to 'alle þe cuntrey' as witness, that Elizabeth at the age of five had to be physically carried out from a burning house because she was incapable of moving under her own power even when threatened with pain and death. Thus, Philip would have us believe that these astounding physical displays of which Elizabeth now proved capable were doubtless divine in origin, 'not of hir strengthe, but of a prive vertue of god' (108).

As described in Elizabeth's *vita*, these miraculous ecstasies are also closely associated with Elizabeth's devotion to the Eucharistic sacrament. The young virgin, we are told, was given residence by her cousin, the abbot of St Truyen, in a chamber attached to a chapel and specially prepared for her. The door of this chamber, Philip is careful to note, was directly opposite the chapel's altar so that Elizabeth could face the celebrant during the performance of the mass from the bed where she lay in her chamber caught up in ecstatic rapture at the Elevation of the Host:

Sooply, anone as she seep þe elevacyon of the sacramente, in þe selfe momente of the sighte þere-of, sche berith over wiþ a merveilous movynge alle hir body overthwarte þe bedde, strecchyng forþe hir armes on boop sydes hir, and

makith a crosse of hir-selfe, and so sche abidith alle-starke as a stok in a swogh and ravishynge; soo þat þe armes, heed and nekke, with a party of þe shuldres er wiþ-outen hire bedde and so as unto þat parte of þe body she hengiþ in þe eyre withouten sterynge, as longe as the masse is in doynge, and þe visage of þe virgyne is algat sumwhatly streight up towarde the auter, as if sche byhelde allewey þe sacramente þurgh þe myddes of the dore. (115)

The miraculous element here, of course, being Elizabeth's uncanny ability to sense the sacramental host even through the closed door as well as being able to remain rigid for the duration of the mass in the awkward half-reclined position Philip describes, a feat that normally would be beyond the young woman's strength, indeed, beyond the strength of most people. A similar feat is afterward described with respect to Elizabeth's actually receiving the host:

Forsooþ, if sche schal þan receyve þe sacrament, she turnith hir anoon ageyns þe auter, and hir sistres and hir moder lifte up and undir-sette hir wiþ cloþes or wiþ two piloues, and so sche abidith neiþer liggyng ne sittynge, but as bytwix booþ, haldynge hire handys to-gedir, wiþ fulle devoute sighynges and goostly greydlynes and oþer-while wiþ teerys abidyng mekely þe comynge of hire savyoure and spouse. And whanne þe preste, cladde wiþ an albe, offirs to hir þe sacramente, she metiþ oure lorde with alle her spirite, and in þe selfe momente þat sche openiþ her mouþe and takiþ þe oste, she is ravysed even forþwiþ: soo þat anone she closith her mouþe and stekith her lippes to-gider and standith stoon-stille; nor it maye not be perceyved þat she holdith þe sacramente in hir mouþe or schewiþ hir moistes or swolowes or decloseþ hit in her mouþe, nor she moveþ teep ne lippes ne chekys. And so she abidiþ starke and ravished a good space. And whan þe pilous are taken awaye or oþere

cloþes þat hilde hir up byfore, never-þe-latter she abidith unmouid in þe same manere of body and membrys as she was whan sche receyved þe sacramente.

(115)

Here, after having been caught up in rapture at the receiving of the sacramental host, Elizabeth no longer requires the artificial supports that previously allowed her to sit upright. The miracle is again associated with the Eucharistic host itself, an association which could easily, in a context where the validity of the sacrament is being actively questioned, be read as a validation of the sacrament itself. In both these examples, it is the visible and ostensible miracle embodied in Elizabeth herself, the transformation of her inert body into a manifestation of divine power, that reflects the more subtle and invisible miracle of the Eucharistic transformation.

And it is this incarnational aspect of Elizabeth's unique spiritual practice that supports, even more so than her unusual devotion to the host, the possibility of Christ's miraculous embodiment in humble matter. There is an unspoken parallel here between Christ's revealing himself in the frail and inert body of this young virgin and Christ's presence revealed in simple bread, and I suggest that this parallel would not have been lost on the devout reader of these texts, confirming what many Lollards denied: It was no more beyond Christ's power to transform the substance of bread into his own flesh than it was to transform this bed-ridden young woman into a living and dynamic representation of his suffering and death. This text can thus be read as an apologia for the miraculous, a confirmation for the devout reader of the transformational power of the divine as a response to a heresy that was broadly seen as a negation of the miraculous in the celebration of the Eucharist. Furthermore, the Eucharistic devotion that Elizabeth demonstrates sets an example for others to follow, perhaps not so much the unusual means of her devotion as the zeal for the Eucharist that her devotion expresses.

Similarly, in the *vita* of Marie of Oignies, there is a clear association between her supernatural experiences and her Eucharistic devotion. It may be recalled that at least one miracle of Marie of Oignies associated with the Eucharist, namely her subsisting without any food but the consecrated host, was known also through James of Vitry's collection of *exempla*, a work incorporated into a number of Middle-English compilations and translations such as *The Alphabet of Tales*. Here also in Douce 114 is Marie's Eucharistic devotion well documented, including her dependence solely on the Eucharist in the days of the illness before her death. Here, James of Vitry relates how, even in the midst of Marie's infirmity when she lacked the strength to eat anything of substance, receiving the sacrament made her countenance shine 'as wiþ sunne-brighte bemes of lighte' (181). James moreover describes how he once offered Marie obleys, and she refused them, recognising them as unconsecrated:

And whanne wee assayed umwhil wheþer she myghte take an obley unconsecrate, anoon she loþed þe savoure of brede. For, whanne a litil party touched hir teeþ, she bygan to crye, to spitte and to pante, as hir brest shulde have bristene; and whanne she hadde longe cryed for ache and often-tymes hadde washen her mouþe wiþ water, after mykel parte of þe nyghte was passed unneþes myghte she ryste. (181)

Such an ability to distinguish between consecrated and unconsecrated hosts reaffirms not only the verity of Marie's supernatural abilities of perception, but also the spiritual change effected by the act of consecration itself. Several of Marie's visions also specifically reinforce the miraculous nature of the Eucharistic host and of Christ's bodily presence:

Also often, whan þe preste lifte up þe sacramente, she sawe bytwix þe prestys handes þe lyknes of a feyre childe and an oost of hevenly spirites doune

commynge wiþ mikel lighte. And whanne þe preste receyved þe sacramente, after þe fraccyon, she sawe in spirite oure lorde abidyng in þe prestys soule and be-shynyng þe soule wiþ a meruelous cleerte; and if hee toke hit unworþily, she sawe þat oure lorde wente awaye wiþ grete indignacyone, and þe soule of þe wrecchid preste was laft tome and voyde and ful of derknesse. And þof she were not in þe chirche, but in hir celle, and hir eyþen coverde, as she usid, wiþ a white vayle, and preyed wiþ Cryste in seiynge of þe woordes of sacrament Cryste come down in þe autere, neverþeles she wondirly chaungyd felte Crystes commynge. (165)

This sort of vision was not exclusive to Marie of Oignies—the Carthusian Beatrice of Ornacieux, the Franciscan tertiary Angela of Foligno, and the nuns of Helfta, Töss, and Engelthal all related similar experiences.<sup>173</sup> But when James of Vitry first recorded this vision, and also later when this same text was translated into the English vernacular, the sacred nature of the Eucharistic host was being actively challenged, and thus the affirmation of the divine presence in the physical host must have acquired new significance. Marie's knowledge of the moment of the elevation even when she was not physically able to see the mass is an added affirmation that places her experiences beyond accusations of mere imagination, and her own devotion to receiving the sacrament substantiates the link expressed throughout her *vita* between piety and a favourable disposition toward the sacrament. As James of Vitry relates concerning Marie, 'for it was even lyfe to hir to receyve Crystes body, and þat was deth to hir to abstene and be dessevered fro þis sacremente' (175).

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<sup>173</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p.130; Henry VI's biographer and chaplain, John Blacman, himself familiar with Marie's *vita*, attributes a similar ability to the king. The example of Henry VI is interesting insofar as the miracle is otherwise almost exclusively an ability attributed to women saints and rare among English lives. See M.R. James, trans., *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1919).

By implication, one might conclude, it was a spiritually painful deprivation for *anyone* with Marie's degree of piety to be separated from sharing in the Eucharist, and conversely, a wilful abstinence from the sacrament was a sure sign of spiritual ill-health. This latter suggestion constitutes a second theme concerning the Eucharist that is expressed not only in this *vita*, but in the others as well: The spiritually troubled are frequently characterised by a reluctance or unwillingness to participate in the sacrament of the altar, and their restoration to spiritual health is indicated by a renewed willingness to partake of the Eucharist.

In one incident recorded in Marie's *vita*, James of Vitry relates how a young virgin resident in an abbey of Cistercian nuns was privately assailed by blasphemies and unclean thoughts. James writes, 'Atte laste, sooply, not syffrynge nor openyng to any opere þe wounde of hir herte, þat she myghte receyve medecyn for feerdfulnesse, she felle as into despayre. For so mykel þe enmye hadde depressed hir mynde, þat she myghte seye neiþer pater noster ne credo; and her synnes wold she not schryue ... She myghte not be atte þe sacramentis of holy chirche, þe sacramente of the auter wolde she not receyve' (144). The nuns of the abbey offered much prayer on her behalf, but failing to 'byreve his douve fro þe develes chaules', brought her instead to Marie. The Beguine offered up intercessions and undertook numerous austerities on the virgin's behalf, fasting for 'fourty dayes wiþ wepyng and prayers'. At last, the unclean spirit who had been troubling the young virgin was constrained to appear before Marie 'wiþ senshyn, sorowe, and shame, wonderly bounden and peyned of Christes aungelle, soo þat hit semyd as hee hadde casten oute alle his bowellis, beryng wreccidly on his nekke alle þat was wiþ-in hym'. After having received counsel from male superiors on how to dispose of this fiend, Marie cast him down to hell and the young virgin was delivered 'þat same oure, and shrove hire and receyved the sacramente' (145). Just as her spiritual affliction is associated with her

reticence to participate in the sacraments, so is her restoration associated with their reception.

In a similar story related in the same *vita*, a Cistercian monk having been driven to despair by his inability to overcome sensuality through his austerities held himself aloof from the obligations of his order to receive the Eucharistic sacrament: 'Wherefore hee wolde not receyve Crystes body any-maner, not þoos dayes þat were ordayned þere-to in þe ordyr' (160). Again, the prayers of the Beguine saint proved effective: Black stones were seen to fall from his mouth during his recitation of the Confiteor, and he 'tornyd to hym-selfe ageyne, receyvynge Cristes body; and after he hadde taken heeful medecyne, parfityly recoveryd' (161). This association of one's participation in the Eucharist and that person's spiritual well-being is fairly conventional, but in the context of a religious climate in which the necessity and nature of the sacrament is being called into question, it acquires new meaning, reaffirming the faith of the orthodox devote and condemning anti-sacramental heretics as spiritual reprobates. It is not difficult then to see the Eucharist-associated miracles related in these *vitae* as being more than attempts to kindle devotion, but as a means to reaffirm the divine nature of the Eucharist itself and to confirm the piety of those who remain devoted to the Eucharist against those heretical, anti-sacramental teachings that would cast aspersions on the sacrament and those who participate in it.

The Eucharist, of course, was not the only controversy raised by the Lollard heresy: The efficacy and necessity of confession and absolution, the veneration of images, the value of pilgrimage and saints' relics, and the existence of purgatory and the value of prayers and acts made on behalf of those interred there were all among those aspects of contemporary belief and devotion questioned by those associated with the Lollard heresy. And although these themes do not appear as frequently in the Douce 114 *vitae* as



the theme of Eucharistic participation and devotion, several of them are nonetheless represented and may have likewise suggested these *vitae* to the Beauvale Carthusians as suitable for reinforcing disputed points of doctrine and devotion.

A second issue, one which is important both to the devotional material contained in the Douce 114 *vitae* and increasingly to the Lollard controversy as it developed in the fifteenth century, concerns the existence of purgatory and the efficacy of prayers made on behalf of the dead. Belief in the existence of purgatory was not the focus of much dispute in either Wycliffe's writings or those of his earliest followers. But denials of purgatory are in fact recorded quite early in the fifteenth century, and they seem to have become much more common by the time of the heresy trials undertaken later in the same century. Hudson, in *The Premature Reformation*, cannot recall any denials of purgatory earlier than those recorded in a 1416 manuscript,<sup>174</sup> and I myself have only been able to locate one earlier example, among the conclusions that Sir Lewis Clifford had denounced in 1402 when he abandoned his own Lollard allegiances, '*Quod non est Purgatorium post hanc vitam*'.<sup>175</sup> The position that Clifford attributes to his Lollard acquaintances could hardly be clearer, but it was certainly not universal. As Hudson also notes, several early Lollard texts accept the existence of purgatory even if they reject the efficacy of prayers for the dead, and Oldcastle too appears to have adhered to the orthodox view of purgatory's existence.<sup>176</sup>

The denial of purgatory, however, is evidenced with increasing frequency as the movement continues into the second quarter of the fifteenth century and beyond. In Norwich in 1429, it was reported that Richard Belward had claimed that '*iste mundus est*

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<sup>174</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.309

<sup>175</sup> Henry Thomas Riley, ed, *Chronica et annales : Regnantibus Henrico tertio, Edwardo primo, Edwardo secundo, Ricardo secundo, et Henrico quarto* (London: Longman's, 1866), p.348

<sup>176</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.309

*locus purgatorii*' and that all souls that depart from this world proceed '*ad celum sive ad infernum*'.<sup>177</sup> Almost identical statements were attributed the following year to another Norwich resident, John Burell.<sup>178</sup> Among the nine Coventry residents questioned before the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in 1485, there were several reported to have denied the existence of purgatory in similar fashion: John Blomstone, Roger Brown, and Thomas Butler were all attributed similar statements, that 'there was no purgatory, for every man immediately after death passeth either to heaven or hell'.<sup>179</sup> The development of such denials is not surprising given Wycliffe's own attacks on indulgences and prayers on behalf of the dead, from which a denial of purgatory itself seems almost inevitably to follow. Again, like the arguments invented against the Eucharist within vernacular Lollardy, these conclusions regarding the existence of purgatory demonstrate that Lollard belief was continuing to develop and diversify long after Wycliffe's death.

