

**The Gothic Saints and Their Mystical Songs:
Performing Sanctity in the Thirteenth-Century Diocese of Liège**

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Luo Wang

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Advisor: Ruth Mazo Karras

May 2018

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been a long time in the making. It would not have been completed, perhaps even started, without the intellectual and spiritual support of my advisor, Professor Ruth Mazo Karras. I will keep to myself the memories of those instances when she salvaged my career, to prevent myself from getting too sentimental here. It is a pleasure, but more of a relief, to finally have the chance to thank my committee members, Professors Gabriela Currie, Kathryn Reyerson, J.B. Shank, and Andrea Sterk. I am also grateful to Professors Bernard Bachrach and Michael Lower for their support in my first two years of graduate school. I felt warmth and enthusiasm every time I came across Professor Barbara Welke and Professor Hiromi Mizuno, to whom I would like to express my gratitude. I am also greatly indebted to other teachers at the University of Minnesota whom I took graduate courses with or worked as teaching assistant for. I thank Professor Emeritus David Good and his wife Rosemary for a graduate scholarship. Loud and cheerful thanks to Andrea Sterk and Howard Louthan, to whom I owed an editorial job, many dinner parties, and almost my entire social life in the last year of graduate school.

Professor Peng Xiaoyu at Peking University has been an advisor and fatherly figure to me for many years, whose influence upon my career and life is, well, too soon to tell. He has made me into a historian, whether successfully or not I shall leave to him to decide. Many debts, material or intellectual, had incurred before I entered the Ph.D. program. Special thanks to Professor Michael Ryan, then at Purdue University and now at the University of New Mexico, a genuinely kind and the most cheerful person I know.

Xu Lixin (“Lao Xu”) at World Bank was my teacher but now a friend, to whom I owe occasional, brief, yet always warm and wonderful conversations.

I thank all my friends, especially Qin Fang in Beijing, Lin Yiqing in Shanghai, and Zhan Yining currently in Boston. This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Wang Zhiqiang and Zhou Lan, who has taught me to love the life of learning, who have been and will always be there for me.

Dedication

To My Parents
给爸爸妈妈

Abstract

This dissertation studies the centrality of musical and liturgical performances in the hagiographical representation of pious women in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège. It is a well-known fact that the Liégeois women occupied a preeminent place in the origin story of later medieval piety. The ensemble of attributes we commonly associate with a later medieval holy person, ranging from fierce asceticism to ecstatic visions, were put together, took a definitive shape, and gained wide currency for the first time in the thirteenth-century southern Low Countries. I would argue that many of these devotional practices should, in fact, be understood as ritualized and stylized reception of the liturgical music and texts, and that liturgy constituted a major explanatory framework of their behavior.

This project also attempts to rethink some conceptual dichotomies underpinning much of the scholarship in medieval religious history. “Mysticism” is an umbrella term often used to label religious women’s “embodied” spirituality, as opposed to the supposedly intellectualized “theology” practiced by male clergy. Mysticism defined as such is said to be “disruptive” and “problematic” to the liturgical and parochial routine of the mainstream Christian society. However, I would argue that there is nothing “mystical” in these religious women’s spirituality. What they practiced was thoroughly embedded in the liturgical tradition of the diocese. Their seemingly peculiar practices constituted one end in the wide spectrum of medieval liturgical life.

Each chapter deals with one supposedly “mystical” phenomenon and interprets it as a liturgically inspired practice. Miraculous singing, for instance, a prominent theme in

these women's *Lives*, had its roots in the regional musical tradition, but also had to do with women's role in offering prayers in the funerary rites. Visions were most often part of the monastic liturgical routine. Some other startlingly somatic performances can also be explained as the religious women's desire to use their bodies as the monumental site for liturgical practices. The last chapter offers a comparison with the performative functions of the popular preachers. In sum, the Liégeois religious women should be placed at the center, rather than the margin, of their community, where their practices were properly understood and duly admired as part of the common liturgical culture.

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Introduction:

The Creation of Mystical Sanctity in Thirteenth-Century Liège

This dissertation studies a locally focused phenomenon and argues for its broader implications for medieval religious history. The phenomenon under discussion is the centrality of musical and liturgical performances in the hagiographical representation of pious women in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège. The subject's significance is twofold. First, the Liégeois women occupied a preeminent place in the origin story of later medieval piety.¹ The ensemble of attributes we commonly associate with a later medieval holy person, ranging from fierce asceticism to ecstatic visions, were put together, took a definitive shape, and gained wide currency for the first time in the thirteenth-century southern Low Countries.² However, one crucial aspect of these women's religiosity, the musical and the performative, has yet attracted sufficient scholarly attention. I would argue that many of these female saints' devotional practices should, in fact, be understood as

¹ The scholarship touching upon various aspects of the subject is immense, but the foundational text on the so-called "women's religious movement" that originated in the Low Countries is Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter: Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik* (Hildesheim: Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1935, 1961). The English translation is *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movements in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, with Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan and Robert Lerner (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995). A more recent classical text rejuvenating the entire field is Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

² For example, the medieval women's Eucharistic piety, first exemplified by the Liégeois saints, is examined in Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. The Feast of Corpus Christi, universally popular in later medieval Europe, was first created in Liège, see: Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 164-212.

ritualized and stylized reception of the liturgical music and texts, and that liturgy constituted a major explanatory framework of their behavior.

Second, this project attempts to reassess some dichotomous terminology underpinning much of the scholarship in medieval religious history. “Mysticism” is an umbrella term often used to label religious women’s “embodied” spirituality, as opposed to the supposedly intellectualized “theology” practiced by male clergy. Mysticism defined as such is said to be “disruptive” and “problematic” to the liturgical and parochial routine of the mainstream Christian society.³ However, I would argue that there is nothing “mystical” in these religious women’s spirituality. What they practiced was thoroughly embedded in the liturgical tradition of the diocese. Their seemingly peculiar practices constituted one end in the wide spectrum of medieval liturgical life. These religious women should be placed at the center, rather than the margin, of their community, where their practices were properly understood and duly admired as part of the common liturgical culture.

I. Historiography: The Creation of Female Mystical Sanctity in Northern Europe

To understand the lasting scholarly fascination with the religious women of Liège, it is necessary to first disentangle some of the historiographical complexities surrounding them. It is perhaps not too much a stretch to say that the dozen spiritual biographies about these religious women have defined our understanding of high medieval spirituality. Admittedly, we do not have direct access to the experiences of the “actual” women—or anybody other

³ For example, Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 316-17.

than ourselves, one might quip. What is more influential is not what these women actually did to their immediate surroundings but the discursive constructions later generated about them. These religious women were promoted first by medieval reformers to construct their idealized model of lay sanctity meant for the contemporary society to imitate. These propagandistic texts are then discovered by modern historians to construct their respective narratives about medieval religion.

The single most important author that gave the *mulieres religiosae* of Liège a distinctive identity is Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1160/70-1240), an Augustinian canon regular operating in the Diocese of Liège who would later make a stellar career as Bishop of Acre in the Holy Land and Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum at the Roman curia.⁴ His *Life of Mary of Oignies* has been called a “foundational text” of the beguine movement and the new female religiosity.⁵ Mary of Oignies (d. 1213), a married lay woman who practiced voluntary chastity with her husband and lived a pious life under no vows, has been celebrated as the “proto-beguine” and precursor to Francis of Assisi in many ways. This *Vita* stands at the fountainhead of the new genre of female spiritual biographies in the late Middle Ages. In the Prologue of the *Vita*, Jacques de Vitry gives an account of the “great multitude of holy women” from the diocese of Liège who lived in chastity and on manual

⁴ Major biographies of Jacques de Vitry are: Philipp Funk, *Jakob von Vitry: Leben und Werke* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909); Jean Donnadiou, *Jacques de Vitry (1175/1180-1240): entre l’Orient et l’Occident; l’évêque aux trois visages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

⁵ André Vauchez, “Prosélitisme et action antihérétique en milieu féminin au XIIIe: la vie de Marie d’Oignies (†1213) par Jacques de Vitry,” in *Problèmes d’histoire du christianisme 17: Propagande et contrepropagande religieuses*, edited by Jacques Marx (Brussels: Éditions de l’université, 1987), 95-110. See also: Michel Lauwers, “Expérience béguinenale et récit hagiographique: A propos de la ‘Vita Mariae Oigniacensis’ de Jacques de Vitry (vers 1215),” *Journal des savants* (1985): 61-103; Anneke Mulder-Bakker, “General Introduction,” in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, edited by Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 1-32.

labor, while wasting away in love of God in their daily piety.⁶ These women, including virgins, widows, and presumably wives separated from their husbands, formed some spiritual companionship among themselves without official affiliation with any monastic orders or strictly imposed male guidance. These “beguines” and their households, the so-called “beguinages,” would become a quite visible presence in major urban centers in the Low Countries, northern France, and Germany from the thirteenth century well into the sixteenth.⁷

Jacques de Vitry’s *Vita* has made Mary of Oignies into an iconic figure in late medieval female spirituality. His astonishing success has much to do with the way he positioned the Liégeois religious women on the wide landscape of European reform movements. According to the familiar narrative, the Gregorian Reform in the eleventh century kindled reforming zeal first among the clergy and then among the laity.⁸ If in the earlier centuries, monks had claimed monopoly over religious excellency either by virtue of their strict vows or as the vicarious worshippers for the entire society, the religious revival in the eleventh and the twelfth-centuries made the search for the *vita apostolica* a common aspiration for the non-monastic circles, both clerical and lay. Ideals such as voluntary poverty, evangelical preaching and apostolic living were upheld by all and

⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, edited by R. B. C. Huygens, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 252 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 43-54. The English translation is by Margot King, in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, 39-50; the quote is on page 44.

⁷ Ernest McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954); Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

⁸ For example, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, “Introduction,” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), 1-22; André Vauchez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Âge occidental. VIIIe-XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

pursued by all. The Gregorian reformers elevated the status of the clergy well above the laity by locating spiritual authority in the priestly office, in particular, the priestly prerogative to perform the Eucharist. However, the lay folk also experimented to imbue spiritual meanings to their worldly status. The lay religious expression emerged in some crude form during the First Crusade (1095-1099), when a quintessentially secular activity, i.e. military service, was lauded as conducive to salvation, even comparable to the monastic ideal.⁹ This lay religiosity matured into sophistication at turn of the thirteenth century,¹⁰ a pivotal moment of which Jacques de Vitry was both an avid participant and shrewd observer.

He made two observations about the contemporary reform movements: the first is the conspicuous female presence and even leadership in setting new devotional trends, as meticulously accounted in his *Vita* for Mary of Oignies. The second insight he bestowed to later historians is the unitary character of the various religious movements across Europe. In his travel letters and *Historia Occidentalis*, Jacques de Vitry saw a common religious impulse behind the established religious orders such as the Benedictines and the Cistericians, the beguines in the Low Countries, as well as the Humiliati and the proto-Franciscans in Italy.¹¹ He suggested that these reform movements should be placed under

⁹ The most well-known example of this interpretation is Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love," *History* 65 (1980): 177-92;

¹⁰ Vauchez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Âge occidental*, 154-157; André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, edited and introduced by Daniel Bornstein, translated by Margery Schneider (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

¹¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, edited by R.B.C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 71-78; Jessalynn Bird, "The Religious's Role in a Post-Fourth-Lateran World: Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones ad status* and *Historia Occidentalis*," in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 209-229.

the pastoral care of the institutional Church and their energy enlisted to fight against the heretics. In the historical prologue to the *Vita* of Mary of Oignies, he contrasts the religious women of Liège with the Cathar heretics in southern France, and sees female piety a perfect counterattack against the heretics' persecution of the Church.¹²

In other words, Jacques de Vitry viewed the religious women of Liège a symptom of the pan-European Great Awakening that posed challenges to the Church authority, but also a solution of it. His prescience was shared by other reformers, the most important being Pope Innocent III (d. 1216). According to Herbert Grundmann's classical work, beset with the problems of heresy and lay disaffection, Innocent III decidedly reversed the policies of his predecessors and adopted a more reconciliatory stance by allowing the apostolic preachers a place within the hierarchical Church as long as they acknowledged the Church authority in principle. The papal approval of Francis of Assisi and his followers was a prime example of this strategy.¹³ Likewise, the religious women of Liège, living in voluntary companionship without forming an Order, received an oral approval from Pope Gregory IX in 1216 and maintained a relatively good relationship with Church hierarchy for the most part of the thirteenth century.

Jacques de Vitry's works are core sources for this grand narrative about high medieval religion. Herbert Grundmann's 1935 foundational work draws heavily from Jacques's insights. Grundmann emphasizes the conspicuous role of the Liégeois religious women in setting the spiritual trends. He also focuses on the role of the papacy in defining the heretical and the orthodox, a conceptual dichotomy created by policies rather than

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 43-54.

¹³ Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 31-67.

rooted in actual doctrinal or devotional differences. Along this line of argument, women's piety, especially its somatic elements, were actively promoted by the Church as part of its anti-heretical propaganda: the bodily performances of the Liégeois women are to be understood as an outright rejection of the dualist and anti-sacerdotal tendencies of the southern French heretics.¹⁴ This interpretative framework has been thoroughly absorbed into other influential theses about high medieval religion, such as R. I. Moore's more radical thesis on the creation of a "persecuting society" in the High Middle Ages. Moore treats the binary of "heresy" and "orthodoxy" as imaginary figment of a paranoid clergy.¹⁵

Other than this "externalist" explanation focusing on papal policy or church patronage, Caroline Bynum's field-defining work *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1988) studies how medieval religious practitioners themselves understood their devotional practices.¹⁶ Her sources are primarily the *Vitae* of early thirteenth-century Low Country beguines, later thirteenth-century German nuns, as well as fourteenth-century Italian tertiaries.¹⁷ Her main argument goes as follows: although women were associated with the "flesh," inferior to the "spirit" in medieval world view, they embraced their physicality rather than simply renouncing it. Women identified with Christ's suffering and humanity through control of food and body. Bodily ascetic performance, in particular the renunciation of food, thus

¹⁴ Vauchez, "Prosélitisme et action."

¹⁵ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

¹⁷ Bynum emphasizes that extreme fasting and the centrality of food symbolism in devotional practices "first emerged in a remarkable group of Low Country women in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries." *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 115.

provided religious women with a privileged venue towards salvation. Bynum's work has granted remarkable agency to the religious women and great vibrancy to their use of religious symbols. Extreme fasting, what was believed to be internalized misogynistic self-loathing, now appears to be assertive appropriation of the essential religious symbol, that is Christ's body, to women's advantage. Her argument is criticized as setting up "a fundamental gender dichotomy" by assigning women a greater attachment to the flesh.¹⁸ This criticism is not entirely fair as what Bynum has tried to explicate is a certain way of bartering and negotiating with that dichotomous discourse by a disadvantageous group, i.e. women who were categorically denied the sacramental authority of ordained priests. But her book seems to have attributed some sweeping theological uniformity to religious women across the Latin Europe for several centuries. Her book (by design rather than negligence) dismisses the concrete social groundings and ignores the minute, dynamic process of barter and negotiation.¹⁹ One might have the impression that there exists a floating body of symbols, ready for anyone to grab to produce a static, coherent set of ideas. Also, Bynum has ascribed too conspicuous agency to religious women, when it is difficult to distinguish the theological articulateness of these women from that of their hagiographers.²⁰ To sum up, the "externalist" interpretation highlights the *Vitae* of the

¹⁸ Miri Rubin, "Medieval Bodies: Why Now, and How?" in *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History*, ed. Miri Rubin (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1997), 212.

¹⁹ Bynum more explicitly defends her intellectual history approach that studies the "common assumptions" rather than individualistic stories in the "Preface," *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xv-xvi.

²⁰ Amy Hollywood, "The Religiosity of the *Mulieres Sanctae*," in her *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 26-56.

Liégeois religious women as “anti-heretical manifestos”²¹ under the patronage of the institutional Church. The “internalist” approach, on the other hand, perceives their embodied mysticism as an outgrowth of the incarnational theology and the late medieval fascination with Christ’ humanity.

Besides these lines of inquiry, there are other historiographical approaches with more localized focus. One is the socio-economic. These studies use archival documents and trace the histories of beguine communities of a certain region from their foundation to demise or survival into the early modern times. These works tend to focus on subjects such as regional patronage, employment, and social composition. Walter Simons’s book on the beguines in the southern Low Countries and Tanya Miller’s on Paris are recent examples.²² These socio-economic studies provide important contextual information for the understanding of the beguine spirituality.

The other approach claims a more ancient pedigree and has transformed from what appear to be antiquarian histories of religious orders. The earliest edition of the liégeois women’ *Vitae* was produced by a Spanish-born Cistercian Crisóstomo Henriques in the seventeenth century.²³ His primary interests were to compile memorable deeds of holy persons associated with his own order. The first modern monograph on the Liégeois hagiography by Simone Roisin, likewise, is a study of Cistercian spirituality.²⁴ One

²¹ André Vauchez, “La sainteté, arme contre l’hérésie: la *Vie de Marie d’Oignies* par Jacques de Vitry,” in *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires: le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Age* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), 179.

²² Simons, *Cities of Ladies*; Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*.

²³ *Quinque prudentes virgines: sive B. Beatricis de Nazareth, B. Aleydis de Sacharenbecka, B. Idae de Nivellis, B. Idae de Lovanio, B. Idea de Leuwis*, ed. Crisóstomo Henriques (Antwerp: Cnobbaert, 1630).

²⁴ Simone Roisin, *L’hagiographie cistercienne dans le diocèse de Liège au XIIIe siècle* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l’Université, 1947).

preoccupation of this approach is how to properly assign a label to the religious lifestyle of the liégeois saints. A more recent effort is made by Anneke Mulder-Bakker, who has classified a selected group of the liégeois religious women as “urban recluses,” rather than “Cistercians” or “beguines.”²⁵ However, one would suspect if a supposedly “Cistercian” brand of spirituality can be squarely distinguished from, say, a “beguine” or a “Franciscan” style. It seems, more often than not, religious people from a certain region shared a common culture of liturgical customs and ritual habits. A fastidious concern with proper classification was more common among critics and polemicists rather than among the religious practitioners themselves.

In a departure from these classical studies, this dissertation focuses on the performativity of female spirituality. While the term “performative” originates in J.L. Austin’s speech-act theory and later becomes a familiar idiom in gender studies,²⁶ here I use it specifically to describe the stylized gestures received from a liturgical tradition. Rather in vogue in recent scholarship on religious women, the term “performative” is often used as a loose equivalent of “physical” or “bodily,” in contrast to “intellectual” or “spiritual.” However, its usage here is more precise. First, what I want to emphasize is the understanding of religious women’s devotional “performances” as acquired behavior of

²⁵ Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, translated by Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). See also: Walter Simons, “Beginnings: Naming Beguines in the Southern Low Countries, 1200-1250,” in Letha Böhringer, Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane and Hildo van Engen, eds., *Labels and Libels: Naming Beguines in Northern Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 9-52.

²⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999). For an almost all-inclusive view on the term, see: Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

received tradition, rather than something spontaneous or idiosyncratic. A performance, as defined here, consists of repeatable and routinized gestures, the intelligibility of which is predicated upon tradition rather than individual genius. This is not to deny the “affective” aspect of late medieval religious life, so famously framed by R.W. Southern and so dominant in the historiography ever since,²⁷ but to strike a balance between the two. To stress a certain conservative character of female spirituality in conformity with the church tradition is not to devalue their creative achievements. In fact, as to be proved later, exterior ritual performance was considered by medieval religious practitioners as powerfully conducive to the affective mode of the mind.

Second, female spirituality in Liège was “performative” in the very technical sense that it, indeed, intimately engaged with the musical, ritual, and even dramatic art forms. For example, remarkable singing ability, by no means a common hagiographical trope, features prominently in many of the female saints’ lives. Medieval liturgical culture was, by nature, far more heterogeneous and variegated than the theological or the textual. Liturgical customs varied greatly from region to region, from order to order, despite duly repeated calls for unity from church councils or conscientious Christian monarchs. Many “peculiarities” of the Low Country devotional style can be better explained in terms of regional liturgical culture rather than formal theology (or papal policy).

The ritual performance, omnipresent in the Liégeois saints’ lives, is a synchronization of various performative genres and crucial in the hagiographical construction of the performer’s religious authority. The often-used label “embodied

²⁷ R. W. Southern, “From Epic to Romance,” in *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 219-257.

mysticism” is a problematic concept imposed on these religious men and women, as it presumes a dichotomy between a “mystical” mode that is contrary to the “ordinary” liturgical routine. In fact, these so-called “mystics” did not use a different symbolic language that was dialectically opposed to theology, but a set of familiar gestural and poetic idiom borrowed from the liturgical tradition. The novelty of these saints’ performance rests in their vigorous appropriation and free combination of different ritual sources. The extraordinary phenomena associated with them, from bodily ecstasy to visionary experiences, can only be explained within the overall liturgical framework.

II. A Tale of Two Cities: Paris and Liège as the Background of the Rise of the “New Hagiography”

Jacques de Vitry was keenly aware that he was creating something new in writing a *Vita* for the lay woman Mary of Oignies from Liège. He talked about “those modern saints in whom God works in our days” (*deus in sanctis modernis in diebus nostris operatur*) in his prologue to this *Vita*.²⁸ John van Engen comments that the previous Christian author who had felt the pressing necessity to populate his land with contemporary saints is the sixth-century Gregory the Great (c. 540-604).²⁹ The influence of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, which collected “modern miracles” about Italian saints including Benedict of Aniane, in shaping early medieval Benedictine monasticism is perhaps no less profound than the Benedictine

²⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 53.

²⁹ John van Engen, “The Religious Women of Liège at the Turn of the Thirteenth Century,” in Steven Vanderputten, Tjamke Snijders, and Jay Diehl, eds., *Medieval Liège at the Crossroads of Europe: Monastic Society and Culture, 1000-1300* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 353.

Rule itself.³⁰ Several centuries later, at the threshold of the thirteenth century, Jacques de Vitry seemed to share a similar sense of urgency with Gregory to assure his Christian readers that although an old age was approaching the end, Christian virtues still flourished “among us”; that flicker of hope would lead the world forward to the uncertain future. Jacques’s contemporary, a fellow student from the nascent University of Paris, Thomas of Chobham, expressed a similar consciousness of heading towards a new age in Christian history. He noticed that earlier preachers had labored on spreading the faith and converting people from idolatry to the One God; “now, however, since almost everyone believes, it leaves with our preaching the easy task, that is, to instruct others in good mores (*nunc autem, quia fere omnes credunt, relictum est predicationi nostre quod facile est, scilicet ut instruamus alios in bonis moribus*).”³¹

The new hagiographical genre about the “modern saints” emerged at the confluence of the rise of lay spirituality in the southern Low Countries and the “Pastoral Revolution” led by the preacher-masters from the Parisian schools. Thanks to John Baldwin’s foundational book on Peter the Chanter and his circle, we now know much about this generation of Parisian theologians whose social program helped prepare the way for the legislation at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.³² Marcia Colish comments that the

³⁰ R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62-63; Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³¹ Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de arte praedicandi*, ed. Franco Morenzoni, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis LXXXII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), 15: “Verumtamen primi predicatorum plurimum laborauerunt ad fidem plantandam et grauissimum fuit conuertere populos ab ydolatria ut crederent unum Deum et ipsum incarnatum et postea mortuum. Qui fidem potius plantauerunt in sanguine suo quam in predicatione. Nunc autem, quia fere omnes credunt, relictum est predicationi nostre quod facile est, scilicet ut instruamus alios in bonis moribus quibus etiam naturalis ratio consentit, ut que in libris philosophorum non minus quam in theologia leguntur.”

³² John Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter & His Circle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). For a more recent effort to study the social views of the

Fourth Lateran Council is the only ecumenical council in the Middle Ages to legislate on both doctrine and praxis, and since then “the voice of the Church’s magisterium spoke less from episcopal thrones than from the classrooms of theologians and canonists in the schools and universities.”³³ According to Baldwin, Peter the Chanter and his associates, including renowned preachers and prelates such as Jacques de Vitry, Stephen Langton, and probably Pope Innocent III, concerned themselves with practical ethics and social justice issues rather than speculative theology. The latter would become the preoccupation among the learned circle only after the 1240s, with the arrivals of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura.³⁴ The early thirteenth-century masters laid their eyes on what they perceived as moral corruption among the clergy and the lay society, and launched a comprehensive social program aiming at “reforming the *mores*,” a sentiment clearly shared by Thomas of Chobham quoted above. Central to this task was the leadership of conscientious and well-educated preachers, who should “give example in their work and good doctrine in their word (*bonum exemplum in opera et bonam doctrinam in uerbo*).”³⁵

thirteenth-century Parisian masters, see: Ian Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University c. 1100-1330* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³³ Marcia Colish, “The Early Scholastics and the Reform of Doctrine and Practice,” in Christopher Bellitto and Louis Hamilton, eds., *Reforming the Church before Modernity: Patterns, Problems and Approaches* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 61.

³⁴ For a recent, brief review on the generational differences of the thirteenth-century Parisian masters, see: Spence Young, *Scholarly Community at the Early University of Paris: Theologians, Education and Society, 1215-1248* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-19. For an overview on the “pre-Aquinas” generations at Paris, see: Nathalie Gorochoff, *Naissance de l’université. Les écoles de Paris Innocent III à Thomas d’Aquin (v. 1200-v. 1245)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012). On the so-called “moralists” and their views on learning, see: Stephen Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985). On the shifting attitudes towards academic learning in the Franciscan Order in the thirteenth century, see: Neslihan Senocak, *The Poor and the Perfect: The Rise of Learning in the Franciscan Order, 1209-1310* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

³⁵ Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de arte praedicandi*, 24; Franco Morenzoni, *Des écoles aux paroisses. Thomas de Chobham et la promotion de la prédication au début du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1995). On theme of teaching “by word and example” (*verbo et exemplo*) in the

David d'Avray suggests that Baldwin has overly exaggerated the novelty in these preachers' sermons which contain overall conventional Christian moralization;³⁶ nevertheless, he identifies the Parisian schools as instrumental in promoting preaching as the prime medium of "mass communication" in the later Middle Ages.³⁷

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 has been bestowed incredibly numerous layers of historical significance by modern scholars and perceived as both a high point and a turning point in the history of the medieval Church. The most extravagant claim for its sinister character is that the Council helped to create a "persecuting society" that would, through a slippery slope, lead to a spectrum of intolerance and violence from the Inquisition to pogroms.³⁸ However, it is dubious whether the medieval contemporaries would perceive and remember the great Council in terms of social engineering or as something path-breaking like John Baldwin has enthusiastically argued. Salimbene de Adam, a major chronicler of the thirteenth century from Italy, understood the great Council essentially as a fairly conservative effort to restore the correct forms of Church services. What was most important for Salimbene was liturgical niceties such as the right number of psalms to be

tradition of the regular canons, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), 22-58.

³⁶ David d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). A classical overview of the thirteenth-century university sermon literature and its themes is Jean Longère, *Oeuvres oratoires de maîtres Parisiens au XIIIe siècle. Étude historique et doctrinale* (Paris: Études Augustiennes, 1975).

³⁷ David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons: Mass Communication in a Culture without Print* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Carolyn Muessig, "Historiographical Essay: Sermon, Preacher and Society in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 73-91.

³⁸ Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 10: "What is essential to the present argument is that Lateran IV laid down a machinery of persecution for Western Christendom and especially a range of sanctions against those convicted, which was to prove adaptable to a much wider variety of victims than the heretics for whom it was designed."

recited in the Office of Nocturnes on Sunday before the *Te Deum Laudamus*.³⁹ He was not satisfied with the achievements of the Fourth Lateran Council, because the services were still too cumbersome with superfluous accretions unfriendly to the laity. Arguably for a significant segment of the clergy, the general reforming program of the period represented by the Lateran IV was to promote the right forms of observance among the laity led a well-behaved, well-educated army of preachers.

Jacques de Vitry was at the forefront of this movement aiming at reforming the *mores* through preaching. The typical literature produced, as a result, is distinctive in two features that are not always reconcilable with each other: a didacticism that precipitates conventional moralizing, but also a sense of detached realism when observing contemporary social reality. A modern reader would find both tendencies in Jacques's historical works. Although scholars diverge in their assessment on Jacques's credential as a "historian,"⁴⁰ one should not underestimate what an overwhelming proportion of his writings concerns with his own age and his own surroundings. No one can deny Jacques de Vitry's profound interests in contemporary events and his immediate social surroundings. He deliberately aimed at contemporary relevancy. The *Historia Occidentalis* is a peculiar work in that it is not a "history" in the sense of a narrative that develops chronically. It is a highly original and perspicacious synchronic panorama of religious life in contemporary western European society.⁴¹ Similarly, Jacques de Vitry's biography of

³⁹ Salimbene de Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, translated by Joseph Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi and John Robert Kane (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1986), 4-5.

⁴⁰ See John Frederick Hinnebusch, "Jacques de Vitry as Historian," in the introduction of *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry*, 11-15.

⁴¹ A widely quoted but oddly understudied work: Jacques de Vitry, *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. John Frederick Hinnebusch (Fribourg: The University Press Fribourg, 1972); Jessalynn Bird, "The Religious's Role in a Post-Fourth-Lateran World: Jacques de Vitry's

the Low Countries religious woman, Mary of Oignies, is a biography of a “modern” saint, whom he had close personal relationship with for years.

Another salient feature of Jacques de Vitry’s and his fellow preachers from the circle of Peter the Chanter seems to be their adherence to a voluntaristic version of reform. Jacques in his writings favored the charisma of individual bishops and preachers, and the spontaneous enthusiasm of the lay people. For him, church reform was less a centralized, but a more localized endeavor. In *Historia Occidentalis*, Jacques de Vitry starts with a Jeremiad about the deplorable sinfulness of about just everyone in the world, and then sees the flickering fire of hope in the heroism of individual preachers, such as Fulk of Neuilly, Peter the Chanter, and John of Nivelles.⁴² The beginning chapters of the *Historia* are a composite of individual biographies of these preachers. This part has much more individuality and concreteness than the rest of the book--a schematic overview of the various religious orders in the Church and on the sacraments. The papacy does not feature at all in this supposedly comprehensive report on western religious life, except perhaps an acknowledgement of Rome as “the head and mother of the faithful.”⁴³ The chapter on bishops is a matter-of-fact treatise on symbolic meanings of the episcopal vestments, serving as a transition into the discussion of sacraments.⁴⁴ The true heroes that Jacques de

Sermones ad Status and *Historia occidentalis*,” in Carolyn Muessig, ed., *Medieval Monastic Preaching* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 209-229.

⁴² Jacques de Vitry, “Capitulum VI De uisitatione occidentalis ecclesiae. De uita et predicatione Fulconis presbyteri,” “Capitulum VII De statu parisiensis ciuitatis,” “Capitulum VIII De magistro Petro cantore parisiensi,” “Capitulum IX De magistro Iohanne de Niella et aliis predicatoribus.” *Historia Occidentalis*, 89-103.

⁴³ Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*, 73: “Caput enim et mater fidei est Iherosolima, sicut Roma est caput et mater fidelium.”

⁴⁴ Jacques de Vitry, “Capitulum XXXV De Episcopis,” *Historia Occidentalis*, 182-191.

Vitry describes with great passion are the preachers, such as Fulk of Neuilly, a mediocly educated popularizer who carried *stylo* and tablets to the university classroom to take notes of "the words about morality and easy to understand (*uerba moralia et uulgaria*)," memorized everything by heart, then preached to "the ordinary lay folks in a simple and popular way (*simpliciter et uulgariter*)."⁴⁵ Jacques de Vitry talks about the Church reform, *renovatio occidentalis ecclesie*,⁴⁶ in revivalist terms, with agitated preachers as its vanguard. If there is an ecclesiology implied in his *Historia Occidentalis*, it is not a hierarchical or legalistic one, but more egalitarian. What he envisioned was a proliferation of varieties of religious life forms, from the Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Canon Regulars, to the Friars, under the guiding principle of evangelical ideal--"the multitude of faithful was of one heart and one soul."⁴⁷

With such a temperament, it is only natural when Jacques de Vitry came to Liège and discovered the "many bands of holy virgins in different places of the lily gardens," he was thrilled.⁴⁸ In the thirteenth century, Paris excelled in sacred learning but definitely not in the quantity of sacred persons. Except for theologians and royals, *Francia* was in a dearth of models of sanctity.⁴⁹ Preachers like Jacques de Vitry found the most vivid examples of

⁴⁵ Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*, 94-95: "... cum tabulis et stylo seu grafio scolas eius humiliter est ingressus, quedam uerba moralia et uulgaria, que secundum capicitatem ingenii recipere et colligere ex ore magistri sui potuit, frequenter ruminando et firmiter memorie commendando...a uicinis sacerdotibus uocatus et inuitatus, cum timore et uerecundia simplicibus laicis simpliciter et uulgariter ea que audierat predicare cepit..."

⁴⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*, 107.

⁴⁷ He used this saying to describe the different forms of monastic lives: "Multitudinis credentium erat cor unum et anima una." Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*, 110.

⁴⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 45: "Vidisti enim, et gavisus es, in ortis liliorum domini multas sanctarum virginum in diversis locis catervas..."

⁴⁹ The major northern French holy persons in the thirteenth century were mostly royalty: King Louis IX, Princess Isabelle of France (1225-70) and Charles of Anjou (1226-85). Important mystics in the thirteenth

religious life from the neighboring Diocese of Liège. With Charlemagne's Aix-la-Chapelle under its episcopal jurisdiction, Liège was at the heartland of the Carolingian imperial power. In the central Middle Ages, the diocese, part of the Lower Lorraine, situated between the German Empire in the east and the French kingdom in the west, was under the competing political and cultural influence from both while developing a distinct regional identity of itself. In 1051, an anonymous cleric from the Cathedral of Liège perfectly summed it up: “Gaul considers us its most distant inhabitants; Germany thinks we are its closest subjects. In fact, we are neither of those, but both at the same time.”⁵⁰ In the tenth and the eleventh centuries, Liège decidedly leaned towards the German east. Notger, Bishop of Liège (972-1008), made a splendid political career under the German emperors. He served the Ottonians so well that he was created the first prince-bishop of Liège by Emperor Otto III in 980.⁵¹ The prince-bishopric, with a secular jurisdiction over a territory much less extensive than its episcopal, would last until the French Revolution. Liège had its golden days in the tenth and eleventh centuries when it was the preeminent center of learning in Europe, the so-called "Athens of the North," until it was gradually eclipsed by the nearby rising royal capital of the Capetians, Paris.⁵²

century, such as Douceline of Digne (c. 1214/1215-74) and Margaret of Oingt (c. 1240-1310), were from southern France. See the overview in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Holy Women in France: A Survey,” in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 241-266.

⁵⁰ Jean Dufour, ed., *Recueil des rouleaux des morts (VIIIe siècle-vers 1536), vol.1 VIIIe siècle-1180* (Paris: Boccard, 2005), 189: “Gallia nos imos et habet Germania primos, amborum neutrum, nos et utrumque sumus.”

⁵¹ Godefroid Kurth, *Notger de Liège et la civilisation au Xe siècle* (Paris: Alphonse Picard & Fils, 1905); Jean-Pierre Delville, Jean-Louis Kupper and Marylène Laffineur-Crépin, eds., *Notger et Liège. L'an mil au Coeur de l'Europe* (Liège: Editions du Perron, 2008).

⁵² For the history of Liège, see: Jean Lejeune, *Liège et son pays: Naissance d'une patrie (XIIIe-XIVe siècle)* (Liège: Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université, 1948); Godefroid Kurth, *La Cité de Liège au Moyen Age* (Paris: Champion, 1909); Jean-Louis Kupper, *Liège et l'Église Impériale, XIe-XIIIe Siècles* (Paris:

In the thirteenth century, although an imperial bishopric, Liège decidedly shifted away from the influence sphere of the Empire and became a staunch Guelf city. The last strong intervention from the Empire was when Frederick Barbarossa imposed his own candidate, Raoul von Zäringen, for its Bishop in 1167. After that, the emperors were mostly too preoccupied with the Italian city-states and the increasingly assertive papacy to focus on the Low Countries. Another formative event for the pro-Papacy and pro-French position of Liège was the Battle of Bouvines on July 27, 1214, when Liège's traditional enemy, the Duke of Brabant, was defeated alongside Emperor Otto IV of Brunswick.⁵³ The winning parties at Bouvines, the French and the papacy, increasingly exerted dominant influence in the prince-bishopric. At the 1245 First Council of Lyon where Emperor Frederick II was deposed, Liège was one of the only two imperial bishoprics (alongside Prague) that were represented to support the papal cause.⁵⁴ In the thirteenth century, all German influence practically ended in Liège. Rome handpicked its bishops.⁵⁵

Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1982); Alain Marchandisse, *La fonction épiscopale à Liège aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles. Étude de politologie historique* (Genève: Droz, 1998); L.J.R. Milis, "Counts, Cities, and Clerics: The Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Centuries," in *History of the Low Countries*, ed. J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), 23-54. A good short overview of the thirteenth-century religious landscape of the diocese is Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1991), 164-168. A recent collection of papers on the monasticism in the diocese in the central Middle Ages is Steven Vanderputten, Tjamke Snijders, and Jay Diehl, eds., *Medieval Liège at the Crossroads of Europe: Monastic Society and Culture*.

⁵³ Jean-Louis Kupper, "L'évêché de Liège dans le contexte politique et militaire de la bataille de Bouvines," *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (1993): 199-207; John Baldwin and Walter Simons, "The Consequences of Bouvines," *French Historical Studies* (2014): 243-269, esp. 265. For a general history on the historical significance of the Battle of Bouvines, see: Georges Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

⁵⁴ Paul Pixon, *The German Episcopacy and the Implementation of the Decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1216-1245: Watchmen on the Tower* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 465.

⁵⁵ Marchandisse, *La fonction épiscopale*, 113-163.

Liège followed Paris intellectually, Rome politically, yet it led in a vibrant religious life. The diocese was situated between the dioceses of Cambrai-Artois, Reims, Trier, Cologne, and Utrecht. It had an extensive network of Benedictine monasteries of antiquity and prestige, including Lobbes, Gembloux, and Stavelot-Malmedy. The Cistercians, prominent in northern Europe since the eleventh century, were also represented in the grand Abbey of Villers. The mendicant orders, in particular the Dominicans, soon joined this diverse religious world in the thirteenth century. What Liège was most well-known for, however, was a precocious development of lay piety and the groupings of *mulieres religiosae*. While the German Rhinish mystics tended to be nuns and the Italian female saints mostly tertiaries, the Low Countries were known for the “beguines,” lay women living voluntarily in a religious lifestyle without official affiliation with an established religious order. In other words, the beguines enjoyed relatively more independence from male supervision and institutional restraint than their monastic counterparts. Although the beguines were testified in the wider geographical area of the Low Countries, northern France and Germany,⁵⁶ the earliest and most famous ones, graced with contemporary *vitae*, such as Mary of Oignies (d. 1213) and Christina of Sint Truiden (d. 1224), all concentrated in the Diocese of Liège. Paris, where its beguine communities enjoyed the royal patronage of Saint Louis IX, claims importance in the history of the beguines mainly because it was where the mystical writer, Marguerite Porete, was burnt as a relapsed heretic. However, Marguerite was originally from Hainaut, and should be more accurately considered a Low Countries religious woman.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*; Tanya Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*.

⁵⁷ In her book about the beguine communities in Paris, Tanya Stabler Miller states that Paris was significant to beguine history “because it was the city where the central drama of beguine history—the trial

What the Low Countries beguines represents has been effusively dubbed by scholars as “the first women’s religious movements”⁵⁸ or even, more extravagantly, “the beginnings of modernity—a bourgeois reaction against the elitism of religious vocation.”⁵⁹ These evaluations are more of modern projections; the medieval realities are necessarily more complex and diverse. The phenomenon of the beguines was far from being a homogenous and self-conscious “movement.” Also, the distinction between an “elite” nun and a “humble” beguine does not appear to be that obvious and absolute; rather, these women often changed career path once or more during their life time, such as Lutgard of Aywières (1182-1246) who moved from a beguine community to a Benedictine convent but ended her life as a Cistercian nun.⁶⁰ An increasingly common label the historians use to designate this group of women is an inclusive one: *mulieres religiosae*. The Liégeois religious women, including beguines, Benedictine and Cistercian nuns, and urban recluses, collectively created a distinct tradition of female piety.

The most cited favorable conditions for the rise of female piety in the southern Low Countries are three. The first is socio-economic: the region was the most densely populated and urbanized in western Europe, with possible competition only from parts of northern

and execution of Marguerite Porete—played out.” *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 4. Marguerite Porete, the author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* who was condemned and burnt to death as a relapsed heretic in Paris on June 1, 1310, was originally from Hainaut, thus should be counted as a Low-Country religious woman. Although she wrote in a French dialect, her main association with Paris was that she died there, as pointed out in John van Engen, “Marguerite (Porete) of Hainaut and the Medieval Low Countries,” in Sean Field, Robert Lerner and Sylvain Piron, eds., *Marguerite Porete et Le mirorie des simples âmes. Perspectives historiques, philosophiques et littéraires* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 25-68.

⁵⁸ Herbert Grundmann first used the phrase “religious movement by women” (*religiösen Frauenbewegung*) in his classical work.

⁵⁹ Michael Sargent, “Marguerite Porete,” in Minnis and Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition*, 296.

⁶⁰ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis*, AASS June, vol. 4: 187-210.

Italy. The city of Liège, though with a relatively modest urban population compared to, say, Bruges, the second largest northern European city after Paris, still boasted a high level of urbanization. The prosperous textile industry in the urban centers attracted large numbers of migrant workers and provided work opportunities for the beguine communities to support themselves.⁶¹ The second benign condition is that of the Cistercian influence and patronage. The regional monastic institutions, especially the grand Abbey of Villers, provided spiritual guidance and patronage to those fledgling small religious communities. More importantly, the Abbey of Villers preserved many of the earliest manuscripts of the beguine *Vitae* and facilitated the earliest cult and historical memories about them.⁶² The third factor is a high level of literacy and lay interest in learning. Take the example of Beatrice of Nazareth (ca.1200-1268), a former beguine and later Cistercian nun from the Diocese of Liège: she could recite the entire psalter by the age of five under the instruction of her mother. When she was seven, the girl was sent to a liberal arts school, which appears to be co-educational because the hagiographer praised her for being a prude avoiding any potentially lecherous contacts with her fellow students.⁶³ Later in her life, she was sent to the Cistercian convent of Rameya to learn the scribal art so that she could copy manuscripts for her own community.⁶⁴ Juliana of Cornillon was said to be fond of the works of St. Augustine and could remember by heart more than twenty of Bernard of Clairvaux's

⁶¹ Simons, *Cities of Ladies*.

⁶² Roisin, *L'hagiographie cistercienne*. A recent study of the Cistercian patronage of the religious women's lives is Sara Ritchey, "Saints' Lives as Efficacious Texts: Cistercian Monks, Religious Women, and Curative Reading, c. 1250-1330," *Speculum* (2017): 1101-1143.

⁶³ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, translated by Roger De Ganck (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 24-27.

⁶⁴ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, 60-61.

rhetorically ornate sermons on *The Song of Songs*.⁶⁵ Besides these remarkable examples, it is not uncommon that the religious women from these *Vitae* at least possessed a copy of the Psalter and were latinate enough to be able to read it.

An insufficiently discussed aspect of the diocese's religious history I would like to emphasize is its longstanding crusading tradition. Liège and its surroundings contributed some of the most legendary first crusaders. Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, led an essentially Lotharingian army in August 1096 to the Middle East and became the first King of Jerusalem.⁶⁶ Among Godfrey's most important followers, Warner, Count of Grez, and Baldwin of Mons, Count of Hainaut, were both direct vassals to the Prince-Bishop of Liège. Although many Lotharingian lords hesitated to participate in what appeared to be a papalist enterprise, the Church of Liège, despite being a part of the Empire, provided steadfast support to the first crusaders in financing their expedition and protecting their properties in their absence.⁶⁷

Alongside this aristocratic strand of crusading tradition, a popular one also existed in the region of Lorraine, most saliently embodied in the historiographical tradition surrounding the curious figure of Peter the Hermit, an itinerant preacher whose sensationally successful demagoguery recruited a large following setting out to liberate

⁶⁵ *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, edited by Jean-Pierre Delville (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Études Médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1999), 22.

⁶⁶ A detailed prosopographical analysis of Godfrey of Bouillon's army is Alan Murray, "The Army of Godfrey of Bouillon, 1096-1099: Structure and Dynamics of a Contingent on the First Crusade," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 70 (1992): 301-329.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London and New York: Continuum, 1986), 37, 44.

Jerusalem but only to be cut into pieces before even reaching the Middle East.⁶⁸ There was a distinct Lotharingian historiographical tradition, represented by the work of Albert of Aachen, that attributed Peter the Hermit as the initiator of the First Crusade, whose preaching campaign was thought to be prior to Pope Urban II's at the Council of Clermont. Jay Rubenstein suggests that the "papalist" tradition was created by the revisionist efforts of some French chroniclers to claim the legacy of the First Crusade for the papacy.⁶⁹ Whether the pope or the hermit launched the crusade is subject to controversy; what is important for the current argument is that the First Crusade, which miraculously captured Jerusalem against all odds, was remembered in Lotharingia as a popular, emotive, and apocalyptic movement inspired by a charismatic individual. The very existence of an independent textual and oral tradition speaks volume about the prominent role the Lotharingians had played in the First Crusade. Liège continued to attract intense crusading preaching campaign in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries led by charismatic itinerant preachers. In the Second Crusade, for instance, a certain Ralph of the Cistercian Order, with the help of a translator from the Liégeois abbey of Lobbes, made huge disturbance in Liège and the Rhinish cities. His anti-semitic demagoguery pressured Bernard of Clairvaux to head for Germany in order to discipline and silence him.⁷⁰ The crusading enterprise is a

⁶⁸ Jean Flori, *Pierre l'Ermitte et la première croisade* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); E. O. Blake and C. Morris, "A Hermit Goes to War: Peter and the Origins of the First Crusade," in *Monks, Hermits and The Ascetic Tradition: Papers Read at the 1984 Summer Meeting and the 1985 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 79-107.

⁶⁹ Jay Rubenstein, "The *Deeds of Bohemond*: Reform, Propaganda, and the History of the First Crusade," *Viator* 47 (2016): 113-135. For a recent discussion of the popular remembrance about the First Crusade, see: Carol Symes, "Popular Literacies and the First Historians of the First Crusade," *Past and Present* 235 (2017): 37-67.

⁷⁰ Penny Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095-1270* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1991), 43-44.

ubiquitous concern in the thirteenth-century Liégeois hagiographical corpus. It suffices for our current purpose to say that the crusading enthusiasm was emblematic of the lay religious fervor in this region; and the numerous preaching campaigns also provided sustaining fuel and a worthy cause to rally behind for the local religious reform.

When Jacques de Vitry left Paris in 1208 where he found its intellectual life disdainfully vain and morally dubious,⁷¹ he soon discovered his perpetual spiritual homeland in Liège and his spiritual mother in Mary of Oignies. He was no longer a confused student, but found his double calling as a crusade preacher and ardent supporter of religious women. Jacques, after Mary's death, traveled to Italy to seek papal support on behalf of the Low Countries women. He secured what appears to be an oral approval from Pope Honorius III in 1216 for the *mulieres reliogiosae* "not only in the Diocese of Liège but in the Kingdom [of France] and the Empire."⁷² Although the only evidence we have about this claim is Jacques' own words, the Church sponsorship, or at least toleration, was guaranteed for the beguine communities for the most part of the thirteenth century. Jacques de Vitry's devotion to Mary of Oignies was unceasing in his later life. He kept a small finger cut from Mary's dead body as an amulet, and invoked her name when in danger.⁷³ After a long and illustrious career in the Middle East and at the papal curia, Cardinal

⁷¹ Jacques de Vitry is often quoted for his satirical passages on the Parisian students' life in both his *Historia Occidentalis* and his sermons. See, for example: *Stephen Ferruolo, The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 184-315.

⁷² Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres*, 74: "Obtinui preterea ab ipso, et litteras cum excutoribus et protectoribus impetravi, ut liceret mulieribus religiosis non solum in episcopate Leodi[n]ensi, sed tam in regno quam in imperio in eadem domo simul manere et sese invicem mutuis exhortationibus ad bonum invitare..."

⁷³ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres*, 72.

Jacques de Vitry died in Rome in 1240 but chose to be taken back to Liège and buried in the chapel of Oignies by the side of his beloved Mary.⁷⁴

Jacques de Vitry inaugurated a clerical tradition of supporting women's spirituality in the Low Countries for the most part of the thirteenth century. A prolific writer, his historical and hagiographical works have defined the medieval as well as the modern perception of Liégeois feminine piety. He had an immediate admirer in Liège, Thomas of Cantimpré (ca. 1200-ca. 1270), a Dominican friar who wrote at least three *Vitae* for the local female saints.⁷⁵ Thomas launched his career as a novice hagiographer by providing a supplement to Mary of Oignies' *Vita*. In his immensely popular encyclopedia of natural sciences, Thomas commented on the supposed physical superiority of the Amazon women over men: Amazon women surpass men in the strength of their bones, and they fight against the Saracens most fiercely; their Queen once saved the Temple and the Holy Sepulcher for the Christians.⁷⁶ It seems women are supreme crusader warriors after all. This theory is a curious combination of the various strands of reforming interests in Liège: an affirmation of women's spiritual even physical strength (albeit only in the case extraordinary women) and the crusading spirit, mixed with a scholastic bent for antiquarian and scientific

⁷⁴ Jacques de Vitry also made a large donation to the chapel of Oignies to ensure its wealth and splendor, see: Sharon Farmer, "Low Country Ascetics and Oriental Luxury: Jacques de Vitry, Marie of Oignies, and the Treasures of Oignies," in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, edited by Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 205-222.

⁷⁵ Barbara Newman, "Introduction," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 3-51.

⁷⁶ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, 31: "Ossa masculorum fortiosa sunt ossibus feminarum nisi tantum in genere Amazonarum mulierum, ubi fortitude et robur feminarum prefertur fortitudini virorum, ut venerabilis Iacobus Aconensis episcopus in Orientali prodit historia, ubi etiam dicit, quod ille feminarum populous fortissimus sit et Christiano nomini dicatus. Contra Sarracenos acerrime pugnat. Et quidem non est diu, quod ipsarum Amazonarum regina veniens a partibus orientis servitio se mancipavit templi et sepulchri dominici."

knowledge. Of course, this intense admiration of religious women's special grace does not necessarily make these men champions of the equality between sexes. The elevated status of a highly selected group of charismatic women did not conflict with the assumed inferiority of the female sex in general. An interest in directing women's spiritual needs constituted an obligation, moreover, an act of humility and charity, on the part of men.⁷⁷

This generally amicable relationship between the religious women and their male supervisors symbolically ended with the conclusion of the thirteenth century, when Marguerite "called Porete" was condemned as a relapsed heretic and burnt at the stake in Paris in 1310. A beguine from the County of Hainaut and author of the Old French text *Mirror of Simple Souls*, Marguerite is known as the first medieval mystic author who died for writing a book.⁷⁸ The Council of Vienne in 1311-1312 that condemned the beguines for their "insanity" and erroneous teaching marked "a turning point not only in the whole beguine movement but in the way churchmen regarded female authors and ecstatically devout women more generally."⁷⁹ The hagiographical tradition of religious women in the

⁷⁷ Fiona Griffiths, "'Men's Duty to Provide for Women's Needs': Abelard, Heloise, and Their Negotiation of the *cura monialium*," in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York: Routledge, 2005), 268-315; John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Fiona Griffiths and Julie Hotchin, eds., *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

⁷⁸ Sean Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 3.

⁷⁹ Field, *The Beguine, The Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 3. The Council of Vienne condemned the beguines for their "mentis insania" and their teachings that would lead the simple go astray, see: *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. I Nicaea I to Lateran V*, edited by Norman Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 374. A discussion on this canon from the perspective of legal history, see: Elizabeth Makowski, "A Pernicious Sort of Woman": *Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 23-50.

southern Low Countries came to an abrupt halt in the fourteenth century.⁸⁰ But the interests in these texts resurged in the fifteenth century.⁸¹ The most well-known proof of the Low Countries religious women's influence beyond their own land is the insular case of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a text about a highly idiosyncratic English woman whose religious lifestyle bears intriguing resemblances with that of Mary of Oignies.⁸²

In this introduction, I attempt to answer two questions: why the hagiographical output in the thirteenth-century Liège is so significant in medieval religious history, and what were the favorable conditions that made Liège special. A brief answer to the first questions is that, for the first time, a credible model of lay sanctity was proposed and popularized in the Diocese of Liège. The spiritual biographies of the Liégeois religious women provided the archetype of a “mystical” saint that would be admired and imitated across Europe in the centuries to come. The reason why Liège occupied such a preeminent place in the thirteenth-century religious history was because it was at the convergence of several crucial reforming trends at that time: the pastoral revolution set in motion by the Lateran IV and led by the school masters from Paris, and the lay religious energy

⁸⁰ See the list of holy women from the Low Countries in the later Middle Ages in Walter Simons, “Holy Women of the Low Countries: A Survey,” in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500*, edited by Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 647-648.

⁸¹ See, for example, the study of the manuscript transmission of Mary of Oignies' *vita*: Suzan Folkerts, “The Manuscript Transmission of the *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis* in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, edited by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 221-242.

⁸² A direct reference to Mary of Oignies's name is in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 292-293: “For aftyward he red of a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines, and of hir maner of levyng, of the wondirful swetnesse that sche had in the word of God heryng, of the wondirful compassyon that sche had in hys Passyon thynkyng, and of the plentyvows teerys that sche wept, the wech made hir so febyl and so weyke that sche myth not endur to beheldyn the crosse...”; See also: Rosalyn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996); Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, translated by Charity Scott-Stokes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 259-261.

accumulated in the past century due to intense monastic reforms and crusade campaigning in the diocese itself. Although not an unquestionable intellectual center like the neighboring Paris, Liège, nonetheless, provided the most hospitable environment to devotional innovations in northern Europe in the early decades of the thirteenth century.

The southern Low Countries, of course, was not the only region in Europe that witnessed sophisticated forms of lay religiosity; however, it was the idea of lay sanctity created here that ultimately won out as the most influential in the later Middle Ages. As André Vauchez has argued, lay sanctity had already been observed in urban centers of northern Italy in the twelfth century. The early Italian lay saints were most often male urban dwellers of artisanal or professional background, whose claim to holiness rested in their charity work benefiting social solidarity within the urban commune.⁸³ In other words, the emerging model of lay sanctity in Italy was civic and active, whereas the northern Europe presented an alternative that was conspicuously feminine and contemplative. It was this northern ideal that would quickly become the mainstream in the later medieval Church. Italy then followed the suit in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, producing female mystics such as Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) whose ascendancy was facilitated by the general crisis of the institutional Church during the Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism.⁸⁴ Vauchez criticizes the ultimate triumph of the highly spiritualized, even politicized, mystical sanctity as too elitist. It is a lamentable fact, in his opinion, that this

⁸³ André Vauchez, "A Twelfth-Century Novelty: The Lay Saints of Urban Italy," in *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, edited and introduced by Daniel Bornstein, translated by Margery Schneider (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 51-72.

⁸⁴ Vauchez, "Mystical Sanctity at the Time of the Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism," in *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 231-236; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

model of sanctity aimed to pursue individualized union with the divinity rather than the modest goal of strengthening the social fabric of the Christian community.⁸⁵ One does not have to accept Vauchez's harsh judgment to appreciate his insight regarding the far-reaching influence of those northern mystics.

In the following chapters, this northern idea of mystical sanctity will be dissected. The regional liturgical customs, rather than Church politics, will be presented as the most crucial context for its various manifestations. Each chapter of this dissertation will deal with one supposedly "mystical" phenomenon and interprets it as a liturgically inspired performance. Chapter 1 focuses on the religious women's miraculous singing. Special vocal talent, a prominent theme in this group of women's *Vitae*, had its roots in the regional liturgical tradition, but also had to do with women's ritual role in the local funeral rites. I attempt to argue that women's ritual singing is by no means a random literary trope unwittingly deployed by the hagiographers, but essential in the construction of pious women as powerful intermediaries between the living and the dead.

Chapter 2 chooses to focus on the liturgical character of monastic visions in the thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège. Although commonly believed to be a "characteristically mystical" phenomenon, the vision, in fact, was part of the monastic liturgical routine. This chapter studies the vision as a ritualized, routinized, performative act that was an integral part of the mundane religious life. There is nothing essentially "mystical" about it.

Chapter 3 turns to the Liégeois saints' use of the body as the monumental site for ritual performance. This chapter examines some most extreme episodes from Liège of

⁸⁵ Vauchez, "A Twelfth-Century Novelty," 72.

violence asceticism and bodily rapture in the cases of Elisabeth of Spalbeek and Arnulf of Villers. These performances were not, in fact, as often assumed, disruptive to the liturgical and parochial routines. Instead, they were lay persons' efforts to mimic the Divine Office, and should be understood broadly as an integral part of the liturgical routine.

Chapter 4 examines the hagiographical and popular accounts about male preachers. As a comparison to female spirituality, the prevailing culture of popular preaching also revolved around the theatrical and the spectacular. The performative element outstripped the verbal in its communicative power. The main difference is that the priests were often represented as the designer, the choreographer, and the manipulator in control of the performance, rather than the actor within it.

Chapter 1 Miraculous Singing in the Construction of Female Sanctity

In his famous *Life of Mary of Oignies*, Jacques de Vitry describes the saintly woman's deathbed scene that culminated her distinguished mystical career. Anticipating the approaching death in July 1213, the woman offered a virtuoso musical performance:

When the promised time was near which she had so tearfully anticipated and, groaning and sighing, had begged for, behold, a sound was suddenly made...She thus began to sing in a high and clear voice and for three days and three nights did not stop praising God, and giving thanks: she rhythmically wove in sweet harmony the most sweet song about God, the holy angels, the blessed Virgin, other saints, her friends, and the holy Scriptures. She did not think about composing sentences, nor did she spend time arranging what she had composed rhythmically, but the Lord gave it to her just as if it had been written out before her at the exactly moment as it was spoken.¹

This episode is the most peculiar, in that it does not conform to established hagiographical tropes. As a devotional practice, Mary's singing is even more unusual. A laywoman, she performed the entire Divine Office before the church altar in front of the whole congregation, with the priest standing by her side as a concerned yet acquiescent spectator.² Jacques de Vitry diligently described the whole sequence of her chants, a bewilderingly

¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 252 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 150-151: "Iam tempus promissum prope erat, quod multis lacrimis prevenerat, multis suspiriis et gemitibus postulaverat... Incepit enim alta voce et clara cantare, nec cessavit spatio trium dierum et noctium Deum laudare, gratias agere, dulcissimam cantilenam de Deo, de sanctis Angelis, de beata Virgine, de Sanctis aliis, de amicis suis, de divinis Scripturis, rithmice dulci modulatione contexere; nec deliberabat an sententias inveniret, nec morabatur ut inventas rithmice disponeret; sed velut ante se scriberentur, dabat ei Dominus in illa hora quid loqueretur." The English translation is made by Margot King, "The Life of Mary of Oignies by James of Vitry," in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 119. The English translation is at times inaccurate in rendering the technical musical vocabulary of the Latin original, which will be analyzed later in this chapter.

² Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

complex array of liturgical songs, vernacular interpolations known as “farsing” and other stylized vocal acts. We know that her performance was structured and punctuated by canticles typical to the Secular Office: the Matins *Te deum laudamus*, the Vespers *Magnificat*, and the Compline *Nunc dimittis*. Her audacity was even more impressive when she constantly interpolated French rhythmic songs in the Office,³ “expounding (*exponens*) the Holy Scriptures in new and miraculous way and subtly explaining (*edisserens*) many things from the Gospels, the Psalms, and the Old and New Testaments which she had never heard before.”⁴ In other words, the woman offered a running commentary in her mother tongue, the Romance language, to the entire Scriptures, in the form of songs.

This merging of the traditions of Latin liturgy and vernacular music was something startlingly original, indeed precocious, in the history of medieval religion. Reformation historians believe that it was only due to Martin Luther's distinctive genius that a reformed hymnody in the German language first brought Christianity as an animating, living faith into the heart and soul of the people.⁵ Reformers used vernacular hymns as a bridge between the learned, elite culture and the “simple folk,” and as a means to inculcate evangelical ideas and consolidate confessional identities. It is commonly assumed that in the Middle Ages the two cultural worlds, the Latin and the vernacular, were often separate

³ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153: “...hec omnia rithmice et lingua Romana protulit.”

⁴ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152: “...quedam etiam de divinis scripturis novo et mirabili modo exponens, de evengelio, de psalmis, de novo et veteri testamento que nunquam audierat multa subtiliter edisserens.”

⁵ Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40-75; Christopher Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 230-236.

and distant from each other. It may well be the case that only in the sixteenth century religious singing in the vernacular languages was systematically promoted and penetrated into the everyday life in an unprecedented scale; nevertheless, it was a resurrection of a once prominent medieval tradition rather than a reaction against or a departure from it. If anything, Mary of Oignies's songs represented something more radical than the reformed hymnody, which had been composed by learned theologians and then handed over to the laity in sanctioned forms. Her songs were apparently creative and improvisational without pre-proved scripts; the nature of her performance is exegetical, not merely devotional.

Mary of Oignies (c. 1177-1213) has long been viewed as the pioneer of the new female spirituality in the thirteenth century, since Herbert Grundmann's 1935 classical work on what he enthusiastically calls "the religious movement of women" in the Middle Ages.⁶ These lay women, called "beguines" by contemporary critics, striving to live voluntarily a chaste and simple pious life without joining an established religious order, represented a "trend" of religious life choice rather than an organized movement.⁷ They were integral to the grand religious renewal of the thirteenth century, alongside the famous new orders of the mendicant friars. Jacques de Vitry's *Life of Mary of Oignies* is the foundational text of this new female religiosity and would provide a model for all the beguine mystical biographies to come. This text becomes well known among medievalists thanks to Caroline Bynum's 1988 study on women's practice of fasting relying heavily on

⁶ Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*.

⁷ The standard general history the Low Country beguines is Walters, *Cities of Ladies*. See also his "Holy Women of the Low Countries: A Survey," from *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 625-662.

the Low Country sources.⁸ The beguines' Eucharistic devotion and their so-called “bridal mysticism” are probably two best known aspects of their religious life.⁹

In these very insightful studies, the liturgical and musical context of the beguine piety is often assumed--apparently the Eucharist was central to Christian liturgy and the *sponsa christi* trope essentially developed from the interpretative tradition of *The Song of Songs*--but not analyzed in its own right.¹⁰ Literary scholars for instance, stress ritual singing as a form of embodied mysticism and the musical vessel as a metaphor for the triumphant, resurrected body in the exegetic tradition of the psalms.¹¹ Ritual has been often treated as a symbolic and conceptual system from which abstract meanings, multivalent albeit, can be extracted analytically. When analyzing religious women's fasting practice as the result of a self-identification with Christ' humanity and physicality rather than internalized misogyny traditionally assumed, Bynum is able to assign greater agency to women and render their practices more theologically respectable. But ritual is not only

⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

⁹ On “Bridal mysticism,” see, for example: Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012), 174-232.

¹⁰ Relevant studies on this passage: Carolyn Muessig, “Prophecy and Song: Teaching and Preaching by Medieval Women,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 146-158; Ulrike Wiethaus, “The Death Song of Marie d’Oignies: Mystical Sound and Hagiographical Politics in Medieval Lorraine,” in *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Ellen Kittell and Mary Suydam (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 153-180; Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 191-258; Walter Simons, “Reading a Saint’s Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the *Vitae* of Thirteenth-Century Beguines,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1-23; Walter Simons, “Beguines, Liturgy, and Music in the Middle Ages: An Exploration,” in Pieter Mannaerts ed., *Beghinae in cantu instructae: Music Patrimony from Flemish Beguinage (Middle Ages-Late-18th Century)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 15-26. The singing religious women are mentioned in some studies of music history, for a recent example see: Margot Fassler, *Music in the Medieval West: Western Music in Context* (New York: Norton, 2014), 171-175.