At the same time that the existence of purgatory was being called into question, a number of vernacular accounts of visionary experiences describing the orthodox view of purgatory also appeared throughout the fifteenth century, offering graphic warnings of the horrors that await those who have not sufficiently cleansed themselves of sin. Most of these were English adaptations of the twelfth-century *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, or *St Patrick's Purgatory*, which was reworked in English first in a six-line tail-rhyme stanza version in the early fourteenth century, and then later around the beginning of the fifteenth century, in an octosyllabic couplet version. A fifteenth-century prose version, *The Vision of William of Stranton*, is also preserved in two manuscripts, one of

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<sup>177</sup> Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p.74

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77

<sup>179</sup> Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p133f.

which appears to be of Nottinghamshire provenance.<sup>180</sup> Other, original compositions also appeared: the vision experienced by an anonymous nun in 1422, for example, or the vision of Edmund Leversedge dated 1464.<sup>181</sup>

These visions appear to be intended more toward traditional devotional application, increased penitence in the present life, rather than comprising a serious defense against doctrinal challenge. It is possible, nonetheless, that this renewed interest in the purgatorial vision reflects specific and unarticulated anxieties regarding the truth of the doctrine concerned. With regard to the Douce 114 *vitae*, given what we have already noted regarding the possible applications of the texts as a defense against heterodoxy, it is perhaps more legitimate here to examine these *vitae* not only as devotional material but also as an apologetic for disputed doctrine. In the Douce 114 *vitae*, visions related to purgatory, both brief glimpses into the state of souls after death as well as the more detailed otherworldly journey attributed to Christina *Mirabilis*, specifically raise the issue of purgatory and the legitimacy of prayers offered for the dead. Marie of Oignies, for example, was granted several visions in which was revealed to her the fate of specific individuals after their deaths, a couple of whom suffered in purgatory for sins that had gone unconfessed in their lifetimes. These visions reaffirmed not only the reality of purgatory, but the efficacy of prayers and deeds made on behalf of the deceased.

James of Vitry describes, in one anecdote, how Marie of Oignies was attending the bedside of a dying woman, 'a sister of þe breþer of Oegines', and perceived 'a multitude of fendes' seeking to claim the soul of the dying woman. Marie, in a moment of

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<sup>180</sup> The extant MSS are described in detail in Robert Easting, ed., *St Patrick's Purgatory* (Oxford: EETS, 1991). The Nottinghamshire copy of *The Vision of William of Stranton* is preserved in BL MS Additional 34,193

<sup>181</sup> MS Thornton, printed in C. Horstman, 'A revelation concerning Purgatory', *Yorkshire Writers*, p.383-92; BL Add. MS. 34,193 is printed in E. Margaret Thompson, 'The Vision of Edmund Leversedge', *Somerset Notes and Queries* 9 (1904): 19-35.

uncharacteristic aggression, laid aside 'hir custummabil sadnesse and naturel shamfastness' and began to combat the fiends and 'wiþ hir mantil drofe hem aweye as flyes'. At last, she prayed, 'Lorde, I undirtake borowshyp for þis soule. Soþly, þof she have synnyd, she is shreven of hir synnes; and if any þinge happely by lafte in hir by neglygens or ignorauns, þof she maye not speke, neverþeles þou haste lente hir space'. Later, Marie was visited with a vision of the woman's soul:

Not mykelle after þat in þe feste of Petir and Poule, while she prayed devoutly for þe same soule and was bisy aboute þe state of hir for whom she was borowe, seinte Petir schewed to hir þat soule hogely disesyd wiþ peynes of purgatory. Soþly, seinte Petir shewed to hir þe peynes and þe causes of þe peynes: For she was turmentyd hogely wiþ hete, for by-cause she hadde loved ouere-mykel þe worlde and lustis of þe worlde; oþere-while she was pyned wiþ ful mykel colde, for she hadde ben slowe to gode, and moost for she ouere-neglyently correctyd hir childer and hir owne meenye; more-ouer she was wrecchedly angwishyd wiþ þriste, for she gaf hir ouere-mykel in hire life to drynkyng; also, for she hadde be superflue in cloþes, she suffred ful grete sorowe for nakyd. Pan þe pitevous mayden of Criste, as she was alle ful of pite, namely aʒenst hem þat were pyned in purgatory, not oonly content wiþ hir owne preyers, but sche gat to þat soule many suffragys and helpes of messes and prayers of oþere. (155)

In a similar anecdote, Marie receives supernatural confirmation that prayers on behalf of the dead were indeed effective. After the death of a religious widow at Willambroc, the holy women there are prompted to pray for her soul after another of Marie's glimpses of the purgatorial state:

And whan þe body was done to byriels, Cristes mayden sawe þe soule of hir, þat was neuer in þis worlde playnly purged, be putte to purgatorye, to fulfille þat wanted of hir peyne. For hir husbonde was a merchaunte and hadde gotten summe goodes by gyle, as is merchauntz maner; also she hadde receyved in hir ostry summe men of þe dukys meynye of Louayne þat hadde mykel spendid in hir hous of wrange-goten goodes; and for þey hadde not 3it made ful restorynge of siche trespasses, she seyde þat hir-selfe was wipholden 3it in purgatory. Whan þis was tolde hir doghter, devoute virgyne Margarete of Villambroc, and hir sisters, þey gat hir many prayers and after her power made restitucyone. Wherefore not mykel after þe soule of þat wydowe, clenner þan glas, whitter þan snowe, bri3hter þanne þe sunne, apperyd to Crystes mayden, whanne she steygh up to everlastyng blysse; and as hit semyd, she holdyng þe boke of lyfe in hir handes. (156)

Such visions would have served to confirm readers' faith in the efficacy of their prayers and to increase their zeal in making supplications on behalf of the deceased.

Likewise, the central doctrinal and devotional application of Thomas Cantimpré's record of the unusual life of Christina *Mirabilis* regards the nature of purgatory and vicarious acts performed on behalf of the dead who suffer there. James of Vitry's own summary of Christina's life, recorded in Thomas' prologue, focuses specifically on this particular aspect, describing how Christina was uniquely granted by God that she should 'suffre purgatorye in þis world', and by so doing, 'ledde soules of þe deed unto purgatorye and þurgh purgatory to hevne, with-outen any sore of hir-selfe' (119). And similarly, where James' description of Christina's life appears as a brief *exemplum* in the *Alphabetum Narrationum*, it comes under the heading, '*Penitencia potius est hic facienda quam in futuro*',

alluding to the way in which her examples of self-torture illustrate the pains that await the impenitent in the next life and encourage penitence in the present.<sup>182</sup>

The extraordinary miracles attributed to Christina only make sense in light of her vision of purgatory that she experiences in the interim between her first death and her subsequent miraculous resuscitation. In the *vita*, Thomas quotes Christina's own words describing her otherworldly encounters:

Mynistris of light, goddes aungels, toke my soule and ladde me into a looply place ful of mennes soules, and þe peynes þat I sawe in þat place, were so grete and so cruel, þat no tunge may telle. And sooply, þere sawe I many deed þe whiche I knewe byfore alyve. I, forsoop, havynge compassyone and grete pite of þoos wrecched soules, asked what-maner place þat was—y þoughte þat hit was helle. And my leders answeyd me, at þat place was purgatorye, in þe whiche þey þat hadde ben synners in her lyfe suffred worþy paynes for her mysdedis. (120)

Having thus witnessed the torments of purgatory and having had pity on their condition, Christina is given the opportunity to return to life and suffer on their behalf:

Þanne oure lorde anoon answerid to my desyre: 'For certeyne, my swetyng,' quod he, 'þou haste be wiþ me heer; but now I putte to þe choys of two þinges: þat is to seye, wheþer þou has lever dwelle stille with me now, or turne ageyne to þy body, þere to suffre peynes of an undeedly soule by a deedly body wiþ-outen harme of hit-selfe, and to delyvere wiþ þy peynes alle þos soules of þe whiche þou haddest pite in þe place of purgatorye, and also with ensauple of

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<sup>182</sup> Banks, *An Alphabet of Tales*, no.616

þy peyne and lyfe stir men to repentauns and penauns and to forsake her synnes  
and be trewly turnyd to me'. (120-121)

Christina, having received the commission offered her, was then restored to life in order to suffer vicarious torments on behalf of tortured souls and thus help deliver them from their torment, while she herself would continue to be miraculously delivered from any permanent harm to her own person. Her self-inflicted sufferings, her subjecting herself to extremes of temperature and various other torments, were also meant to serve as a living example of the kinds of sufferings that awaited the impenitent in the next life, and thus stir others to timely repentance. Within the narrative, however, the commission also serves another purpose, to make Christina's episodes of self-torment theologically meaningful, rather than episodes of mere eccentricity or madness, and to clarify that her miraculous deliverance was of divine rather than demonic agency. And conversely, Christina's imperviousness to harm confirms the story of her purgatorial vision by lending her tale the evidential weight of the miraculous.

For the fifteenth-century English reader, for whom acts performed on behalf of the dead and even the existence of purgatory itself had been called into doubt, the miracles attributed to Christina would have had not only the devotional application alluded to in the *vita* but would also have confirmed the existence of purgatory and the efficacy of acts and prayers performed on their behalf. Christina's life could thus have been read both for its devotional applications as well as for its function as an apology for the orthodox position on the afterlife.

As with the traditional teaching on the existence of purgatory, the Lollard heresy also called into question other aspects of contemporary devotion, and the veneration of images was one issue which exercised both sides of the controversy. As with other

aspects of Lollard belief, opinion on the veneration of images was quite varied and often departed radically from the more careful statements previously formulated by Wycliffe. The latter had in fact very little to say on the matter: There is no indication that his opinion on images had been a subject of much controversy when his opinions were being debated at Oxford, and the subject of images makes no appearance in the condemnation of Wycliffe proclaimed in 1382.<sup>183</sup> At the same time, however, and throughout the century which followed, opposition to the veneration of images was being expressed among Lollard circles in incidents of outright iconoclasm, such as the aforementioned burning by Leicestershire Lollards of an image of St Katherine in 1382<sup>184</sup> or the burning of a cross by a chaplain in the diocese of Norwich in 1424.<sup>185</sup> Of course, Lollard opinion was more varied than such episodes suggest—Swinderby and Oldcastle both expressed more reserved opinions with regard to the veneration of images<sup>186</sup>—but doubtless it was the more outspoken and iconoclastic that most raised popular outrage and concern.

The subject of image veneration is not represented in Douce 114 to the same extent as the subject of Eucharistic devotion, but the subject is nonetheless raised in connection with the life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, in an incident in which her veneration of an image of Christ is linked inextricably to her extraordinary physical abilities. For Elizabeth, the veneration of images comprised an important part of her devotional life. Philip of Clairvaux describes how there was regularly brought to Elizabeth a tablet 'ful wele depeynte with an ymage of oure lorde crucified':

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<sup>183</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.302

<sup>184</sup> Martin, *Knighton's Chronicle*, p.296; Hudson cites several other examples of iconoclastic attitudes from Lollard testimonies, *Premature Reformation*, p.303n.

<sup>185</sup> Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, vol.3, p.586.

<sup>186</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.304



And holdyng þat open and vncouerd wip boop handys, ful devoutly she lokip on oure lorde, and often and þikke sche seiþ þese wordys: '3ouche here, 3ouche heere', þat is to sey in Englysche: swete loord, swete lord, and wip hire clene virgyn-lippys she kysseþ often sweetly þe feet of oure lordis ymage. Among þees she makip fro hire prive herte rotys large, depe, jocunde and lufsum sighes wip a clere stiryng of breste and þroot and with a swete sounyng whysperyng of her lippes. After þat sche lokith evene in þe same ymage with alle þe intende of hir mynde. And a litil after, whanne she has tasted, as it is trowed, þe unspekabil swetnesse of his passyone: forþ-with, as sche is wonte, sche is ravesched and waxes alle starke, holdyng þe tabil as sche didde byfore. (110)

Again, as with Elizabeth's reaction to the Eucharist, her devotion is linked to her ability to transcend the limits of her physical impairment:

And oþere-while her lippes are joynd to the feet of the crucifix, and hir necke and hir heed a litil reryd fro the grounde, as accordith to a kyssyng, and soo she lastith unstirred and starke ... And in þe spaces of þos ravischynges þe same tabil is holden so strongly with her fyngers, þat, when þe tabil is shaken, moved or drawn of any body, as with enfors to have it aweye, hit departith never, but alle hir body is stiryd after þe steryng of þe tabel. Þen þe spirite, turnyng ageyne fro þe contrey of goostly joyes, quykenes þe body, gladith the mynde, lightsomnes þe semblaunte, and bishines hit with a gracyous cleerte. (110)

After she has thus remained in steadfast contemplation of the image for some time, Philip describes, she closes the image and hands it to someone nearby, after which her mother or younger sisters must carry her back to bed, her strength having again left her.

Unquestionably, Philip would have us believe that Elisabeth's devotion to the image of Christ, much like that of the Eucharist, is inextricably linked to her miraculous strength. For a reader in fifteenth-century England, this could only help to reaffirm the propriety of image veneration, which contemporary heretics were bringing into question.

Lollard objections to the veneration of images were often extended to encompass also the value popularly attributed to holy relics, as in the rhyme recorded in some Lollard trials, 'stokkes and stones and ded mennes bones'<sup>187</sup>, all of which were considered dead material objects whose veneration detracted from the worship due the living God. To the objections shared in common with those raised against the veneration of images was added the additional criticism that holy relics may be easily counterfeited. One Lollard is recorded as claiming that 'among the reliques that be worshipped in churches is many a shippes bone'<sup>188</sup>, and another, that 'the blode of Hayles is but the blode of a dog or a drake'<sup>189</sup>.

With regard to the *vitae* of Douce 114, the efficacy of holy relics was a matter of much personal importance to Marie's friend and hagiographer, James of Vitry. He was himself well known to have carried with him relics of Marie after her death, and had moreover credited her finger, which he wore about his neck, with having saved his life on several occasions.<sup>190</sup> It was a matter of devotion that he seemed to have shared with Marie herself, and visions associated with holy relics are a prominent part of Marie's *vita*. On one occasion, Marie is said to have observed milk flowing from the relics of St Nicholas while she was praying before his altar. Her *vita* also claims that whenever relics were brought to the church at Willambroc, she 'felte byfore in spirite comynge of þe reliques,

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p.304

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.305

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.304n

<sup>190</sup> Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards*, p.24

and alle nyghte joyed wiþ þe holy reliques, and she sawe Criste joiynge, and oþere relikes', presumably those already housed there, 'as wiþ joye and worshyp receyvynge þe newe reliques' (174).