¹¹ Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), esp. 191-258.

thought, also acquired behavior. Its efficacy rests in the act of performance and the socialization. In many cases, there are no preexisting, freestanding Platonic “ideas” from which ritual is generated accordingly; ideas actualize through being transmitted by ritual, and sometimes they are only attributed to a certain ritual in a post hoc manner.

This article attempts to study the ritual singing of the thirteenth-century Low Country lay religious women. One apparent reason is that singing was such a prominent theme in the textual representation of women's piety at this time, and integral to their identity as the local saints. I would argue that the religious culture in thirteenth-century Liège was profoundly influenced by the heritage of the musical and liturgical culture of the Meuse-Moselle region. Encompassing the old heartland of the Carolingian Empire and close to the probable birthplace of the Gregorian chant, the Diocese Liège had a distinguished musical culture in the Early Middle Ages. Only taking this cultural milieu into account can we explain many sophisticated features of the religious practices at this time: the crossing-over of the Latin and the vernacular traditions, the partnership between the clergy and the laity in a shared, common ritual space, and the emotionally charged and physically stylized manifestations of its religiosity. “Mysticism” defined as ecstatic encounter with the divine might be a misnomer for some of these local saints' behavior; as out-of-ordinary they might seem, these behaviors were often stylized ritual gestures predicated upon the norms of the larger performance culture of the society. Religious women learned their behavior by sitting in the church and participating the communal worship every day; and the hagiographers recorded what they deemed as worthwhile noting also through the infiltrating lens of their familiar experiences with the ritual surroundings.

In particular, this article will focus on two *Vitae* of the Liégeois religious women, that of Mary of Oignies and Christina “the Astonishing.” Both texts contain ample references to the saints’ singing practices. More importantly, they seem to complement each other: the former renders the woman’s performance an unmistakably liturgical character by using carefully chosen musico-liturgical language, which suggests that the hagiographer was highly conscious in his construction of Mary’s liturgical piety. The latter points out one specific ritual context where women’s singing seems especially important, i.e., the funerary rites. Miraculous singing is essential in the construction of pious women powerful intermediaries between the living and the dead. Women's singing must be understood within the context of local funerary rites in the thirteenth century, a period when the nascent notion of purgatorial expiation was actively promoted by the reforming Church and women's intercessory prayers were deemed especially potent.

I. The Land between Meuse and Moselle: “A Nest of Singing Birds”¹²

Singing was ubiquitous in the Middle Ages. Wherever people gathered, they sang; whenever people were on the move en masse, they sang. There were familiar secular scenarios where soldiers sang before going into battlefield, students sang while wandering on the road or drunken in the tavern, and court entertainment revolved around performances of popular ballads and *chansons de geste*. In the realm of courtship and expression of human emotions: decades after her tragic love affair with Peter Abelard, Heloise recollected with certain nostalgia his two qualities “that could win any woman's

¹² This phrase is from Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 477.

heart”---”the gift of composing and the gift of singing.”¹³ Abelard's philosophical genius could be appreciated by a connoisseur like Heloise; his vocal talent was of appeal universal.

In the ecclesiastical culture, singing was more prevalent and indeed obligatory, as liturgical celebrations were essential everyday reality in any clerical or monastic community. Communal singing was instrumental in inculcating doctrines and shaping group identities in such closely-knit environment. For someone who had serious ambition in pursuing a clerical career, the ability to sing was both a natural talent and a social accomplishment. Pope Innocent III was praised for being “skilled in chants and psalmody,” alongside his erudition and eloquence. The list is a litany of topoi; nonetheless, the inclusion shows what was keenly valued and deemed worthy for the dignity of a pope.¹⁴ In the opening ceremony of the Fourth Lateran Council on 11 November 1215, the pope's intoning of the hymn *Veni Creator* was so solemn and dignified that it moved its audience into tears.¹⁵ Even for churchmen not endowed with a melodious voice, their grammatical education in Latin metrical verse could be transformed into the ability to compose hymns and chants. It is no incidental a fact that leading churchmen in the High Middle Ages from Anselm of Bec, Thomas Aquinas to Bonaventure wrote important hymns or liturgical

¹³ *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, edited and translated by David Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon, 2013), 136: “Duo autem, fateor, tibi specialiter inerant quibus feminarum quarumlibet animos statim allicere poterat, dictandi uidelicet et cantandi gratia.”

¹⁴ *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III*, translated by James Powell (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 3. In fact, the talent of singing was a pretty common virtue attributed to thirteenth-century popes and cardinals in Rome, see: Julian Gardner, “The Cardinals’ Music: Musical Interests at the Papal Curia c. 1200-1234,” *Early Music History* (2015): 97-132.

¹⁵ Stephen Kuttner and Antonio García y García, “A New Eyewitness Account of The Fourth Lateran Council,” *Traditio*, vol. 20 (1964): 124.

offices; and when they did not, in the cases of Bernard of Clairvaux and Stephen Langton, people found it important to say they did.¹⁶

The Diocese of Liège had a distinguished musical tradition from the Early Middle Ages, and its religious life was ever galvanized by this musical-poetic impulse.¹⁷ With Charlemagne's Aix-la-chapelle under its episcopal jurisdiction, Liège was at the heartland of the Carolingian imperial power in the eighth and ninth centuries. Musicologist Christopher Page describes the lands between Liège on the Meuse and Metz on the Moselle as “a nest of singing birds”.¹⁸ It was in this area where the foundational work of the Western musical tradition, namely the Gregorian plainsong, took its final form under the Carolingian auspices.¹⁹ Traditionally attributed to Pope Gregory the Great and a Roman origin, the chant music largely originated in Franco-Roman monasteries and Carolingian cathedral schools. Despite the fierce rhetoric of Romanisation and uniformity, the liturgical reform under Pippin III and Charlemagne was a slow process of incremental adaptation and experimentation. The reformers' overriding concern was more with the ideological

¹⁶ A good list of (actual and attributed) medieval composers of liturgical chants can be found in Thomas Forrest Kelly, “Medieval Composers of Liturgical Chants,” *Musica e storia* (2006): 95-125.

¹⁷ For specialized works on the musical history of medieval Liège, see: Antoine Auda, *La musique et les musiciens de l'Ancien Pays de Liège* (Brussels: Librairie Saint-Georges, 1930); Philippe Vendrix, “La musique à Liège du Xe au XIIIe siècles,” in *L'Art mosan: Liège et son pays à l'époque romane du XIe au XIIIe siècle*, ed. Benoît van den Bossche (Liège: Perron, 2007), 1-6; for the musical history of Liège in the Later Middle Ages, see: Catherine Saucier, *A Paradise of Priests: Singing the Civic and Episcopal Hagiography of Medieval Liège* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 477.

¹⁹ Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 2001); Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 340-345; Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers*, 329-359; Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 188-194.

unity of faith rather than eliminating diversity and peculiarities in practice.²⁰ The resulting rite, therefore, was a selective reception of Roman elements into entrenched indigenous liturgical customs. The successive imperial power of the Carolingians and the Ottonians promoted this “Gallicanized” liturgy empire-wide that would eventually replace the “old” Roman liturgy even in Rome itself.²¹ The earliest surviving example of *planctus* with musical notation, the *Lament on Charlemagne's Death*, is believed to be composed by Colomanus of Saint-Trond c. 814 from Liège.²² In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Liège was the preeminent center of learning in Europe, reputed to be “the Athens of the North.”²³ Bishop Stephen of Liège (c. 850-920) composed famous Offices of Trinity and Saint Lambert; Abbots Heriger of Lobbes (d. 1007), Lambert of Saint Lawrence (c. 1075) and the Benedictine monk Sigebert of Gembloux (c. 1035-1112) all composed or compiled liturgical Offices for regional saints. The most prolific Twelfth-Century Renaissance writer, Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075-1129), ruminated on the supreme reality of the liturgy in his *De divinis officiis* in the local monastery of Saint Lawrence and engaged a controversy with Alger of Liège on Eucharistic theology.²⁴ More importantly, the only two medieval additions to the Temporale cycle of the universal liturgical calendar were both originated

²⁰ Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul*.

²¹ *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 189.

²² Antoine Auda, *La musique et les musiciens de l'Ancien Pays de Liège*, 13-14; Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity*, 225.

²³ The phrase is from J. C. H. Blom and E. Lamberts ed., *History of the Low Countries*, trans. James Kennedy (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), 53.

²⁴ John van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1983), esp. 56-94. A classic discussion on the liturgical culture in monastic environment is Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 236-254.

in the Diocese of Liège: the feast of the Holy Trinity on the Sunday after Pentecost, and the feast of Corpus Christi on the following Thursday.²⁵ And let's not forget the most lengthy musical treatise ever compiled in the Middle Ages *Speculum musicae*, was probably by Jacques de Liège, identified as a canon at the collegiate church of Saint Paul from the diocese in the early fourteenth century.²⁶ Liège is one of the few places in Europe with a continuing musical culture, both in theory and in practice, from the early Middle Ages well into the Renaissance.

One reason for the vibrant musical tradition in Liège was the predominance of ecclesiastical communities in this area. In the later Middle Ages Liège was primarily a spiritual force in the Low Countries, as the city itself was ruled by a prince-bishop since ca. 1000 without the competing patronage of a secular court; also, unlike other major cities in the Low Countries such as Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp or Brussels, Liège was not a major commercial center. Its sole claim to any kind of eminence could have only been realized through its ecclesiastical institutions and the religious culture they cultivated.²⁷ By the thirteenth century, the city itself boasted one of the most dense networks of religious

²⁵ Auda, *La musique et les musiciens*, 16-23; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 164-212; Barbara Walters, Vincent Corrigan, and Peter Ricketts, *The Feast of Corpus Christi* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

²⁶ A recent and comprehensive discussion of the authorship of *Speculum musicae* is Karen Desmond, "New Light on Jacobus, Author of *Speculum musicae*," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 9/1 (2000): 19-40.

²⁷ For the history of Liège, see: Jean Lejeune, *Liège et son pays: Naissance d'une patrie (XIIIe-XIVe siècle)* (Liège: Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université, 1948); Godefroid Kurth, *La Cité de Liège au Moyen Age* (Paris: Champion, 1909); Jean-Louis Kupper, *Liège et l'Église Impériale, XIe-XIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1982); Alain Marchandisse, *La fonction épiscopale à Liège aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles. Etude de politologie historique* (Genève: Droz, 1998); L.J.R. Milis, "Counts, Cities, and Clerics: The Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Centuries," in J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts ed., *History of the Low Countries* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), 23-54. A good short overview of the thirteenth-century religious landscape of the Diocese is Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1991): 164-168.

institutions in Europe: besides its cathedral (Saint Lambert), there were seven collegiate churches (Saint Barthélemy, Saint Peter, Saint Croix, Saint Martin, Saint Denis, Saint John and Saint Paul), twenty-six parish churches, two Benedictine monasteries (Saint Lawrence and Saint James), one Cistercian monastery (Val Saint Lambert), two Cistercian convents (Robertmont and Val Benoît), a house for Augustinian canons (Saint Giles), the Praemonstratensian community at Mont-Cornillon, as well as the houses of the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Further in the hinter land under its episcopal jurisdiction were famous abbeys of Stavelot-Malmédy, Lobbes, Gembloux, Saint Hubert and Saint Trond.²⁸ The proliferation of religious communities of all orders brought about strong local pride and independent clerical identity, as well as competition in liturgical patronage: when Charles the Bold's Burgundian army broke into Liège's city walls in the year 1468, his lieutenant Guy of Brimeu was reported to say that, "there were as many Masses said there every day as in Rome."²⁹

To give a detailed account of the performance style of worship in the early medieval Church is difficult given the amount and the nature of the sources; but a few prominent characteristics can be tentatively outlined. The most important aspect is that there was no clear-cut distinction between official liturgy authoritatively prescribed by the Church and the practices of popular piety of the faithful. Terms such as "paraliturgical" or "popular piety" are anachronistic, historiographical constructs for later generations to grapple with. Local diversity and variety is assumed as the norm; hence, the term "liturgy" here is used to be synonymous with any church service and ritual acts performed for divine worship.

²⁸ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 164.

²⁹ Saucier, *A Paradise of Priests*, 4.

More specifically in the northern part of Europe where Liège belongs, the liturgical style from the Merovingian period and beyond possessed some distinctive yet persistent features: the most important being its strong dramatic tendencies prone to vulgarisation.³⁰ Or, it might be more proper to say that a popular element had always been intrinsic to the northern liturgical tradition. The “old” so-called Gallican liturgy in pre-Carolingian Gaul, though an extremely murky phenomenon transmitted through a handful of manuscripts, such as the Bobbio Missal, *Missale Gothicum*, and the Luxeuil Lectionary, is described as “luxuriant, exuberant, and prolix...filled with long and florid prayers and actions in which a dramatic spirit was almost palpable,”³¹ in comparison with the more sober and “Spartan” style in Italy and Rome. Such “dramatic” tendency is realized in the following concrete forms: the Rite contains some rather lengthy and rhapsodic prayers that express intense personal feelings toward the Divinity.³² It also features the chanted recitation of elaborate hagiographical narratives in solemn Matins and Mass. This seems to have been a lasting peculiarity of the northern European customs outlasting the Carolingian liturgical reform. The public reading of saints' lives was never approved in Roman liturgy, deemed a provincial variation and prone to popularization. It has been argued that these

³⁰ Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. William Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen (Washington, DC.: The Pastoral Press, 1981), 31-60; C. Clifford Flanigan, “The Roman Rite and The Origins of The Liturgical Drama,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43 (1974): 263-84; Catherine Dunn, *The Gallican Saint's Life and the Late Roman Dramatic Tradition* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989); Yitzhak Hen and Rob Meens eds., *The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³¹ Roger Reynolds, “The Drama of Medieval Liturgical Processions,” *Revue de Musicologie*, 86/1 (2000): 127.

³² Flanigan, “The Roman Rite and The Origins of The Liturgical Drama,” 268-273. Some scholars attribute these emotional prayers to Irish monastic tradition introduced to the Continent by persons such as Alcuin of York, see: Michael Driscoli, “The Conversion of the Nations,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 190-191.

hagiographical narratives about heroic sufferings and epic struggles bore close resemblance with the story-telling of great warriors' deeds in Germanic cultures and later with reciting the *chansons de geste*, thus especially attractive to a popular audience.³³ A well-known passage by the Parisian Johannes de Grocheo in his *Theoria* (c. 1300) testifies this custom robustly survived well into the later centuries when he affirms that jongleurs customarily sang both *chansons de gestes* and saints' lives: "We call a song a *chanson de geste* in which the deeds of heroes and the achievements of our forefather are recounted, like the life and sufferings of the saints and the conflicts and adversities which men of old endured for the faith and for the truth--the life of St. Stephen the first martyr, for example, and the story of Charlemagne."³⁴

It is difficult now to precisely describe the actual performance style of such hagiographical reading, but Johannes de Grocheo's attribution to the jongleurs is certainly suggestive. A hypothesis has been advanced that early medieval recitation of hagiographical texts was not some plain "reading aloud" as we moderns would do, but more resembled the late ancient Roman mimetic drama, which consisted of "a symbolic mode of gesture and rhythmic movement, accompanied by recitation or commentary to guarantee an intelligible narrative line to the spectators."³⁵ While in the representational drama the histrionic craftsmanship is primary, vocal sophistication is more appreciated in

³³ John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 235-267.

³⁴ "Cantum vero gestualem dicimus, in quo gesta heroum et antiquorum patrum opera recitantur, sicuti vita et martyria sanctorum et proelia et adversitates, quas antiqui viri pro fide et veritate passi sunt, sicuti vita beati Stephani protomartyri et historia regis Karoli." ed. Ernst Rohloff, *Die Quellenhandschriften zum Musiktraktat de Johannes de Grocheio* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), 130.

³⁵ Dunn, *The Gallican Saint's Life and the Late Roman Dramatic Tradition*, 48.

the mimetic art, since the bodily movements are largely symbolic and the background voice renders intelligibility to the entire performance. Imagine the early medieval religious reading was more akin to the kind of chanting that might accompany a pantomimic dancer.³⁶ Whether this is an accurate analogy or not, one fact is uncontroversial: the early medieval northern European society was especially attracted to lengthy narratives about saintly martyrs that would necessarily require some artful reading or chanting. The long, lively forensic debates between the saint and the persecutors usually featuring in these narratives could be vestiges of such vocals performances. Also, the fact that all the earliest surviving examples of vernacular French narratives are saints' lives, such as the *Life of Saint Eulalia* (c. 880) and the late tenth-century *Life of Saint Leger* is not incidental, as they may point to the early medieval tradition of exuberant liturgical reading in church assemblies.³⁷

More direct evidence of vernacular hagiographical narratives being sung in liturgical setting comes from the twelfth- and thirteenth- century manuscripts with musical notation. The most prominent example is the troped epistles for the feast of Saint Stephen. These tropes are lengthy narrative songs about the saint's Passion in Old French sung by the sub-deacons during the high Mass, intended to magnify the importance of the Latin reading and the joyfulness of the occasion, as the Saint Stephen's feast took place on December 26 right after Christmas.³⁸ In the surviving early medieval French texts with

³⁶ Dunn, *The Gallican Saint's Life and the Late Roman Dramatic Tradition*, 54.

³⁷ Sarah Kay, Terence Cave, and Malcolm Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32-33; Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages*, 237-239.

³⁸ Stevens, *Words and Music*, 239-249; John Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Languages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 103-115.

music notation Saint Stephen's tropes constitute an impressive proportion.³⁹ They were mostly produced in the area around Paris and Chartres, which leads to a speculation that the practice of vernacular troping of Latin liturgy originated in northern France.⁴⁰ Grocheo quoted above compared jongleur's song of Stephen to that of Charlemagne not without collaborating evidence: in the surviving trope texts there appears the influence of *chansons de geste*. Not only Stephen was called *Esteine le baron*, he is praised for his courage like a warrior, *de vertu grant*.⁴¹ As we will discuss later, Mary of Oignies was also familiar with some version of Saint Stephen's French trope song, even though a Liège text does not seem to survive.

To summarize some general features of liturgical culture in the Franco-German north in the early centuries of the Middle Ages: the prominent role of hagiographical narratives dramatically performed or chanted as part of the Church offices, the frequent references to the jongleurs in sources indicating lay participation and creativity, and finally, the increasing use of the vernacular language mixed with the original Latin. All these features were inherited by our thirteenth-century mystics and constitute essential context for us to evaluate both the traditionalism and novelty of Mary of Oignies's mystical singing in 1213. Before moving to a close analysis of Mary's mystical singing, it is worthwhile to cite a piece of evidence from Liège to fill the gap between the impressionistic generalization about the “Gallican” style and the local specificity: a late eleventh-century

³⁹ John Haines edited and translated the surviving five versions of Saint Stephen Epistle with Old French trope in *Medieval Song in Romance Languages*, 245-296.

⁴⁰ Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Languages*, 103; John Haines, “Le Chant vulgaire dans l'Église à la fête de Saint Étienne,” in *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 159-75.

⁴¹ Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Languages*, 245.

work composed in the monastery of Stavelot in the Diocese Liège, *Triumphus sancti Remacli*, tells a miracle after the translation of Saint Remaclus's body to the monastery Stavelot he had founded. During the Vigil, a jongleur happened to be sleeping in the hospice with his companion, who received a miraculous vision calling him to venerate the saint; jumping to his feet the jongleur joined the Vigil service, and began to sing. He “did not know what he was to sing (*ignarus quid caneret*); he began to sing many things about the saint extemporaneously (*fortuitu coepit de sancto percurrere plura canendo*).” The crowd was greatly comforted by his songs. The future Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV after hearing the jongleur songs venerated the saint with great awe and devotion.⁴² This episode is yet another piece of evidence to demonstrate that lay people could be singing during a liturgical service, especially if the service was the commemoration of a saint. The jongleurs songs should have been in the vernacular language given the crowd being moved should be at least partially lay people. Lastly, it seems the jongleur's performance involved great amount of improvisation, divinely inspired or not.

II. Mary of Oignies's Mystical Songs and the Liturgical Tradition of Liège

⁴² *Triumphus sancti Remacli de Malmundariensi Coenobio*, ed. D. W. Wattenbach, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* 11, 456: “Cantator quidam iocularis ipsa nocte cum sodali suo apud hospitem dormitum ierat, qui statim sompno excitus:

*Sodes, ait, surge, nos illo praestat abire,
Non est hoc vanum, non est hic crede morandum,
Excubias illas celebrare iuvat venerandas.*

Cumque ille renuens eum erroneae visionis argueret: *Non fallor, ait, sompno ludificante, sed testor Deum, quendam venerandi habitus quasi manu apprehensa me illuc trahentem vidisse.* Quibus dictis praepeti cursu se contulit inter vigiles, ac ignarus quid caneret, fortuitu

Coepit de sancto percurrere plura canendo.

Ac nostros digestim referendo casus, tristes sua quodammodo solabatur cantilena choreis concinentibus. Rex autem desuper auscultans per fenestram de se metuenda memorantem intendebat sollicitus, qui pro eo quod acciderat indutus laneis et factus nudis pedibus iugiter pernoctabat cum timore et obsecrationibus.” A discussion of this episode can be found in Alison Elliott, “The *Triumphus Sancti Remacli*: Latin Evidence for Oral Composition,” *Romance Philology* (1979): 292-298.

Mary of Oignies is the heir of the totality of this early medieval liturgical culture, even though she is more viewed as a pioneer of something radically new. Mary was born into a non-aristocratic but economically well-to-do family in Nivelles in southern Brabant, on the western part of Diocese of Liège.⁴³ She married a man named John when she was fourteen years old but persuaded her husband to live in chastity and take care of the lepers. She remained a lay woman throughout her life while gaining a great reputation as a *mulier religiosissima*. She died in the priory of the Augustinian canons of Saint Nicolas at the town of Oignies in 1213. The hagiographer Jacques de Vitry, a graduate from the University of Paris, was drawn to the diocese by her fame, personally knew the woman very well and completed the *Vita* within short time after her death before 1215. Though later making his career in the Middle East as Bishop of Acre and Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum at the papal curia,⁴⁴ Jacques cherished most dearly his Low Country experiences and the memories of his spiritual mother. He insisted to be taken back and buried at Saint Nicolas, near the tomb of Mary, when he died in 1240 in Rome.⁴⁵

⁴³ "...Maria, que mediocribus orta parentibus, licet divitiis et multis bonis temporalibus habundarent..." *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, I.1., 56.

⁴⁴ For Jacques de Vitry's life, see: Philipp Funk, *Jakob von Vitry: Leben und Werke* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909); Maurice Coens, "Jacques de Vitry," *Bibliographie nationale, Supplement. Académie Royale des sciences des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique*, Vol. 31, suppl. 3, col. 465-74 (Brussels: Bruylant, 1962). On Jacques de Vitry's relationship with Mary of Oignies, see: John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 68-88. On the general theme of *cura monialium*, see: Fiona Griffiths and Julie Hotchin eds., *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). On the so-called "circle of Peter the Chanter" in the University of Paris of which Jacques de Vitry was a member and its influence on Jacques's reforming vision, see: John Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter & His Circle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); David D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). For a more recent study see: Vera von der Osten-Sacken, *Jakob von Vitrys Vita Mariae Oigniencensis zu Herkunft und Eigenart der ersten Beginen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

⁴⁵ An interesting discussion on the large endowment Jacques de Vitry made before his death to the church where he intended to be buried near Mary, see: Sharon Farmer, "Low Country Ascetics and Oriental Luxury: Jacques de Vitry, Marie of Oignies, and the Treasures of Oignies," in *History in the Comic Mode:*

Jacques de Vitry's *Life of Mary* has two books, structured around the “outward person” (*exteriorem hominem*) and the “interior” (*interiora*).⁴⁶ A repeated theme is the outward complexion and “gesture” reflect the interior status of the mind.⁴⁷ Unlike many “legendary” saints' lives that warn against imitation, Jacques explicitly calls the devout readers to imitate the saint's behavior in his accounts,⁴⁸ it seems the imminent threat of the dualist heretics in southern France (Toulouse) left no room for lighthearted wonderment about the miraculous but called for immediate action from the common folk.⁴⁹ Jacques's narrative keeps legendary element to the minimum and reveals from time to time plain, journalistic incisiveness. In the first book on the “outward person” Jacques enumerates Mary's ascetic practices including her compunctious weeping, confession, penitence, fasting, prayer, vigils, and manual labor; the second book is organized according to the Seven Gifts of Holy Spirit (fear of God, piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, intellect, and wisdom).⁵⁰ The climax is the final episode on Mary's deathbed singing, so the narrative ends with a triumphal note. This is one rare descriptive account about an actual singing performance from the Middle Ages.

Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 205-222.

⁴⁶ “Sed iam huic priori libello finem imponamus, in quo de his que ad exteriorem hominem pertinent et sensibliter exterius exercentur diximus, ut quasi media dieta peracta, priusquam ad interiora et subtiliora transeamus modicum respiremus.” *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 91.

⁴⁷ “Interiorem mentis eius compositionem gestus exterior extrinsecarumque partium ostendebat compositio.” *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 87.

⁴⁸ “...ut infirmorum fidem roborarent, indoctos instruerent, pigros incitarent, devotos ad imitationem provocarent, rebelles et infideles confutarent.” *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 43.

⁴⁹ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 44.

⁵⁰ “De spiritu timoris, de spiritu pietatis, de spiritu scientie, de spiritu fortitudinis, de spiritu consilii, de spiritu intellectus, de spiritu sapientie.” *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 93.

First and foremost, Mary's singing was a pre-meditated public spectacle of piety; the hagiography made no effort to attribute the idea itself to any unexpected divine inspiration. Anticipating her impending death, Mary came to the priory church of Saint Nicolas to prepare for the last day. After having fasted for a month (from the feast of the Annunciation on March 25 to the feast of John the Baptist on June 24), she began to sing unceasingly for three days and three nights in the church, a public place of worship, with the prior, the brothers (Augustinian canons), and all sorts of “secular people from different regions” as the audience.⁵¹ The place and the timing were deliberate choice, and it does not appear that any of the spectators felt surprised or offended by the very concept of a lay woman loudly chanting in the church. The Liégeois people might have been accustomed to such performance by a jongleur, as evidence from earlier centuries suggests, but it seems there is no earlier account about lay women singing liturgical chants.

Second, what makes Mary's singing remarkable is that its content seems bewilderingly inclusive and hard to categorize, which proves that the divide between official Church Liturgy and popular piety at this time was rather blurry. It is also worth noting that Jacques de Vitry's meticulous listing of Mary's individual songs, including some very peculiar items, suggests that his account is likely to be at least based on observation of an actual performance rather than purely a clerical construction. Mary structured her three-day performance around the Divine Office for sure, but decorated it with numerous other devotional songs, prayers, and variegated vocal acts. She even enumerated a priest's sins through singing.⁵² Jacques de Vitry reports she punctuated her singing with familiar

⁵¹ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

⁵² *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 154.

Latin chants such as the *Magnificat* (Vespers), *canticum Symeonis*, and *Nunc dimittis* (Secular Compline). She also performed some liturgical chants originated in the Diocese of Liège at this time: an antiphon about the Trinity,⁵³ which might have been one composed by the tenth-century Bishop Stephen of Liège, later rapidly adopted throughout western Europe, and would become a universal feast formalized by Pope John XXII in 1314.

Another featured song was about Saint Stephen, which seems to bear some resemblances to a jongleur song: “She said, when she sang about Saint Stephen the proto-martyr, who she called the *rosarium paradisi*, that when he [Stephen] was praying before death Lord gave him Saint Paul as a gift, and when the blessed Paul crowned martyr and breathed out his spirit in death, Saint Stephen was present and offered Paul's spirit to the Lord saying: 'This is the great and singular gift you have me, and I return to you with multiplied fruit.’”⁵⁴ This passage seems to suggest that what Mary was singing was a narrative song about the saint's martyrdom with extensive monologues from the protagonist: a characteristic perfectly conforming to that of the survived Saint Stephen epistles, which are lengthy narrative songs about heroic deeds parallel to the secular *Chansons de geste*. It is unclear why Mary would sing this song though, as chanting this particular piece mostly occurred during the Mass of the saint's feast on December 26 and the only other feast concerning Saint Stephen was the Finding and the Translation of his body celebrated on August 3, whereas Mary's singing should be happening sometime in June. The hagiographer did not attempt at all to offer an explanation to this oddity; he dutifully

⁵³ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152.

⁵⁴ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153: “Dixit etiam, cum de sancto Stephano prothomartyre caneret, quem *rosarium paradisi* appellabat, quod dum oraret in morte dominus sanctum Paulum dedit ei in munere, cumque beatus Paulus martyrio coronatus spiritum in morte emitteret, sanctus Stephanus presens fuit et beati Pauli spiritum domino obtulit, dicens domino: 'Hoc magnum et singulare munus michi dedisti, et ego cum fructu multiplici illud reddo tibi.’”

recorded it. It seems that Mary had an intimate knowledge about the liturgical tradition from the region, but she did not care to adhere to a strictly fixed routine.

Third, a most salient feature of Mary's all-encompassing repertoire was the French songs and prayers she interpolated into the original Latin liturgical Office. Take her antiphon on the Trinity for illustration:

At first she began her antiphon in a very high and supreme tone, about the Holy Trinity, about the Trinity in unity and the unity in Trinity, praising for a long time and **inserting marvelous and almost ineffable things into her song about the holy Trinity. She expounded the holy scriptures, in a new and marvelous way, about the Gospels, the Psalms, the New and Old Testaments** which she had never heard interpreted. From the Trinity she descended to the humanity of Christ and from there to the blessed Virgin, the holy angels, the apostles, and the other saints who followed them. Then, as it were, having come to the last and the lowest point, she said much about her friends who were still in the world and commended them to the Lord one by one in order and poured out many prayers for them to the Lord, and **she brought forward all these rhythmically and in the Romance language.**⁵⁵

Mary supplied French commentary songs to the Latin chants with great theological depth and complexity. She expounded on the entire sequence of the biblical books and on the two greatest mysteries of Christianity, the doctrines of Trinity and the Incarnation. The content of her versified songs was unquestionably exegetical according to Jacques de Vitry the hagiographer. Although interpolating the vernacular into Latin liturgy was a practice at this time known as “farsing” (old French *farcir* “to stuff”),⁵⁶ the early French songs with

⁵⁵ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152-153: “Primo autem a summo et supremo tono antiphonam suam incoavit a sancta scilicet Trinitate, Trinitatem in unitate et unitatem in Trinitate diutissime laudans et mirabilia quasi ineffabilia de sancta Trinitate cantilene sue interserens, quedam etiam de divinis scripturis novo et mirabili modo exponens, de evangelio, de psalmis, de novo et veteri testamento que numquam audierat multa subtiliter edisserens. A Trinitate vero ad Christi descendit humanitatem, dehinc ad beatam Virginem, dehinc de sanctis angelis et de apostolis et de aliis sequentibus sanctis multa pronuntians. Tandem quasi in ultimo et infimo puncto de amicis suis, qui adhuc in mundo sunt, multa dicens dominoque singillatim per ordinem commendans, multas pro eis orationes ad dominum effudit, et hec omnia rithmice et lingua Romana protulit.”

⁵⁶ Stevens, *Words and Music*, 241.

musical notation we have today are of only two kinds: either short, devotional lyrics such as Passion songs and Marian hymns notable mainly for their emotional intensity, or longer narrative poetry of saintly adventures such as that of Saint Stephen or Saint Leger.⁵⁷ In the latter case, the French interpolations are extensive elaborations on the Latin phrases that tend to reinforce the dramatic actions rather than to extrapolate abstract theological meaning. It is believed that this practice of inserting French commentary is mostly for “celebratory rather than didactic” purpose to add ceremonial jollity to the occasion.⁵⁸ However, Mary's songs certainly defies this characterization: her songs are lengthy exposition on the Scriptures and on doctrinal issues.

What is remarkable in Jacques de Vitry's account is not Mary's understanding of the Scriptures, but her understanding of her relationship with the Scriptures. A lay woman, she seemed to have had some experiences with the Scriptures comparable to that of the cleric's reading. We do not know if she actually gained her theological knowledge through reading; she knew some rudimentary Latin to be able to read her own copy of a Psalter.⁵⁹ Today we do have a handful of vernacular French religious texts intended for a lay audience about the Scriptures survived from the late twelfth century, which scholars eagerly label as “vernacular exegesis”; these texts, nevertheless, are ostensibly paraphrases or translations from the Latin original.⁶⁰ No audacious novelty is claimed and certainly no comprehensive

⁵⁷ Such as the late tenth-century “Domine Deu devemps lauder” and the late eleventh-century “O Maria, Deu maire,” see Haines, *Medieval Songs in Romance Languages*, 197-243.

⁵⁸ Stevens, *Words and Music*, 241.

⁵⁹ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 155.

⁶⁰ Morgan Powell, “Translating Scripture for *Ma Dame de Champagne*: The Old French 'Paraphrase' of Psalm 44 (*Eruclavit*),” in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Warren (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 83-104.

knowledge about the Bible is attempted. All the currently survived Old French texts on the Bible before 1200 are exclusively on the Old Testament, more specifically on the Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and some books from the Pentateuch, perhaps more suitable for the beginners?⁶¹ Also, all the survived French paraphrases of the Bible are limited to an elite, aristocratic audience. In the unique case of Mary of Oignies, either Jacques de Vitry was stretching his account to a hyperbolic extreme or Mary, a lay woman from rather socially mediocre background, had managed to marshal knowledge and understanding about the Bible with astonishing range and depth. But even if Jacques de Vitry was exaggerating for laudatory purpose, his description, nevertheless, reveals a tolerant even welcoming attitude on the part of the clergy towards women's claim to knowledge about the Scriptures.

Lastly, Mary's singing style requires a comment. She was a very skillful singer. The hagiographer repeatedly mentioned her voice being “high and clear (*alta voce et clara cantare*),” “acute and sublime (*acuta et sublimi voce*).”⁶² To translate her voice as “high” and “sharp” might be a little misleading as if it compares to high-pitched shrieking, especially when in one place the hagiography seems to be comparing the sound to the pangs of women giving birth.⁶³ But in fact the Latin words could be technical terminology about

⁶¹ Powell listed the survived five Old French texts on the Bible: *Les proverbes de Salemon* by Samson de Nanteuil, ca. 1150; *Eruclavit*, attributed to Adam de Perseigne, ca. 1180 and a commentary on Genesis, by Evrat, ca. 1198 both for Marie of Champagne; a commentary on the Song of Songs attributed to Landri of Waben and Possibly written for Count Baldwin II of Guines, ca. 1200; and *la delivrance du peuple d'Israël*, a paraphrase of the Book of Exodus, ca. 1200. See Powell, “Translating Scripture,” *The Vernacular Spirit*, 98, no. 1. See also: Guy Lobrichon, “Un nouveau genre pour un public novice: la paraphrase biblique dans l'espace roman du XIIe siècle,” in *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 87-108.

⁶² Both from *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 153.

⁶³ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152: “Fili enim seculi, filii doloris, non mirantur si quis clamat pre angustia vel dolore, sicut accidit in parturiente, obstupescunt autem et mirantur si quis pre gaudio clamans ex plenitudine cordis non potest silere.”

the quality of human voice. Amalar of Metz, for example, in his famous treatise on the Liturgy instructed that the hymn is replete with thanksgiving and praises of the angels, so it should be sung in “a very high voice (*excelsa voce*)” to befit the dignity of the ceremony.⁶⁴ In a thirteenth-century anonymous *Summa Musice* from Paris, there are three modes (*tonos*) appropriate to the human voice, the low, the high, and the very high (*gravis*, *acutus*, and *peracutus*), and a proper modulation of the three will produce sound pleasing to all.⁶⁵ As a late thirteenth century treatise on the actual singing techniques instructs: “Chest voices are good in low parts (*gravibus*), throat voices are effective in high parts (*acutis*), and head voices are effective in the highest range (*superacutis*). In general, coarse and low voices are chest voices, delicate and very high voices are head voices, and voices that are intermediate between these are throat voices.”⁶⁶ In medieval church services, it is formulaic to say one sings “in a high voice” (*alta voce*) and pray “in a low voice” (*sub missa voce*).⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, Vol. 2, ed. Eric Knibbs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 134, 136: “Ymnus ideo dicitur quia refertus est gratiarum actione et laudibus angelorum; praeparatio, quia parat fratrum mentes ad honestatem decentem conventum sanctorum angelorum, qui solent adesse consecrationi corporis Christi, et ad ipsa reverentiam tantae consecrationis: ad ideo excelsa voce cantatur.”

⁶⁵ *Summa Musice: A Thirteenth-Century Manual for Singers*, ed. Christopher Page (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 153.

“Inter utrumque gravis et acutus et est peracutus
Estque tonos proprios proprie modus iste secutus.
Est et ab inde diatonicus de iure vocatus;
Iste placere potest cunctis recte modulatus.”

⁶⁶ Jerome of Moravia, *Tractatus de musica*, from Timothy McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 174: “Voces pectoris valent in gravibus, gutturis in acutis, capitis autem in superactuis. Nam communiter voces grossae et bassae sunt pectoris, voces subtiles et altissimae sunt capitis, voces vero inter has mediae sunt ipsius gutturis.” The author was from Moravia but received his education from Paris.

⁶⁷ Pascal Collomb, “*Vox clamantis in ecclesia: Contribution des sources liturgiques médiévales occidentales à une histoire du cri*,” in *Haro! Noël! Oyé! Pratiques du cri au Moyen Age*, ed. Didier Lett and Nicolas Offenstadt (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), 117-130.

Another word pregnant with biblical resonances yet hard to translate is Mary's "cry" (*clamor*). She was all joyful with "continuing cry" (*continuo clamore*);⁶⁸ "She cried from day to night (*tota die usque ad notem clamasset*);⁶⁹ and she was "crying out of joy from a fullness of heart" (*pre gaudio clamans ex plenitudine cordis*).⁷⁰ These "cries" are not ecstatic, unintelligible, uncontrollable piercing wails, but, most likely, stylized vocal acts fully expected in a medieval church assembly. The ultimate model is the Old Testament. The substantive *clamor* and its various verbal forms frequently occur in the Latin Vulgate to denote the unique relationship the Israelites had with God, which "was rooted in the crying out of God's people on the one hand and God's hearing of these cries on the other."⁷¹ These ritualized cries can express a complaint against God or his enemies, a supplication for God to readdress the injustices, a groan of suffering and distress, or simply synonymous with any prayer directly addressing God: "In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and he heard me (*Ad Dominum in tribulation mea clamavi et exaudivit me.*" (Psalm 119:1) On the other hand, cries can be that of praises and jubilation.⁷² The Synoptic Gospels give the messianic description of Jesus entering Jerusalem while people followed him and "shouted (*clamabant*) Hosanna" (*qui sequebantur clamabant dicentes osanna benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*, Mark 11:9, also Matthew 21:9; John 12:13). This passage later would

⁶⁸ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

⁶⁹ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 151.

⁷⁰ *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 152.

⁷¹ Richard Nelson Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Carleen Mandolfo, "Language of Lament in the Psalms," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Psalms*, ed. William Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 114-130.

⁷² Collomb, "*Vox clamantis in ecclesia*", 119.

become the Scriptural foundation for the ritualized cries at the Palm Sunday procession in the medieval Latin Church. Amalar of Metz explained this custom in the early Middle Ages: “It is our custom to carry palm branches through our churches and cry (*clamare*) 'Hosanna' in memory of Him the King.”⁷³ Medieval preachers sometimes even recommended “clamorous prayer” (*oratio clamorosa*) over silent prayers as a means against mental distractions.⁷⁴

Therefore, the words Jacques de Vitry used to describe Mary's singing are carefully chosen to meet the expectations a medieval audience would have about a proper liturgical performance. A corollary is that the emotion displayed in Mary's singing that appears to be uncontrollable and spontaneous was, in fact, codified precisely by liturgy. The overall mood was one of “exultation” (*exultatio*) and “jubilation” (*iubilatio*). The word *jubilus* in the Middle Ages had a more concrete meaning than its modern English counterpart: it was usually associated with “the extended singing of the second part of the Alleluia which was a vital component of the Benedictine liturgy.”⁷⁵ This word could denote a joyful spoken or sung prayer, either with or without the implication of mystical ecstasy. Jacques de Vitry described Mary's exuberant performance in an admiring yet matter-of-fact way, reporting no mystical visions or divine visitations as a result. It seems to him, a beholder, Mary's emotional display was well orchestrated and perfectly predictable.

⁷³ Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, Book I. 10, 90: “In memoriam illius rei nos per ecclesias nostras solemus portare ramos et clamare 'Osanna.’”

⁷⁴ Collomb, “*Vox clamantis in ecclesia*”, 120.

⁷⁵ Gertrud Lewis, “The Mystical *Jubilus*: An Example from Gertrud of Helfta (1256-1302),” *Vox Benedictina* 1/4 (1984): 237-247; Peter Dinzelbacher, “*Jubilus*,” in *Wörterbuch der Mystik* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner Verlag, 1989), 282; see also the discussion in Peter Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 77-79.

To sum up, Mary of Oignies's three-day-and-three-night singing performance was a complex ensemble of Latin liturgy, vernacular exegesis, hagiographical narrative, devotional lyrics, and special vocal acts such as ritualized cries of jubilation. This performance defies tidy categorization, as all the binary historiographical concepts seem to collapse in this case: Latin vs. vernacular, popular piety vs. official liturgy, mysticism vs. theology, rehearsed performance vs. improvisation. It seems the liturgical tradition assigned the laity, in particular women, a more active and authoritative role than commonly assumed. Singing in any pre-industrial society was a pervasive and most powerful means of communication, probably much more so for the wide unlettered lay society than the written words. Songs were also a versatile medium as they can be used to pray, praise, and prophesize. In the particular case of Mary of Oignies, singing was a way of expounding the Scriptures and theology without impinging upon the priests' prerogative to "preach."⁷⁶ More suspicious readers may say, instead, Jacques de Vitry's textual representation of Mary is a carefully woven tapestry of liturgical language while it is difficult to say to what extent he sanitized the likely more folkloric original performance. Even if that might well be the case, this text still tells us what was expected from the person of a holy woman by the surrounding society and what were deemed as acceptable and laudable of her behavior.

III. Christina the Astonishing's Mystical Songs and Funerary Piety in Liège

Mary of Oignies was by no means an isolated case of religious singing in the thirteenth-century Liège. A disproportionate number of religious people from this region were

⁷⁶ A point made in Muessig, "Prophecy and Song: Teaching and Preaching by Medieval Women," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, 146-158.

reported in their biographies as either possessing exceptional musical talents or sensitive to musical stimulation. A Cistercian nun Lutgard of Aywières (c. 1182-1246), for instance, repeatedly had a mystical vision when singing a certain verse at the Vespers:

It sometimes seemed to her (for, to be sure, Lutgard used to chant the verse for the sake of devotion) that Christ, with the outward appearance of a lamb, was positioning himself on her breast in such a manner that one foot was on her right shoulder and the other on her left. He would place his mouth on her mouth and by thus sucking would draw out from her breast the sweetness of a wondrous melody. Nor could anyone doubt that a divine miracle was taking place in this chanting, for it was only at that verse alone that her voice was heard to be measurelessly more filled with grace than usual and, in like manner, so too were the hearts of all who heard her marvelously moved to devotion.⁷⁷

Lutgard sang one particular liturgical verse so well that everybody agreed that it must have been induced by a miracle. Her hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, had a much more extravagant writing style than that of Jacques de Vitry, whose hagiographical model about religious women he greatly admired and explicitly followed. While Jacques after finishing his only hagiographical work on Mary of Oignies moved onto more ambitious projects of Church history on a universal scale, the *Historia Occidentalis* and the *Historia Orientalis*, Thomas remained in the Low Countries for the most part of his life and kept working on a series of local saints' lives appealing to more focused interests and tastes.⁷⁸ His works are

⁷⁷ “...cum Versus super Responsorium cantabatur (cujus utique versum ob gratam devotionis Lutgardis sola cantare solebat) videbatur ei interim dum cantaret, quod Christus in specie Agni super pectus suum se tali modo locaret, ut unum pedem super humerum eius dexterum alium super sinistrum, & os suum ori illius imponeret; & sic sugendo de pectore illius mirabilis melodiae suavitatem extraheret. Nec dubitare quisquam poterat in hoc cantu, divinum adesse miraculum, cum in solo Versu illo vox in infinitum solito gratior audiretur. Unde & corda audientium ad devotionem interim mirabiliter movebantur.” *Vita Lutgardi*, AASS, 16 June, 241.

⁷⁸ For Thomas of Cantimpré's life see Barbara Newman's “Introduction” in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, trans. Margot King and Barbara Newman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 3-51.

in general more “bizarre” and anthropologically more interesting in comparison with Jacques de Vitry's discipline and economy.

A lurking theme behind the frequent accounts about women's singing revealed in Thomas of Cantimpré's writings is a connection singing had with death, funerary rites, and the afterlife. Women generally had a more important role taking care of the bodies, mourning the dead, and preserving their memories within the communities across cultures and throughout history. Singing at funerals, or ritual lamentation, as a liminal practice linking the living and the dead, was an activity monopolized by women in many pre-modern societies. In classical Greek tragedies, the most important scenario where a female character could have an aggressive or provocative voice is at the funeral of her kinsmen or beloved ones.⁷⁹ In the classical Latin tradition, among all the neumed texts (thus to be chanted and performed) survived from the early Middle Ages to the end of the twelfth century, a large proportion are speeches made by women; and most of these speeches are laments, such as Dido's soliloquy before her suicide in Virgil's *Aeneid*.⁸⁰ In the Shiite Muslim traditions in Iran and Iraq, women have been instrumental in performing public mourning rituals in commemoration of the Battle of Karbala of 680, where the Prophet's grandson Hosayn and his supporters were massacred by the Umayyad caliph, a historical event pivotal in the Sunni-Shiite schism.⁸¹ The primary models of biblical women in the

⁷⁹ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Helen Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁸⁰ Jan Ziolkowski, “Women’s Lament and the Neuming of the Classics,” in *Music and Medieval Manuscripts: Paleography and Performance*, edited by John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 128-50.

⁸¹ *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

Latin liturgical tradition were the Virgin Mary lamenting the death of her son, Mary Magdalene's weeping at the Cross, and Rachel's *planctus* over the Massacre of the Innocents.⁸² The festival celebration of the Holy Innocents featuring Rachel's mourning song with the promise of rejoice and fulfillment at the End was probably the richest, if not the earliest, tradition of Latin Liturgical drama. As Susan Boynton has put it, the exchange of songs between the grieving Rachel and her consolers is “a form of performative exegesis through the medium of dramatic impersonation.”⁸³ Mary's *planctus* featured prominently in the popular genre of Passion plays in the later Middle Ages. Albeit in literary traditions that do not necessarily reflect her own voice, woman as a figure is most visible and audible in mourning scenes deemed appropriate for her role as the supreme *consolatrix*.

Since singing in medieval Europe was associated with funerary rites, it is no surprise that it was integral to the Christian conceptions of the afterlife itself. The clerical discourse about singing was governed by a dichotomy: it could either be angelic or diabolic, leading to paradisiacal bliss or hellish fire, with little gray area in between. It is a trite narrative that the ecclesiastical attitude towards popular singing in the church consisted of a long list of unequivocal condemnations (with the possible extenuating case of singing saints' lives).⁸⁴ Songs, especially those performed by women over the dead bodies at the

⁸² Ziolkowski, “Women’s Lament and the Neuming of the Classics”; Susan Boynton, “From the Lament of Rachel to the Lament of Mary: A Transformation in the History of Drama and Spirituality,” in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, ed. Nicholas Bell, Claus Clüver, and Nils Holger Petersen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 319-40; Susan Boynton, “Performative Exegesis in the Fleury *Interfectio puerorum*,” *Viator* (1998): 39-64; Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. Joseph Berrigan (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988); Rachel Fulton, “Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs,” *Viator* 27 (1996): 85-116.

⁸³ Boynton, “Performative Exegesis,” 44.

⁸⁴ John Haines compiled a list of clerical condemnation of singing from the third to the thirteenth century in Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Language*, “Appendix,” 162-171; see also: Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and ideas in France 1100-1300* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1989).

family grave or the martyr's shrine, were seen as scurrilous, raucous, and diabolic by the Church Fathers in the Late Antiquity. Augustine, for example, chastised the “pestilence and the wantonness” of songs and dances performed all night long at the burial place of Saint Cyprian in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.⁸⁵ A functionalist explanation has been offered that such strong patristic antipathy to funerary celebration traditionally hosted by private families was an effort to centralize cultic practices under the control of the Christian bishops by replacing it with communal worship in church assemblies.⁸⁶ Yet a steadfast, continuing literature condemning popular singing and dancing in the church and the churchyard well into the Middle Ages testifies both the strenuous struggle of the Church authorities and, ironically, the very entrenchedness of such practices among the populace. Incidences of celebratory feasting and singing continued to be reported, for instance in the twelfth century, by Lambert le Bègue (d. 1177), a parish priest from Liège, about his congregation instead of observing Sundays and feast days directing attention to “mimes, dancing girls, and actors...singing obscene songs and making lewd gestures even outside the church, and around the tombs of their ancestors and kindred.”⁸⁷ Commemorative singing and dancing at the church or family graveyards were far from being exterminated simply by church proclamations in the twelfth century and presumably beyond.

⁸⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon on the Feast of Saint Cyprian*, from Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Language*, 162.

⁸⁶ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1-49.

⁸⁷ “L'*Antigraphum Petri* et les Lettres concernant Lambert le Bègue, conservées dans le manuscrit de Glasgow,” ed. Arnold Fayen, *Compte rendu des séances de la Commission royale d'histoire* 68 (1899): 349-350: “Vidi infinitam multitudinem utriusque sexus Dominicam diem non restorationi negligentarium, sed multiplicationi gravius peccando deputare; sollempnibus etenim diebus a labore manuum tantum abstinentes, ad mimos, saltatrices, histriones intendebant, obsceni canticis et gestibus impudicis pro foribus ecclesiarum et super tumulos parentum at affinium suorum...non ludebant sed insaniebant.”

However, the aggregate of Christian tradition is never without contradictions and always susceptible to a reversal in its symbolic order: singing and dancing can also signify the highest form of devotion. The obvious biblical model associating music with devotion is King David the Psalmist. David, the poet-singer, is also known for having sung a dirge demonstrating his deep sorrow over Saul and Jonathan's death (2 Samuel, 1:17-27). In a famous illustration from the twelfth-century Psalter from the Abbey of Saint Remigius of Reims, King David was playing harp with his court musicians surrounding him in a festival manner, while below David was beating a drum with his followers in a supposedly hysterical manner--a good example showing that music could assume dual meaning, capable of denoting both good and evil.⁸⁸ Another positive image of fervent singing immensely popular in the later Middle Ages was that of the choir of angels. In Gothic and Northern Renaissance art, angels were often depicted as singing the *Sanctus* and holding musical instruments accompanying the souls of the dead to the journey thereafter.⁸⁹ Especially in the case of the six-winged seraphim who cried out "Holy, holy, holy" in the Scriptures (Isaiah 6:2-7), medieval exegetes identified the Hebrew word *seraph* as "burning" and associated it with the fiery love toward God, but also, according to Hugh of Saint Victor, the purgatorial fire that the human beings would need to endure.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 65-66.

⁸⁹ David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31, 178; Paul Binski, "The Angel Choir at Lincoln and the Poetics of the Gothic Smile," *Art History* (1997): 350-374, on musical angels see 361-362.

⁹⁰ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 59.

In terms of local reality, Michel Lauwers demonstrates that in the thirteenth century there was a major shift of control over the death rituals and the commemoration of the dead from the local monasteries to the emerging mendicant orders and the beguine communities in Liège.⁹¹ Not only the major work of charity the religious women daily conducted was to take care of the sick and the dying and prepare for the proper burial, women's intercessory prayers were considered especially potent in alleviating pains and eliminating sentences the dead had to suffer in purgatory. The saints' lives from Liège at this time are replete with stories about the tormenting dead coming back to his world and requested intercessions from the religious women. In one local legend, even Pope Innocent III himself, right after his death in the year 1216, with purgatorial fire all over him, appeared to Lutgard, a Liégeois nun, asking for intercessory prayers to alleviate his pains.⁹² The ghost of Emperor Otto IV (d. 1218) also appeared to a certain nun, bargaining punctiliously for prayers: she should recite the psalter for 10,000 times, and for each verse to add the angelic salutation, i.e. the

⁹¹ Michel Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts: morts, rites et société au Moyen Âge (Diocèse de Liège, XI-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997). Scholarship on prayer for the Dead in the early medieval history is extensive, see for example: Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), translated by Arthur Goldhammer as *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984); Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁹² Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis*, AASS, 16 June, Vol. 3, 245: “Sub isto fere tempore Dominus Innocentius Papa tertius, post celebratum Lateranense Concilium, ab hac vita: nec intercessit mora post obitum, cum ipse Papa piæ Lutgardis visibiliter apparuit. Illa autem ut vidit apparentem, maxima flamma circumdatum; [Innocentio Papæ ex purgatorio sibi apparenti] quis sic esset, interrogat: Et ille: Ego sum, inquit, Innocentius Papa. Et illa cum gemitu; Quid est, inquit; te nostrum omnium Patrem tanto supplicio cruciari? Cui ille: Tres, inquit, causæ sunt, quare sic crucior: per has autem eram dignissimus æterno supplicio tradi: sed per intercessionem piissimæ Virginis Mariæ, cui monasterium ædificavi, in fine pœnitui, & æternam mortem evasi. Cruciabor tamen atrocissimis pœnis usque in diem extremi iudicii. Hoc ipsum autem, quod ad te petiturus suffragia venire potui, mihi utique a suo Filio, misericordiæ Mater obtinuit. Hæc cum dixisset, repente disparuit. Lutgardis autem obitum & necessitatem defuncti Sororibus, ut ei succurrerent, indicavit. Ipsamet autem animo compassa tanto piaculo, [succurrit, & succurri petit,] mirabili se pro illo, qui apparuit, afflixit supplicio. Nota autem Lector, quod ex revelatione piæ Lutgardis ipsas tres causas accepimus; sed eas ob tanti Pontificis reverentiam subticemus.”

Ave Maria, as well as the Lord's Prayer, i.e. the *Pater noster*.⁹³ The most frequent guests received by the holy women on a daily basis in Liège were either dead people returning from purgatory seeking intercessory prayers, or dead people from heaven recounting the splendid vision and delivering an inspirational speech about the afterlife. It seems that the religious women's major *raison d'être* was to facilitate the communion between the living and the dead.

The most important saint the beguines identified themselves with was Mary Magdalene, who was as a quintessential penitent and reformed sinner of course, but also a model of funerary piety: she featured prominently in almost every Passion or Deposition scene in medieval art, weeping copiously at the cross by the side of Virgin Mary; she visited the Sepulcher and brought ointment to embalm the body of Christ according to the Gospel and the patristic traditions. She was also identified as one of the first witnesses of Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Her image in the Middle Ages was further inflated with that of Mary of Bethany whose brother, Lazarus, was raised from the dead by Jesus in the Gospel of John.⁹⁴ Mary of Oignies, the only *mulier religiosa* from the Low Countries who received a local liturgical feast and was commemorated in the Cistercian monastery of Villers, had

⁹³ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, II. 53, 19: "Otthonis Imperatoris defunctis apparitio, & per orationes a poenis purgatorij liberatio...Otthone Imperatore mortuo, quaedam cognata eius in monasterio virginum praeerat, quae zelo castimone circa subditas mire feruebat. Obseruans ergo die quadam fenestram locutorij, summo mane quemdam leniter pulsantem audiuit, qua aperta, ecce Imperator apparens materterae dixit: Defunctus ego sum, & in purgatorio poenis excrucior. Dirigas ergo nuncios ad diuersa & deuota coenobia, & deciesmille psalteria pro me legi facias: ita vt ad singulos psalmos accipiatur decem ictuum disciplina, & ad vnumquemque versum addatur salutatio angelica, Aue Maria, & oratio Dominica, Pater noster..."

⁹⁴ Lauwers, *La mémoire des ancêtres, le souci des morts*, 437. For Mary Magdalene's image throughout the early centuries see: Katherine Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. 18-46; Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, eds. *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

her office texts and music heavily borrowed from that of her namesake, Mary Magdalene.⁹⁵ The Mass text from Mary of Oignies's liturgical office petitioned for the saint's intercession on behalf of “all the faithful living and dead”, a phrase otherwise found in the Office for the Dead: “Most benevolent (*benignissime*, a pun on the word “beguine”) God, we ask you, sanctify this Host in view of the grace of the blessed Mary, your beguine (*benignae tuae*), and by the most mighty power of your love grant it to all the faithful living and dead (*cunctis fidelibus vivis et defunctis*) for the animation of their souls.”⁹⁶ “God, may the sacraments of your goodness, through the intercession of your blessed beguine Mary, purify us from all that is old, and bestow upon all the faithful living and dead (*cunctis fidelibus vivis et defunctis*) the salutary effect of your perpetual redemption.”⁹⁷ Even though Jacques de Vitry clearly framed his narrative about Mary of Oignies's singing within the context of church liturgy carrying broad theological messages, let us not forget it was first and foremost a deathbed song with fervent anticipation of the afterlife, a memorial service she performed for herself.

Thomas of Cantimpré made a more explicit connection between women's mystical singing and death in his most famous hagiographical work about the bizarre woman known

⁹⁵ Ike de Loos, “Saints in Brabant: A Survey of Local Proper Chants,” *Revue belge de Musicologie* (2001): 9-39; the text was edited in Daniel Misonne, “Office liturgique neumé de la Bienheureuse Marie d'Oignies à l'abbaye de Villers au XIIIe siècle,” *Revue bénédictine* (2001): 267-286; an English translation can be found in Hugh Feiss, “The Liturgical Office of Mary of Oignies by Goswin of Bussut,” in *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 175-196. The English translation used here is of my own.

⁹⁶ Misonne, “Office liturgique neumé,” 278: “Hostiam hanc, benignissime Deus, ob gratiam beatae Mariae benignae tuae, quaesumus, sanctifica atque fortissima caritatis tuae virtute cunctis fidelibus vivis et defunctis in vegetationem transfer animarum.”

⁹⁷ Misonne, “Office liturgique neumé,” 278-279: “Sacramenta bonitatis tuae Deus, intercedente beata Maria benigna tua, ab omni nos vetustate purificent, et cunctis fidelibus vivis et defunctis perpetuae redemptionis tuae salutarem praestent effectum.”

as Christina the Astonishing (d. 1224) from the town of Sint Truiden (or St. Trond). Christina was already dead at the very beginning of this highly unusual *Vita*. During the Requiem Mass of her funeral, Christina's body stirred in the coffin and she returned to life. She then told the horrified crowd that she had toured in the Purgatory, the Paradise, and the Hell, and accepted an offer from God out of great compassion: she would return to the world as a living dead, and by her exemplary suffering she shall convert the living from their sins and would eventually return to God's embrace after the task is done.⁹⁸ Christina literally died three times and was resurrected twice in this not very long biography.⁹⁹ Her major work of charity in the world was to take care of the dying, both Christians and Jews: “She assisted the dying most willingly and gladly and exhorted them to a confession of their sins, to the fruit of penance, to a hope of everlasting joy, and to a fear of the destroying fire.”¹⁰⁰

In order to fulfill her promise to live through the purgatorial pains for the sake of the salvation of others, Christina intentionally inflicted on her own body inexplicably grotesque sufferings, such as immersing herself under the river Meuse for six days or creeping into hot ovens when bread was baking.¹⁰¹ However, it would be too facile an

⁹⁸ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, II-III. Relevant studies on this work see: Robert Sweetman, “Thomas of Cantimpré, *mulieres religiosae*, and Purgatorial Piety: Hagiographical ‘Vitae’ and the Beguine ‘Voice,’” in *A Distinct Voice: Medieval Studies in Honor of Leonard E. Boyle, O.P.*, edited by Jacqueline Brown and William Stoneman (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 606-626; *ibid.*, “Christine of Saint-Trond’s Preaching Apostolate: Thomas of Cantimpré’s Hagiographical Method Revisited,” *Vox Benedictina* (1992): 67-97.

⁹⁹ Nancy Caciola, *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 66-68.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, IXI, 27: “Libentissime ac benignissime morientibus assistebat, exhortans ad peccatorum confessionem & poenitentiae fructum, ad spem perennis gaudii, & horrorem exitialis incendii. Nec hoc solum in Christianos morientes, verum etiam in Judaeos, quorum congregatio in urbe maxima erat, mirabili compassione sollicita faciebat.”

¹⁰¹ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, VI. 11, VII. 12.

analysis to see the woman simply as “crazy” or the hagiographer “fanciful.” Most of these torments centered around either water or fire.¹⁰² They could be seen as deliberate mimesis of the purgatorial torments, to make the excruciating pain not only imaginable but almost palpable by invoking the audience's everyday experience: the purgatorial fire is as cruelly insufferable as touching the inside of a hot oven and worse. In popular beliefs, moreover, running water was thought to have some cleansing and curative effect against demonic possession; large rivers, such as the Rhine or the Meuse, might have “formed some sort of boundary that the demon could not cross,”¹⁰³ thus crossing the river or immersing in it often constituted a form of ritual exorcism. When Christina, as reported by Thomas of Cantimpré, ran so fast away from two priests by jumping into the deep streams and re-emerging unscathed on the other side of the river, the awed priests identified her as a “phantasm” rather than a mere human body.¹⁰⁴

A more intriguing allusion to the beliefs of the resurrection and the afterlife is that Christina, when contemplating and praying, would roll up her body in the shape of a ball. Again, I would like to emphasize that all the seemingly bizarre and outlandish descriptions of Christina’s bodily manifestations are, in fact, by no means random, entertaining, or fanciful tales, but are intentionally deployed to present a set of coherent beliefs about the afterlife. The hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, was serious and careful in his execution

¹⁰² Christina also jumped into cauldrons of boiling water and immersed herself in the cauldron, see Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, VI. 11; She immersed herself in a baptismal font, in *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, XV. 21.

¹⁰³ Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 50-51.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, V. 10: “...ante se in vero corpore feminam quasi phantastico profundos aquae gurgites introire & per aliam fluminis ripam ab aquis immunem exire.”

and arrangement of the material. In this particular detail, Christina is said to gather together all her limbs into a globe “as if they were hot wax, and all that could be perceived of her was a round (*sphaericum*) body.” After her spiritual inebriation, her limbs would then extend back to their original positions.¹⁰⁵ This rather bizarre account may allude to a contemporary belief about the disembodied soul after death: Caesarius of Heisterbach tells a story about the death and resurrection of a certain Cistercian abbot, in which the “shape and power” of the soul (*forma et virtute animae*) of the dead is said “like a glassy spherical vessel (*vas vitreum et sphaericum*), that it had eyes both before and behind, had knowledge of all sorts and a universal range of vision.”¹⁰⁶ Apparently, when Christina rolled up herself in the perfect round shape, her body temporarily assumed the qualities of a spiritual being like the celestial spheres or the disembodied soul.

Besides this general theme of vicarious bodily torment and transformation, the other prominent trope in Christina's *Vita* is her mystical chanting. Suffering and singing may appear uncorrelated, capricious choices made by a whimsical hagiographer. The crucial nexus, however, is Christina's overall identity as a returning dead, someone between-the-worlds, a half-human-half-spirit who “guided the souls of the deceased to purgatory or through purgatory to heaven without any harm to herself.”¹⁰⁷ Just like crossing

¹⁰⁵ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, XI. 16: “Iterum cum oraret, & contemplationis in ea gratia divina descenderet, velut calefacta cera, omnia membra ejus in unum globum concludebantur, nec poterat in eis nisi tantum corpus sphaericum deprehendi. Cumque spiritali ebrietate digesta actualis sensus propria membrorum loca reciperent, instar ericei conglobatum corpus redibat ad formam, & extendebantur membra, quae sub informi prius materia claudebantur.”