Furthermore, it was attributed to Marie the ability to perceive 'wheþer þey were verrey relykes' (174), and relics of dubious origin were brought to her for verification. On one occasion, she was able to identify the provenance of an unidentified bone as a relic of St Aigulf through a cryptic vision of the saint himself:

A famylier frende of oure hous amonge oþere relyques þat hee hadde, founde a bone of a seynte wiþoute writynge, and wiste not whos relikes þey were. And whanne he broghte to hir þese relikes to wite þe soþe, she perceyved in sprite þe vertue and þe verrynesse of hem. And whan hee prayed þat god shulde shewe to hir of whome þey were, a grete gloryous seinte apperyd to hir. Þen þe holy woman asked: 'who arte þou?' But hee named not hym-selfe, but discreved foure lettirs byfore hir mynde. And whan she helde þe lettirs in hir þoghte, but wist not what þey mente, she cleped a clerke and tolde hym þe lettirs, þat were a.i.o.l., and asked what þey betokenyd. Þan hee, spellynge hem to-gedir, answeryd þat þey signified *aiol*. And þenne she knewe openly þat þis relikes were of seint Aiol [Aigulf], þe whiche atte Prime in Chaumpayn is hadde in grete reverens. (174-175)

Like Marie's ability to distinguish between consecrated and unconsecrated hosts, her ability to distinguish false relics from true could have easily been understood in the context of the readership of Douce 114 as a reaffirmation of the sacredness of the genuine articles. Also, among the prophetic utterances that Marie received during the

course of her life came one shortly before her death that affirmed to her that her own garments and physical remains would themselves be valued as sacred relics:

Vpon a tyme, whan she was stired wip an houge spirite and hadde forgotten hirselfe more þan wone was, for plente of herte she sayde amonge many oþere: 'þe cloþes of þe kynges doghter smellen like spyce, and þe membrys of hir body are halowed of oure lorde as precyous relykes' ... And for she knewe not when I schulde come ageyne, she hyed to make hir testamente, leuyng to me a þonge, þat she was girde with, and a lynnyn moctour, wip þe whiche she wipte hir teres.... (177)

Thus, Marie's visions, her ability to discern false relics from true, and the legacy of her own remains in the life of her hagiographer, all tend toward the reaffirmation of the efficacy of holy relics, just as the miracles associated with Elizabeth's veneration of the image of Christ reaffirm the propriety of honouring holy images.

Thus far, I have explored how the reading of the Douce 114 *vitae* in the context of 15th-century England may have helped reaffirm belief in specific issues called into question by the Lollard heresy. These texts could have easily been mined for specific anecdotal *exempla* meant to reaffirm faith and counter specific doubts. I suggest, however, that read as a whole, the Douce 114 *vitae*, in addition to providing reaffirmation for specific elements of belief, work to address a more fundamental trend of thought underlying vernacular Lollard opinion, one which questioned the very means by which the divine expressed through special manifestations of the miraculous.

The criticisms raised by the vernacular advocates of Lollardy against the attribution of sacredness to the Eucharistic host, pilgrimage sites, saints' relics, holy images, and so on

appear to have been part of a more general trend of opinion that supplanted the kind of singular manifestation of the miraculous represented by these objects of devotion with a more generalised and immediate notion of the divine presence. This had the effect on the one hand of elevating the commonplace, while on the other diminishing those special and particular manifestations of the miraculous revered by those who remained loyal to orthodox teaching. Testimonies given at examinations for heresy naturally describe Lollard heretics belittling the host and other revered material items, but in many cases, these items are specifically denigrated by calling attention to their mundane qualities, their commonalities with items of everyday experience.

A few such comments stand out, not only insofar as they illustrate this tendency to de-particularise the spiritual, but also for the irreverent humour that often punctuated the statements reported of detected Lollards. One accused heretic, Robert Bartlet, tried in the diocese of Lincoln and forced to detect several members of his own family, reported a brief incident regarding his father: "The other day came a man to him as he was threshing, and said, "God speed, father Bartlet, ye work sore". "Yea", said he, "I thresh God Almighty out of the straw!"<sup>191</sup> Such a comment reveals much more than the wit of the speaker: Barlet here denigrates the orthodox view of the host by bringing to mind its humble origins as mere grain and by acknowledging his own role in the production of the revered object. He detracts from the attribution of holiness to the Eucharistic host by calling attention to its humble origins among the objects and activities of everyday experience.

Nor is this an isolated example: With regard to sacred images, Henry Phip, another examined in the diocese of Lincoln, was reported to have referred to the image of Christ

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<sup>191</sup> Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, vol.4, p.222

as 'Block Almighty'.<sup>192</sup> And John Falks, an accused from Coventry, remarked that he'd give the image of our Lady 'an half-penny worth of ale' if it would speak to him.<sup>193</sup> The Coventry Lollards held particularly vehement opinions with regard to the image of the Virgin venerated in the Tower at Coventry, and John Blomstone, a Lollard from the city, remarked that 'there was as much virtue in a herb as in the image of the Virgin', 'a man might as well worship the blessed Virgin by the fire-side in his Kitchen' as in the Tower, and he might just as easily 'worship the blessed Virgin when he seeth his mother or sister as in visiting images, because they be no more but dead stocks and stones.'<sup>194</sup> Again, these statements reveal a shift toward a type of spiritual life which substitutes the mundane and the practical for those objects of devotion that were seen as possessing some miraculous potency.

Similar references to images as 'dead stocks and stones' recur throughout Lollard testimonies, and although these are often just formulaic repetitions by individual Lollards of their instructors, they together with more detailed statements to similar effect demonstrate the nature of Lollardy's departure from those beliefs advocated by the Church. Orthodoxy had always held in tension the idea of God being generally revealed through the whole of his Creation with the idea of His being specifically manifest in particular instances of the revelatory, the miraculous, or the holy. As diverse as the opinions of those under the umbrella of Lollardy may actually have been, the overwhelming trend of Lollard thought represent a shift in that balance away from the particular and toward the general, and it was this current of thought that likely swept many adherents of Lollardy toward beliefs that went well beyond anything formulated by Wycliffe.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p.238

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p.134

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.133

There is no denying that most Lollards still retained their faith in the miraculous. While a few who were swept up in the offensive against Lollardy seem to have been merely sacrilegious, most were nonetheless devout believers in the power of God, but differed from the mainstream Church on how and where that power was made manifest. Lollards subjected to ridicule the idea that God would specially manifest his power in a obley of wheat, an image of wood, or the bone of a saint, and it was this fundamental difference underlying Lollard belief that may well have appeared to the critics of Lollardy as a more general lack of faith in the ability of God to transform the mundane into displays of his power.

Miracle tales that lent credence to beliefs disputed by the Lollard heresy would not have been difficult to come by in late-medieval England, but most such examples would have proved effective in reinforcing devotion only among those already sympathetic with orthodoxy and whose faith in the miraculous had not been shaken by the doubts the Lollards raised. It is unlikely that such stories would have carried much weight with the Lollard heretics themselves, who were quick to deny as false or demonic in origin reported miracles which confirmed orthodox opinion. Similarly, for those adherents to orthodoxy whose faith in such singular manifestations of the miraculous had nevertheless been shaken, the mere reiteration of miracles tales may have been rendered less effective by the aspersions raised by Lollard critics. It is interesting then that the theme of scepticism proves to be so consistently present in the Douce 114 *vitae*, not only among doubters and critics described in the stories but among the writers themselves, who confess to being convinced only after having seen the miracles themselves or after having examined numerous first-hand witnesses. To this extent, the *vitae* of Douce 114 themselves, in addition to providing several prominent examples of miracles related to the Eucharist and the like, may be viewed collectively as both a celebration and defence

of the miraculous—and specifically, the miraculous as embodied in the unremarkable and homely—against a movement that could be viewed as negating such singular manifestations of the otherworldly in material life.

The Latin originals for the texts translated in Douce 114, of course, long predate the outbreak of the Lollard heresy, but it is interesting nonetheless, with regard to *the selection* of the texts translated, that all of them describe the miracles of relatively recent saints, the veracity of which is formally established within the texts themselves. Philip of Clairvaux, for example, in chronicling the marvels associated with Elizabeth of Spalbeek, is quick to point out in the prologue to his account that he initially discredited the tales he heard concerning Elizabeth until he was able to confirm the miracles with his own eyes:

I gaf no credens to hem þat tolde me, til-tyme þat I come my-selfe and sawe and proved þat I hadde not herde þe halfe. Þerfore I schalle discryve a fewe merveyles of many, and after my sympul conseyte þo þat are more notabil and moor merveylous, as my conscyens gyveþ me, begynnyngge atte þoos thinges þat I perceyued undoutably with myn eyen, and afterwarde puttyngge to þat I have herde of many oþere trewe men. (107)

His doubts were dispelled principally by the wounds of Christ that Elizabeth bore, according to Philip's account, 'with-ouen any dowte, similacyone or fraude'.

Thomas Cantimpré also, not having been a first-hand witness of the uncanny miracles of Christina *Mirabilis*, was especially careful to defend in his prologue the truth of the miracles he had documented. In recounting Christina's life, Thomas first invokes the testimony of his contemporary James of Vitry, whose trustworthiness was well established:



We, purposynge to write þe lyfe of þe memorabil Crystes virgyne Crystyne, þat put wee firste in þe bigynnyng of oure sermone, at worshepful James byshope of Accone, after cardinale of þe court of Rome, seiþ of þis Crystyne in þe lyfe of seinte Maire of Oegines, in þese wordes: 'I sawe an oþere womman', seiþ hee, þat is to sey þis Cristyn mervelous, 'aboute wham oure lorde wrou3te so merveilously þat, whan sche hadde liggē longe deed, she lyved ageyne, or she were beryed; and sche hadde graunte of god þat sche livynge in body, shulde suffre purgatorye in þis world'. (119)

Thomas is moreover not content to establish his belief on authority alone, but notes also that he has been made 'certeyne and syker' by numerous first-hand testimonies. He goes on to note, remarking that 'þese thinges were not done in corners and hyrnes, but openly amonge the pepil', his familiarity with those who were still alive to recount to Thomas their eyewitness testimony. And he furthermore affirms that his witnesses were neither spurious nor attention-seeking: 'Wite hee wel þat redith this, þat I leued to sicke witnessse þat wolde not goo fro þe soþe, þof þey schulde lose her heedes'. The conviction of the witnesses, Thomas would have us believe, was strong enough to make martyrs, and on the strength of such testimony, Thomas builds his case for the veracity of Christina's miracles. The nature of Christina's miracles must have, in fact, required that a major burden of proof be shifted, so improbable are the wonders attributed to her life. Whether she is passing through fire and ice unharmed, feeding herself with her own virgin lactation, or spontaneously reading Latin although illiterate, Christina *Mirabilis* clearly earned her cognomen. It does not seem strange then that even Thomas' medieval contemporaries, to whom is often attributed a certain naïve credulousness, should require a bit of persuasion.

Doubters, we are told, beset Christina herself throughout her life, questioning her sanctity and attributing her uncanny feats to madness or possession. On more than one occasion, she is taken by wrong-headed friends who bind her with chains, but every time, Christina effects a miraculous escape. In one of the more interesting examples, Christina's friends employ the help of a foreigner, 'a ful wicked and ful strange man', to take Christina against her will from the wilderness where she had taken residence. In the attempt, Christina is much abused: Her leg is broken, and she is forcibly bound with chains to a pillar in a locked cellar. This attempt to confine her, like the others, is miraculously foiled. The 'holy goost', we are told, looses her chains and fills her with tremendous strength, enough to demolish the wall of her confinement with a stone from the cellar floor and then flee the cellar itself flying bodily 'as a bridde in þe eyre'.

In another curious example, Christina's friends again bind her, this time to a tree, and feed her a diet of only bread and water. Christina soon develops festering wounds from her bindings and grows faint from lack of food, but God again provides relief, this time with a 'miracul atte was never harde heer-byfore': Christina begins to produce an oil from her breasts, a substance with both medicinal and sustentative properties, and by this miraculous oil feeds herself and treats her wounds. It is this unusual divine intervention in particular that finally convinces Christina's friends to concede that Christina is neither insane nor demonically empowered.

Whereas Thomas' preface defends the story of Christina *Mirabilis* from critics external to the text by carefully explaining his process of gathering evidence and testimonies concerning his subject and describing how he too came to believe, the miracles themselves provide evidence for the characters internal to the narrative. On the other hand, neither James of Vitry's life of Marie of Oignies nor Stephen of Siena's letter concerning Catherine of Siena required the kind of formal defence prefacing the other

two *vitae*, since they are both unmistakably first-hand accounts. Stephen is quick to remind us, in fact, when recalling Catherine's more incredible feats, that he was an eyewitness many times over. He informs us, describing Catherine's ecstatic rapture, that her records only events that 'wee sawe oure-selfe' (187). Moreover, describing Catherine's levitation during prayer, he notes that 'she was often-tymes seen of many men in preyer hovene and lifted uppe fro þe erþe—of þe whiche men I am oon.' (188). And again, describing the extent of Catherine's radical fasting, he suggests that he would have found it impossible 'but if I hadde sene hit wiþ myne ey3en' (191). Stephen furthermore establishes the credibility of his report by including a cautionary anecdote concerning a certain '3onge damyselle . . . ful of vanyte, no-þinge havynge of god' who secretly tested Catherine's sincerity by pricking her feet with a pin while she remained insensible in a state of ecstatic rapture. The young woman's impertinence is later revealed and she reproved for her doubt.

It is not surprising that these lives should so carefully argue for the truth of the events described. James of Vitry and Thomas Cantimpré were both campaigners against the heresies of their own contemporaries, and they employed the *vitae* of the women saints they observed in order to combat heretical opinion in their own day. And as an apologetic for the miraculous in a broad sense, these *vitae* would also have been useful in the context of England's own struggles with heterodoxy, particularly insofar as they would reaffirm for the devotional reader God's continuing willingness to make himself manifest in specific incidents of the miraculous.

I have here argued that the selection of the texts for translation in Douce 114 may have been influenced by the threat of contemporary heresy, and the texts' tendency to reinforce disputed beliefs and devotional practices may have overshadowed any apprehension about the production of a vernacular translation, an act concerning which

the translator himself expressed considerable anxiety. The possibility remains that the production of this translation may have been a less than conscious impulse; its applicability toward inculcating readers against Lollardy may have been the result of more intuitive and unarticulated concerns about declining faith and devotion.

However, the possibility that the Douce 114 manuscript may have been prepared consciously with the goal of strengthening orthodox belief against Lollard denials gains some support from the contemporary precedent of Carthusian involvement in preparing vernacular devotional texts with this expressed purpose. The principal Carthusian contribution to the vernacular refutation of Lollardy was the devotional treatise produced at Mount Grace by Carthusian Nicholas Love. Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is largely a translation of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* to which Love added his own additions and interpolations. A number of Love's additions deal specifically with beliefs then current among the heretical Lollard sect, and the *Mirror* was written primarily with this purpose in mind, according to the work's Latin prologue, '*ad fidelium edificacionem et hereticorum sine lollardorum confutacionem*'. The production of the *Mirror* followed soon after Archbishop Arundel's 1409 Lambeth Constitutions, which introduced stringent new rules on the examination and licensing of the clergy and forbade the translation of any scriptural text into the vernacular without express permission, an act of legislation intended to quell the spread of Lollardy. Love's work was likewise designed to confute heterodox opinion, and the compilation was in fact produced with the Archbishop's hearty endorsement.