¹⁰⁶ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, I. 32: “...animam suam fuisse tanquam vas vitreum et sphaericum, oculum retro et ante, plurimum habuisse scientiae, vidisse universa.” On the thirteenth-century Dominican ideas about the resurrected body, see: Zachary Matus, “Resurrected Bodies and Roger Bacon’s Elixir,” *Ambix* 60:4 (2013): 323-340.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, I.1: “...ut multotiens rapta in spiritu animas defunctorum usque in purgatorium vel [per] purgatorium sine aliqua sui laesione usque ad superna regna conduceret.”

river is crossing a spiritual boundary, mystical singing is a threshold practice as it fundamentally separates the world of the dead from the world of those who are about to die but also somehow bridges the two. Thomas of Cantimpré gave the hauntingly beautiful image of Christina, unburdened by her flesh, so lightweight that she could often stand on treetops or other lofty points singing the psalms just like a sparrow.¹⁰⁸ This peculiar image of her bears uncanny resemblance to that of choir angels in a liturgical setting, perhaps in a Gothic church, such as the famous angel choir in Lincoln Cathedral constructed in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Thomas's bizarre account that right after her first resurrection Christina fled, like a bird, to rest on the rafters (*trabes*) of the church, might have been another reference to angels which usually were sculpted high above near the roof in Gothic architecture.¹⁰⁹

Christina was more of a spiritual being, impassible to water or fire, like an angel; and like an angel, she sang. Thomas describes her ineffably enchanting voice. When Christina was sitting in the choir with the nuns of the convent of St. Catherine:

Sometimes while she was sitting with them, she would speak of Christ and suddenly and unexpectedly she would be ravished in the spirit and her body would roll and whirl around like a hoop...When she had whirled around for a long time in this manner, it seemed as if she became weakened by the violence of the rolling and all her limbs grew quiet. Then a wondrous harmony sounded between her throat and her breasts which no mortal man could understand, nor could it be imitated by any artificial instrument. Her song had not only the pliancy and tones of music but also the words...sounded altogether incomprehensibly. The voice or spiritual breath, however, did not come out of her mouth or nose, but a harmony of the angelic voice resounded only from between the breast and the throat.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, X. 15-XI. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, II. 5: “Cumque pro depositione ejus Missarum oblatio fieret, subito commotum corpus exsurrexit in feretro, statimque instar avis evecta templi trabes ascendit.”

¹¹⁰ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, XXV: “Proinde cum esset familiaris valde monialibus S. Katerinae extra oppidum S. Trudonis: & cum ipsis aliquando [sedendo] loqueretur de Christo, subito & inopinate rapiebatur a spiritu, corpusque ejus velut trochus ludentium puerorum in vertiginem

After this, she began to sing the *Te deum laudamus* and invited the entire convent to join her song. The hagiographer ensured us that Christina's song was beautiful and harmonious even if the content was incomprehensible to him. But in other incidences, her songs were more identifiable: when she attended the vigils of Matins every night, she would utter “song so sweet that it seems to be the song of angels and not of human origin. The song was so amazing to hear that it was far superior to all the musical instruments and voices of all the mortals. Nevertheless, this song was less sweet and much unequal to the sweet song of harmony which sounded incomparably from between her throat and breast and which surpassed human understanding. This song, I say, was in Latin and wondrously adorned with harmonious oratorical device.”¹¹¹

The incomprehensible beauty of Christina's songs fits perfectly with her eerie status as a *revenant* from the dead and the general folkloric flavor of the story. Our hagiographer ensured us Christina's singing was “angelic” in origin, literally from the other world, impossible for the mortals to understand. Singing as a liminal practice separating the living from the dead was a widely held belief from this region around this time. In his massive tome of *exempla* stories, *Bonum universale de apibus*, Thomas of Cantimpré told a tale

rotabatur, ita quod ex nimia vehementia vertiginis nulla in corpore ejus membrorum forma discerni posset. Cumque diutius sic rotata fuisset, acsi vehementia deficeret, membris omnibus quiescebat; sonabatque proinde inter guttur & pectus ejus, quaedam harmonia mirabilis, quam nemo mortalium vel intelligeret posset, vel aliquibus artificiis imitari. Solam flexibilitatem musicae & tonos ille ejus cantus habebat: verba vero melodiae, ut ita dicam, si tamen verba dici possunt, incomprehensibiliter concrepabant. Nulla interim de ore ejus vel naso vox vel anhelitus spiritalis exibat, sed inter solum pectus & guttur harmonia vocis angelicae resonabat.”

¹¹¹ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, XXIX: “...Canticum tantae dulcedinis emittebat, ut potius vederetur cantus angelicus quam humanus. Cantus ille tam mirabilis erat auditu, ut omnium musicorum instrumenta, omnium mortalium voces excelleret; minor tamen & longe impar dulcedine illius harmoniae júbilo, qui dum mente excederet, inter guttur & pectus ejus [incomparabilis] resonabat. Cantus, inquam, iste Latinus erat, mirisque consonantium clausulis exornatus.”

about the miraculous chanting of the angles during the midnight before the sudden death (*morte subita*) of a certain blessed Cistercian monk. The singing voice was at first mistaken to be from the choir nuns, perhaps indicating that the angelic voice was not very distinguishable from women's voice in medieval imagination.¹¹² From the neighboring region of Cologne, Caesarius of Heisterbach also recounted several stories about the choir of angels singing celestial songs at the deathbed of pious individuals.¹¹³ A Cistercian sister Christina of Volmuntseine of Bergen, longing for death, saw a most beautiful being at the altar claiming “I am the Archangel, whose office is to present souls to God.” The Archangel, St. Michael, also foretold the precise date of the nun's death in the coming Easter.¹¹⁴ Along a more learned vein of speculative music theory, Jacques de Liège in his vast encyclopedia *Speculum musicae* analogized the union of the human body and soul with the harmony of musical notes, quoting Boethius: “For what is it that mingles that incorporeal life of reason with the body, if not some harmony and, as it were, tuning, making low and high notes like a single consonance?”¹¹⁵ The other side of this belief was that certain disharmony in voice was ominous, adumbrating the dislocation of the human soul from the body. Thomas of Cantimpré recorded an *exempla* story: Count of Looz and his court enjoyed the incredibly sweet singing of a certain beautiful young girl; however, a physician in the Count's

¹¹² Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, ed. G. Colvener (Douai, 1627), II. 40. 8: “De cantu Angelorum in obitu B. Godefridi, capellani in Camera iuxta Bruxellam...ut ipso morte subita ante noctem mediam intercepto, melodia & cantus mirabilis angelorum, quasi de loco prope ecclesiam audiretur...Non enim suspicari poterat aliunde esse cantum, nisi a monialibus intra chorum.”

¹¹³ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, 11.6 and 11.7.

¹¹⁴ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, 8. 45

¹¹⁵ Jacques de Liège, *Speculum musicae*, excerpt from *Music, Mysticism and Magic: A Sourcebook*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 104.

entourage suddenly made a grim, Cassandran remark that the girl would soon die. When his prescience later proved true, Thomas conjectured that the physician had been able to tell the imminent death by discerning a certain defect in her singing voice (*vocis cantantis vix indagabili vitio*).¹¹⁶ A common theme in these tales seems to be that the singing voice could prefigure the coming End, although usually a sudden and unexpected one.

It can be argued that the guiding principle of the selection of attributes of Christina's spirituality is her role as the purgatorial saint in the funerary ritual of the local society: the outlandish torments she inflicted upon her body were part of an extensive, vivid dramatization of the medieval beliefs about the afterlife; and her vocal talent is consistent with her function of guiding the human souls through the rite de passage to the other world. Our Dominican hagiographer was unstinting in his imagination and his acknowledgment of the woman's role as an angelic intermediary effortlessly gliding between here and thereafter. In fact, Christina's charismatic presence was so potent in the society that she might have constantly usurped priestly prerogative to hear the last confessions of the dying: Count Louis of Looz called Christina to his deathbed, lay full prostrate before her feet, and recited to her all his past sins. Christina, alone, heard his last confession and advised him how to dispose his worldly possessions. Thomas was obliged to add an awkward explanation that as a lay woman she was not allowed to grant absolution, but only to pray for the count's atonement.¹¹⁷ This passage, nevertheless, tells us that Christina was at the

¹¹⁶ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universalem de apibus*, II. 43, 5: "Et nota lector, quod physicum non credo alias, nisi vocis cantantis vix indagabili vitio, mortem in puella subitam praecognoscere potuisse."

¹¹⁷ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita de S. Christina Mirabili*, XXXIII. 44: "Comes virtute, qua potuit, erexit se, & supplex ante pedes Christinae toto corpore factus, ei omnia peccata sua ab anno aetatis suae undecimo usque ad diem illam cum maximis lacrymis recitavit: & hoc non pro indulgentia, quam dare non potuit, sed ut magis ad orandum pro eo, hoc piaculo moveretur."

center of local funerary piety while sometimes people's fear and hope were directed at her rather than the priests.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter chose to focus on the spiritual biographies of two important lay religious women in the early thirteenth-century diocese of Liège: Mary of Oignies, the acclaimed “proto-beguine”, and Christina the Astonishing, considered an “extreme” representative of the beguine spirituality. It showed how ritual singing, previously underappreciated by most scholarship, was in fact crucial to the hagiographical representation of their religious persona, and the musical-liturgical culture of the region rendered intelligibility to their performance. The “extraordinariness” of their religiosity depended on its ordinariness, in that their behavior should be readily recognizable therefore meaningful to the surrounding society, which at this time might not be far from a “song culture”. The hagiographers, when lacing their texts with liturgical vocabulary, placed these saints firmly in the mainstream culture of medieval Christian worship, if not in the high-brow elitist discourse of the theologians.

These women's fondness of songs also suggests what might be a prevalent characteristic of lay piety in medieval society, especially if we notice the parallel with Francis of Assisi's life also from the early thirteenth century. A merchant's son who had never gone to school and knew little Latin, the saint started his religious movement in the form of a lay confraternity, to be recognized by the Church only later in his lifetime. Francis found the most natural expressions of his religious sensibility through joyful songs in French: “Intoxicated by love and compassion for Christ, blessed Francis sometimes did

this: a sweet melody of the spirit bubbling up inside him would frequently become on the outside a French tune: the thread of a divine whisper which his ears heard secretly would break out in a French song.”¹¹⁸ He famously composed popular vernacular songs such as the *Canticle of Brother Sun* or *Canticle of the Creatures*. Among the early generation of Franciscans, singing was intimately associated with popular preaching; it is argued that the bond was severed over the next decades because the friars did not want to be mistaken for street entertainers: a deliberate effort only to prove how similar these two groups must have appeared to contemporary onlookers.¹¹⁹ One of the most efficacious means of mass communication in a pre-modern society, singing allowed considerable freedom for the laity to express their religiosity and assert an authoritative role in controlling the cultic practices of the wider society.

¹¹⁸ Peter Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 29. On Francis' vernacular singing, see also: André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael Cusato (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), 312-323.

¹¹⁹ Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 315.

Chapter 2 Mystical Visions as Liturgical Performances in Liège

Scholarship has tended to posit a somewhat stark dichotomy between the textual culture of medieval monasticism and the supposed performative culture of the lay society. For example, Barbara Newman unequivocally states that "nuns and their monastic brethren belonged to a Latin textual community grounded in Scripture, exegesis, and liturgy. This culture was textual to the core, in contrast to the fundamentally oral and performative culture of the aristocracy. Even in the later Middle Ages, when the vernacular had largely displaced Latin as the medium of devotional writing for women, writings as such still held a central importance for vowed religious that it had yet to attain for the laity."¹ The last chapter has, indeed, showed how the reform-minded hagiographers constructed lay women's sanctity surrounding exuberant musical and ritual performances that were overtly somatic in terms; however, it would be misleading to assume a more intellectually sober monastic culture based on "pure" textuality, which could not possibly exist at all to start with but especially unhelpful here given the profoundly liturgical character of the monastic lifestyle.² The cloistered may have enjoyed a higher level of Latin or vernacular literacy; yet one can argue that literacy itself was performative on so many levels within the

¹ Barbara Newman, "The Visionary Texts and Visual Worlds of Religious Women," in *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Susan Marti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 151.

² For a classic survey on the monastic culture and specifically the role of liturgy in it, see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, translated by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), esp. 236-254. A more recent overview on the importance of liturgy in monastic history is Margot Fassler, "The Liturgical Framework of Time and the Representation of History," in Robert Maxwell ed., *Representing History, 900-1300: Art, Music, History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 149-171. An especially helpful case study is Susan Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy & History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa, 1000-1125* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006). See also: Amy Hollywood, "Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism," in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman eds., *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59-79.

Cloister³: the Scriptural and liturgical texts were primarily received through oral recitation, melodious chanting, and scribal transcription; the words were believed to possess so great potency that they could certainly "do things"--to repeat J. L. Austin's well-known phrase⁴--quite effectively, such as chasing away demons or bringing about mystical visions. More importantly, the monastic reading practice was fundamentally corporeal and performative. Medieval authors quite routinely described textual understanding using analogies of physicality, such as food consumption or seal making impressions on soft wax. Mary Carruthers has described the monastic education as a "craft" that requires apprenticeship and mastery, comparable more to masonry or carpentry than anything that can be verbally and dogmatically conveyed.⁵ Among the myriad layers of performances in monastic life, this chapter will focus on one that was especially prominent in the southern Low Countries and the neighboring Rhine area in the central Middle Ages: the crafting of visionary experiences in the liturgical context.

The monasteries in the lands between the Meuse and the Rhine glittered with a milky way of visions in the later twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. A predominant portion of these visions were associated with the liturgical culture of medieval monasticism: a fully

³ Throughout the Middle Ages, texts "are not essential but ancillary" and rely on oral transmission of various kinds. See Carol Symes' review of Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) on *The American Historical Review* (2010): 1440.

⁴ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); see also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The applications of monastic meditative techniques in the vernacular context, see: Kathryn Duys, "Performing Vernacular Song in Monastic Culture: The *lectio divina* in Gautier de Coinci's *Miracles de Nostre Dame*," in Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta Krueger and E. Jane Burns eds., *Cultural Performances in Medieval France in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 123-133.

conscious subject saw with his or her carnal eyes the divine characters in their physical forms in an environment of communal worship accompanied by choral recitation of liturgical verses. To explain such monastic visions with the hindsight of the later highly theologized and intellectualized canons of "mysticism" such as that of Meister Eckhart would be misleading. There was no apparent effort to present a theory about different stages of "mystic ascent". Rather, monastic vision is better understood as a practice, conditioned by a set of concrete visual, musical, and gestural conventions circumscribed by a particular liturgical culture of the time and the place. A monk keenly anticipated the occurrence of visionary experience through the cultivation of a complex set of techniques and by strenuous practice. It was something that could be prepared and sought after. Visionary experience was the ultimate fruit of living a certain way of life rather than acquiring a formally conceptualized knowledge. A scrupulous disciple of the monastic routine was to make an assiduous effort to attune his mind to a particular mode, sharpen an acute sensibility, and choreograph the essential mental faculties of emotion, imagination, and cogitation to facilitate desired visionary experiences. Granted that grace was still the decisive factor, its dispensation, nevertheless, seemed to be surprisingly generous towards and especially favor those who had observed the spiritual discipline with stamina for a prolonged period of time. Such visions did not occur out of blue or provoke a radical conversion, but were "part of an integrated spirituality."⁶

Peter Dinzelbacher in his overview of medieval visionary literature pinpoints the year 1200 as a watershed, before which the dominant genre of early medieval visions had

⁶ This phrase is from Anne Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth-Century Visionary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 79.

been a unique, once-in-a-lifetime tour in Heaven and Hell that lasted for a sustained period of time; the typical later medieval vision, however, was a repeatable, ephemeral ecstasy that can be expected and prepared for; there was no bodily transportation to the Other World, but the seer was visited by celestial figures in This World.⁷ The prominent twelfth-century visionaries, interestingly, almost all originated from the Mosan area and the neighboring Rhineland: the Benedictine monk Rupert of Deutz from Liège, two Benedictine nuns Hildegard of Bingen, so-called "Sibyl of the Rhine," and Elisabeth of Schönau from the Diocese of Trier. The geographical proximity makes these three authors a regional group. While Joachim of Fiore, a Calabrian, was a major regional exception, his apocalyptic philosophy of history did not represent Dinzelbacher's second ideal type of visionary literature but was *sui generis*.⁸ The new visionary genre, not necessarily invented by the northern European monastic authors, were developed with considerable sophistication by them and proliferated in religious literature after 1200.

The question whether the accounts of these visions are literary constructions or transcriptions of actual experiences is of no particular relevance here.⁹ The shifting focuses of the textual representation of favored visions already have a lot to say about the changing

⁷ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981).

⁸ A discussion of the visionary experiences of Rupert of Deutz, Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau as a group, see: Barbara Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," *Church History* (1985): 163-175. For a classic survey of the twelfth-century visionaries, see: Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, Vol. II of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 324-341; Anne Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth-Century Visionary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), esp. 68-100.

⁹ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 26-56. Hollywood argues that before the fourteenth century the association between women and embodiment was a hagiographical construction made by men; and that hagiographical texts necessarily focused on the exterior in contrast to mystical texts.

religious imaginative landscape of a particular period. Tropes cannot be dismissed as empty formulas as they indicate the value of the society that produce them. If in the earlier centuries, visions, perceived as a profound and unique experience about the afterlife, had implied a distinctly proselytizing and apologetic fierceness; the later medieval visions, more miscellaneous in content and more tender and introspective in tone, catered for the taste and temperament of a more settled monastic life centering on disciplinary exactitude and meditative niceties in the ongoing everyday life. Also, the high medieval world was one where the mundane life won unprecedented valorization, the sacred exuding from the profane, and the Heaven drawn infinitesimally close to the Earth---Beryl Smalley in her trenchant witticism says in the thirteenth century "what had been seen as secret and holy ceased to be secret and by familiarity became less holy. The tabernacle served as the kitchen cupboard."¹⁰ The changing taste in the variety of visions implicated changes in the monastic lifestyle and religious sentiments of the Christian society at large.

In recounting the *practiced* rather than the *theorized* medieval visions, visual art forms such as manuscript illumination and devotional sculpture have received most scholarly attention.¹¹ Jeffrey Hamburger forcefully rejects the notion of art-inspired religious experience as a diluted, deviant, or vulgarized form for the unsophisticated laity

¹⁰ Beryl Smalley, "Use of the 'Spiritual' Senses of Scripture in Persuasion and Argument by Scholars in the Middle Ages," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 52 (1985): 46. A recent interesting study on the constant blurring of the sacred and the profane in later medieval culture by a prominent literary scholar is Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

¹¹ See for example: Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011). For a historiographical review on later medieval female spirituality in the German-speaking lands, see June Mechem, "Breaking Old Habits: Recent Research on Women, Spirituality, and the Arts in the Middle Ages," *History Compass* (2006): 448-480.

in contrast to the monastic ideal of intellectual abstraction.¹² Caroline Bynum has emphasized the materiality of later medieval visions where the physical objects are described in such fine detail that they render rich experiences of the tactile and the textured.¹³ Traditional history of medieval art and religion might have read too literally the twelfth-century Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux's satirical polemic against what he saw as Cluniac excessiveness that only "a carnal people" would use material ornamentation to arouse devotion because they were "incapable of spiritual things."¹⁴ It is now established that art-aided religious experiences were thoroughly mainstream in later medieval devotional practices, either monastic or lay.

But medieval religious experience as a multi-sensory aesthetics, not exclusively visual, has posed much greater difficulty for historians to reconstruct. Some intriguing work has been done on the role of Byzantine liturgy and vocal art in shaping worshippers' experiences. Bissera Pentcheva has shown that, for example, the Byzantine understanding of liturgical chanting in the Hagia Sophia as animating and enlivening, thus engendering the sacred. What was emphasized in the worshipping experience was the breathing, exhaling and inhaling in chant, amplified and rippled through the body of the faithful, the material fabric of the church interior decorations, as well as the chiaroscuro of the flickering candle lights; the whole effects created the sense of movement and thus liveliness in the icons. In this aesthetic ensemble, human breath in singing was the most essential in unifying all the sensory experiences together, echoing the paradigmatic Genesis story of

¹² Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*.

¹³ Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 101-104.

¹⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Cistercians and Cluniacs: St Bernard's Apologia to Abbot William*, trans. Michael Casey (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 64.

God breathing life into Adam (Genesis 2:7).¹⁵ Because of their extended reflections upon the icons as images of the divine prototypes with an established place in the liturgy, the Byzantines had a much more refined sense of the liturgy being "the synthesis of the arts", quoting the Russian born philosopher Pavel Florensky.¹⁶ He insists that the church ritual as an artistic whole could not lose one single drop of its most auxiliary yet crucial art: "the art of fire, the art of smell, the art of smoke, the art of dress...the distinctive choreography that emerges in the measured movement of the priests as they come in and out, in the converging and diverging of their countenances, in their circling around the throne and the church, and in the church processions."¹⁷

The work done by the Byzantinists has reminded us this profoundly performative reality in Christian liturgy. In Western monasticism, the daily celebration of the Divine Office had occupied the major part of daily routine, especially in female houses, and in practice was of greater importance than the Mass, which was celebrated only once a week or even less frequently.¹⁸ Richard Southern broadly asserts that the Psalter was the "main

¹⁵ Bissera Pentcheva, "Performing the Sacred in Byzantium: Image, Breath and Sound," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* (2014): 120-12; idem, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

¹⁶ Pavel Florensky, "The Church Ritual as Synthesis of the Arts," in *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. by Nicoletta Misler and trans. by Wendy Salmond (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 101-111. A good historiographical review on the arts in liturgy can be found in: Eric Palazzo, "Art and Liturgy in the Middle Ages: Survey of Research (1980-2003) and Some Reflections on Method," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 105.1 (2006): 180-184; Eric Palazzo, "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages," *Viator* 41.1 (2010): 25-56.

¹⁷ Florensky, "The Church Ritual as Synthesis of the Arts," 110.

¹⁸ Gisela Muschiol, "Time and Space: Liturgy and Rite in Female Monasteries of the Middle Ages," in Jeffrey Hamburger and Susan Marti eds., *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 191-206; idem., *Famula Dei: Zur Liturgie in merowingischen Frauenklöstern* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994).

instrument of all forms of devotion", monastic or lay, throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁹ One most innovative philosophy of music from the medieval West hailed from the Rhineland by Hildegard of Bingen, and reflected her upbringing and immersion in the Benedictine liturgical routine. Her theory bears some striking similarities with the Byzantine understanding of the human voice as an animating and unifying principle in communal worship. As Margot Fassler points out, Hildegard "defined the rendering of communal song as an incarnational act, basic to the creative regeneration of life that takes place within the monastic community."²⁰ In her much-quoted letter to the prelates of Mainz, Hildegard insisted that "just as the body of Jesus Christ was born of the purity of the Virgin Mary through the operation of the Holy Spirit so, too, the canticle of praise, reflecting celestial harmony, is rooted in the Church through the Holy Spirit. The body is the vestment of the spirit, which has a living voice, and so it is proper for the body, in harmony with the soul, to use its voice to sing praises to God."²¹

Perhaps not achieving the level of sophistication in the Byzantine discussion, the medieval Western monastic liturgical culture, nevertheless, also implied the synthetic nature of sensory perceptions, the visual, the aural, the olfactory, and the tactile. Such

¹⁹ Richard Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 93.

²⁰ Margot Fassler, "Composer and Dramatist," in Barbara Newman ed., *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 149. See also: Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 87-136; Sara Ritchey, *Holy Matter: Changing Perceptions of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 55-90. On Hildegard's connection with the female houses in Liège, see the study by Sara Moens, "The *Mulieres religiosae*, Daughters of Hildegard of Bingen? Interfaces between a Benedictine Visionary, the Cistercians of Villers, and the Spiritual Women of Liège," in *Medieval Liège at the Crossroads of Europe: Monastic Society and Culture, 1000-1300*, ed. Steven Vanderputten, Tjamke Snijders, and Jay Diehl (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 301-338.

²¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, Vol. 1, trans. Joseph Baird and Radd Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79.

experiences could not be reduced to straightforward mental reactions to either the textual or the imagery content. The verse fragments, the devotional image, or the musical melody do not necessarily add up to the mental images conjured up in the meditative mind. There could be multiple gaps and discrepancies between the verses being chanted at the enlightening moment and the subsequent visionary experience, despite the apparent affinities. It is an experiential, aesthetic, and performative process rather than a reflective one in the sense that, firstly, the totality rather than a single ingredient of the liturgical environment bears an indirectly suggestive relationship to the ultimate visionary experience; and secondly, the visionary, by virtue of her attentive participation *within* the performance, has a complicated and not always coherent process of isolating, juxtaposing, elaborating or even distorting phrases or images that have been sticking to her mind. There could be other more important sensory stimuli beyond the auditory and the visual that could not be easily uttered. The subject's personal history certainly also plays a manipulative part. The frequent blurring of the sacred and the profane, and the effortlessness with which the divine characters breaking into the realm of the everyday routine suggest that the subject processes information with certain degree of spontaneity even idiosyncrasy.

To cite one example of such liturgical vision from Caesarius of Heisterbach (c. 1180-c.1240)'s encyclopedic repertoire of monastic anecdotes *The Dialogus miraculorum*.²² He took his oral and written sources mostly through the network of

²² Relevant studies on Caesarius of Heisterbach see: Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and Their Stories, 1100-1250* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Victoria Smirnova, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu and Jacques Berlioz eds., *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and Its Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

Cistercian monasteries and convents, such as Himmerod where Caesarius himself resided, from the neighboring Dioceses of Cologne, Liège, and Trier.²³

In Hemmenrode there was a certain monk of deep devotion, who seemed to have up him the good hand of God. He was indeed one who was strenuous in manual labour, devoted in prayer and praise, mighty in vigil, and fervent in fulfilling all commands. Now since, about the feast of All Saints, he had so willing a mind, and experienced little or no weariness for several days, he began, not so much boldly, as reverently, to beseech the Lord in prayer to comfort him with some sort of visitation on the feast of His most holy nativity...Now in the night, when they all got up for matins, so great a languor overwhelmed both his body and soul that even to live became a weariness to him. Nevertheless he went into church with the rest, though unable and unwilling to sing, so that he seemed to be about to lose entirely the whole of that most sweet service for his part, and to be utterly frustrated of his desire...And while he thus sat, occupied with these and similar thoughts awake...with closed eyes, the lector said: "Thou too (*Tu autem*)."

And the cantor rose in his place and added the response "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord (*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*)."

And behold there stood before that fainting monk, a matron of reverend countenance and incomparable beauty, having in her arms an infant so small, as if only nowborn, wrapped in very cheap and poor swaddling clothes, so cheap and so poor that he was even filled with compassion for their poverty. Further, there stood behind her an old man clad in a tunic...²⁴

As expected, this monk had a vision of Mary, Jesus and Joseph during the Matins service at Christmas Eve. Most of the vision stories reported by Caesarius of Heisterbach should belong to the specific genre of "liturgical visions" as opposed to the prophetic or the literary ones: Such visions primarily occurred in a liturgical setting of communal worship, in fact *during* or *right after* the solemn Matins more frequently than other hours. Solitary quietude in a private space we nowadays associate with intense meditation, dream visions, or literary

²³ Brian Patrick McGuire, "Written Sources and Cistercian Inspiration in Caesarius of Heisterbach," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 35 (1979): 227-282, anthologized in *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and their Stories, 1100-1250* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

²⁴ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum / Dialog über die Wunder*, edited by J. Strange and translated into German by Nikolaus Nösges and Horst Schneider (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), Vol. 4, VIII. 5. The English translation is from Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, Vol. 2, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 6.

composition was rare and unusual in these stories. The surrounding of these visionary experiences was likely to be bustlingly crowded, festively loud and brightly lit. In this context, communal worship and private prayer were not distinguished, but inseparably conditioned each other. A corollary of this primarily ceremonial setting is that most of these visions were identified as "corporeal visions" by Caesarius in that the visionaries clearly were fully awake and conscious during the services, and thus they must have seen Virgin Mary or Christ with their carnal eyes. Caesarius most intriguingly claimed that "although spiritual vision is of greater dignity than the corporeal, nevertheless I would love better to hear examples of the latter, because I think it a greater thing than any vision to be able to see with the bodily eye heavenly spirits, or what is even still greater, the creator of spirits Himself."²⁵ The supposedly most superior third category, the intellectual vision, in St. Augustine's tripartite paradigm of visions, left no traces at all in Caesarius's work, while the corporeal ones were fervently pursued and recorded.²⁶ Most of these vision narratives adopt a matter-of-fact approach to theophany by simply stating "he saw (*vidit*)" or "she [Virgin Mary] stood in front of the monk (*astitit ante illum...monachum*)."

The second feature of the liturgical vision as perceived by Caesarius is that it was conditioned by a punctilious observance of the monastic discipline and preceded by a certain period of preparation and anticipation. The monk who saw Mary and Joseph at the

²⁵ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 4: "Novicius: Licet visio spiritualis dignior sit corporali, magis tamen me delectat audire exempla de ista, quia coelestes spiritus, sive quod maius est, ipsum creatorem spirituum oculis corporeis posse videre, omnibus visionibus antepono."

²⁶ Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80.1 (2005): 1-43. A distinction between "visionaries" and "mystics" is drawn by Bernard McGinn, who defines the "mystics" as those who "see" God or Christ and "visionaries" as those who have contact with others than the divine such as the saints, the angels, or the Virgin Mary, see his *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 327.

Nativity service had been "strenuous in manual labour, devoted in prayer and praise, mighty in vigil, and fervent in fulfilling all commands (*in opere manuum, in oratione et psalmodia devotus, potens ad vigilandum, et fervens ad quodlibet iniunctum*)."

He began to mold his mind and body beseeching a divine visitation from the Feast of All Saints (November 1), and had his wish fulfilled. What exactly techniques had this monk exploited to induce the vision are unspecified here. But in another story recorded by Caesarius, a monk from the same monastery of Hemmenrode, Peter, believed that to recite "once a day at least the most holy and most sweet reproaches of the passion of Christ" was the "most efficacious stimulants of spiritual graces."²⁷ The Reproaches (*Improperia*) taken from the Good Friday liturgy do not appear to be merely vocal, but requires some quite violent physical actions, because Caesarius goes on to say that Peter "persisted in his knocking, and unweariedly resisted the injuries and difficulties offered to him (*cum perstitisset pulsans, et illatas sibi iniurias et difficultates indefessus effregisset*)."²⁸ It is curious what kind of dramatic acts would have accompanied the *improperia*, or reproaches of Jesus on the Cross to His people, that would actually lead to bodily injuries and afflictions to the performer. The fact that Caesarius found an explanation unnecessary may imply a familiar, common practice among the Cistercian monks in the Rhineland. Besides this somewhat dangerous recitation of the passion chant, Peter the monk also lay prostrate in the choir and prayed lengthily. When he was in doubt of the efficacy of these meditative techniques, he suddenly was graced with a visit of Christ.

²⁷ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 13: "Sane huic iuveni studium erat, semel in die adminus revolvere et recitare sibi sanctissima et dulcissima passionis Christi improperia, gratiarum spiritualium effecacissima incitamenta."

²⁸ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 13.

Thirdly, in these visionary narratives specific songs or verses chanted during the services provided the temporal structure, and, more likely, the crucial exterior stimulants facilitating the visionary experiences. Caesarius often meticulously identified the precise moment of the vision occurring: the monk suddenly saw the Nativity scene when the lector said *Tu autem* and the cantor sang *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*; A prior saw a bright star, representing Christ, in the choir when on the fourth Sunday in Advent the cantor sang the response "See how great is He who cometh to save the nations (*Intuemini quantus sit iste qui ingreditur ad salvandas gentes*)"²⁹; A lay brother saw a white dove descending from the cross, perching on the lectern and listening to the scriptural reading when the hymn *Te Deum laudamus* was finished and the reading from the gospel began.³⁰ Sometimes these phrases seem to serve no special purposes other than anchoring vacillating memories during posterior recollection and oral rendition. But, more often, they indicate the emotional climax of the ceremony that most appropriately occasioned the splendid vision. It is a well-established trope in Christian revelation narratives that hearing a mysterious voice chanting verse fragments, particularly from the gospels or the psalms, serves the function of a divine oracle, as in the conversion stories of St. Antony the Great as well as Augustine of Hippo.

Fourth, these visions are usually straightforward dramatization of the content of the liturgical verses without any "mysterious" elements. The Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, angels, and saints were co-mingling with the monastic community and integral to the mundane setting of communal worship. They were either willing participants of the services, or they

²⁹ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 6.