Curiously, however, the *Mirror* is not for the most part an obviously anti-Lollard treatise. It is, as Hudson describes it, 'not primarily a direct answer to Wycliffite theology but represents instead an alternative form of edification to Wycliffite preoccupation with the

naked word of scripture'.<sup>195</sup> The compilation endeavours not so much to point out the errors of the Lollard heretics as it does to bolster orthodox positions, and Love seems more intent on inculcating the laity against error with a healthy dose of correct belief than he does on detailing the particular errors of the heterodox or converting the wayward back from heresy. It is '*ad fidelium edificacionem*' that he writes primarily, and by this, he achieves his second goal, '*lollardorum confutationem*'.

The *Meditationes vitae Christi*, which Love adapts as the primary basis of his work, is structured as a series of meditations on the life of Christ, following a hebdomadal structure which allocates the meditations according to the days of the week. Love's selection of these *meditationes* as the basis of his work was founded on the principle that contemplations on the manhood of Christ were far better suited to the 'symple soule' than the consideration of more complex theological matters. In describing the life of Christ, both the original *Meditationes* and Love's elaborations go well beyond the bare narrative of the scriptural text, establishing a sensory encounter in which the reader can engage imaginatively. The *Mirror*, as Hudson describes, 'encourages the use of the reader's imagination to fill out the story and its accompanying emotions further',<sup>196</sup> a method which the *Mirror* makes explicitly clear throughout the text: 'Now take hede', Love advises early in his account of the gospel narrative, 'and ymagyne of goostly thing as it were bodily, and thinke in thyn herte as thou were present in the si3t of that blessed Lord'.<sup>197</sup> The effect is one which is at once far divorced from the text-based devotion advocated among the Lollard sect as well as conducive to a sort of affective imaginative engagement that transcends dangerous speculation about doctrinal concerns. As Watson describes, Love created in the *Mirror* 'a clear model of vernacular theology which, despite

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<sup>195</sup> Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.437

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.439

<sup>197</sup> Michael Sargent, *Mirror*, p.21

its narrowness, offers the uneducated reader more than catechesis: substituting the rational and social concerns it so scrupulously shuns with an offer of a life of affective intensity'.<sup>198</sup> In this manner, *The Mirror* offered a system of devotion that strengthened lay faith against the challenges of the Lollard heresy without the potential pitfalls that may have been anticipated in a more polemic text.

I suggest, in trying to make sense of Beauvale's apparent promotion of the Beguine saints described in Douce 114, that Love's important and well-received anti-Lollard work may have set a pattern for the smaller charterhouses and that these may have undertaken smaller projects of the same sort to increase lay devotion and inculcate the laity against heretical opinion. One possible suggestion that Love's *Mirror* may have suggested to the Carthusians at Beauvale the Beguine *vitae* of Douce 114 as a suitable companion to Love's own anti-heretical efforts lies in the form of the first *vita* of the Douce 114 collection itself. I suspect it possible, in fact, that the form of Elizabeth's *vita*, the first of the texts translated in Douce 114, may have recommended the collection to the manuscript's compilers as a potential supplement to the anti-Lollard *Mirror*.<sup>199</sup> As I have mentioned, the meditations in Love's translation are arranged primarily according to the days of the week, each day corresponding to a particular episode in the life of Christ: On Monday appears the Annunciation and Nativity; On Tuesday, the childhood of Jesus; On Wednesday, the temptation of Christ and his early ministry, and so on. Friday, a day devoted to meditations on the Passion of Christ, is divided still further into the liturgical

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<sup>198</sup> Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', p.854

<sup>199</sup> Rebecca Clouse suggests that the evidence for the Latin originals then circulating in England indicates that the compilers or translators may have made a significant change to the order of the *vitae* when adapting them from their Latin source, placing the *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek first in their vernacular version. Clouse, however, also offers no suggestions as to why such a change may have been made. See "The Virgin Above the Writing in the First *Vita* of Douce 114" in Allen J. Franktzen and David A. Robertson, eds., *Figures of Speech: The Body in Medieval Art, History, and Literature* (Chicago: Illinois Medieval Association, 1994), p.87-100. Tempted as I am to infer some significance from their having placed Elizabeth's *vita* first, the Latin text nearest to Beauvale geographically, the copy in the library of Thurgarton Priory, also places Elizabeth's *vita* first, indicating that the order of the Latin texts was likely preserved in the Middle English translation.

hours. The reader is encouraged in each of these divisions to visualise a particular stage: for matins, the arrest of Christ; for prime, his appearance before Pilate, and so on. In each case, the *Mirror* describes for the devout reader the relevant scenario, and the language employed in these sections, as in the rest of the *Mirror*, reiterates often the conceit that the action is occurring as it is being described. Love uses liberally throughout his descriptions phrases like 'here abide we a litel while', 'lo nowe he praieþ', and 'behold how he is ladde of þoo vileste wrecches', all of which imply intense visualisations, the 'devoute ymaginacions' that Love advocates as a basis for lay devotion.

This hebdomadal arrangement of these meditations, or the subdivision of the Passion meditations according to the liturgical hours, was not unique to the *Mirror*, or the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* on which Love based his compilation<sup>200</sup>, but the *Mirror* was the best-known English example of such a work, and most likely the one with which the Carthusians of Beauvale would have been most familiar. The parallels between the nature of Elizabeth's devotion, her own physical reenactment of the Passion according to the liturgical hours, and the devotional programme advocated by Love would likely not have gone unnoticed. Obviously, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* appeared far too late to have had any influence on Elizabeth or her hagiographer, and indeed, there are a number of points of differences in regard to what elements of the Passion narrative are allocated to specific liturgical hours. The concept, however, is similar enough to imply that the parallels between the two texts may have suggested to the Carthusians who prepared the compilation and translation of the Beguine *vitae*, and who were doubtless familiar with Love's version of the *Meditationes*, that the *vitae* would serve as a suitable companion, as a reinforcement of Love's devotional programme. Elizabeth was enacting physically the

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<sup>200</sup> Other English examples are found in *The Mirror of Saint Edmund* and *The Privy of the Passion*, the latter also a free translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Both are edited in Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers*, vol. 1.

images that Love prescribed for his inward imaginations, and her *vita* itself provides a different way for the devout reader to visualise the Passion as well as marvel at the miraculous nature of Elizabeth's imitation.

It is improbable at best that either Philip of Clairvaux, who first penned the *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, or the Carthusians who translated and compiled the Douce 114 manuscript intended that Elizabeth's physical re-enactment of the Passion serve as a literal example for other devout women to follow. The text itself makes some effort to reiterate that Elizabeth's behaviour was supernatural in origin, not generated merely by her own enthusiasm. As Philip describes, Elizabeth's abilities came 'not of hir strengthe, but of a prive vertue of God' (108). Her bodily performance of the Passion was a special grace granted to her, not a model of spiritual practice for others to emulate. Her enthusiasm, however, in visualising and embodying the kind of meditations described in *The Mirror* models in exaggerated fashion the kind of zeal, the identification with the suffering Christ, to which lesser devout should aspire.

It is obvious in examining the details of Elizabeth's reenactment, that she, like the visual imagery of the *Mirror*, draws her own representation of the Passion not from the naked texts of the Gospels themselves, but from the whole repertoire of visual imagery that had accumulated around the foundation of the scriptural narrative. Indeed, some of Elizabeth's representations owe a greater debt to the visual and iconographic imagery of the age than to any textual rendering. In presenting the image of the virgin Mary and the disciple John beside the cross, for example, Elizabeth reproduces dramatically an image familiar from contemporary iconographic representation:

Sche figured unto us how oure blessyd lady, Crystes moder, stood be-syde þe crosse, puttynge hir left hande undir hir lefte cheek and bowynge hire heed and



hir nekke to þe same syde, and holdyngē hir ri3hte hande undir hir ri3hte pappe. And anoon she shewiþ in an oþere liknesse blessyd John Euangelist, loutyngē doun wiþ hir heed and latyngē doune on þe lifte syde boōþ hir handys ioyned to-gedir and þe fyngers ilke in oþere folden with-ouTEN þe handes. (114)

Similarly, throughout Elizabeth's reenactment, her physical actions serve to silently recount the details of the Passion narrative as it had come to be understood through visual media and through the body of devotional literature which accessed the common stock of visual information that iconographic representations had generated. For this reason, it is not surprising that both the *Mirror* and Elizabeth's physical illustrations, although lacking a direct relationship, should bear such similarity in the details of their visual imagery. Elizabeth's representation of Christ's binding and conducting to trial, for example, demonstrates such a parallel:

At prime, soōþly, after þat sche is ravysched, she ryseth with a merveilous swiftnes, and anoon standith upri3hte, and kastīþ boōþ hir handes byhynde hir backe and so joyneþ hir armes to-gedyr, soo þat sche puttith þe fyngers of þe lefte hande to þe rihte elbowe and the fyngers of the riht hande to þe lefte elbowe, and she walkith by hir chaumbir with her armys joyned to-gedir byhynde hir bak, as a þeef were openly taken and his handes bounden ladde to the barre or to þe galous, representyngē alle the space of þat oure how oure lorde Jhesu was ladde from Anne to Cayphas, to Pylate, from Pylate to Herode, to Pilate a3en efte, wiþ his handys bounden byhynde hym for dispite and schame. (111)

This representation compares readily to the same details described in Love's *Mirror*, both in the imagery as well as the traditional comparison of Christ's treatment to that of a thief:

And also beholde how paciently he suffreþ himself to be takene, bonden, smyten, and wodely ladde forþ, as þei he were a thefe or a wikked doare ... Now forþermore beholde how he is ladde of þoo vileste wrecches from þat ryvere up towarde þe cite of Jerusalem, and þat hastilye and with grete pyne, havynge hees handes bonden byhynde hym as a thefe.<sup>201</sup>

Such examples can be multiplied throughout the texts, but it is clear that Elizabeth could have easily been seen as enacting the same kind of devotional programme that Love set for his readers to engage with imaginatively. Moreover, Elizabeth provides an alternative visualisation for the readers of her *vita*, another representation of the Passion by which to stir devotion and affective piety.

Apart from the similarities of Elizabeth of Spalbeek's devotional practice to that envisioned by Love, the *Mirror's* forays into the more explicitly didactic mode of countering Lollardy through Love's additions to the *Meditationes* also bear some relevance in examining how Douce 114 may have been intended to remedy the spread of heresy among the lay populace. While I have said that the *Mirror* is not for the most part an obviously anti-Lollard work, Love does nonetheless engage at several points more explicitly with the doctrinal problems raised by the heretical movement. Even here, however, the *Mirror* proves itself a vernacular text in method as well as logic, using miraculous *exempla* and the simple reiteration of correct belief rather than the elaborate theological argument and patristic citations common to Latin polemic.

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<sup>201</sup> Sargent, *Mirror*, p.167

In translating the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, Love inserted a number of additions making specific application of his text to those beliefs currently being challenged by the English heretics. These additions to the *Meditationes* focus, as Michael Sargent has pointed out, in the introduction to his edition, on three principal themes: the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the necessity of oral confession, and the nature of the Eucharistic host.

In regard to the first of these themes, Love makes several points, identified in the marginalia of most manuscript copies as *notae contra lollardos*. In his explication of the Annunciation, Love addresses the Lollard unwillingness to be subject to immoral clergy, instead arguing that only those priests who lived godly lives merited obedience. Love's aside on obedience to clergy is introduced in the context of how to determine whether one is truly numbered among God's people, to which end Love explains:

But wolde þou know wheþer þou be of his peple or wilt þou be of his peple, do þat he oure lord Jesus biddeþ in þe gospel and þe lawe and þe prophetes, and also þat he biddeþ by his ministres, and be buxum to hes vikeres, þat bene in holy chirch þi sovereyns, not only gude and wele lyvyng, bot also schrewes and yvel lyvyng, and so lerne of Jesu to be meke in herte and buxom and þen shalt þou be of bis blessed peple.<sup>202</sup>

Later, Love counters Lollard objections to tithing in his teaching on Mary's anointing of the Christ, in which Judas complains that the proceeds from the costly ointment could have been better spent caring for the poor. Love is able to appropriate this passage as an exemplum against those who oppose the giving of tithes and offerings made to images:

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.24

Here mowe we forþermore note specialy to oure purpose þat þei are of Judas parte þat reprehenden almesdede, offrynges, and oþere devociones of þe peple done to holi chirch, haldyng all siche 3iftes of deuocion bot foly, and seying þat it were more nedeful and bettur to be 3iuen to pore men.<sup>203</sup>

The implication is that the heretics, like Judas, care nothing for the poor but are merely covetous, as Love explains in his apostrophe to such among his contemporaries: 'O Judas, þou þat pretendest with þi mouth þe relevyng of pore men, þere as soþely in þe entent of þi herte þat is grondet in envye a3eynus men of holi church!'

Similarly, the additions to his source text in which Love addresses attacks on the necessity of oral confession are also explicitly made to counter Lollard belief. These comments come in the chapter describing the conversion of Mary Magdalene, a story that had been adopted by Lollard polemicists as evidence that confession need not be expressed orally but only in the heart. In the oft-rehearsed story, a penitent Mary Magdalene washes the feet of Christ with her tears, dries them with her hair, and anoints them with precious oil. In response to the thoughts of his host, who regards the woman as sinful, Christ relates a parable affirming that the person guilty of greater sin is more grateful for forgiveness than he who is guilty of lesser sin. And with this, he pronounces the sins of Mary Magdalene forgiven, although she has made no formal oral confession.

This anecdote was a well-loved staple of devotional writing and preaching, but the story had been commandeered by adherents of the Lollard heresy in order to demonstrate the superfluity of oral confession. Again, this is the argument from anecdotal precedent that we have seen before, but in this instance lent the added weight of scriptural authority. Mary here is forgiven without having made oral confession, her inward penitence being

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p.140

enough to attain absolution, and this suggested to some an argument against orthodox opinion. As Love explains in his addition,

Bot here perantere sume men þenken afture þe fals opinyon of lollardes þat shrift of mouþe is not nedeful, bot þat it sufficeþ onely in herte to be shriven to god, as þe forseide woman was, for þe gospel telleþ not þat she spake any worde by mouþe, and 3it was hir sinne fully for3iven as it is seide, and as it semeþ þis is a gret euidence for þat opinion.<sup>204</sup>

Love then mounts an argument against this false interpretation, a defence that he expands into a more elaborate teaching on the importance of 'shrift of mouþe'. He responds to the Lollard interpretation of this narrative by demonstrating how the parallel between Mary's situation and that of his contemporaries is too problematic to draw such easy conclusions. First he reminds his readers that Christ was both 'verrey god and man', and moreover, 'by vertue of þe godhede was also opune þe þouht of [her] hert', as Christ in fact demonstrates by responding to his host's unspoken criticism. Moreover, Love notes that sins committed against Christ are not committed only against his godhead, but against him as bodily man as well. Mary had the man Jesus immediately available, whereas Love's contemporaries did not. Thus, according to Love's argument, some other means of providing satisfaction to Christ after his human nature must be made available to those who do not have Mary's immediate access.

Love then, having reinterpreted the story in a way more favourable to his conclusions concerning confession, elaborates on the more traditional justifications, namely the authority granted to the disciples—and by extension, the church—that 'what so evere 3e bynden in erþe, it sal be bonden in heven, and what þat 3e unbynden in erþe sal be

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.92-93

unbonden in heven', the passage usually quoted to justify the church's claims to the authority of absolution. After having thus justified the orthodox interpretation of the anecdote, Love goes on to explain how Mary in fact offers a model of the contrition and penitence appropriate to those making oral confession. In other words, Love turns the Lollard argument on its head and uses the conversion of Mary Magdalene as a teaching on oral confession, rather than an argument against its necessity.

I think it entirely possible that much of the vernacular argument and unrecorded discussion about the Lollard challenges to orthodoxy, took precisely this sort of form: each side appropriating anecdotal precedents from Scripture, tradition, and word of mouth, and each struggling to re-appropriate those stories to his own ideological perspective. It is easy to see how just this sort of discussion could have generated many of the comments that later appeared in Lollard heresy trials, as I have already discussed. In this case, we see Love here reclaiming the story of Mary Magdalene that had been previously appropriated by Lollardy and using it for his own ends. And, in doing so, Love demonstrates his awareness of vernacular interest in more demonstrative proofs than a more theological discourse might provide.

But it is in regard to the nature of the Eucharistic host that we find the most obvious similarities between Love's method and what may well have been the intent of the Douce 114 *vitae*. Here, Love uses miracles and visions associated with the sacrament, similar in nature to those recorded in the *vitae*, to reaffirm the traditional view. According to Love, the Eucharist-associated miracles confirming the orthodox perspective were to be found readily in numerous books and sermons:

þis before seide feiþ of holi chirch touching þis excellent sacrament tauht by holi doctours and worþi clerkes is confermede by many maneres of myracles as we redene in many bokes and heren alday prechede and tauht.<sup>205</sup>

Love himself offers as illustrations Edward the Confessor's vision of the Christ child in the Eucharist and St Gregory's vision of bloody flesh, well established examples that wielded considerable cultural weight. Love's selection of well authenticated miracles is important in light of the Lollard's known tendency to deny Eucharist-affirming miracles as mere superstition or deceit: 'Bot here lawheþ þe lollarde', Love explains, 'and scornep holi chirche in allegance of seche myracles, haldyng hem bot as maggetales and feyned illusiones'. This denial, however, points to a more fundamental failing of the Lollard heretic, his inability to perceive the spiritual benefits of partaking in the Eucharistic sacrament: 'Bycause þat he tasteþ not þe swetnes of þis precious sacrament nor feleþ þe gracious wirching þerof in himself, þerfore he leveþ not þat any oþere doþ.'<sup>206</sup> And it is this inward, spiritual experience of Christ's bodily presence afforded to certain of the devout that is for Love the most definitive proof of the nature of the Eucharistic host, one which simultaneously demonstrates that the heretic stands outside of God's grace:

þere is one person þat I knowe now lyvyng and peraventure þere bene many þat I knowe not, in þe self degre or hierē, þe which persone, oft siþes whan our lorde Jesus vouchsafe, to touch him of his grace in tretim of þat blessedē sacrament, with þe inwarde siht of his soule, and devote meditacion of his precious passione, sodeynly feleþ also shedde in þe self bodye, a joy and likyng þat passeþ without comparison þe hiest likyng þat any creature may have or fele as by wey of kynde in þis life, þorh þe which joy and likyng alle þe membres of

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p.154

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

þe body ben enflaumed of so deletable and joyful a hete þat him þenkeþ sensibly alle þe body as it were meltyng for ioy as waxe doþ anentes þe hote fire, so farforþ þat þe body miht not bere þat excellent likyng, bot þat it shold utterly faile, nere þe gracious kepyng and sustenyng of þe touchere oure lord Jesu above kynde.<sup>207</sup>

Love's use of this example of ecstatic rapture is particularly effective insofar as this example of the more common experience of inward grace at the reception of the sacrament offers evidence less easily dismissed, since those who scoff demonstrate that they have not themselves had such an experience and thereby demonstrate their estrangement from truth. Those who belittle the Eucharist have obviously not known the ecstasies of true communion with Christ made possible through the sacrament and thus disqualify themselves as reliable authorities on the nature of the host.

Love's discussion of the Eucharist, and in particular the miraculous as a proof of the sacrament, is greatly expanded by the *De Sacramento*, an original treatise on the Eucharist that he appended to his translation of *Meditationes vite Christi*. As Sargent notes in the introduction to his edition, both textual and internal evidence indicate that the *Mirror* never circulated without this additional text. Seen from the beginning as an integral part of Love's purpose for his work, the treatise greatly expands on the examples and arguments that Love alludes to in his earlier interpolations.

Here, Love goes on to condemn fiercely those who deny the true presence, arguing that such heretics must deny either the power of God to effect such a transformation, in which case they are counted 'worse þan Jewes or saracenes for boþ byleven þat god is almihty', or they must deny the authority of God's church and the wisdom of holy

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.



doctors who teach such doctrine, in which case these heretics 'prevene hem self grete fooles'.<sup>208</sup> It is perhaps not accidental that Love here compares the Lollards unfavourably with the Jews, who themselves were described in *exempla* and mystery play alike as the archetypal foe of the Eucharist. Here, however, the miracles that Love compiles are not the type of tale in which Jews or sceptics desecrate the host, but rather, more positive affirmations in which the supernatural properties of the host are displayed in visionary episodes.

Love also reiterates here what he suggested earlier in the text of *The Mirror*, that the spiritual confirmations of the Eucharist's nature only make themselves truly known to those who are favourably disposed toward the sacrament and who demonstrate a proper disposition toward God. The wicked, for which we might also read the Lollard heretics, cannot experience the true presence in the sacrament:

Bot þei þat dreden not god haven neiþer gostly sustenance nor heleful likyng  
of þis precious mete, bot þorh hir owne wikkednesse and undisposyng in soule,  
taken it and eten it to hir gostly deþ and everlastyng dampnacion. And þat bene  
tweyn maner of peple, one is of hem þat drede not to receyve þis holiest  
sacrament in dedely sinne, or elles by defaut of drede contynuene in hir sinne.  
For as þe wise man seiþ, *þe drede of god casteþ out sinne*, and þerfore whoso  
continueþ in dedely sinne, it is an opune prefe, þat he dredeþ not god, and þan  
is he unable to receyve and helefully ete þis worþi sacrament.<sup>209</sup>

Again, this argument cleverly puts the concept of the true presence beyond discussion, by villainising those who would bring it into dispute, and it finds parallels in the examples

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.227-228

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p.227

we have already seen from the Douce 114 *vita*, in which those who are ill-disposed toward God hold themselves aloof from participation in the sacrament and receive none of the benefits thereof.

Love expands on the implicit miracle of the Eucharist by further describing miracles and visions associated with the Eucharist, which display 'opunly' what the average devout experience only 'by byleve', and presents a systematic analysis of the types of 'marueiles' associated with the Eucharistic host. Here, Love categorises Eucharist-associated miracles into one of three types, based on the effect of the miracle in question.

For þre skilles oure lorde shewep in diverse maneres þoo miracles and merueiles in þis preciose sacrament, þat is to sey, sumtyme to confort hem þat bene in trewe byleve of þis blessedde sacrament, and to kyndle hir love þerby þe more fervently to god and to wirchipyng of þat sacrament. Also sumtyme by speciale grace fort conuerte and turne to trewe byleve hem þat bene out þerof, and also sumtyme to opune prefe of þe grete vertue þerof in delyverance of peynes and savyng fro bodily meschefe and gostly. And of eche of þees þre I shalle telle shortly sume merueiles and myracles þat I fynde writen, þe which bene of so grete auctorite as to my felyng, þat þere may no man aþeyn sey hem bot he be worse þan a Jewe or a payneme.<sup>210</sup>

Besides Love's three-fold categorisation of Eucharist-associated miracle, it is also noteworthy that Love again admits to including examples only of miracles that are established on sound authority, and he does so in full anticipation that some might doubt those that are less well-authenticated. These miracles, having been taken from established authorities, cannot to Love's mind be questioned by any but the most

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p.229-230

reprobate heretic, he who is 'worse þan a Jewe or a payneme', again alluding and linking his own examples to the larger body of anecdotal tales and *exempla* in which such characters appear as the conventional desecrators of the Eucharist.

For the first of the three categories into which Love divides Eucharistic-related miracles, that is 'to confort hem þat bene in trewe byleve', the treatise expands on a miracle to which Love had earlier alluded, the vision experienced by Edward the Confessor at the elevation of the host. Here Love emphasises two additional details of the miracle that work to affirm the veracity of the tale: first, that the vision was experienced simultaneously by Edward's friend Leofric, Earl of Mercia; and second, that the account of the miracle was originally hidden away, lest either the two 'falle in to veyn glorie and pride þorh þe opinion of þe comune peple' or 'þe envye of misbylevyng men lette and destruye trewe byleve to þe wordes hereof'.<sup>211</sup> These details serve to place the account beyond any accusation either that the vision was the product of a single individual's overworked imagination or else that the account itself was mere propaganda for the piety of the king.

With regard to the second of his categories, those miracles that occur 'fort converte hem þat bene of misbyleve in to þe trewe byleve', Love brings forth another miracle tale that is again interesting in its applicability to the Lollard heresy. This miracle, drawn from the life of St Gregory, describes a woman who regularly offered to the saint loaves of bread that were then used in the consecration. When she is later offered as the body of Christ bread which she herself had made, she bursts out in 'dissolute lawhtere', explaining upon inquiry that she laughed 'by cause þat þou clepedest goddus body þe brede þat I made wiþ myn handes'. Gregory then prays for the woman's lack of faith, and the consecrated bread is changed before them both into the likeness of a bloody finger, revealing for a

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p.231

moment its true nature as the body and blood of Christ, and the woman is thus converted from her disbelief.<sup>212</sup> The similarity between the woman's simplistic disregard of the host based on her role in its production and corresponding knowledge of the host as simple bread finds parallels, as we have already seen, in much of the Lollard rhetoric regarding the Eucharist. Moreover, her skepticism with regard to the host places her beyond accusations of being prone to imaginative self-deception.

Love recalls another miracle of note in regard to his third category, in which he describes the virtue of the Eucharist 'in delyverance of peynes and savyng fro bodily meschefe and gostly'. In this example, from a homily by St Gregory, a man imprisoned in a distant country finds his bonds frequently loosed. Upon returning to his home country, he discovers that his wife, presuming him long dead, had weekly masses said for his soul, and that the loosing of his bonds corresponded to the celebration of mass on his behalf.<sup>213</sup> This, much like Elizabeth of Spalbeek's awareness of the elevation even when she was could not observe it physically, strengthens the supernatural connection and puts accusations of mere imagination beyond question. With these miracles, along with other examples, Love illustrates the range of experience with regard to Eucharistic miracles, providing examples of such miracles witnessed by sceptic and faithful alike. In this, Love perhaps hopes to transcend any question of his using selective or suspect evidence, demonstrating instead the universality of miraculous experience with regard to the sacrament. It is not merely the hysterical or suggestible, but individuals representing the whole range of human experience and even impersonal objects that respond to the divine nature of the sacrament.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.232-33

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p.235

Love's approach to countering Lollardy's attack on the sacrament of the altar is significant with regard to our understanding of the production of the Douce 114 *vitae* for at least two reasons: First, Love's use of illustrative *exempla* in addition to more detailed argument in order to defend the orthodox position regarding the Eucharist provides an important model for vernacular approaches to the Lollard debate. This use of *exempla* was not, however, a new practice: James of Vitry had long ago realised in his own preaching against the Albigensians the power of such tales to influence the lay devout and to combat heretical opinion, and his collection of *exempla*, including tales from the life of Marie de Oignies and other notable Beguines, was well-known in England and extracted in several vernacular compilations. In his introduction to the *Sermones Vulgares*, James described the value of the *exemplum*, which E.W. McDonnell summarises thus in his work on the Beguine movement:

Rough preaching converts more laymen than the elaborate sword of a subtle sermon. Leaving behind affected and polished speech, one ought to turn his mind to the edification of rude men and the education of peasants to whom he must present again and again the tangible and concrete which they know from experience. For they are moved more by strange illustrations than by authorities or profound observations.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p.29. For more on James of Vitry's use of the *exemplum* and his influence, see also Thomas Frederick Crane, ed., *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1890) and Jean Thiebaut Werner, *L'exemplum dans la Littérature Religieuse et Didactique du Moyen Âge* (Paris 1927). For a more recent treatment of the *exemplum* in English literature, see Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

McDonnell furthermore adds that 'in practice, examples were introduced not merely for edification, although a moral is generally deduced, but to excite attention',<sup>215</sup> an observation easily applied also to the extraordinary lives translated in Douce 114.

Love was similarly applying the *exempla* tradition to the Lollard debate, using miracle tales to demonstrate the unique nature of the sacramental host, and in doing so, Love set a pattern for others to follow. Like the texts that Love mines for miraculous confirmations of the nature of the Eucharist, the Douce 114 *vitae* could also have easily provided examples of anecdotal evidence confirming the orthodox perspective on the sacrament.

I believe it also significant that Love insisted on examples derived from authoritative writings, texts whose reliability could not easily be questioned. His concern that some might 'a3eyn sey' tales of lesser authority was probably not unfounded, and Love had to account for this possibility when compiling the tales for his own treatise. As we have seen, the Douce 114 *vitae* likewise go to some length to reaffirm the veracity of the miracles they describe, by referring to the first-hand observations of the authors as well as the testimony of first-hand witnesses. For the writers of the *vitae*, the purpose was largely to reaffirm the sanctity of the individual saints, insofar as the hagiographers were arguing toward the canonisation of these holy women. But in the context of the Lollard heresy, and given the fact that many of the miracles associated with these women serve to reaffirm beliefs now brought into dispute, the hagiographers' pains to substantiate the truth of the stories takes on new importance.

In his careful selection of miraculous exempla, and indeed throughout *The Mirror*, Love demonstrates a particular attentiveness to the needs of the vernacular lay readership and

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

the specific ideological challenges they faced, and this care is surely what made Love's work so successful as the representative anti-Lollard vernacular treatise and what served to garner such important endorsement from the ecclesiastical establishment. In preparing his work, Nicholas Love incorporated much material from the Continental mystical tradition, including material attributed to women mystics like Mechtild of Hackeborn and Elizabeth of Hungary, works originally composed, of course, with no thought towards England's own future struggles with heterodoxy. Yet here, ecclesiastical authorities saw some value in the translation and adaptation of continental devotional literature for the use of literate English laypersons, particularly insofar as the texts upheld orthodox opinion of the Eucharistic miracle and other key doctrines denied by the Lollard heretics.