³⁰ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 37.

dutifully reenacted the scene scripted in the liturgical texts. It seems these visions were to make plain the content of the liturgy through some straightforward dramatization by divine actors themselves, and therefore to validate the truthfulness and orthodoxy of its messages. There was little sense of numinous, dreadful mystery Rudolf Otto relates to all phenomena of mysticism,³¹ but only serene intelligibility. In Caesarius's admittedly imaginative literature, there was no future to prophesy, no enigma to solve, no allegory to expound, but a sense of delighted wonder and playful familiarity. A certain virgin in France, after the Mass, lingered in the church and saw a little boy of about three years old walking around the altar. She thought the child must have been left there and forgotten by his mother, and decided to teach him how to pray: "Say after me, Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you (*Dic post me, Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum*)." The Christ Child repeated her words joyfully and distinctly. But the Child refused to repeat after her the clause "And blessed is the fruit of thy womb (*Et benedictus fructus ventris tui*)," because He was willing to glorify His Mother but not Himself.³² The epiphany appears to be a mesmerizingly tender moment of everyday life when a young woman takes care of a little child she assumes to have been left behind by his mother. What is more striking is that the woman recognized the Child as Christ *only through* His articulation of or reticence from particular

³¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

³² Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 8: "Die quadam cum dicta missa ipsa, populo omni egresso, sola in ecclesia moram faceret, et oraret, infantem quasi triennem circa altare deambulantiem conspexit, putans a matre illum ibidem neglectum. Erat enim tam speciosissimus, et tantae gratiae vultus eius, ut in illius aspectu delectata ad se vocaret et manibus demulceret, sic dicens: 'Dic mihi bone puerule, ubi est mater tua?' Qui dum nihil ei responderet, aestimans illa utpote infantem eum nondum posse fari, subiunxit: 'Nosti dicere Pater noster tuum?' Ad quod dum non responderet ut prius, adiecit: 'Dic post me, Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum.' Et dixit post eam infantulus eadem verba tam hilariter et tam distincte, ut illa miraretur. Similiter factum est de clausula secunda, scilicet, *Benedicta tu mulieribus*. Cum vero ei praediceret: *Et benedictus fructus ventris tui*, totius humilitatis magister sua inspiratione sciens scriptum: *Non te laudet os tuum, sed alienum, eandem clausulam dicere noluit...*"

liturgical verses. The experience was not "mystical" in the sense of an ineffable encounter with the Divine, but more of an exegetical sort that validated the doctrinal messages of the liturgical text.

To recapitulate, visionary experiences as perceived by the thirteenth-century Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach, were thoroughly an outgrowth of the monastic liturgical life. They were not some profoundly revelatory, terrifying experiences that only manifested in a specially graced prodigy, such as Hildegard of Bingen. Instead, there was some democratizing tendency in this new visionary literature where a religious, by virtue of observing the liturgical routine of his or her community, could be graced with a vision. With significantly shortened duration, the vision was more of a craft, a technique that a monk regularly practiced following the calendrical rhythms of the year. The recounting of such visions, in turn, helped to reinforce the liturgical discipline and the orderliness of a monastic community.

The *Vita* of a choir monk, Abundus, from the grand Cistercian monastery Villers from Liège is the best testimony to this liturgico-visionary culture.³³ Though adopting the overall framework of the hagiographical genre by following the chronology of the monk's life, *Vita Abundi* is more of a composite of staccato episodes of liturgical visions constructed to appeal to the experiences and expectations of an insider audience within the monastery itself. The abbot of Villers commissioned the work from one of his own monks, Goswin of Bossut, when Abundus was still alive. Goswin claimed to have conducted oral

³³ There are two medieval manuscripts of this work, and the one from Brussels copied during the hagiographer Goswin of Bossut's lifetime in Villers is edited by A.M. Frenken, "De Vita van Abundus van Hoi," *Cîteaux* 10 (1959): 5-33. An English translation can be found in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of la Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. Martinus Cawley (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 207-258.

interviews with his fellow monk and probably completed the work shortly after Abundus's death in 1239.³⁴ In many ways, this work is much less a conventional hagiographical document meant for promoting official canonization or a posthumous cult---just like all the other "saints" from the Low Countries Abundus was never proposed to be canonized, but more of a book of remembrance to be cherished by old companions. Goswin mainly attempted to appeal to the common experiences of the liturgical community of his monastery, and weaved his narrative with references and idioms familiar to that cozy circle of intimate friends.

The overarching theme of this *Vita* is the liturgical piety of Abundus, a common Cistercian monk whose personality rather self-effacing and life events completely void of worldly drama. He seemed to have been born a meek, monkish type of person. When he was twelve years old, Abundus first revealed his pious nature by going to the church "circling the altar, kneeling before the crucifix, fixing his devout gaze upon the nails in the hands and feet and also the scar of the side wound, and drawing to himself the grace of the most loving Redemptor with devout soliloquies."³⁵ The twelve year old is symbolic as it is the age when boy Jesus taught in the Jerusalem Temple (Luke 2: 41-52) and the first sign of His wisdom and life mission was made manifest to the world. Modeled on this biblical narrative, Goswin chose to stress the young boy's pious *behavior* as a prefiguration of his future monastic career. Rather than an imbuelement of spiritual understanding, what distinguished Abundus was his observance of certain ritualistic behavior of prayer and self-

³⁴ See the prologue of *Vita Abundi*, 11-12.

³⁵ *Vita Abundi*, 14: "...majoris ecclesie frequentare limina, circuire altaria, ante crucifixum genua flectere, fixuram clavorum in manibus ac pedibus, cicatricem quoque vulneris in latere piis oculis intueri et devotis soliloquiis piissimi redemptoris gratiam sibi allicere."

discipline such as incessant prostration and kneeling behind the church pillars and when he "lifting the hem of his robe, lied on his bare side applied to the cold stones."³⁶

Abundus's entire adult life as a professed choir monk was studded with various liturgical visions in the precise mode we already see in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*: a solemn feast day provides the appropriate setting and occasion, then the monks' voice of chanting carried by a breeze suddenly triggers a profound state of ecstatic vision, and a set pattern of praying or meditative gestures help to carry it through. Following these preparatory stages the major vision follows. For instance, on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, Abundus was helping the lay brothers in the kitchen:

Then, towards the end of the mass, he came out and was strolling in the cloister, when he heard the monks in the choir singing the communion verse: "You, child, shall be called prophet of the most high." (Luke 1:76) He reflected on the force of these words and the sweet-sounding modulation of the voices, so assiduously and intently that *his heart grew warm inside him and in his meditation there sprang up that fire* (Psalm 38:4), which *Lord Jesus had kindled upon the earth, vehemently wished to blaze it up* (Luke 12:49). He turned aside into the chapter room and laid himself down on the flagstones, with his arms sweetly embracing, as it were, the guest of his soul in holy love.³⁷

Then, Abundus was inebriated with grace and had a vision of Heaven. On the one hand, this story was firmly rooted in the century-old monastic literary tradition of Heaven and

³⁶ *Vita Abundi*, 14: "Et quum propter corpusculi sui teneritudinem grandes sibi afflictiones imponere non poterat nec licebat, interdum sublevata a parte inferiori clamide super nudum latus frigidis illud lapidibus applicando recubabat."

³⁷ *Vita Abundi*, 18: "Et circa finem misse procedens deambulabat per claustrum audivitque monachos in choro cantantes versiculum Postcommunione, scilicet <<Tu puer propheta altissimi vocaberis>>. Cunque sedula intentione consideraret vim verborum et dulcisonam vocum modulationem, concaluit cor eius intra ipsum et in meditatione ipsius exarsit ignis ille, quem Dominus Jhesus misit in terram ac voluit vehemente accendi. Continuo divertens in capitulum capituli pavimento procubuit et dulcissimum anime sue hospitem quasi quibusdam brachiis sancti amoris dulciter amplexabatur." The English is from *Send Me God*, 220.

Hell visions, such as the *Vision of Wetti* composed in 824 by Heito of Reichenau.³⁸ Obvious parallels include, first of all, a food analogy: Brother Wetti, before his grand journey to the other world, kept vomiting what he had eaten and found great difficulty in digestion, whereas Abundus was helping in the kitchen preparing meal for the brothers. Material food was a commonplace metaphor for the spiritual nourishment which in both cases would prove to be infinitely more satisfactory. Moreover, Wetti prayed in a specific bodily position with the assistance of human chanting voice: "He fell down in the presence of these brothers, his body in the shape of a cross, so that they prayed for his sins with all the strength that they had. While he was prostrated these brothers began to sing the seven penitential Psalms for him..."³⁹ The cross-shaped praying position and the Psalm chanting were essential stimuli to devotion in both stories of Wetti and Abundus. The cross-shaped gesture---that of prostration with hand horizontally outstretched and parted associated with the *proskynesis*---was one of the two principal praying gestures for early medieval Christians inherited from the antiquity. It was also among the seven praying gestures described in Peter the Chanter's twelfth-century treatise *De oratione et speciebus illius*.⁴⁰

On the other hand, Abundus's story deviates from this monastic literary convention in that the hagiographer Goswin found no necessity to actually give any description about the image-content of the vision itself; it sufficed to say that Heaven was "super-glorious"

³⁸ Heito of Reichenau, *Heitonis Visio Wettini*, ed. E. Duemmler. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latinae aevi Carolini*, II, 267-275. For an English translation, see: Gardiner ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, 65-79.

³⁹ Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, 67.

⁴⁰ Peter the Chanter, "De oratione et speciebus illius," edited by Richard Trexler in *The Christian at Prayer: An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d. 1197)* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 178-234.

(*superglorioso*).⁴¹ The practices that had led to the vision seemed to be more worth recording than the actual vision itself. Abundus' vision is also less extraordinary than Wetti's. The latter was an austere, near-death experience in a spectacular scale persisting for several days with multiple intermissions, whereas what Abundus had was a lighthearted ecstasy in the middle of the day, albeit a special feast day, that could potentially be repeated or imitated over and over again. A curious glimpse into the other world was not the primary concern for the thirteenth-century hagiographer; the focus subtly shifted, instead, to something more microscopic, i.e. the monk's devotional mind and his integration into the liturgical community of his monastery.

The hagiographer's concern to strengthen the liturgical community more than to showcase individual sanctity is obvious in another vision of Marian devotion. One day between Circumcision and Epiphany, "when the Antiphon *O, admirabile commercium* was chanted as well as other sequences about Lord's incarnation." Abundus was in the choir singing the Terce: "Show me, the very sweet one, your face, and let your voice sound in my ears! (*Ostende michi, o dulcissima, faciem tuam, sonet vox tua in auribus meis*)." Abundus saw Virgin Mary appear and sing along with the choir: "He suddenly saw her standing beside him, the blessed among women, mother of the King of glory, dressed in the most beautiful cowl as a nun wearing a fine and most pure veil over her head, a little hung down in front of the face, and he heard her singing with the monks the hymn, in praise of her and her blessed son, the hymn that starts with *A solis ortus cardine*."⁴² Mary

⁴¹ *Vita Abundi*, 18-19.

⁴² *Vita Abundi*, 19: "Alio tempore contigit prefatum Dei servum infra Circumcisionem ac Epiphaniam ascribi officio invitatoris, quando cantatur antiphona <<O. admirabile commercium>> et cetera sequentes, que pertinent ad incarnationem Domini. Et Factum est die quadam, stante eo in choro, cum jam inchoata esset hora tertia, tamquam dixisset Beate Virgini Matri: <<Ostende michi, o dulcissima, faciem tuam, sonet vox tua in auribus meis>>, vidit repente juxta se stantem benedictam in mulieribus, matrem regis

gracefully participated the choir singing by bowing with the monks at the last stanza of the hymn *Gloria tibi, Domine, qui natus es de virgine*, and intoning the psalm *Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi* (Psalm 119).⁴³ This vision of the Virgin Mary dressed as a Cistercian nun cordially chanting along with the monks is the ultimate validation of the liturgical practices of the monastic community, no less than a testimony to Abundus' sanctity as a choir monk. Like those reported by fellow Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach, this vision does not betray any polemical urgency or terrifying mystery; it occurred in bright day-light (during the Terce); the image-content is banal and concrete---so concrete that a dramatic scene can be easily recreated with human actors and actress. Unlike some visions replete with symbolism and allegory, this vision was plain and straightforward, with the exception of the vaguely symbolic immaculate veil. In a scene scripted and punctuated by the sequence of the rite, the divine actress only dutifully performed her part.⁴⁴

Lutgard of Aywières (ca. 1182-1246) was one of the *mulieres sanctae* who sang wondrously in thirteenth-century Diocese of Liège.⁴⁵ She at first joined a small beguine

glorie, amictam cuculla pulcherrima, quasi sanctimoniam habentem velum subile ac mundissimum super caput suum, aliquantulum in parte anteriori demissum super faciem eius, audivitque eam cantantem cum monahis ymnium, in laude eius ac benedicti filii sui editum, cujus initium est <<A solis ortus cardine>>."

⁴³ *Vita Abundi*, 20: "Cum autem ventum esset ad ultimum versum ymni, scilicet <<Gloria tibi Domine, qui natus es de virgine>>, tunc virgo, speculum totius humilitatis post filium suum, devote et reverenter cum inclinantibus inclinavit. Deinde cum vir Domini ebdomadarius invitatorii inchoasset antiphonam <<Rubum quem viderat Moyses>>, tunc ipsa, cujus virginitas incorrupta per rubum incombustum probatur significari. subsequenter imposuit psalmum <<Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi>>."

⁴⁴ Joaquin Martinez Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

⁴⁵ For a narrative of her life, see Barbara Newman, "Introduction," in *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, 43-51.

community of St. Catherine's in the town of Sint Truiden, where the purgatorial singer-saint Christina the Astonishing was from (see Chapter 1). Sint Truiden, now sounding provincial and inconsequential, was in the old Carolingian heartlands and fairly close to Charlemagne's Aachen. In the history of medieval music, the abbey of Sint Truiden under the temporal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Metz was perhaps among the centers disseminating the Gregorian chant under the Carolingians. In the early years of the twelfth century, Rudolf of Sint Truiden, a student from the school of Liège who taught the monks at the local abbey how to chant by using the stave recently invented by Guido of Arrezzo, was among the earliest promoters of this revolutionizing technique beyond the Alps.⁴⁶ By all means the abbey of Sint Truiden was a musical center in the early Middle Ages. In the early thirteenth century, the beguines of St Catherine's were under the direct spiritual guidance of the abbot of Sint Truiden.⁴⁷ Thus, Lutgard and her female community thrived in this rich local tradition of sacred chant.

It sometimes seemed to her (for, to be sure, Lutgard used to chant the verse for the sake of devotion) that Christ, with the outward appearance of a lamb, was positioning himself on her breast in such a manner that one foot was on her right shoulder and the other on her left. He would place his mouth on her mouth and by thus sucking would draw out from her breast the sweetness of a wondrous melody. Nor could anyone doubt that a divine miracle was taking place in this chanting, for it was only at that verse alone that her voice was heard to be measurelessly more filled with grace than usual and, in like manner, so too were the hearts of all who heard her marvelously moved to devotion.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers*, 465-492.

⁴⁷ *Vita Lutgardi*, Acta Sanctorum 16 June, 241.

⁴⁸ "...cum Versus super Responsorium cantabatur (cujus utique versum ob gratam devotionis Lutgardis sola cantare solebat) videbatur ei interim dum cantaret, quod Christus in specie Agni super pectus suum se tali modo locaret, ut unum pedem super humerum eius dexterum alium super sinistrum, & os suum ori illius imponeret; & sic sugendo de pectore illius mirabilis melodiae suavitatem extraheret. Nec dubitare quisquam poterat in hoc cantu, divinum adesse miraculum, cum in solo Versu illo vox in infinitum solito gratior audiretur. Unde & corda audientium ad devotionem interim mirabiliter movebantur." *Vita Lutgardi*, 241. I consulted the English translation in *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 233-234, with minor changes.

Lutgard is most famously or rather ignominiously known for this startlingly erotic vision of lamb suckling experienced as she chanted the Office. It has been convincingly argued that the suckling vision is rooted in the convention of bridal mysticism, which is ultimately sanctioned by the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs. Jeffrey Hamburger draws the parallel of Lutgard's visionary imagery with a miniature of a nun embracing a lamb found in Joinville's *Credo*, a French illuminated manuscript from about 1270, which Hamburger concedes that Lutgard "had almost certainly never seen."⁴⁹ Not to dismiss the role of artistic visualization in shaping monastic visions but to complement it, it might be helpful to find the liturgical or musical root for this vision: after all, Lutgard had this vision not from reading a book but in the middle of singing the Office. A source worth comparing is the beautiful twelfth-century sequence *Virgines Caste*, of which both the text and the music are sometimes attributed to the towering figure in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, Abbess Héloïse, and was almost certainly performed by her nuns at the Paraclete:

.....
Crebro saltus
dat hic agnus,
inter illas discurrendo,

Et cum ipsis requiescit
fervore meridiano.

In earum pectore
cubat in meridie:

Inter mamas virginum
collacat cubiculum.

.....
(Often the Lamb leaps and prances, bounding in their midst--yet he rests with the maidens in the noonday heat.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Hamburger, "The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions," *Viator* (1989): 168. See also his *The Visual and the Visionary*, 118-120.

In the middle of the day he lies upon their breasts: he sets his sleeping-places between maidens' breasts.)⁵⁰

The erotic imagery of a lamb positioning on the virgin's breasts in this sequence bears remarkable resemblances to the vision of Lutgard embracing a lamb. Another essential element in this vision, the act of "suckling" on the mouth which draws sweet melodies from her breasts might have been inspired by yet another liturgical text from the Feast of John the Evangelist (December 27): this responsory after the second lesson of the First and the Third Nocturnes refers to John as the eagle of the keenest sight "who drank the streams of the Gospel from the sacred fountain of the Lord's breast (*Fluenta evangelii de ipso sacro Dominici pectoris fonte potavit*)."⁵¹ Thomas of Cantimpré, in fact, explicitly citing this particular verse, records a vision of Lutgard directly inspired by it: an eagle, symbol of John the Evangelist, was seen "placing its beak in her mouth and filling her soul with flashes of such ineffable light that no secrets of divinity lay hidden from her insofar as it is possible for mortals to know them."⁵² The original responsory seems to have provided the essential phrase of "drinking from [God's] breast" as a metaphor for infused wisdom; and

⁵⁰ The Latin and the English are from Peter Dronke, "Virgines Caste," *Lateinische Dichtungen des X. und XI. Jahrhunderts: Festgabe für Walther Bulst zum 80. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1981): 93-117. Dronke does not accept the Abelard or Heloise authorship. But more recently David Wulstan and Constant Mews agree that it was composed by Heloise, see: David Wulstan, "Novi modulaminis melos: the Music of Heloise and Abelard," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11 (2002): 1-23; Constant Mews, "Heloise and Liturgical Experience at the Paraclete," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11 (2002): 25-35.

⁵¹ For a study of the patristic origins of this phrase, see: Karl Rahner, "De Dominici pectoris fonte potavit," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 55 (1931): 103-108.

⁵² "Proinde ad recordationem illius acutissimæ visionis aquilæ, Joannis scilicet Euangelistæ, qui fluenta Evangelii de ipso sacro Dominici pectoris fonte potavit; apparuit ei in spiritu aquila, tanto pennarum nitore refulgens, ut totus potuisset orbis illius claritatis radiis illustrari. Ad visionem ergo illius super id quod dici potest admiratione nimia stupefacta; præstolabatur ut Dominus, secundum capacitatem debilis aciei, tanti speculationis gloriam temperaret. Et factum est ita. Visionis ergo modum moderatius contemplata, vidit quod aquila ori suo rostrum imponeret, & animam ejus tam ineffabilis luminis coruscatione repleret, ut secundum id quod viventibus possibile est nulla eam divinitatis secreta laterent." *Vita Lutgardis*, 240.

it is perhaps no mere conjecture to surmise that the hagiographer borrowed this poetic language and recast it by insisting that the eagle, having drunk from God's breast, then transfused this divine wisdom to Lutgard by the same act through mouth. There is strong parallel in both language and imagery between this eagle vision and the lamb vision; the only difference is that the divine wisdom was embodied in flashes and lights in the former, whereas it adopted the form of mellifluous songs in the latter.⁵³ Although a direct chain of allusions and borrowings cannot be positively proved, Lutgard's lamb suckling vision, nevertheless, should have appeared rather intelligible and not-so-out-of-ordinary for her community familiar with the various ingredients already existent in the liturgical language ready to be plucked out to create a new coherent set of visionary vocabulary.

Physically participating in communal worship seems to have constituted Lutgard's only education and source of religious knowledge. She was conspicuous for her illiteracy and lack of linguistic capabilities, which in her *Vita* was made into a remarkable virtue and, indeed, a miracle so that she could entirely focus on the interior and cultivating a personal relationship with the divine: she did not read Latin nor did she understand the literal meaning of the liturgical verses she daily recited; as a Dutch native speaker, Lutgard spectacularly failed to grasp French except for the most rudimentary while staying in a French-speaking convent for decades later in her life.⁵⁴ In a visionary exchange with Christ, Lutgard asked for a complete understanding of the Psalter; however, she later regretted and withdrew her request on the grounds that "the reverence of a veiled mystery is the mother

⁵³ In another passage, Thomas of Cantimpré describes "a flame of material light rising from Lutgard's mouth and piercing the upper air" seen by a fellow nun. *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 253.

⁵⁴ *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 239.

of devotion, what is hidden is the more avidly sought, and what is concealed is looked upon with more veneration."⁵⁵ Despite the *Vita's* insistence on her remarkable singing voice and regular attendance to the Office, the hagiographer also suggested that she "understood neither the psalms nor anything in the Scriptures."⁵⁶ Lutgard's relationship with the word was maintained through the physical act of repeated chanting rather than internalized understanding. The liturgical verses were perceived in quite a material sense that they can and should be weaponized; and their spiritual efficacy was made manifest in terms of material results. When Lutgard ruminated on the psalm verse "O God, come to my assistance" (*Deus in adiutorium meum intende*, Psalm 69.2), she could literally see the demons running away; hence she understood that "it was by the strength of the words, even when she did not understand them, that the demons were repulsed and their power weakened in temptations."⁵⁷ She knew the the verse *Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem, non horruisti Virginis uterum* from the Canticle *Te Deum laudamus* was good and pleasing, when she saw Mary herself appear in the choir.⁵⁸

The most well-known vision from the thirteenth-century Low Countries and without questions the most impactful not only was generated from, but also generated a liturgical feast. Juliana of Cornillon (1193-1258), a saintly woman from Liège, while attending the Eucharist repeatedly had a vision of a full moon, all splendid but with a small blemish (*Apparebat inquam ei luna in suo splendore, cum aliquantula tamen sui sperici*

⁵⁵ *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 226.

⁵⁶ *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 251.

⁵⁷ *Thomas of Cantimpré: Collected Saints' Lives*, 251.

⁵⁸ *Vita Lutgardi*, 250.

corporis fractione).⁵⁹ After some twenty-year intense contemplation upon its mystery, eventually Christ himself revealed the meaning of the vision to her that the moon represented the Church and the little defect stood for the absence of one feast in the Church (*Tunc revelavit ei christus in luna presentem ecclesiam; in lune autem fractione defectum unius sollempnitatis in ecclesia figurari*).⁶⁰ Juliana went ahead to create the Feast of Corpus Christi, commissioned an entire set of liturgical texts and music, assiduously promoted the feast and had it formally approved in the Diocese of Liège in 1246. The Papal Legate to Germany, Hugh of St. Cher, former Regent Master of Theology at the University of Paris, celebrated the feast in St. Martin's Church of Liège in 1251, and instituted it throughout the German-speaking lands by a decree issued on 29 December 1252. Pope Urban IV, former archdeacon of Liège, finally promoted the feast to universal celebration in 1264.⁶¹ Mainly through the persistent promoting efforts of the clerical network associated with the Diocese of Liège, the Feast of Corpus Christi became one of the only two medieval additions to the Temporale cycle of the universal liturgical calendar. The texts and music proposed by Juliana, however, did not become the standard for the feast, but were replaced by a new set of texts and chants traditionally attributed to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

⁵⁹ *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, edited by Jean-Pierre Delville (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Études Médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1999), 120.

⁶⁰ *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, 122.

⁶¹ A study on Juliana's role as the originator of the Corpus Christi Feast, see: Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 78-117. See also: Emile Denis, *Sainte Julienne et Cornillon: étude historique* (Liège: Printing Co. Société Anonyme, 1927). A history of the origin and the promotion of the feast to universal observance, see: Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 164-212. The textual and musical transcriptions of complete offices of Corpus Christi with English translations, see: Barbara Walters, Vincent Corrigan and Peter Ricketts, *The Feast of Corpus Christi* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

The feast's afterlife of immense popularity in later medieval society requires little further comment; it all started with Juliana's moonlit vision during the Eucharistic celebration.

It is probably not too absurd to conjecture that Juliana's moon vision was a conflation of various ritual and textual recollections gathered through longtime liturgical participation and meditative reading. Anneke Mulder-Bakker has interpreted Juliana's Eucharistic vision in terms of a simple visual effect: when the priest made the ritual gesture of holding up high the host between his thumb and the index finger, the host was in the shape of a defective full moon.⁶² It has to be noted that this particular gesture of elevating the consecrated host with hands joint and raised occasionally appeared in sources from the eleventh and twelfth centuries and only became popular and generalized around the mid-thirteenth century.⁶³ Thus, Juliana's vision seems to have been promoting this new understanding of the Eucharistic host as the visible object of adoration for the laity. On the other hand, the exegetic tradition of the moon as a symbol of the Church dates back to the early Christian patristic writings, culminated in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* where he compared the Church with the moon that partakes in the splendor of the Crucified Sun.⁶⁴ Little scholarly discussion has been devoted to the question of the literary sources of Juliana's vision. Miri Rubin has suggested the symbolic tradition of the moon was presented in the *Glossa ordinaria*,⁶⁵ a scholastic source of which the *Vita* offers no

⁶² Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, 86.

⁶³ Gerhart Ladner, "The Gestures of Prayer in Papal Iconography of the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," in Sesto Prete ed., *Didascalie: Studies in Honor of Anselm M. Albareda, Prefect of the Vatican Library* (New York: Bernard Rosenthal, 1961), 246-275, esp. 266-268.

⁶⁴ On the early Christian tradition of the moon symbolism, see: Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1971), 154-178.

⁶⁵ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 170.

evidence to prove Juliana's knowledge. In contrast to the illiteracy of Lutgard, Juliana was educated and can even be called well-read. According to her *Vita*, Juliana could read both in Latin and French; she even memorized by heart more than twenty of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on *The Song of Songs*, and was especially fond of St. Augustine's works (in plural).⁶⁶ It is not impossible that Juliana had some knowledge of the Augustinian tradition and was illuminated about the moon symbolism she had seen in the celebrant priest's gesture.

The anonymous hagiographer, an excellent Latinist and well-trained theologian,⁶⁷ apparently admired Juliana's bookish learning, but insisted that the visionary experiences she received during liturgical services were on more solid doctrinal foundation and utterly impossible to err.

She understood most of [the visions] with an intelligence so pure and clean that she seemed to have a share in the undiluted truth of our future knowledge. As for all the articles pertaining to the Catholic faith, she had been so fully instructed by the One *that teacheth man knowledge* (Psalm 93. 10) that she had no need to consult masters or books about them. Indeed, because her teacher was the anointing, *unctione magistra*, she had received such an indestructible foundation of the orthodox faith that she once said whatever might happen (that is, whatever heretical from the straight traps were set before her), she would never be able to deviate path of the faith.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ "Que cum jam omnem scripturam latinam et gallicam libere legere didicisset; libros beati augustini multo affectu legebat, ipsumque sanctum plurimum diligebat. Verum quoniam scripta beatissimi bernardi vehementer ignita sibi visa sunt et dulciora super mel et favum...et plusquam viginti sermones extreme partis editos ab eodem super cantica canticorum in quibus ipse beatissimus humanam scientiam visus est excessisse studiose cordetenus didicit, et firme memorie commendavit." *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, 22.

⁶⁷ Jean-Pierre Delville, "Introduction," in *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, xiii: "...derrière cette modestie, se cache une personne qui maîtrise très bien le latin. Le style de cette *Vita* est beaucoup plus travaillé que celui de la *Vita* de sainte Lutgarde, par exemple, qui est presque contemporaine."

⁶⁸ "Horumque plurima tam pura et defecata intelligentia comprehendebat, ut mera cognitionis future veritas vel ex parte ipsi contemplanti partes suas agere videretur. De omnibus autem que ad catholicam fidem pertinent articulis illo docente *qui docet hominem scientiam* ita ad plenum fuerat edocta, ut non esset quod super hijs doctores deberet consulere vel scripturas. Tam inconvulsibile siquidem orthodoxe fidei unctione magistra sumpserat firmamentum: ut aliquando diceret quidquid contingere posset id est iniectis etiam coram

Apologetic passages like this in religious women's lives have drawn divergent interpretations that are, nevertheless, based on the dichotomy of a male, clerical, bookish learning and a female, charismatic, visionary knowledge. The argument typically begins with the Gregorian Reform of the late eleventh century that widened the chasm between the clergy and the laity beyond retrieve. The reformers exalted the status of the priestly office by prescribing strict celibacy and the exclusive clerical prerogatives to preach and to perform the Eucharist.⁶⁹ This move toward clericalization within the western Church, along with the rise of the universities in the thirteenth century as the uncontested center of intellectual authority, decisively excluded women from the ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as high learning. The argument then goes that visions and revelations became means of female empowerment, alternative if not subversive. The priests and friars were sponsors, collaborators, and censors of female visionary experiences; men feared but also fascinated by women's highly somaticized religiosity, as women's place outside the hierarchy both reinforced men's institutionalized authority and, moreover, represented a potentially superior force of charisma.⁷⁰

se quarumlibet heresium decipulis, se nunquam posse ab ipsius fidei rectitudine deviare." *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, 61-62. The English translation is from *Life of Juliana*, trans. Newman, 54.

⁶⁹ For a brief history of this increasing separation of the clergy and the laity in the central Middle Ages, see: Gary Macy, "The 'Invention' of Clergy and Laity in the Twelfth Century," in Michael Horace Barnes and William Roberts eds., *A Sacramental Life: A Festschrift honoring Bernard Cooke* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003), 117-135. see also his *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ John Coakley emphasizes the collaborative relationship between female religious and their male confessors, see his *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Dyan Elliott charts the historical development of the male clergy's early sponsorship to women's religious activities and later their increasing suspicion in her *Proving Women: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). The two approaches to divine knowledge, scholastic and visionary, is discussed in Anneke Mulder-Bakke, "Introduction," in idem ed., *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-*

Whether to represent the university-trained clerics as admiring collaborators or scornful critiques of the female visionaries, the underlying presumptions are a clear division of the bookish as opposed to the visionary knowledge and the triumph of the former over the latter. Both presumptions are somewhat anachronistic and imply more of a modern obsession with the verbal and the textual as the only legitimate form of knowledge. All medieval learning that started with *lectio* aspired to end with *meditatio*. Stephen Jaeger proves in the case of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Cathedral schools and Alain de Libera argues about the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century universities that a common thrust of medieval educational ideals was to impart virtuous comportment and behavior to the disciples through the exemplarity of the master as a person.⁷¹ That is to say, even in the scholarly environment, the charismatic and the performative was still regarded as the more desirable means of education. In the monastic tradition, the preference was probably always given to the experiential and the aesthetic rather than the textual knowledge.⁷² Let us not forget the scholastic dialectics had been viewed as an anomaly in the twelfth century, as manifest in the cause célèbre of Peter Abelard condemned at the Council of Sens, and continued to receive criticisms for centuries to come.⁷³ In a predominantly oral and performative culture of the Middle Ages, women's singing, dancing,

1550 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 1-20. See also: Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010).

⁷¹ Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), esp. 299-347, on page 302: "Le théologien étant à la fois *Lesemeister*, « maître de lecture », c'est-à-dire du sens, et *Lebemeister*, « maître de vie », c'est-à-dire modèle de conduite et conducteur modèle."

⁷² Leclercq, *The Loving of Learning and the Desire for God*.

⁷³ Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University*, 47-277.

ascetic practices, or other non-discursive means of communication should be rather mainstream and efficacious than the written word for the local community and the lay audience.