*The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom*, which comprises the second half of Douce 114, provides one further connection between the Beauvale manuscript, the work of Nicholas Love, and the possible production of Douce 114 as an anti-Lollard compilation. The translation of the portion of Henry Suso's *Orologium Sapientiae* that makes up *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom* appears to have been originally produced by the Carthusians at Mt Grace.<sup>216</sup> In the treatise on the Eucharist appended to Love's *Mirror*, Love closes his work with a prayer on the Eucharist from *The Seven Poyntes*, and Love's version appears to have been adapted specifically from the English version of the text rather than the Latin *Horologium*.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> G. Schleich suggested that the translator was a Carthusian of Beauvale; however, the colophons on several manuscripts attribute the work to Mount Grace, and as Michael G. Sargent points out, the translator's reference to 'his place of grace' (p.326, l.18 in Horstmann's edition) seems also to allude to a Mt Grace provenance. See Schleich, 'Über die Entstehungszeit und den Verfasser der mittelenglischen Bearbeitung von Susos Horologium', *Archiv* n.s.57 (1930): 26-34 and Sargent's introduction to Love's *Mirror*, especially p.lvi-lvii, lxx.

<sup>217</sup> As argued by Schleich in "Susos Horologium". See Sargent's *Mirror*, p.lvi.

*The Seven Poyntes*, according to the translator's introduction, was prepared for a lady by her chaplain, and the text extracted from the *Horologium* concerns, as the title implies, 'VII poyntes þat longene to þe trewe love of owre lorde Jhesus' (325) and takes the form of a dialogue between 'þe discyple' and Jesus represented by personified 'everlastyng wisdam'. These seven points cover several standard aspects of devotion—devotion to the name of Christ, contemplation of the Passion, perseverance through suffering, and so on—but it is from the sixth point that Love's prayer on the Eucharist is drawn, a section of the *Seven Poyntes* which describes 'þe sovereyne love of oure lorde Jhesu schewed in the holy sacramente of his blissed body, and how it schalle worthily be receyved of þat longith þere-to' (324). The dialogue on the sacrament mostly concerns Eucharistic devotion, but it also addresses Disciple's specific doubts regarding the nature the Eucharistic celebration by reaffirming the orthodox position and providing illustrations to ease Disciple's intellectual difficulties concerning the miracle of transubstantiation.

If the application of Douce 114 to the Eucharistic controversy was still somewhat vague in the *vita*, here it is made more explicitly obvious as the manuscript approaches head-on the nature of the sacramental host and affirms the orthodox view. The established view is set forth unambiguously and Disciple's queries straitforwardly addressed. "In most certeyne", Wisdom declares, "and soþfastly and with-oute eny doute, I am conteyned in þis sacramente god and man, with body and soule, flesche and blode, as I wente oute of my moder wombe and hanged on the crosse and sette on þe father ri3hte hande". Disciple, despite his eagerness to adhere to church teaching in regard to this matter, is nonetheless plagued by doubt: 'Hit semith ful grete wonder how þat schappely body of my lorde with alle his membrys and mesures in alle-maner perfeccyone maye be conteyned undur þat litel forme þat wee seen of þe sacramente, as to proporcyone unlike in mesure' (366).



Disciple's question thus sets the stage for a dialogue about the arguments that justify the traditional view, and Wisdom's strategy in reassuring him of the doctrine recapitulates much of what we have seen already. Wisdom does not so much engage with the intricacies of the teaching as much as reaffirm the church's doctrinal authority and demolish a few objections by the use of analogies reaffirming the limits of human wisdom and the need to defer to established tradition. Wisdom here admits that the miracle of the sacrament is beyond human comprehension, 'þere maye no tunge telle ne witte undirstande ne mannes resone maye comprehende, but oonly by feith it is conveniente to knowe þis, in as muche as hit is þe grete worchyng of goddes vertue onely' (366). For this reason alone, the type of reasoning employed by the heretical to cast aspersions on the sacrament demonstrates a failure to understand the depth of the Eucharistic mystery.

Wisdom nonetheless concedes that a few analogies from 'kynde' might be profitable in reaffirming Disciple's faith, arguing for example, that just as 'a broken glasse maye receyve a parfite image in every broke parte þere-of', so might the body of Christ be equally and fully contained in each sacramental host (366). This example is employed also in Love's *De Sacramento* and, given Love's obvious familiarity with the text of *The Seven Poyntes*, may well be the direct source for his own illustration: 'Hereto also is a maner of likenes þat we seene in kynde,' Love explains, 'howe þe ymage of a mannus grete face and of a grete body is seene in a litel mirrour, and if it be broken and departede, 3it in euery parte it semeþ alle þe hole ymage, and not in partye after þe partes of þe glasse so broken'.<sup>218</sup> Wisdom, however, is somewhat loathe to employ natural analogies insofar as these are in the heretical mind often the source of error. As he explains, the heretic errs in expecting the miraculous to correspond to the things of nature: 'Alle suche wittys', he

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<sup>218</sup> Sargent, *Mirror*, p.229

asserts, 'and conceytes in errour of þoo þinges þat touchen þe feith, ryseb ofte-syþes of þat grounde þat a man ymaginith and demith of goodly thinges as hee wolde of manly thinges, and of þoo þinges þat ben above kynde as of þoo þat ben in kynde' (366-67). Instead, the believer must 'be warre' in this respect, and lean instead on the established teaching of the church rather than expect that the nature of the sacrament should find ready analogy in the natural world.

This strategy undermines so much of what we have seen in the arguments of vernacular Lollardy against the Eucharist by placing the doctrine well beyond the simplistic arguments formulated by the Lollard heretics, arguments that usually appealed to the physical differences between the physical host and the body of Christ which the church claimed it to be. Like the miracles recorded the Douce 114 *vitae* or those recounted in Love's *Mirror*, the dialogue of *The Seven Poyntes* attacks these arguments and reaffirms the fact of transubstantiation without having to engage with the precise philosophical difficulties the doctrine raises.

### Idiosyncratic Spirituality and Its Critics

The *vitae* translated in Douce 114, as we have seen, are constructed in such a way as to discourage the possibility of imitation. The special grace afforded to each of the women described in the manuscript's translations places them in a qualitatively different category of spiritual endeavour, one that can be the subject of wonder for the average devout but which ought not be one of imitation. This does not, of course, completely preclude the possibility that those familiar with these and similar *vitae* might nonetheless attempt some degree of imitation. James of Vitry's warning in the *vita* of Marie of Oignies at once discourages imitation but tacitly, by its warning, acknowledges the possibility. Furthermore, there remain possibilities of imitation *not* specifically precluded by the text but which nonetheless might find themselves at odds with the prevailing spiritual climate current in the context in which the texts were translated, which differed appreciably from the environment in which the texts were originally composed.

I have suggested in the previous chapter how the details of the Douce 114 *vitae* may have had specific appeal to those in the Carthusian order who, inspired by the example of Nicholas Love, likewise sought to counter the influence of Lollardy through the production of texts that sought to demonstrate, in the language of *mirabilia* and *exempla* popular among the lay devout, the truth of the orthodox position on the Eucharist and

other tenets of belief challenged by the Lollard heresy. But answering the question of why the Beauvale Carthusians thought these texts suitable to translate into the vernacular involves the examination of another contemporary result of Lollardy and the orthodox response: an environment of suspicion that affected not only the production of vernacular religious texts, but also curtailed freedoms of religious discourse and expression, especially for women who were seen as particularly vulnerable to heretical influence.

Locating the Douce 114 texts within the landscape of English devotional reading in the fifteenth century and speculating on how the texts may have been received by those who encountered them is not a simple task. I have offered some suggestions on how these texts may have addressed themselves to contemporary concerns about the sacraments and other disputed aspects of traditional belief. I am convinced that the tradition of affective devotion, especially as expressed in Beguine and mendicant spirituality, had much to commend itself as an antidote to the denial of the miraculous implicit in much of Lollardy, and I do not believe that such connections were lost on either those responsible for the translation of the texts nor on the texts' readers.

However, the subject of affective devotion itself was not an uncontroversial one, apart from any perceptions that may have existed either way of its connection or opposition to specific heresies. It has long been commonplace, in the study of late-medieval English spirituality, to distinguish two divergent traditions that contributed to the landscape of devotional literature and practice, to differentiate the competing influence of those who pursued a more affective devotional practice from the teaching of those who on the other hand criticized such excess. David Knowles, for example, has written concerning the 'intellectual and emotional austerity and a sense of the transcendence of supernatural reality', typified by writers like Walter Hilton and the *Cloud of Unknowing* author, 'which

are derived from some of the purest sources of theological and ascetical tradition'. According to Knowles, 'This stream continued to flow till the reign of Henry VIII, but there is some evidence that from the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards it was contaminated by another current, that of a more emotional and idiosyncratic devotion, manifesting itself in visions, revelations and unusual behaviour'. The latter was developed by the Continental teaching of mystical authors like Ruysbroeck and Suso, and promoted by a nascent interest in the lives of various Continental women mystics, among who Knowles includes Angela of Foligno, Dorothea of Prussia, and Bridget of Sweden.<sup>219</sup> We can include also among the latter 'current' the popularity of Richard Rolle, whose writings popularised even more so than the Continental writers an affective sort of mysticism and were themselves the subject of much thinly-disguised criticism from Hilton, the *Cloud* author, and other contemporary critics.

But arguably, Knowles' generalisation here—and his privileging the 'intellectual and emotional austerity' of the more staid tradition of English mysticism over its more affective manifestations—oversimplifies the complexities of devotional reading and practice in fifteenth-century England. The reading of Cecily of York, for example, whose preferred texts included both Hilton's work on the active and the contemplative life as well as the writings of Continental mystics better placed within what Knowles deems the 'contaminated' current, illustrates how readers drew their devotional reading from both streams without apparent conflict.<sup>220</sup>

Similarly, the extant lists of Carthusian book-holdings suggest that, as interested in mystic experience as the Carthusians undoubtedly were, they appear as a whole to have been as

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<sup>219</sup> David Knowles, 'The Spiritual Life of the Fifteenth Century', *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961), vol.2, p.222-223. Roger Lovatt also distinguishes 'two divergent' traditions within English spiritual writing, although he appropriately notes that they are 'never exclusive', in 'The Library of John Blacman', p.210.

<sup>220</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, p.254

interested in examples of affective devotion as they were in those writers who were critical of devotional excess. This may well suggest that the Carthusian order was not wholly uniform in its opinions on devotional practice. This is almost certainly true with regard to the most influential English mystic of the affective school, the Yorkshire hermit Richard Rolle. On the one hand, Carthusian libraries were well-stocked with volumes of Rolle's work and the Carthusians themselves may have played a significant role in the promotion of his writings and cult—in fact, the only surviving manuscript besides Douce 114 known to have been in the library at Beauvale is a copy of Rolle's *Incendium amoris*.<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, one of the more outspoken critics of Richard Rolle—the only one to provoke a written response by one of Rolle's supporters—was himself a Carthusian.<sup>222</sup>

Extant Carthusian manuscripts and lists of Carthusian book-holdings similarly draw equally from both the school of affective devotion and from its critics; The unique manuscript containing the most extensive biography of an English mystic of the affective sort, the autobiography of Margery Kempe, was preserved by the Carthusians, as were English translations of key Continental works, but the order was also instrumental in copying and promoting the writings of more conservative authors like Walter Hilton, who doubtless would have been critical of Kempe's form of religious expression. Each tradition presumably had its partisans within the order, but it is also probable that there

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<sup>221</sup> There is, however, no support for Jonathan Hughes' suggestion, in *Pastors and Visionaries*, that Beauvale was 'a major centre' of Rolle studies. The MS referred to here was probably not copied at Beauvale, but at St Mary's beyond the wall of York, and brought from there to Beauvale by the monk Christopher Braystones, who transferred to Beauvale late in his life and died there around 1474. The MS includes an indulgence granted by Thomas Spofforth, abbot of St Mary's from 1405 before becoming bishop of Hereford in 1422. Braystones had previously served as Spofforth's chaplain. On the MS, see Michael Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle', *Analecta Cartusiana* 55 (1981): 160-205. p.169-170.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Bassett's defence of Richard Rolle, written in response to an anonymous Carthusian critic, is printed as an appendix to Michael Sargent's article 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle'.

were those who took a broader view that held as important both a more exploratory mysticism as well as the criticisms which sought to check the worst of its excesses.

Walter Hilton and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* both took strictly conservative views with regard to religious enthusiasm and devotional excess, but for many interested in exploring affective and ecstatic mystical experience, such criticism may well have been seen as a necessary and vital corrective: Few were as likely concerned with the orthodoxy of visions and ecstasies, singular asceticism and affective experiences, as those for whom such occurrences were an immediate concern of their devotional life. They had a personal interest in avoiding what might be deemed spiritual deception, both for the sake of developing their own spirituality as well as avoiding external criticism and condemnation. One of the most extensive discourses circulated in England on determining the orthodoxy of singular religious practices and experiences, for example, came from the writings of one who was a visionary herself, Catherine of Siena, who otherwise is at home among the writers Knowles identifies as comprising that second stream of 'idiosyncratic devotion'.

It was especially important in the religious climate of fifteenth-century England that those who adopted singular religious practices be able to effectively navigate what Rosalynn Voaden has called 'the discourse of *discretio spirituum*', the system of traditional criteria by which false, demonic, or otherwise heterodox experiences were distinguished from those that were genuine.<sup>223</sup> I have alluded elsewhere to the chilling effect that Lollardy and the associated suspicion of devotional aberration had on England's spiritual climate, adding the suspicion of heresy to the host of potential criticisms that might already be applied to singular religious expressions. Margery Kempe provides the most obvious example of its effect, having been several times accused of Lollardy although her

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<sup>223</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, 'Women's Words, Men's Language'

theological beliefs always proved orthodox. Those who, like Kempe, sought to establish themselves in that liminal space between the life of the religious and that of the layperson, following the model of the Beguines and tertiary orders, often bore an suspicious resemblance to the more zealous Lollards whose own lifestyles obfuscated the lay-religious divide and who sought to appropriate to the laity many of the privileges reserved to the priesthood.

This resemblance made the establishment of a lay movement, like those successful on the Continent, especially perilous, and it made all the more important, for those whose devotional lives included conspicuous mystical phenomena, the ability to appropriate and navigate the discourse which distinguished genuine experiences from the counterfeit. Some obtained a measure of success: Julian of Norwich consciously eschewed autobiographical elaboration in the record of her revelations, effectively writing herself out of the narrative and thus avoiding personal criticism. In the case of Margery Kempe, however, it was precisely her failure to avoid consistently the pitfalls identified by the critics of mystical experience that contributed to her limited success, as Voaden has suggested, arguing that her 'inconsistency worked against establishing her veracity as a visionary' and 'contributed to her mixed reception'.<sup>224</sup>

There is also a common assumption, one which Knowles' comment makes explicit, of a distinct division between the more reserved mystical tradition perpetuated in England and exemplified by the principal writers of the English mystical tradition and, in contrast, the marked religious enthusiasm that was often celebrated on the Continent and known only in England largely through translated texts like those found in Douce 114. Certainly, it was this assumption, in part, that made the discovery of the manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* so intriguing for twentieth-century scholarship. Hers was the sort of

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p.76



religious expression that was largely undocumented in England, and research into the life of Margery Kempe turned, quite appropriately, to the texts by and about Continental women saints in order to explain the apparent incongruity of a life unprecedented among her English contemporaries.

Certainly, the Continent proved far more fertile ground for texts celebrating the religious enthusiast, particularly of the type of woman mystic described in the *vitae* of Douce 114. But when we consider whether there is here a disparity in the actual occurrence of such affective spirituality or simply one reflected in the available evidence, the situation becomes more complex: Religious enthusiasm and affective devotion were more often celebrated by Continental writers, as demonstrated by James of Vitry and Thomas Cantimpré, than their later English counterparts, but it is obviously more difficult to determine how possible unrecorded examples of religious enthusiasm in England compared to those of the Continent. In other words, it may not be as much a difference of frequency or degree as it was in the willingness of contemporaries to celebrate or record such examples in a climate in which such devotional excesses were especially suspect. Furthermore, England did have a long tradition of women's spirituality, but its tradition was that of the anchoress, and individual anchoresses, largely because of their strict claustration, rarely obtained more than local and predominately oral notoriety.

It is entirely possible that England may have produced its own equivalents to the extraordinary saints described in Douce 114, but their stories remained unrecorded, their mystical experiences hidden within the confines of the cell of the anchoress with no one, in England's stifling climate of suspicion, willing to promote their cult and especially not to write about them in the much deprecated vernacular. All that has survived as possible evidence of a broader movement of affective devotion are a few Latin accounts, the

occasional allusion to English anchoresses, and, of course, the exceptional and problematic vernacular account of the life of Margery Kempe.

Thomas Netter, as I have mentioned earlier, describes in his anti-Lollard treatise the example of Joan the Meatless, who was sustained physically solely on the Eucharist and was able to distinguish between consecrated and unconsecrated hosts, a feat as we have seen also attributed to several of the Douce 114 holy women.<sup>225</sup> John Blacman's Latin biography of Henry VI describes the king's also distinguishing between consecrated and unconsecrated hosts as well as his experiencing Eucharistic visions reminiscent of Marie of Oignies'. The Carthusian Richard Methley left behind a Latin diary of his mystical experiences, and Richard Rolle was notable in having developed his own influential systemisation of mystical experience which he set forth in his own treatises. Of these, only the last, the writings of Richard Rolle, obtained any circulation in the vernacular, in part due to the obvious advantage of his being a man with the freedom and education to produce his own work without the mediation of a confessor. But even Rolle's mysticism was not popularised without attracting a number of outspoken critics.

It remains a possibility, then, that the landscape of late-medieval English spirituality may have in fact resembled, far more than the extant evidence suggests, the kind of affective devotion that has come to be associated predominantly with the Continent. Whatever accounts may have otherwise been written were stifled by the effect of the church's policy with regard to vernacular literature, the withering critique levelled at those like Richard Rolle who pursued a less conventional religious life, and the general atmosphere of suspicion toward singular religious expressions.

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<sup>225</sup> Bynum, *Holy Fast*, p.91

More conservative writers like Hilton and *The Cloud* author, conditioned to a degree by this general atmosphere of mistrust that existed with regard to devotional excess, certainly did their part to stigmatise some of the behaviours that had come to be associated with the school of affective devotion that Richard Rolle and others had inspired. The most comprehensive and informative body of vernacular literature produced in late-medieval England on the subject of singular contemplative practices, and the broader topic of *discretio spirituum*, was produced by one of its more prolific mystical authors, the anonymous author best known for his longest text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. His criticism of certain practices of affective devotion, while clearly biased against them, provide us some of the few descriptions of extremes of devotional practice to occur in texts that are *not* intended to lionise the practitioner, and so stand as an interesting counterpoint to the sort of *vitae* we have already encountered in which such extremes are invariably and implicitly described as the product of a special grace beyond the criticism of those who lack the saint's degree of sanctity.

The *Cloud* author's catalogue of the odd spiritual affectations and habits of misguided contemplatives is not an unbiased one; it is meant as the basis for criticism, and much is certainly exaggerated for the purpose of ridicule. Nonetheless, his descriptions reveal a world, a subculture of practice within late-medieval spirituality, that belies the easy assumption of English conservatism in spiritual pursuits. The *Cloud* author, at one point in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, attempts to check his impulse to give detailed descriptions of deviant devotional habits and questions the value of cataloguing the behaviours of those who err—'for what schuld it profite to þee,' he asks, 'to wite hou þees greet clerkis, and

men and wommen of oþer degrees þen þou arte, ben disceyvid?'—and yet, in practice, he finds it difficult to restrain himself from lampooning their behaviours.<sup>226</sup>

Som sette þeire iþen in þeire hedes as þei were sturdy scheep betyn in þe heed, and as þei schulde diþe anone. Som hangen here hedes on syde, as a worme were in þeire eres. Som pipyn when þei schuld speke, as þer were no spirit in þeire bodies; and þis is þe propre condicion of an ypocrite. Som crien and whinen in þeire þrote, so ben þey gredey and hasy to sey þat þei þink ... For som men aren so kumbred in nice corious contenaunces in bodily beryng, þat whan þei schal ouþt here, þei wriþen here hedes onside queyntely, and up wiþ þe chin; þei gape wiþ þeire mouþes as þei schuld here wiþ hem, and not wiþ here eres. Som, when þei schulen speke, poynten wiþ here fyngres, or on þeire fyngres, or on þeire owne brestes, or on þeires þat þei speke to. Som kan nouþer sit stille, stonde stille, ne ligge stille, bot 3if þei be ouþer waggyng wiþ þeire fete, or elles sumwhat doying wiþ þeire handes. Som rowyn wiþ þeire armes in tyme of here spekyng, as hem nedid for to swymme over a grete water. Som ben evermore smyling and leiþing at iche oþer worde þat þei speke, as þei weren gigelotes and nice japyng jogelers lackyng kontenaunce.<sup>227</sup>

Such affectations, he argues, derive from a basic misunderstanding of the language of contemplative instruction, from a literalism with regard to terminology and the resultant excessive attempts to effect with bodily strength what is meant to be undertaken as a spiritual effort. At several points, the *Cloud* author attributes the sensory phenomena experienced by some contemplatives to a physiological basis—the bodily strain wrought by trying to effect physically what is meant to be understood figuratively and spiritually—

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<sup>226</sup> Phyllis Hodgson, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing ; and, The Book of Privy Counselling* (London: EETS, 1944), p.86-87

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97-99

though this is never totally exclusive, in his mind, from the complementary deceptions attributable to more diabolic sources.

Some for example, misunderstanding as physical the instruction that one 'drawe alle his witte wiþ-inne hymself', may mistakenly 'turne þeire bodily wittes inwardes to þeire body aþens þe cours of kynde, and streynyn hem, as þei wolde see inwardes wiþ þeire bodily iþen' until, through physical strain 'þei turne here brayne in here hedes' and makes themselves susceptible to false sensory phenomena, 'fals li3t or soundes, swete smelles in þeire noses, wonderful taastes in þeire mowþes, and many queynte hetes and brennynges in þeire bodily brestes or in þeire bowelles, in þeire backes, and in þeire reynes, and in þeire pryve membres'.<sup>228</sup> Similarly, aspirant contemplatives might misconceive the instruction 'þat a man schal lift up his herte unto God' and then physically strain their hearts attempting to fulfil the command literally. Such an unnatural exercise, the *Cloud* author claims, results in some contemplatives' experiencing a sensation of physical heat within their chests caused by the physical strain.<sup>229</sup> Walter Hilton elsewhere makes a similar argument, criticising those who seek to attain mystical advancement through the strain of the physical body: 'For there are some lovers of God that make themselves for to love God as it were by their own might; for they strain themselves through great violence, and pant so strongly that they burst into bodily fervours as they would draw God from heaven to them'.<sup>230</sup>

For the *Cloud* author, such physical affectations and false sensations may be a prelude to more dangerous deceptions: Demonic influences capitalize on the bodily strain produced by misguided contemplative exercises and heresy is never far behind. As surely as

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p.96-97

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p.85-86, 105-106

<sup>230</sup> Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Scale of Perfection* (London: Watkins, 1923), p.387

authentic visionary experiences lead to true knowledge, false sensations lead to heresy and error, as the *Cloud* author explains:

Treuly of þis disceite and of þe braunches þer-of, spryngyn many mescheves: moche ypocrisie, moche heresy, and moche errour. For as fast after soche a fals felyng comeþ a fals knowyng in þe feendes scole, ri3t as after a trewefeling comeþ a trewe knowing in Gods scole. For I telle þee trewly þat þe devil haþ his contemplatyves, as God haþ his.<sup>231</sup>

Later in his text, the *Cloud* author reiterates the association of this sort of affective spirituality with heretical and diabolical leanings, suggesting that the devil 'haþ no parfite ypocrite ne heretike in erþe, þat he ne is gilty in somme þat I have seide', and he proceeds to associate these practices further with the impulse to 'blasphemyn alle þe seyntes, sacramentes, statutes, and ordenaunces of Holy Chirche', a charge which recalls in particular the heresies of Lollardy.<sup>232</sup>

In another of his works, the *Cloud* author tackles the related issue of singular devotional habits—extremes of fasting, silence, isolation and the like—with a scepticism toward the value of such practices and a similar unease concerning their propensity to give way to hypocrisy and error. The letter, entitled *A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings*, was written in response to the query of a young contemplative, confused about the degree to which he ought to follow his inward compulsions toward a stricter, more ascetic lifestyle.

In the course of his response, the *Cloud* author reiterates in a way the theme I have already scrutinized in the course of my examination of the Douce 114 *vita*: the pursuit of singular devotional habits and extremes of asceticism are made possible only through a

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<sup>231</sup> Hodgson, *Cloud of Unknowing*, p.86

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98, 104

special grace, not through personal volition and strength of will. The ascetic life is thrust upon a person from above through a special grace not of one's own choosing, and that grace makes itself known to a person only through a deep and abiding inner urge, not through the inspiration of external observation and imitation. The *Cloud* author indicates that the veneration of singular devotional practices was enjoying something of a vogue among his contemporaries—'for oft-tymes now þees dayes, þei ben demid most holy ... þat most aren in silence, in singulere fastyng and in only dwellyng'—yet this resurgent interest was not without its dangers unless the practices themselves were motivated solely by grace: 'Sop it is þat þei ben most holy 3if grace only be þe cause ... 3if it be oþerwise, þen þer is bot perile on alle sides', he suggests, 'for it is ful perilous to streine þe kynde to any soche werk of devocioun ... I mene, passing þe comoun custom and þe cours of kynde and degree, bot it be ledde þerto bi grace'.<sup>233</sup>

The *Cloud* author makes the argument in his epistle that such devotional singularities, with regard to fasting, silence, solitude, and the like, are not in themselves automatically conducive to spiritual development. They are never ends, but merely means to virtue, and they can only result in virtue '3if þei ben done lawfully and wiþ discrecioun'.<sup>234</sup> In the *Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton suggests a similar argument with regard to the sensory phenomena of affective devotion:

By this that I have said mayst thou somewhat understand that visions or revelations of any manner spirit, in bodily appearing or in imagining, sleeping or waking, or else any other feeling in bodily wits made as it were ghostly; either in sounding of ear, or savouring in the mouth, or smelling at the nose, or else any sensible heat as it were fire glowing and warming the breast, or any other part

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<sup>233</sup> Phyllis Hodgson, ed., *Deonise hid diuinite : and other treatises on contemplative prayer related to the Cloud of Unknowing* (London: EETS, 1955), p.62

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70

of the body, or anything that may be felt by bodily wit, though it be never so comfortable and liking, are not very contemplation; nor they are but simple and secondary though they be good, in regard of ghostly virtues, nor of this ghostly knowing and loving of God. For in virtues and in knowing of God with love is no deceit. But all such manner of feelings may be good, wrought by a good angel, and they may be deceivable, feigned by a wicked angel, when he transfigureth him into an angel of light. Wherefore since they may be both good and evil, it seemeth well that they are not the best; for wit thou well that the devil may when he hath leave, feign in bodily feeling the likeness of the same thing which a good angel may work.<sup>235</sup>

The logic of these two arguments is essentially identical: If a practice or experience can be either good or bad, as the *Cloud* author argues for ascetic practices and Hilton for the sensory phenomena of contemplation, they cannot be virtues in themselves, for a virtue by definition can be only good. In bare outline, this is not appreciably different from the ideas regarding devotional singularities implicit in the Douce 114 narratives. In every case, the hagiographer argues that the saint's unusual devotional habits were born of a special grace without which those very practices would have been impossible. And moreover, each demonstrates in his narrative the virtues that were produced in each individual as a result in acts of charity, devotion to the sacraments, and other genuine expressions of faith.

But Hilton and the *Cloud* author use these basic assumptions to a much different end, not extolling the virtuous possibilities of those singular devotional practices that are appropriately wrought by special grace, but instead highlighting the perils of misguided enthusiasm and essentially concluding that these perils comprise a persuasive enough

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<sup>235</sup> Underhill, *The Scale of Perfection*, p.19-20



deterrent that singular devotional practices and the cultivation of sensory experiences ought to be treated minimally with neutrality if not outright suspicion. And the didactic writings of Hilton and the *Cloud* author differ also from the *vitae* with respect to their context: The genre of hagiography comprises a sort of transcendent 'other' which the average devout, no matter how confident his faith in the miraculous, is not expected to encounter in the everyday. Hilton and the *Cloud* author, on the other hand are not writing *about* those saints who exist in the context of unspoken otherworldliness, but are writing *to* individuals, known individuals, who are not reasonably expected to attain to such heights of the miraculous. Of course, both Hilton and the *Cloud* author doubtless believed in the possibility of the supernatural; but faith in the *mirabilia* of books is a different matter than faith in the overtly miraculous among the everyday, even among the most devout.