Moreover, the medieval literary culture also had some conspicuously performative and visual aspects. Besides the fact that the scholastic pedagogy itself was dialogical and disputative,⁷⁴ visualization was at the core of the medieval understanding of knowledge. Carruthers has shown how medieval intellectual culture was profoundly memorial and how central to this memorial culture was the mental practice of imposing a rigid order to the prepared pieces of textual content by the means of a visual scheme or diagram, such as a colonnade or a gridded Noah's ark.⁷⁵ One of the most widely known mnemonics manual written by Hugh of St. Victor describes memory as "a *linea*, a line of cells in a numerically addressed grid."⁷⁶ He recommends in his treatise "The Three Best Memory-Aids for Learning History" that the first step towards memorization is to "construct in your mind a line [of numbers] numbered from one on, in however long a sequence you want, extended as it were before the eyes of your mind" and then associate the verbal cues for the material (in his discussion the first words of the 150 Psalms) with the numbered position.⁷⁷ This medieval practice of ordering the thoughts in a graphical way can find its echo as late as in the seventeenth-century work of René Descartes, whose rationalist, deductive method

⁷⁴ For a recent take on this issue, see Alex Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁷⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.

⁷⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 162.

⁷⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, "The Three Best Memory-Aids for Learning History," translated in Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 340.

appears to be the very antithesis of the medieval culture of memorization yet also emphasizes a linear lay-out of thoughts as its foundational principle: "In order to make our knowledge complete, every single thing relating to our understanding must be surveyed in a continuous and wholly uninterrupted sweep of thought, and be included in a sufficient, well-ordered enumeration."⁷⁸ Whether this feature is "distinctively medieval" or not,⁷⁹ it certainly says about the importance of visual classification for the proper functioning of intellectual faculty commonly believed in a pre-modern society where textual aids were not always readily available. Unsurprisingly, Juliana's meditative techniques preceding her vision seem to share this feature: "In her blessed ecstasy she used to contemplate the state, the bliss, and the glory of that celestial Jerusalem...Passing through the mansions and chambers of that house not made with hands, which are many and diverse because of the diversity of merits, she arrived at that supreme Divinity whom her would love."⁸⁰ The building blocks and pieces of her meditative material were organized and mentally placed into "the mansions and chambers" of the diagram of the heavenly Jerusalem for both mnemonic and mimetic purposes. What follows is a grand vision on the most important doctrinal knowledge of the Christian faith, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist:

With the eyes of a pure heart, therefore, she contemplated the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity...She beheld, and in beholding marvelled, how that divine being does not refuse division in person, although in its most simple substance, essence, and nature it admits no partition. She saw (*videbat*) how that supreme Deity, by the Incarnation of the Father's only-begotten Son, descended wholly to earth yet nevertheless remained wholly in Heaven. She saw (*videbat*) the blessed spirits and

⁷⁸ René Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," in *The Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 25.

⁷⁹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 162.

⁸⁰ *Life of Juliana*, trans. Newman, 51.

the souls of the saints...She saw (*videbat*) how Christ shows himself whole, unbroken, and perfect in the bread.⁸¹

The anonymous hagiographer insisted that what Juliana of Cornillon "saw" about the Trinity and the Incarnation was on impeccable foundation and she did not need to consult books or masters. There are two possible ways to interpret this passage: one, as discussed above, is to assume the written texts and their interpreters, the university masters, as the normative and the authoritative, then Juliana's visionary epistemology would be posited as out of the ordinary. But the other more likely reading is that in a society where reading meant voicing and oral transmission was the more natural way, memory was taken for granted to be more reliable than the written word.⁸² Isn't the hand-copied manuscript always susceptible to scribal errors, smudgy ink, missing lines, interpolations, even falsifications? The texts were often the memory-aids rather than a source of authority that memory had to conform to. On the other hand, isn't a holy person who carries the weight of centuries of tradition and is the object of collective veneration a more certified repository of knowledge about that tradition and that community? What the cleric hagiographer claims about the superiority of visionary knowledge is rather a truism in the Christian

⁸¹ *Vie de Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, 60: "Contemplabatur igitur mundi cordis oculis trinitatem in unitate et unitatem in trinitate. Trinitatem in personarum proprietate, unitatem in simplici substantia. essentia. natura. Intuebatur et in suo intuitu mirabatur quomodo illa deitas in personis non abnuit divisionem, que in sua simplicissima substantia essentia natura nullam recipit sectionem. Videbat quomodo illa summa deitas in incarnatione unigeniti patris tota descendit in terris, et nihilominus tota remansit in celis. Videbat beatos spiritus necnon et sanctorum animas quomodo erant in seipsis...Videbat quomodo christus singulis se sumentibus in salutem se totum integrum et perfectum exhibet in cibum..."; *Life of Juliana*, trans. Newman, 51.

⁸² The transition from a primary reliance on memory to the written document in England is explained as a somewhat contingent process precipitated by the administrative needs following of the Norman Conquest in Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 3rd edition (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

tradition. Either the visions or the scriptures are unerring insofar as they are divinely illuminated.

Also, because Juliana apparently did read and read a lot, there is no question about her theological training, even if not in the scholastic, dialectic mode, her vision when understood as a process of intellectual interiorization is not so much different from any other kind of intellectual endeavor that initially begins with book reading. An example cited by historians to prove this analogy is the passage describing Anselm of Bec's discovery of the ontological argument about God's existence in his *Proslogion*: "Then suddenly one night during matins the grace of God illuminated his heart, the whole matter became clear to his mind, a great joy and exultation filled his inmost being. Thinking therefore that other also would be glad to know what he had found, immediately and ungrudgingly he wrote it on writing tablets and gave it to one of the brethren of the monastery for safekeeping."⁸³ Admittedly a figure transcending the archetypes of a monk or a scholastic, Anselm's philosophizing was strongly reminiscent of a monastic visionary experience, at least hardly distinguishable from Juliana's vision about the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist.

In other words, to say that visionary knowledge is not dialectically opposed to theology is because theological reading, thinking and writing all involved so crucial elements of visualization that the visionary and the theological, though conceptually different, were often indistinguishable in practice. This should be especially true in

⁸³ *The Life of Saint Anselm by Eadmer*, edited and translated by Richard Southern (Oxford: Nelson, 1963), 30. Arjo Vanderjagt, "The Performative Heart of St Anselm's *Proslogion*," in *Anselm: Aosta, Bec and Canterbury*, ed. by David Luscombe and G. R. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 228-37. See also: Rachel Fulton, "Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice," *Speculum* 81.3 (2006): 700-733.

medieval monastic environment where Latin was nobody's native tongue but to be painfully acquired through visual memorization from the manuscripts. Moreover, this was a "bookish" culture where books were not always available; this "bookish" culture was profoundly memorial in which the books often served to anchor memories and thus occupied a more subsidiary role. Anneke Mulder-Bakker has proposed that these two approaches to divine knowledge were recognized as of equal spiritual authority in the Middle Ages and it is a modern misconception to privilege the bookish over the visionary.⁸⁴ Her reminder is certainly valid and important. But a further contention can be added that they often *could not* be distinguished because the scholarly learning in the Middle Ages was itself visual and performative. In other words, the very dichotomy between the bookish and the visionary is a misconception. The ruminating process of an Anselm to produce theological arguments is not very different from the process of a Juliana to induce a liturgical vision: they all require a prepared, disciplined, concentrated mind mustering all available resources in mental storage, perhaps with the exterior stimuli of praying gestures or liturgical music.

Perusing through the literary and hagiographical works from the thirteenth-century Mosan area and the Rhineland, liturgical visions are the dominant genre. What discussed above are just a small group of samples from this prevalent literary fashion. These visions are results of a lifelong virtuous living, monastic discipline, and psychological preparation; the monastic liturgy provided both the meditative material filtered through music and chanting, and the dramatic setting for such visions to happen. The protagonist would combine complex techniques of bodily and mental exercises to induce visionary

⁸⁴ Mulder-Bakker, "Introduction," in idem., ed., *Seeding and Knowing*, 1-20.

experiences, and, because of the highly quotable, allusive, and yet discursively unstable nature of this oral and performative culture, would select, collate, and convolute various musical, textual, and gestural elements to produce new visionary imageries freestyle. This visionary effervescence was largely cross the gender line and transcended the divide of literacy and illiteracy. Such practices and performances were deeply rooted in the monastic liturgical tradition and thoroughly mainstream in the thirteenth-century monastic and hagiographical literature.

Chapter 3 From Meditation to Theater: Performing the Passion of Christ in Liège

Having analyzed miraculous singing and liturgical vision in previous chapters, this chapter turns to the trope of bodily performances in the hagiographical corpus from thirteenth-century Liège, and studies them as stylized ritual behavior. The term “bodily performance” here is broadly conceived to include some of the most common as well as the most extravagant gestural elements attributed to a saintly lifestyle. I shall argue that these performances, which might appear sensationally idiosyncratic, were deeply rooted in the popular liturgical culture in the diocese in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. At the heart of this culture, devotion was defined as essentially corporeal and emphatically performative. Gestural language was considered prior to its verbal counterpart and generative of religious sentiments, not vice versa.

In the classical master narrative of medieval religion, the central Middle Ages was a period of fundamental transition. A shifting of religious sentiments, most famously articulated by Richard Southern in the concluding chapter of *The Making of the Middle Ages*, occurred in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, when monastic authors explored the theme of “tenderness and compassion for the sufferings and helplessness of the Savior of the world” with unprecedented emotional intensity.¹ A mimetic devotion to Christ's humanity, especially in His suffering and death at the cross, emerged as the central theme in later medieval Christianity. Southern identifies the great monastic minds, Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, as the major influences in directing the spiritual impulses of their contemporaries towards an affective identity with Christ's earthly

¹ Richard Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961), 232.

existence and an introspective looking at the human emotions. Rachel Fulton suggests that such transformation happened exactly at this particular historical moment--the eleventh and the twelfth centuries--because the monastic authors anxiously strived to respond to the great disappointment caused by the failure of the Apocalypse to come at the millennial anniversary of Jesus' Crucifixion (1033) and the even greater disillusionment when the Second Coming was further delayed after the First Crusaders captured a Christ-less Jerusalem in 1099. The religious intellectuals began to urge the crusaders to search for Christ's presence inside themselves through constant remembrance of His suffering and death, rather than looking for His literal presence in the material site of the Holy Sepulcher.² Giles Constable marshals his characteristic erudition to demonstrate that the desire to imitate Christ's humanity and his bodily suffering had been a persistent theme throughout the Christian history, but also gained renewed impetus since the eleventh century.³ Historians have largely agreed on there was a turn to the "interiority" (without necessarily a consensus on its definition) in the central Middle Ages.⁴

This transformation of religious sentiments is a too immense topic to be tackled with any measure of satisfaction here (which seems to require a comprehensive assessment of the whole body of religious literature from the medieval Europe), but I would like to

² Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, The Ideal of The Imitation of Christ, The Orders of Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 194-217.

⁴ On the theme of medieval "discovery of the individual" see exemplary works such as Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); a critique of Morris' thesis can be found in Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 82-109.

make two points that might help complement and elucidate the overall storyline. First, as Fulton has suggested that there was a missing link between the centuries old monastic practice of *lectio divina*, pivotal to which was the rumination of the life events of Christ as described in the Scriptures, to a full-blown affective identification with the suffering and dying God-man on the cross.⁵ How did a meditative practice develop into a desire for bodily imitation, for example, by receiving the stigmata (of which all the known cases have occurred after the twelfth century⁶)? One possible explanation is the incongruity of the genres of sources historians have examined. When Southern located the original inspiration for that “tender introspection” in the monastic milieu, the religious emotions he discovered were extracted from brilliant literary compositions by St. Anselm and St. Bernard. But when recounting the full-fledged bodily imitation of the Crucified, the sources are usually more of a hagiographical kind, such as the *Vitae* of St. Francis of Assisi. So not too surprisingly there would be a missing link between introspective whispering of the former and loud theatricality of the latter. If we look at the more descriptive sources about monastic practices, admittedly rather sketchy from the earlier centuries, one would find a more glacial evolution of the various ritualistic behavior later identified as imitation of Christ's humanity. Second, a thesis about a wholesale “turning inward” in the central Middle Ages overlooks the fact that a deeper search for the unfathomable human interior could have synchronized with an explosive experimentation in exterior performances. An increasing sophistication of ritual protocols could parallel an emphasis on self-scrutiny and emotional exuberance. They are not necessarily irreconcilable opposites. Not to say a clear distinction

⁵ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 1-2.

⁶ Constable, *Three Studies*, 201.

between an essentialized “inner self” and a material, external body is arbitrary and questionable dualism anyways.

In this chapter, I will, first, examine some of the most “extreme” devotional practices from the thirteenth-century Liège and contextualize them with earlier and widespread, popular monastic praying techniques. The argument is that there was a particular understanding of devotion as something intrinsically corporeal among the northern devotional writers and religious practitioners. The somatic display of spirituality among religious men and women was not deviant but normative. The conclusion of this chapter should not be very surprising, given that religious worship involves the human body looks like a rather common-sense observation. However, much of the scholarship on medieval religion seems to have founded on shifting definitions about “the internal vs. the external”, especially when it comes to interpret the hagiographical construction of religious women. Scholars feel comfortable to characterize medieval religious practices such as ascetic fasting, ecstatic visions, mystical lactation and pregnancies as somatic and definitively “external”. Amy Hollywood, for instance, has suggested that the male hagiographer of the Liègeois saintly woman Beatrice of Nazareth often “transposes her internal experience into descriptions of the body in its externality. The visionary woman becomes a vision, a divinely marked body, a spectacle for the viewing pleasure of her contemporaries. For this reason, the internal mystical life of Beatrice is transformed into a series of struggles between the body and the soul, of battles represented and enacted on the body of the holy woman.”⁷ The premise here is that one can clearly distinguish between an “internal

⁷ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 35.

mystical life” and “external” bodily manifestations; and this distinction not only makes sense for us, but also made sense for the medieval men and women; and that a hagiographical narrative centering on the latter reflects men's claim to dominion rather than women's self-understanding.

However, a completely opposite evaluation was reached only decades ago in the first academic monograph on the hagiographical corpus from the Diocese Liège. Simone Roisin lauded the “an entirely interior virtue” (*une vertu tout intérieure*) radiating from these hagiographical texts.⁸ In contrast to early medieval *Vitae* which concentrate on the bishops' and abbots' public profile in proselytizing non-believers, founding monasteries or reforming the institutional Church, these thirteenth-century *Vitae* are almost exclusively about ascetics and visionaries. Thus, for Roisin, these protagonists are unquestionably direct spiritual progeny of the Desert Fathers who stood at the origin of the Christian hagiographical tradition.

Why, then, would scholars reach such divergent conclusions on the same source material? Why would some see the devotional practices in these texts as transparently physical and exterior while others without hesitation see them as affective and interior? I think this controversy is potentially sterile, because the attempt to draw a clear line between the external and the internal is to fixate upon a false dichotomy and neglect the dialectical subtleties. In fact, it is a prominent feature of these Liégeois texts that the interior emotional depth is made manifest *only* through exterior bodily movements. The propensity towards elaborate ritualistic behaviors is exactly what fostered rich religious sentiments in the thirteenth century northern Europe. It is oversimplification to judge these people's religion

⁸ Roisin, *L'hagiographie cistercienne*, 81.

as either “external” or “internal,” as at the heart of their devotion was a dialectical relationship between the two.

I. Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Passion Play

The most curious and notorious case of the thirteenth-century “embodied mysticism” is probably Elisabeth of Spalbeek's spectacular reenactment of Christ' Passion every day for almost ten years.⁹ Elisabeth (1246/7-1304), from the town of Spalbeek in the Diocese of Liège, was a famed trance-performer and stigmatist. Her case is highly unusual not only because her performance seems to have pushed the empathetic imitation of Christ's Passion to its most extreme, but also because the document about her performance is an eyewitness account written with meticulous care. Philip of Clairvaux, abbot of the renowned Cistercian abbey, paid a visit to Elisabeth sometime around the year 1266 with the exclusive purpose of examining her reputation as a Passion performer. Elisabeth was a laywoman associated with the Cistercian convent of Herkenrode, a daughter house of Clairvaux, and thus Philip was not an entirely disinterested party. Nevertheless, he cast himself implicitly as an inquisitor to verify the authenticity of her claim to sanctity: “I, Brother Philip of Clairvaux...did not believe the stories, until I came myself and saw with my own eyes and

⁹ The eye-witness account of her daily performance was recorded by Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth Sanctimonialis in Erkenrode. Ordinis Cisterciensis, Leodiensis Dioecesis,” *Codicum Hagiographicorum Bibliothecae Regiae Bruxellensis* 1 (1886): 362-78. The English translation is mine. Relevant studies on this text include: Walter Simons, “Reading a Saint’s Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the Vitae of Thirteenth-Century Beguines,” in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 10-23; Walter Simons and Joanna Ziegler, “Phenomenal Religion in the Thirteenth Century and Its Image: Elisabeth of Spalbeek and the Passion Cult,” *Studies in Church History* (1990): 117-26; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 113-124; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 186-188; Jesse Njus, “The Politics of Mysticism: Elisabeth of Spalbeek in Context,” *Church History* 77 (2008): 285-317; Jesse Njus, “Performing the Passion: A Study on the Nature of Medieval Acting,” Diss. Northwestern University, 2010.

proved (*probavi*) the other half of the story that hadn't been told. I wanted to see what have been heard, and scrutinize what have been seen.”¹⁰ As a result, the document he left consciously adopted a level-headed, slightly incredulous tone. It was a *probatio*---an examination of gathered proofs about the veracity of someone’s sanctity, rather than a standard hagiographical work.¹¹

To summarize Elisabeth's highly complex performance Philip painstakingly described: she reenacted Christ's Passion throughout the day according to the seven liturgical hours, starting from the Matins, to the Prime, the Terce, the Sext, the Nones, the Vespers, and ending with the Compline.¹² Each of the hours corresponded to a scene or event from the Passion narrative. She began at midnight with a performance of Jesus's arrest,¹³ then followed by a performance of Him being led to Annas, Caiphas, Pilate, and Herod at the hour of Prime.¹⁴ At the hour of Terce, Jesus was bound to a column and flagellated.¹⁵ During the hours of Sext, Nones and Vespers, Elisabeth performed the Crucifixion.¹⁶ The sequence ended with Jesus' burial at the hour of compline.¹⁷

¹⁰ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 363: “...ego frater Philippus de Claravalle...non credebam narrantibus, donec ipse veni et vidi oculis meis, et probavi quod dimidia pars mihi non fuerat nuntiata. Audita siquidem videre volui, visa scrutari.”

¹¹ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 186-188.

¹² Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 363: “...septenis horis singulis diebus, in Matutinis scilicet, prima, tertia, sexta, nona, vespere et completorio, mirabili modo repraesentationem suae beatissimae et beatificae passionis ostendit.”

¹³ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 363-364.

¹⁴ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 368.

¹⁵ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 369.

¹⁶ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 369.

¹⁷ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 370.

What is most spectacular is that Elisabeth's reenactment seems to be a dual performance: a physically violent pantomime of the historical Passion and simultaneously a mimesis of the liturgical office commemorating it. Take the most meticulously described Matins service for example. She suddenly arose at midnight as if “dragged most cruelly by impious hands” (*impiorum manibus crudelissime pertractus*).¹⁸ A trance status (*statu in quo rapitur*) precluded the performance when she was senseless and motionless like “a statue of wood or stone”. Then she “as if returned to herself” rapidly arose and left her bed, and was marching in her chamber “like being led by angelic hand” (*angelica ut creditur manu ducta*).¹⁹ Elisabeth was acting like a marionette, which Philip noted was believed to be no less than a miracle by the local community because the girl was an invalid and had not been able to even escape a fire without assistance.²⁰ What followed was a physically demanding test of strength and endurance. During the First Nocturn, she walked back and forth in her chamber and “repeatedly stroke her cheeks with both hands” to make some sustained, clear and harmonized sounds in place of “the psalmody as if in drums and cymbals” (*loco psalmodiae quasi in tympanis et cymbalis benesonantibus*).²¹ A

¹⁸ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 364.

¹⁹ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 364: “...in eodem statu in quo rapitur non modico spatio ut imago quaedam ligni aut lapidis sine sensu et motu et flatu tota rigida perseverat, ita quod de ipsa nihil tangi aut moveri potest, nec etiam minor digitus, quin tota machina moveatur. Post quem raptum, quasi ad se reversa, surgit et exit de lecto velociter, et incedit per cameram suam mirabili et composito gressu, angelica ut creditur manu ducta.”

²⁰ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 364: “Tanta enim a puerilibus annis aetati suae, videlicet dum adhuc esset quinquennis vel circa, corporis et membrorum imbecillitate tenetur, quod nec instante immo nec extante domus in qua degit incendio sine alieno adminiculo inde posset exire, prout hoc in tota vicinia notorium habetur et indubitatum.”

²¹ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 364: “...incedit honestissime per cameram suam et sine intermissione eundo et redeundo utraque palma crebro ordine se percutit in maxillis, clara exinde et concordi sonorum constantia resultate: et sic diu loco psalmodiae quasi in tympanis et cymbalis benesonantibus primi nocturni vigiliis solemnizat.”

percussionist, she used her own body parts as instruments to perform the psalms. Then, in place of the Lessons (*quasi pro lectionibus*), she made gestures (*in suis gestis textit*) to represent the beginning of Lord's Passion, i.e., "how He was captured and dragged out by horrendous cruelty."²² She seized her own clothes on the breast and dragged herself right and left, and then "striking herself forcefully on the cheek that she bends her whole body to the ground" and also "on the back of the head, now between the shoulders, now on the neck."²³ Philip conceded that it was "terrible to watch"²⁴ and Elisabeth "in a new and unheard of way at one and the same time exhibits in her person both the suffering Lord and the persecutor or the savage tormentor: the person of the Lord when she suffers and the person of the persecutor when she strikes, drags, or pierces or threatens."²⁵ Then after an intermission of stillness and quiet, Elisabeth began her Second Nocturn in a similar fashion. Again, she used her body parts as musical instruments to perform the psalmody: "the new drummer uses her flesh as the harp, her cheeks as the drum, cry as the psaltery, palms and fingers as the plectra..."²⁶ Philip then noticed Elisabeth's peculiar manner of praying: she turned her face to the east, standing straight, with her eyes wide open seeing nothing as if

²² Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 364: "quasi pro lectionibus, in suis gestis textit exordium Dominicae passionis, videlicet quomodo captus fuit et terribili quadam crudelitate tractatus."

²³ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 364-365: "Post quae statim seipsam percutit, nunc ita fortiter in maxillam quod ad aliam partem totum corpusculum suum versus terram ex pondere percussione inclinatur, nunc in occipite, nunc inter scapulas, nunc in collo."

²⁴ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 364: "Terribilibus oculis intuetur."

²⁵ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 366: "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 pulsatur, trahitur, aut percutitur aut minatur."

²⁶ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 365: "Loco psalmodiae, ut supra scribitur, nova tympanistria carnem ponens pro cithara, genas pro tympano, jubulum pro psalterio, palmas et digitos pro plectro, modulationis organicae instrumento ejusdem secundi nocturni vigiliis novo psallendi genere solemniter prosequitur et devote, iterato subjungens figuras et signa et modos incipientis Dominicae passionis sub forma superius annotata."

insentient.²⁷ She also used an exquisitely painted diptych of the Crucifixion to facilitate her imagining. She repeatedly murmured these words “*here soete Here*, that is *Lord, sweet Lord*” while kissing the Lord’s feet on that painting: “She made from the deep bottom of her heart some big, deep, pleasant and amorous (*jocunda et amorosa*) sighs with some calm commotion on the breast and the throat and sweet-sounding whispering on the lips.”²⁸

After the Matins, the minor hours were much briefer following the liturgical convention. Elisabeth would make gestures to indicate some absentee props. When performing the flagellation at the Terce, she stood upright “joining her arms before her breast, the figure tips touching her elbows, her stretching arms joining before her breast signifying an empty space left for the column.”²⁹ During the hours of the Sext, Nones, and Vespers, she performed the Crucifixion exhibiting “her bodily disposition always in the shape of the cross.”³⁰ At the hour of the Compline, she “represented (*figurat*) Lord in the Sepulcher with her bodily gesture sometimes by sitting sometimes by standing.”³¹

²⁷ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 365: “Quibus expletis, versus orientem vultu converso, stans recta, apertis oculis nihil videns, immo nec sese sentiens.”

²⁸ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 367: “Statim offertur ei tabula quaedam optime depictam habens imaginem Domini crucifixi; quam apertam et discoopertam ambabus tenens manibus, devotissime contemplatur dulcissimum Dominum. Et crebro commemorat haec verba, frequenter ingeminans: *Here, soete Here*, id est *Domine, dulcis Domine*. Purissimis labiis, in quibus diffusa gratia manifeste relucet, saepe Dominicae pedes imaginis dulciter osculatur. Inter haec larga, profunda, jocunda et amorosa suspiria cum aliqua serena commotione pectoris et gutturis necnon et labiorum susurrio dulcisono ex intimo cordis arcano producit.”

²⁹ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 369: “...brachia ante pectus jungens, summitates digitorum cubitis supponens, elongans a pectore brachia sic conjuncta, quasi signato et vacuo relicto spatio pro columna...”

³⁰ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 369: “In sexta vero hora et nona et Vesperis, exceptis illis temporis spatiis quibus sub forma suprascripta jacendo se percutit, in sui corporis dispositione semper exhibet formam crucis.”

³¹ Philip of Clairvaux, “Vita Elizabeth,” 370: “In hora vero completorii in sui corporis gestu seu positione figurat Dominicam sepulturam, tam in sedendo quam in stando.”

Elisabeth's performance was culminated by receiving the stigmata. Philip gave a forensic description of the wounds on her body: "...I and my companions, the abbots and the monks, saw during the nocturns and other hours blood exuding from her eyes and soaking the linen garment which she wore with streaming drops. Also, we saw blood oozing from the wounds of her hands and feet." Moreover, on Friday at Nones, they saw "blood, not entirely red but as if mixed with water flowing from her side through the opening on her garment."³² Philip cautiously reported at the beginning of his report that "it is known that this said girl most clearly bears the stigmata of Jesus Christ our Lord in her body: new wounds show most evidently on her hands and feet without ambiguity of simulation or question of fraud."³³ Philip consciously constructed Elisabeth as the female counterpart of Francis of Assisi, the most well-known stigmatist in the thirteenth century: "It [the miracle of stigmata] recently revealed in the virile sex in the person of blessed Francis: so that each sex may discover that which it honors, venerates, reveres, imitates, and loves not only in the testimony of the Scriptures, but also from the living exemplars of the human condition on the cross of Christ."³⁴ Although Francis of Assisi is the most familiar stigmatist from the Middle Ages, he is perhaps not the creator of this tradition.

³² Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 371: "...ego et socii mei, abbates et monachi, in nocturnis et aliis quibusdam horis vidimus sanguinem per ipsius oculos exeuntem et vestem lineam qua superinduitur guttis inde fluentibus intingentem. Item per manuum et pedum vulnera sanguis, nobis videntibus, pluries ebullivit. De latere etiam ipsius quadam sexta feria, hora nona, per aperturam vestimenti sui, factam circa mamillam, sanguinem non omnino rubeum, sed quasi admixtum aquae, vidimus defluentem."

³³ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 363: "Sciendum igitur est quod praefata puella manifestissime stigmata Domini nostri Jesu Christi in corpore suo portat: in cuius scilicet minibus et pedibus patent plagae recentes..."

³⁴ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 373: "In sexu etiam virile, videlicet, in persona beati Francisci, dudum revelavit idipsum: ut sic uterque sexus non solum ex testimonio Scripturarum, sed ex vivis exemplaribus conditionis humanae in cruce Christi inveniat quod honoret, veneretur, revereatur, imitetur, amet..."

There are several early-thirteenth-century examples. A conspicuous one is, again, Jacques de Vitry's Mary of Oignies, who when dead in 1213 was discovered with full stigmata on her corpse.³⁵ But in this example, along with two other early cases listed by Giles Constable,³⁶ the said holy person was supposed to conceal the wounds out of humility or caution until they were discovered posthumously in an autopsy. Stigmata on the dead corpse seem to save the person from possible accusations of presumptuousness and avoid the difficult question about the origin of the wounds (i.e. whether they were penitential self-affliction or miraculously bestowed wounds). However, Elisabeth of Spalbeek was still alive when she revealed her wounds, a "living exemplar (*vivis exemplar*)" as Philip strategically put.

By referring to Elisabeth as the "living exemplar," Philip of Clairvaux perceived her performance as a didactic drama intended for the local community to behold and imitate: "No one, however illiterate or simple, can excuse himself for saying 'I cannot read or understand such profound mystery, which I do not know the literal meaning' or 'the book is closed,' for an illiterate person can read, just like a literate person (*sicut litteratus*) not from the parchments or papers, but the limbs and body of our girl--a living and open Veronica, the vivid image of his own salvation and a living history of redemption."³⁷ This

³⁵ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 66-67.

³⁶ The other two early-thirteenth-century stigmatists are the Premonstratensian lay brother Dodo of Hascha (d. 1231) and the dauphin Robert of Auvergne (d. 1234), see: Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 216-217.

³⁷ Philip of Clairvaux, "Vita Elizabeth," 373: "...nihil excusationis praetendere possit homo, quantumcumque illiteratus aut simplex, quem intemeratae Virginis partus redemit, ut dicat: 'Non possum legere aut intelligere tam profunda mysteria, quia nescio litteram' vel 'quia liber clausus est' cum non in membranis aut chartis, sed in membris et corpore memoratae nostrae puellae, scilicet vivae et apertae Veronicae, suae salvationis vivam imaginem et redemptionis animatam historiam sicut litteratus ita valeat legere idiota."

brilliant metaphor of the holy woman's body as the parchments is intriguing: Philip affirms the woman's performance as a living theatre for the illiterate lay folk, and elevates it to be on an equal footing with the written word. This association of the human body with the parchments made of animal skins is certainly not Philip of Clairvaux's innovation, but a Cistercian literary trope. In Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*, he explained to the novice why there were more visions about the Passion than the Resurrection in his book even though the latter was more exalted in dignity than the former: "Christ is the book of life, sealed with seven seals according to John... And when first they [i.e. the Apostles] offered it to those who knew the letters, that is the Jews, and they rejected it as if sealed, next they offered it to those who did not know the letters, that is the Gentiles, and when they could not understand it, they expounded it to them... Christ Himself wrote this book, because He suffered of His own will. The small and black letters of it were written on the parchment as it were of His own body, by the bruising blows of the scourge; the red letters and capitals by the piercing of the nails; and the full stops and commas by the pricking of the thorns. Well had that parchment been polished beforehand by multitudes of blows, marked by buffeting and spitting, and lined with the reed."³⁸

Elisabeth of Spalbeek, despite of her intricate Passion performance that sustained for a remarkably lengthy period of ten years, was never the subject of a full-length hagiographical *Vita*, not to say any campaign effort towards sainthood. Like many *mulieres religiosae*, she did have a network of powerful patrons and friends---Philip, Abbot of

³⁸ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 8, 35: "Liber vitae Christus est, secundum Johannem septem signaculis signatus... Quem cum primo obtulissent scienti littera, id est Judaeo, et respuisset illum tanquam signatum, obtulerunt illum nescienti litteras, scilicet gentilitati, et cum illum intelligere non posset, exposuerunt ei... Librum hunc Christus ipse scripsit, quia propria voluntate passus est, In pelle siquidem corporis eius scriptae errant litterae minors et nigrae, per lividas plagas flagellorum; litterae rubeae et capitals, per infixiones clavorum; puncta etiam et virgulae, per punctiones spinarum. Bene pellis eadem prius fuerat multiplici percussione pumicata, colaphis et sputis cretata, arundine liniata."