The *Cloud* author, in particular, is especially derisive of those who take up singularities of religious practice. He appears to assume throughout his treatise, rather pessimistically, that those who take up such singular habits do so, not out of an inner compulsion or inspiration, but through an effort to imitate the habits of others and attain the praise of their peers. He relates, in this regard, a story concerning a mutual acquaintance of his and his reader that undertook his own singularities of 'fastynges' and 'only dwellyng' only after having observed another of similar habits. He iterates this story as a warning:

Men sein commonly þat aþe doþ as he oþer seeþ ... loke þat þou be none aþe;  
þat is to sey, loke þat þi steringes to silence or to spekyng or to etyng, to onlines  
or to companye, wheþer þei ben comyn fro wiþinne of habundaunce of loue

and of deuocioun in spirite and nor fro wiþouten bi windowes of þi bodily wittes.<sup>236</sup>

In another of his treatises, one on a related topic, *A Tretis of Discrecyon of Spirites*, the *Cloud* author goes even further, dismissing as foolish those who venerate the practitioners of such singularities. Such practices, neutral as the author conceives them with regard to virtue, reflect nothing of a person's true spiritual attainments. Such 'singulare doers' are popular with those of common insight, who respect only the outer man; but the wise man is not so easily swayed by such outward displays:

For wheresoeuer þat any one or two ben in any devoute congregacioun, þe whiche any one or two useþ any soche outward singuleertees, þan in þe si3t of alle foles al þe remenaunt ben ensclaundred by hem; bot in si3t of þe wise man þei ensclaundre hemself. Bot for-þi þat foles ben moo þen wise men, þerfore, for favour of foles, soche singulere doers wenen þei be wise.<sup>237</sup>

In other words, such singular doers believe themselves to be wise because they are held in the esteem of the majority, but the majority, the *Cloud* author argues, are fools who respect only outward displays of religion, not the inner virtues that are the fruits of genuine contemplation.

In my previous chapter on Douce 114 in the context of the Lollard controversy, I distinguished between, on the one hand, the kind of popular discourse regarding heresy and orthodoxy that existed among lay persons and those clergy most closely involved with lay communities, and on the other hand, the kind of discourse that took place in the context of the academic debate concerning the doctrinal claims of Wycliffe and his

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.68-69

<sup>237</sup> Hodgson, *Deonise hid divinite*, p.86

followers. The former privileged illustrative tales of wonders and *mirabilia*, while the latter, although not wholly eschewing the value of *mirabilia*, chiefly emphasized argument from abstract principle. Here, also, the *Cloud* author's discussion of 'fools' who are persuaded by outward and wondrous singularities and the 'wise' who pursue mystical attainment through a more intellectualized path of development suggests a similar opposition at play.

The existence of such a cultural distinction is demonstrated also in a work defending singularities of devotional practice, the *Defensorium contra oblectatores* of the hermit Thomas Basset, written in defence of the religious practices of Basset's fellow hermit Richard Rolle. Here, Basset acknowledges the distinction between the simple and uneducated—the *simplices* to whom God grants mystical experiences—and the educated—the *sapientes* who take it upon themselves to criticize those who pursue sensory mystical experience and singular living. But here, Basset turns the distinction on its head in order to defend Rolle's mystical practice, arguing that it oft pleases God to confound the wisdom of the educated and reveal himself to the simple, *secreta sapientie sue a sapientibus et prudentibus abscondere*. There is a certain irony in that Basset, in his treatise, demonstrates himself to be anything but uneducated but seemingly well-read in the scriptures and contemporary devotional literature including the revelations of St Bridget, the work of Henry Suso, and the pseudo-Bonaventurean *Stimulus Amoris*. His identification with the uneducated may have been a more or less conscious self-effacement, an association with an intellectual underclass of sorts that he reinterpreted as a point of superiority in light of God's preference for the simple. Nonetheless, his identification reaffirms that the distinction existed as an important cultural construct, even if the distinction wasn't always in reality so well-defined. The *Cloud* author, although one usually numbered among the more conservative mystical writers, also used such rhetoric to similar effect, dismissing those

learned clerks who criticise his work as 'so harde and so hei3', instead suggesting that his descriptions of mystical experience were easily intelligible to those who lived in 'parfite charite'.<sup>238</sup>

So the pursuit of singular devotional practices and ecstatic religious experiences was a potentially divisive one in the context in which the Douce 114 *vitae* were translated, and although the lives and revelations of Continental holy women were translated and copied in relative abundance, it is unsurprising in such an atmosphere that no English equivalent to the *mulieres sanctae* of Douce 114 arose or at least had their lives recorded for posterity. Even had there been an English Marie of Oignies, there arose no English James of Vitry willing to endanger his ecclesiastical career to document her life and promote her cult. We do have, in contrast, the record of Margery Kempe, whose attempts to find an amanuensis willing to record her life were only realized with much difficulty. I have referred earlier to the account of Margery Kempe as a 'problematic' one, partly because of the difficulty in locating the text within a genre. The book, at points, resembles quite closely the *vitae* of the sort we have already seen, but unlike the *vitae* translated in Douce 114, the account of Margery Kempe's life is fragmented by the lack of a single consistent author and the disjointed means by which the book arrived in its final form.

I have placed much emphasis in my account of the Douce 114 *vitae* on the role of hagiographer as apologist, on how the authors of those *vitae* were able to manipulate their accounts of the singular devotional practices of holy women as the basis for a defence of their sanctity and orthodoxy. In many ways, the textual unity of those accounts constructed by the formal qualities of the *vitae* themselves, worked to establish a sense of order in what could have otherwise been chaotic narratives: Philip of Clairvaux organizes his account of the life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek according to the liturgical hours; Thomas

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<sup>238</sup> *The Book of Privy Counselling* in Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p.137

Cantimpré uses Christina's purgatorial vision to provide a foundation and referent for understanding the miracles he later describes; and James of Vitry uses the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as a framework for emphasising the virtues to which each act of asceticism or incident of the miraculous contributes.

Such formal constructs provide a sense of order and purpose to what might be seen as inchoate and random. They incorporate the unfamiliar by association with the familiar, demonstrating what resemblance such singular and supernatural manifestations bear to the more mundane objects and goals of common devotional forms. Elizabeth manifests physically images of contemplation corresponding to the objects of more common meditation; Christina's miracles are described as a specially privileged way of aiding those in purgatory, a feat accomplished by those without Christina's unique grace through the usual means of prayer and penitence; and Marie's asceticism is not an end in itself, but a means to virtues that ought to be cultivated by everyone through the grace made available to each individual.

The success of those holy women had as much to do with the qualities of each individual saint as it did the skill of their hagiographers in crafting the accounts of their lives. The book of Margery Kempe suffered in this sense—although it remains an extraordinarily useful text in a different sense because of its less mediated nature—because of its lack of a single author as well as the authorial control which Margery herself attempted to exert.

Margery's final amanuensis, who redacted and expanded the text from an earlier, less intelligible version, 'addyd a leef' to the quire he had already written in order to attach a more detailed prologue describing the process by which the book arrived in its final form. The prologue describes how Margery specifically delayed the production of a written record of her revelations until some twenty years after her revelations had first

begun. The prologue records how she received several offers by would-be amanuenses among the clerks and anchorites with whom she associated, but rejected them based on a revelation that her experiences ought not be recorded until later in her life.

Yet, more than twenty years later, when the appropriate time to have her life and revelations recorded was finally revealed to Margery, there were few willing to offer their services. This change may in part be attributable to the increasing suspicion of vernacular religious texts that developed in the wake of Arundel's 1409 prohibitions and the general climate of antagonism toward singular religious practices that had arisen from the Lollard controversy. Furthermore, her own reputation had complicated her task: 'for þer was so mech obloquie and slawndyr of þis creatur þat þer wold fewe men beleve þis creatur' (6) when it came time to commit her revelations to writing. Although Margery's beliefs always proved orthodox under examination, and her devotion to the Eucharist and confession absolved her of any association with the teachings of Wycliffe—none other than Arundel himself had found in her 'no defawt' (37)—accusations of Lollardy were nonetheless raised against her on several occasions, with no seeming justification other than her being an outspoken woman sometimes critical of clerical authority.

The actual composition of Margery's *Book* arose from a series of failed attempts to have others commit her life to writing. Her first amanuensis was a resident of Germany, English by birth, whose attempt to record her life was interrupted by his death. She then took the manuscript to a priest who found the text illegible, 'for it was neiþyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oþer letters ben', and the priest, confounded by the poor quality of the writing and fearful of the criticism surrounding Margery, put off revising the text for more than four years despite Margery's persistence. He finally referred Margery to another priest, who had known the first writer in Germany and who was familiar with the latter's form of writing. Margery paid this

second writer a sum for his efforts, and he too endeavoured to revise the text but could not produce more than a single leaf, for 'þe boke was so evel sett and so unreasonably wretyn' (4).

The proem of *The Book of Margery Kempe* explains the writer's difficulties in reading the text as a demonic affliction: 'Whan þe prest began fyrst to wryten on þis booke, hys eyn myssed so þat he mygth not se to make hys lettyr ne mygth not se to mend hys penne' but 'all oþer thyng he mygth se wel a-now', but through Margery's prayers he was given the grace to see 'as evyr he dede be-for be day-lyth and be candel-lygth boþe' (5), and he was able to revise the text, adding a new proem and appending the second book of the account.

The main text of the book, however, suggests an alternative reason for the priest's initial reticence: A friar, whom an annotator's note identifies as the Franciscan William Melton and whom the text describes as 'on of þe most famows frerys in Inglond', had arrived in Lynn and, after having his preaching disrupted by Margery's loud weeping, excluded Margery from attending his sermons and publicly condemned her from the pulpit (148-152). 'And þan many of hem þat pretendyd hir frenschep turnyd a-bakke for a lytyl veyn drede þat þey haddyn of hys wordys and durst not wel spekyn wyth hir, of þe which þe same preyste was on þat aftirward wrot þis boke and was in purpose nevyr to a levyd hir felyngys aftyr' (152).

The priest was persuaded back to Margery's support only after having later read about Marie of Oignies own 'plentyuows teerys' in a copy of Marie's Latin *vita* and finding support also for the grace of tears in the *Stimulus Amoris*, the writings of Richard Rolle, and the life of Elizabeth of Hungary (153-154). The text does not indicate to what degree beyond the anecdote about Marie's ecstatic weeping the priest became familiar with the

life of Marie of Oignies, but it is entirely possible that he may have learned from his reading also about the extent to which James of Vitry's relationship with Marie helped establish his ecclesiastical success. James of Vitry's relationship with Marie and his account of her life helped secure his reputation in the church, and Margery's anonymous priest may well have also had similar aspirations.

If so, however, these hopes never materialized. The task of writing Margery's life was complicated by the difficulties of redacting the existing text, Margery's own imprecise recollections of the events which had occurred to her some twenty years earlier, and possibly the editorial supervision Margery herself exerted on the final form of the account of her life. When her amanuensis explains in his proem the process of the book's dictation, his frustration is almost palpable: "Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thing aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme and þe ordyr whan thyngys befallyn'(5). Whereas the authors of the *vitae* translated in Douce 114 carefully controlled the form and organization of the events described in order to make them conform to the conventions of hagiographical standards, Margery's priest was constrained by the vagaries of Margery's recollections.

The result is something much less than polished hagiography. The second, much briefer, book of Margery's life is wholly the work of the second amanuensis and recapitulates in summary many of the details contained in the text redacted from the first amanuensis' attempt. It suggests an attempt to revise the earlier account into something more strictly chronological. It is concluded with an appended account of Margery's prayers. These materials may comprise the second writer's unrealized attempts to construct a more seamless account of Margery's life, a task that in the end may have required more effort than the priest determined it was ultimately worth.



Wynkyn de Worde's 1501 printed extracts from *The Book of Margery Kempe* demonstrate that such a redaction was entirely possible. His three folios draw material in no order related to the original text of Margery's *Book*, arranging them in the form of a dialogue between Christ and his 'daughter' Margery. The result is a much sanitized version of the original text, cleansed of any details that suggest Margery's idiosyncratic devotional life. As Sanford Brown Meech has described:

In no extract is there a single circumstance of the worldly life of Margery. Of her mystical experiences only those of quiet communion with Our Lord and the Virgin are represented in the selections. The extractor (whether Wynkyn de Worde or another man) chose passages which could not shock or offend religious sensibilities, but which in their total effect give a very imperfect and one-sided impression of Margery's character and a rather flavourless one of the *Book*.<sup>239</sup>

The effect was such that the 1521 re-issue of de Worde's printed text by Henry Pepwell could refer to Margery as 'a devoute ancre' without any awareness of the obvious contradictions between Margery's very public life as described in her *Book* and the life of an anchoress's strict enclosure.<sup>240</sup> The safe and uncontroversial printed extracts of Margery's life accomplished something similar to what her amanuensis may have desired but lacked the freedom, will, or talent to carry out, a version of Margery's life that was acceptable to contemporary religious sensibilities and which could secure her place as a venerated holy woman.

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<sup>239</sup> Meech, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.xlvi-xxlvii

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p.357

Whereas James of Vitry used the example of Marie of Oignies to secure the place under the umbrella of orthodoxy the women's movement she helped inspire, the various redactors of the life of Margery Kempe helped in total to produce an increasingly sanitized version. Although Margery—in her voluntary abstinence, her mode of dress, her pursuit of the mixed life, and her habit of ecstatic weeping—had much in common with Marie of Oignies and other Continental women saints, she never enjoyed the enthusiastic ecclesiastical endorsement afforded the latter. In part, this can be attributed, as Rosalynn Voaden has suggested, to Margery's failure to successfully navigate the discourse associated with the idea of *discretio spirituum* and her lack of a steady relationship to a single confessor. But there were also cultural forces at work that cast suspicion on idiosyncratic religious expressions and singularities of devotional habits, which made Margery's task a more difficult one in many ways than that experienced by the Continental saints whom she in many ways resembled.

I began this thesis by relating the account of Margery Kempe's conflict with one of her contemporaries over her unusual practice of ecstatic weeping. Although the conflict between Margery and her critic was never resolved, she and her priest found justification for her practice through the example of Marie of Oignies and through the literary tradition of affective devotion of which Marie's *vita* was a part. The collected *vitae* translated in Douce 114 similarly appeared at the convergence of several conflicting ideologies and traditions. The texts appeared in the vernacular at a time when the English translation of Latin religious works was eyed with suspicion; they extolled the devotional value and supernatural nature of the sacraments at a time when belief in the same was being actively challenged and ridiculed; and they held up for admiration singular devotional practices that were the subject of no small controversy. In the absence of any further direct evidence for the texts' being read in late-medieval England, I have had to

approach the study of the Douce 114 *vitae* by attempting to place the texts within the broader context of fifteenth-century English spirituality and by doing so discovered that context to be anything but homogeneous.

There remain many potential lines of research suggested here that merit further investigation—the methods of debate, explicit and implicit, concerning the Lollard controversy and the various forms of discourse those conflicts took, for example, or the heated ongoing discussion in late-medieval England concerning the pursuit of devotional singularities—but I hope what I have uncovered has been sufficient to contextualize the Douce 114 *vitae* within their contemporary milieu. What initially seemed to me texts that were rather unusual in the midst of a largely conservative body of spiritual literature turn out not to be as completely anomalous as they first appeared, but nor do they seem in that context contentedly at home. Instead, these *vitae*, via the act of translation, were thrust into the intersection of contemporary controversies that by no means could have been anticipated by their original authors.

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