Clairvaux apparently, and also the abbot of the Benedictine abbey of St. Trond who was both her protector and blood relative. However, her reputation as a local holy woman seems to have been severely tarnished by her involvement in an odd court intrigue around the year 1277, after which Elisabeth completely vanished from historical records. In 1276, the French King Philip III's eldest son Louis from his first wife died. Surrounding the dauphin's sudden and mysterious death there were two competing rumors about the culprit: one circulating in Paris blamed the King's second wife, Mary of Brabant, for having poisoned the dauphin to pave the way for her own offspring to the throne; the other was reported by a certain canon of Laon who had been told by two Liègeois beguines that the King had sinned against nature and was punished for his sodomy.³⁹ A series of interrogations were conducted. The two beguines denied first to the papal legate then to several Liègeois churchmen they had said anything about the king's sexuality. One of the two beguines was identified by the Latin chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis as "a certain beguine, pseudo-prophetess of Nivelles" (*quaedam Beguina Nivellensis...pseudoprophetissa*), while, interestingly, the French vernacular translation, called her "a diviner (*une devine*) from Nivelles who said marvelous things about the past and the future, and was in the habit of a beguine and lived like a holy woman of good life (*comme sante femme et de bonne vie*)."⁴⁰ The vernacular version of the same chronicle entry, supposedly a direct and literal translation of the Latin original, yet presents a far

³⁹ The political background of the incident is most fully studied in William Chester Jordan, "The Struggle for Influence at the Court of Philip III: Pierre de la Broce and the French Aristocracy," *French Historical Studies* (2001): 439-468. See also: Richard Kay, "Martin IV and the Fugitive Bishop of Bayeux," *Speculum* (1965): 460-483; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 113-124; Gérard Sivéry, *Philippe III le Hardi* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

⁴⁰ Guillaume de Nangis, *Gesta Philippi tertii Francorum regis*, in Martin Bouquet, ed., *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. 20 (Paris: l'imprimerie royale, 1840), 502-503.

more positive opinion about the beguine' reputation. This beguine was identified in the deposition of the papal legate as "Ysabel de Sparbeke", the Gallicized form of Elisabeth, and in the Bishop of Liège's report to the king as "a Lizabeth de Spalbeke."⁴¹ She should be the protagonist in Philip of Clairvaux's Passion narrative ten years ago. However, the vast lacuna between these two sets of documents leaves us wonder why she moved on to pursue a career in prophecy and what brought her to be involved in French court politics. The biggest loser in this whole incident turned out to be Pierre de la Broce, the King's former favorite and chamberlain, who was put to death for being the mastermind behind the rumor slandering the Queen. His downfall confirmed the increasing Brabantine influence in the French court.⁴² There is no evidence about the beguines being punished for the attributed rumor.

While Elisabeth has been pitied as an easily manipulated pawn in this bizarre political struggle⁴³ and the evidence about her role is extremely scanty and reported only by second-hand, she emerged as a religious woman with considerable public visibility, or at least credible enough as a source of rumor involving the French king. Her Passion devotion was never mentioned in the dossiers about the 1277 affair; she was at this time primarily known for her prophetic spirit. Prophecy had long played a part in the social and political life in the medieval society, and prominent pious women did frequently get

⁴¹ J. de Gaulle ed., "Déposition du légat Simon contre Pierre de Beneis, évêque de Bayeux," and "Rapport de l'évêque de Liège au roi Philippe le Hardi," in *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire de France* (1844): 89 and 96.

⁴² Jordan, "The Struggle for Influence."

⁴³ Caciola called her "a weak, vain, and manipulable woman," in *Discerning Spirits*, 122.

consulted and publicly express opinions that had political implications.⁴⁴ Although Elisabeth never achieved the degree of influence comparable to Hildegard of Bingen or Catherine of Siena, her reputation for prophecy, good or ill, went beyond the Liègeois region and reached the French court in Paris. A lay woman, her path to religious fame and political influence was stereotypical for a medieval society that was maintained through oral communication (i.e. in the form of prophecy or rumor) and performative display (thus the Passion performance).

Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Passion play was a complex synthesis of penitential practices and performing arts. Noticeably, neither she nor her admirers seemed to care about the differences between the two. Her performance was sensible only if these various elements were fully recognized and their meanings agreed upon by the local audience. In other words, the validity of her claim to holiness was premised on a communal consensus on what were expected about the behaviors of a holy person. She was an extraordinary case; or perhaps not so extraordinary given the paucity of written documents about other similar lay, local saints. She was representative of a particular devotional tradition that nurtured her ideas in the first place and also assigned her a sympathetic audience and interpreter. Not to dilute the extraordinariness of her case, Elisabeth the Passion performer was a persona anticipated, demanded and constructed by a devotional community who chose to interpret her behaviors in a certain way. The next section of this chapter will show how the individual elements of her performance had been created, elaborated, and endowed with

⁴⁴ On the political prophecies of twelfth-century religious women, see, for example, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Visions and Schism Politics in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard of Bingen, John of Salisbury, and Elisabeth of Schönau," in Mathilde van Dijk and Renée Nip eds., *Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies: Festschrift in Honour of Anneke Mulder-Bakker on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 173-187. On the later period of the Great Western Schism, see: idem, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

meaning in the religious culture of northern Europe. And some similar cases from the surrounding of Liège will be proposed for comparison.

II. The Devotional Background: The Monastic Tradition and the case of Arnulf of Villers

It has been a long Christian tradition to allocate individual canonical hours to specific events in the salvation history. According the Gospels, for example, Jesus died on the Cross at the ninth hour. The *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 215) attributed to Hippolytus and supposedly reflecting the liturgical customs in the Roman Church was an early example associating the prayer-hours to the events surrounding the Passion: “If you are at home at the *third hour*, you should pray to God and offer him praise...for it is the time when Christ was nailed to the cross...you should pray at the *sixth hour*, thinking of Christ hanging on the cross while the sun was checked in its course and darkness reigned supreme...At the *ninth hour*, your prayer and praise should be protracted...It was at this time that Christ, pierced with the spear, poured forth water and blood...”⁴⁵ But an exclusive focus on commemorating the Passion in the Office of the Hours was not present in the Benedictine Rule or the ninth-century Amalar of Metz's *On Liturgy*. It should be a somewhat later development when medieval liturgists allegorized the individual hours by associating them precisely with biblical accounts of the Passion. In the late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century Liège, Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) in his *De divinis officiis* used the Passion narrative to structure

⁴⁵ Quoted from “The Liturgical Code in the Rule of Benedict,” *RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 380-381.

the daily routine of monastic worship.⁴⁶ However, Rupert's exegetic concern is to show how the Passion story at every important moment prefigures the ultimate glory of the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. The emphasis is not an empathetic identification with Christ's sufferings. For example, the hour of the Prime, according to Rupert, was when Jesus was brought before Pilate, and the significance of this hour was that we should offer the first hour of the day to Our Redemptor and seek His kingdom who died for our sins and will resurrect to judge us at the End.⁴⁷ Rupert assigns the seven canonical hours with events from the Scriptural Passion narrative in a matter-of-fact manner without apparent effort to give any imaginative descriptions to visualize the scenes or invoke emotions. His work concerns more with allegorical exegesis than concrete ritual practices.

If we want to better understand the exuberant performance of people like Elisabeth of Spalbeek, monastic works of a more practical character might have exerted a more direct influence. Although not systematized, the tendency to fit the life events of Christ into the daily prayer routine and organize them according to the Hours was already present in monastic practices by the eleventh century. Abbot Benedict of La Chiusa (d. 1091), from the Alpine region near Turin, was said to meditate upon Jesus' life events from the Annunciation and Nativity to His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension "everyday

⁴⁶ Rupert of Deutz, *Ruperti Tuitiensis Liber de divinis officiis*, ed. Hrabano Haacke, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 7* (Turnhout: Brepols 1967), 7-10. Jürgen Bärsch, "Liturgy and Reform: Northern German Convents in the Late Middle Ages," in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon, eds. *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 32.

⁴⁷ Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, 7: "Prima hora creatori nostro laudes referre debemus ante omnem curam corporis, qua scilicet hora Dominus noster iam consputus et illusus atque alapis caesus et adhuc opprobriis saturandus Pilato propter nos ligatus astitit, itemque rediuius stans in litore, cum in captura piscium, a quibus retia rupta non sunt, significasset ecclesiam, qualis futura est in resurrectione mortuorum, melllitum cum septem discipulis celebrauit conuiuium..."

with pure devotion, and inserted fifty appropriate psalms with suitable antiphons and collects.”⁴⁸ We do not know Benedict's precise praying routine or how widespread such liturgical additions were among the monastic circles in the eleventh century. Another well-known example is from the late eleventh century, when Goscelin, from the important Flemish abbey of St. Bertin, advised the English recluse Eva: “Sanctify all hours with Christ's suffering. In the middle of the night adore him captured and incarcerated, in the morning as he is being flagellated, in the third hours as he is handed over to be crucified. Shouting, 'Let him be crucified,' they crucified him with their tongues. In the sixth hour venerate him as he is being nailed to the cross, in the ninth hour venerate him dead, in the evening as he is being buried. Then, at cock's crow, when the morning star rises, greet the Lord's resurrection with a morning prayer of praise.”⁴⁹

In the later twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, a number of anonymous treatises on meditative and praying techniques started to circulate under the names of distinguished devotional writers such as Bede the Venerable, Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux. These short tracts won immense popularity in the thirteenth century and later were expanded into monumental works such as Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes vitae*

⁴⁸ William, *Vita Benedicti Clusensis*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, XII, 201: “In hunc igitur modum sollempnes dies, ac potissimum ipsius Domini et intemeratae genitricis eius festa colebat, quamvis in profestis ac cotidianis diebus a missarum celebratione cessare minime noverat. Dominicae quoque annuntiationis, nativitatis, circumcissionis, apparitionis, in templum praesentationis, parentibus exhibitae subiectionis, baptismi, ieiunii, sanctae temptationis, et angelicae ministracionis, necnon et praedicationis ac miraculorum, transfigurationis itidem, passionis et mortis, resurrectionis, ascensionis, advocationisque et secundum adsumptam totius nostrae salutiferae dispensationis memoriam, cotidie pura devotione recolebat, et quinquaginta psalmos inter ista apte partiendo cum antiphonis congruis et collectis intercinebat.” This source is mentioned in Constable, *Three Studies*, 205.

⁴⁹ Goscelin of St Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation [Liber Comfortatorius]*, trans. Monika Otter (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 99.

Christi in the fourteenth century.⁵⁰ One early representative, the Pseudo-Bede's *De meditaione passionis Christi per Septem diei horas libellus*, was probably from the last quarter of the twelfth century and composed by a northern Cistercian author.⁵¹ In this brief and literally crude piece intended as a practical manual, the arrangement of the seven hours is slightly different from Rupert's or Elisabeth's routines: here the meditation cycle starts with the commemoration of the Last Supper during the Compline and ends with the Deposition from the Cross during the Vespers the next day, while, as mentioned above, Elisabeth's performance begins with Jesus' arrest during the Matins and ends with His burial at the Compline the next day. These variations might have something to do with the dispersed origins and wide popularity of such praying practices uncodified by official liturgy.

These practical tracts dictated proper emotional preparation and vivid mental imagination for prayers. It directly appealed to the reader to feel the suffering and compassion for Christ using the present tense and the second-person singular subjunctive: “as if you were present at the time when He was suffering. And if you feel the pain, and if you should see your Lord suffering before your eyes, Lord Himself will be present and will accept your vows.”⁵² In contrast to the scholarly exegetic tone of Rupert of Deutz, such treatises ornately expanded the Passion narrative with biblical and imagined dialogues by inviting the reader to participate in the highly dramatized scenes. For instance, when

⁵⁰ For a recent study on the textual problems of this work, see Sarah McNamer, “The Origins of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*,” *Speculum* (2009): 905-955.

⁵¹ Pseudo-Bede, *De meditatione passionis Christi per septem diei horas libellus*, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne 94: 561-568.

⁵² Pseudo-Bede, *De meditatione passionis Christi*, 561-562: “...ac si praesens tum temporis fuisses, quando passus fuit. Et ita te habeas in dolendo, ac si Dominum tuum coram oculis tuis haberes patientem, et ita ipse Dominus praesens erit, et accipiet tua vota.”

meditating upon the Last Supper and His subsequent arrest during the Compline, it is recommended that “you shall consider (*cogitabis*) in what manner the Lord said to his disciples, 'Arise, let us go hence.' and you shall answer Him in spirit: 'Lord, where shall we go?' And He himself will answer you in spirit: 'We shall go to my Passion; we will have my distress. And you should prepare yourselves for the bodily tribulation in this world.’”⁵³ The treatise *De meditatione passionis* frequently uses the imperative verb *Cogita* urging the devotional reader to think carefully about every actor's emotional, verbal as well as gestural reactions, in particular Jesus' “mode of praying in bodily gesture and pious word” (*modum orandi in gestu corporis et verbo pio*) in the Garden of Gethsemane.⁵⁴

Such popular tracts advising on concrete meditative techniques indicated some widespread interests in such practices in the twelfth- and the thirteenth centuries. Juliana of Cornillon (d. 1258), the creator of the Feast of Corpus Christi, for example, was said to desire for a “spiritual” crucifixion: “Many times, it is said, she expressed a desire to suffer death on a cross for Christ's sake in the presence of all living, so that in this way she might return at least some measure of the love Christ showed by dying on the Cross. But since she could not physically die on a cross as she wished, she often stretched herself spiritually, with unbelievably fervent love, on the same cross where Christ had suffered.”⁵⁵ Juliana was also said to habitually meditate upon Christ's Passion at its every stage: “She saw him bound, scourged, spat upon, provoked with mockery, pierced with nails. She saw him as

⁵³ Pseudo-Bede, *De meditatione passionis Christi*, 562: “...cogitabis qualiter dixit Dominus discipulis suis, *Surgite, eamus hinc*; et respondebis ei in spiritu, *Domine, quo ibimus?* et ipse tibi in spiritu respondebit: *Ibimus ad passionem meam, ibimus ad angustiam meam, et ad se parationem a vobis, corporaliter in hoc mundo.*”

⁵⁴ Pseudo-Bede, *De meditatione passionis Christi*, 563.

⁵⁵ *The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon*, 48-49.

the brazen serpent lifted high on the rod of the Cross in the desert of this exile [Num. 21:9], given myrrh for his drink, his side pierced by the lance. These marks of the suffering and dying Christ were ever present to Juliana's heart."⁵⁶ Beatrice of Nazareth (1200-1268) also regularly recited "in an orderly way what the infant Christ bore at the time of his birth, the miracles he manifested in his youth, the disgrace, the spittle, the scourges, the cross and death he endured in the manly strength of his passion, and what he powerfully accomplished after his death, smashing the gates of hell and snatching his own people from the darkness. Thus, she also arrived in her meditation at the glory of the Lord's ascension."⁵⁷

It is well-known that the later medieval piety was Christocentric, its goal being an empathetic participation in the Passion and Christ's suffering. But what is less studied and can only be glimpsed from scattered evidence is that such meditation seems to have always been corporeally centered and physically demanding. As an actual practice, when mentioned in sources across the genres, it usually involved complex bodily performance and was rarely considered an emotional, mental or intellectual exercise that solely operated from within. Again, let's take Juliana of Mont-Cornillon's example. She was reported to regularly "see" Christ' Passion, but it is noteworthy that the hagiographer went on to add a brief comment that such exercise always cost her great physical strength and was extremely exhausting: "There were three things that exhausted Juliana's physical strength from her

⁵⁶ *The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon*, 49.

⁵⁷ *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, edited by Léonce Reypens and translated by Roger De Ganck (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 48-49: "...omnibus ex ordine recitatis que vel in natiuitatis tempore christus infans pertulit, vel in iuuenili etate miracula demonstrauit, aut in virili robore passionis obprobria, sputa, flagella, crucem mortemque sustinuit., aut post mortem, inferni portas confringendo suosque de tenebris eripiendo, potenter expleuit., ad ascensionis dominice gloriam vsque meditando peruentum est..."

youth up...The second was frequent remembrance of the Lord's Passion, and the third was the violence of intense love for her Creator.”⁵⁸ We should not assume this passage simply means to say that intense mental meditation is physically consuming. In fact, meditations, for the thirteenth-century audience, meant some very concrete, physical acts, as evident from another more illuminating piece of evidence: Caesarius of Heisterbach tells about a monk Peter from the Cistercian monastery of Hemmenrode whose favorite spiritual exercise was to recite at least once a day the Reproaches of the passion of Christ. Caesarius mentioned that Peter kept “knocking and unweariedly resisted the injuries and difficulties offered to him” (*cum perstitisset pulsans, et illatas sibi iniurias et difficultates indefessus effregisset*) in his assiduous prayers.⁵⁹ That is to say a performance of the *improperia*, or Jesus' reproaches to the ungrateful people and part of the Good Friday liturgy, would actually bring the reciter physical “injuries and difficulties.” But Caesarius did not bother to specify what exactly the monk did to himself while reciting the reproaches. Let’s draw yet another piece of evidence about the close affinity between the Good Friday liturgy and fierce asceticism: the eleventh-century *Vita* for Dominic *Loricatus*, “the one who wore metal plates (*lorica*),” composed by the fervent Church reformer Peter Damian. According to Damian, Dominic was primarily a heroic self-flagellant who gave himself one thousand lashes for every ten Psalms recited and performed one hundred genuflections for every fifteen.⁶⁰ Dominic and Damian are believed to be among the first to transform self-flagellation from a disciplinary punishment into a penitential rite among the monastic

⁵⁸ *The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon*, 49.

⁵⁹ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, VIII. 13.

⁶⁰ Giles Constable, “Attitudes toward Self-inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages,” in *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 15.

circle.⁶¹ Peter Damian is also known to be especially devoted to the veneration of the Cross and elaborated the original three sets of *Improperia* in the liturgical formula into nine, where the officiating priests, impersonating Christ, detailed item by item the iniquities He had endured for His people and severely demanded individual as well as collective accountability.⁶² It is high conjectural but not unlikely that Peter Damian was the great champion, if not the initiator, who appropriated this dramatized element of the Good Friday liturgy and paired it with penitential practices such as genuflections or self-flagellation. Peter, the monk from Hemmenrode, seems to have made this practice into his daily praying routine; thus, gruesome physical injuries naturally ensued and made an impression upon Caesarius who then recorded such ascetic feast into his *Dialogus*.

The conceptual distinction between introspective mysticism and exterior asceticism exists more glaringly in the modern scholarly discussion than in the medieval descriptive sources. Besides Elisabeth of Spalbeek, another fascinating example of extravagant bodily performance of piety from the Liège area is the Cistercian lay brother Arnulf (c. 1180-1228). His *Vita*, written by Goswin of Bossut from the Cistercian monastery of Villers, has posed great interpretative difficulties for modern scholars who have more or less viewed this account an embarrassment for the Cistercian Order that has to be explained away. Goswin indulged in lurid descriptions of Arnulf's numerous innovative penitential instruments and manners of self-torture. He wore a penitential shirt next to the skin made of eleven hedgehog pelts and regularly whipped himself over a thousand times for a day,

⁶¹ Constable, "Attitudes toward Self-inflicted Suffering": Katherine Allen Smith, "Saints in Shining Armor: Medieval Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250," *Speculum* (2008): 572-602.

⁶² Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 142-144. On the development of the Good Friday liturgy in the early Middle Ages, see, for example, Yvonne Rokseth, "La liturgie de la passion vers la fin du Xe siècle," *Revue de Musicologie* (1949): 1-58.

for example. The thirteenth-century hagiographer found no problem presenting Arnulf as a heroic athlete who persevered with lifetime bodily martyrdom, while some modern commentators have found this image difficult to be reconciled with a certain ideal of monastic spirituality.⁶³ Not only did Arnulf fervently seek common monastic ascetic practices such as self-flagellation and extreme fasting, he also displayed some seemingly idiosyncratic behaviors that are worth comparison with Elisabeth the Passion performer.

Once when Arnulf had come home to the monastery for a major feast, he happened to be standing during vigils apart from the stalls and adjacent to the monks engaged in the psalmody. Heavenly grace then flowed into his heart, and he conceived a devotion he could not conceal, nor keep from showing up in some bodily gesture. Facing him stood one of the brethren, Walter by name, who now looked up and noticed Arnulf softly laughing, bobbing his head and rhythmically tapping his foot on the ground (*leniter ridentem, caput agitatam, et etiam solo pede saepius tripudiantem*)...Here a prime consideration for our hearers should be wonderment at Arnulf's wondrous *conversatio*, for while enduring such pain from his bodily affliction, he could yet nourish an inward joy and keep it up so heartily as to break out into full-throated laughter... Arnulf would conceive in his inner heart a joy great enough to force him into outbursts of rollicking laughter, a laughter at once spiritual and yet seemingly wanton. He would fling away his scourge, clap his hands and tap-dance (*tripudiet*) with his feet.⁶⁴

First, as discussed in last chapter, sublime religious experience always occurred in the setting of communal worship and incited by singing the psalms. It was rarely a truly

⁶³ See the historiographical review section in Brian Patrick McGuire, "Self-Denial and Self-Assertion in Arnulf of Villers," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* (1993): 241-259. See also: Martha Newman, "Disciplining the Body, Disciplining the Will: Hypocrisy and Asceticism in Cistercian Monasticism," in Oliver Freiberger ed. *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93-115.

⁶⁴ *De B. Arnulfo Monacho*, 621: "Cum in quadam festivitate praecipua venisset ad monasterium homo Dei, contigit, eum hora vigiliarum stare se orsum extra chorum juxta conventum psallentium monachorum. Et cum devotionem cordis, quam ibidem ex infusione gratiae caelestis conceperat, occultare non posset, quin aliquo gesto corporis eam ostenderet; respiciens Frater quidam, Walterus nomine, qui ex adverso secus eum stabat, vidit eum leniter ridentem, caput agitantem, & etiam solo pede saepius tripudiantem... In primis igitur universi haec audientes, mirentur, & considerent, quam mirabilis conversationis vir iste fuerit; qui cum dolore quem in afflictione corporali sustinuit, etiam gaudium cordis, quod per risum oris exterius apparebat, interius nutrire & conservare potuit... magnum interius in corde concipiebat gaudium, cujus magnitudine tam validum exterius solvebatur in risum, ut flagellum de manu projiciens, cum spirituali quadam lascivia, plauderet manibus, pedibusque tripudiet." The English translation is from *Send Me God*, trans. Newman, 166-167.

introspective experience of an isolated self. Moreover, the ecstatic person was supposed to be observed by attentive beholders. Here, a named witness, Walter, vouched for the accuracy of what everybody had seen. Second, laughter is hardly a literary commonplace in medieval hagiographical tradition. Even Goswin himself seems to have been a little uneasy with the propriety of this behavior and explained that it must be bodily manifestation of inner joy and devotion that could not be controlled. Arnulf's laughter is described as "spiritual and yet seemingly wanton" (*cum spirituali quadam lascivia*). It is certainly possible that this curious combination of adjectives suggests an ambiguous attitude on the part of the hagiographer. But in Philip of Clairvaux's description of Elisabeth's kissing of Christ's feet on the painted diptych, her breath is said to be "pleasant and amorous" (*jocunda et amorosa*). Given the context, the implication of eroticism here does not necessarily convey anything morally dubious or deviant. Art historians have long noticed that facial gestures were widely used in Gothic architecture to denote angelic salutation and celestial joy (or the very opposite). Famous examples include the serenely smiling Wise Virgins statues and the grotesquely grinned Foolish Virgins at the Magdeburg Cathedral completed in 1250. A similar contrast is to be found in the well-balanced facial expressions of the saved and the grimaces of the damned at the Bamberg Cathedral. A dichotomy of gesture and gesticulation was created in Gothic visual representation of moral attributes: controlled, graceful facial expressions denoting gravity and virtue vs. uncontrolled, contorted "grimaces" representing sin and damnation. In other words, a facial gesture is invariably ambiguous and versatile that can be read either as a sign of lasciviousness or expression of eternal heavenly joy. Intriguingly, Goswin's description of Arnulf's *risus* is exactly ambivalent in this sense, "both spiritual and wanton."

A third feature of Arnulf's ecstasy is his bodily movements that closely resemble dancing. He kept stamping the ground with one foot (i.e. *tripudiare*) and clapping his hands.⁶⁵ Elisabeth of Spalbeek is also said to strike her own body parts rhythmically to make some psalmic audio effects, although it is hard to assess whether their acts should be treated as the same genre of performative art. Dance, if broadly understood in the sense of rhythmically patterned bodily movement, assumed rich religious meanings in the medieval society, of which the most well-known example is the *Danse macabre* from the late Middle Ages.⁶⁶ According to Elina Gertsman, dance was closely associated with funeral rituals in the Middle Ages, and by extension with death and the afterlife.⁶⁷ Just like the enigmatic smile/laugh in Gothic art, dance since the twelfth century also started to assume dual significance, capable of denoting either paradisaal bliss, as evidenced in Fra Angelico's painting of the ring-dance of angels, or death and damnation, as in the grotesque *danse macabre* cycle. The difference is that the former was supposed to be elegant and composed, the latter wild and jerky. The unnerving ambiguity in Arnulf's dance movements rests in the fact that they might be considered as more rustic folk dance associated with the lower class;⁶⁸ the hagiographer saw something excessive and uncontrollable thus slightly offensive to the sensibility of the well-educated. That is perhaps why Goswin gave that apologetic trigger warning to his Latinate readers, trying to convince them that Arnulf's

⁶⁵ The Latin word *tripudiare* understood as dancing in the Middle Ages, see: E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, trans. E. Classen (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), 44-50.

⁶⁶ For a recent study on this subject, see: Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

⁶⁷ Gertsman, *The Dance of Death*, 51-75.

⁶⁸ Gertsman, *The Dance of Death*, 67.

dance was the manifestation of outflowing devotion and should be appreciated for exactly that.

Given that women were stereotypically associated with the body and men with the spirit, Caroline Bynum has argued that medieval religious women strategically appropriated this discourse about female carnality to their advantage, and claimed to identify with the humanity of Christ. They adopted fierce bodily asceticism as a privileged access to the Incarnated.⁶⁹ More specifically, women could more easily identify with the nurturing, reproductive, life-giving, or “feminine” body of Christ. She has brilliantly examined some of the curious medieval images of Christ’s side wound bursting out life-saving blood just like a female breast bursting out milk.⁷⁰ A male brother like Arnulf, on the other hand, seems to have identified himself with the masculine body of Christ as the unassailable and victorious: the overarching image of Arnulf constructed by Goswin of Bossut is a courageous warrior, who, through the sufferings he afflicted upon his own body, literally repaid Christ “skin for skin (Job 2.4). That is to say, he was giving the skin of this wretched flesh in exchange for the glorious skin of the Resurrection.”⁷¹ Ferocious asceticism was constructed as a super masculine way of imitating Christ’s Passion. Goswin emphatically repeated various military imageries to show how Arnulf persevered with and thrived on bodily tortures. A Sisyphus of self-torment only knowing too well the purpose

⁶⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁷⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg,” *Renaissance Quarterly* (1986): 399-439.

⁷¹ *Send Me God*, trans. Newman, 140.

of his life, Arnulf always miraculously recovered overnight from whatever injuries he had suffered the day before.⁷²

It has to be pointed out that both Elisabeth of Spalbeek and Arnulf of Villers were lay persons associated with the Cistercian order. In the hagiographical constructions of them, they shared similar attributes in their synthesis of complex bodily performances, from penitential practices of self-mortification to the mimetic dramatization of the Passion narrative. Such emotional and physical extravaganza was rarely attributed to literate members of established religious orders, an abbot or a bishop, even though the line between the “out of ordinary” excessiveness and the “ordinary” additions to liturgical services was rather fine and at times arbitrary. Goswin of Bossut was also the narrator of the life of Abundus, the sweet choir monk who was constantly graced with visionary experiences during the liturgical services at Villers (see last chapter). Liturgical visions, mild rather than rampant asceticism, featured the choir monk’s life. It is possible that Elisabeth and Arnulf represented a more spontaneous spirit among the lay community in the Diocese of Liège that were not constrained by rigorous religious rules or consensus of propriety for monks and nuns. Or, it is possible that not constrained by hagiographical conventions set for regulated religious, the hagiographers documented the practices of their lay protagonists with a free hand. What is more important is that liturgical visions only made sense if understood by a monastic community fully immersed in that liturgical culture and familiar with those biblical, liturgical imageries and allusions. For a lay culture that was predominantly oral and performative, an Elisabeth or an Arnulf commend deeper adoration as dancers and performers by their charisma and awe-inspiring presence.

⁷² *Send Me God*, trans. Newman, 136.

III. Praying as Bodily Performance: The Theoretical Approach from Paris

To emphasize Elisabeth's and Arnulf's lay status is not to assert a wide divide between an elite, literate, clerical culture and a popular, performative, lay culture. Such distinction meant very little in actual practices of worship and devotion. This section will discuss two relatively "theoretical" and definitely "elite" sources on devotional performance penned by the leading intellectuals in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These two treatises would complement with the hagiographical, more descriptive sources, and demonstrate a somewhat consensus understanding of praying as an essentially corporeal and performative art, even as an artisanal craft. This tradition was especially associated with influential masters from the Parisian schools, such as Hugh of St. Victor and Peter the Chanter. It is undisputed that at this period Paris became the intellectual center of northern Europe to whom the older cities of learning such as Liège or Chartres bowed their heads. In the thirteenth century Liège was thoroughly under the shadow of the intellectual dominance of the vicinal Paris. Jacques de Vitry, author of the *Vita* of Mary of Oignies who first installed the hagiographical tradition of the living saints of Liège, was a disciple of Peter the Chanter and a tireless propagandist of Peter's reforming ideas.⁷³ Thomas of Cantimpré, who composed a supplement for Mary's *Vita* and also a series of *Vitae* for other Liègeois saints, was in turn an admirer of Jacques de Vitry.⁷⁴

⁷³ John Baldwin first advanced this thesis about the social and political influence of "Peter the Chanter's circle" in his *Masters, Princes and Merchants*.

⁷⁴ See Thomas of Cantimpré's *Supplementum* to Jacques de Vitry's *Vita, Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 167-201.

Interestingly, this group of tracts of spiritual instruction has only been sporadically treated as conduct literature, thus implicitly juxtaposed with “secular” genres such as “mirrors of princes”. Scholars have been rather reluctant to fully acknowledge them as spiritual or mystical work. Literary scholar C. Stephen Jaeger has made one of the most insightful analysis of Hugh of St. Victor’s *De institutione novitiorum*, but he has treated it as a “humanistic” work decidedly classical and Ciceronian, affiliated with court or courtly literature targeting the secular aristocracy. He duly notices that this treatise was placed by the editors of the *Patrologia Latina* among Hugh’s mystical corpus, but declines to treat this problem in detail.⁷⁵ Admittedly, Jaeger chooses to write a book about medieval humanism as a continuation of classical pedagogical tradition, not a book on medieval spirituality; but his commentary is rather revealing of a modern assumption that external comportment or bodily behavior does not constitute proper subject matter of religious literature. However, this assumption is not necessarily shared by Hugh of St. Victor’s medieval audience and certainly not by the editors of *Patrologia Latina*.

Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1140/41) was one of the most illustrious masters of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Originally from Saxony, he spent most of his career in the community of canons regular dedicated to St. Victor outside the city wall of Paris. *De institutione novitiorum*, or *On the Formation of Novices*, is one of Hugh’s most popular writings. At least 172 medieval manuscripts of this work have survived, more than Hugh’s

⁷⁵Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione novitiorum*, ed. H.B. Feiss and P. Sicard, in *L'oeuvre de Hugues de Saint-Victor*, Vol. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 18-113. C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 255: “The work’s religious intent deserves a more critical analysis than it has received. The editors of the *Patrologia* edition placed it among Hugh’s mystical work. While this is not the place to treat the question in detail...” On this particular treatise, also see: Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La Raison des Gestes dans l'Occident Médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 173-205; John Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110-111.

most well-known work to modern readers, *Didascalicon*, of which 125 manuscripts survive.⁷⁶ This tract intended to provide spiritual instruction to novices to the religious community of St. Victor, and in many aspects resembled in spirit the *Liber ordinis Sancti Victoris*, the official Rules of the community written by its first abbot Gilduin.⁷⁷ Unless one accepts Jaeger's assessment that *De institutione novitiorum* is a somewhat frivolous first draft and its author was carried away from his original plan to flirt with classical literature, this is without question a work of serious religious intention.⁷⁸

The thematic term surrounding which the whole treatise develops is *disciplina*, which Hugh defines in almost exclusively behavioral terms. Jean-Claude Schmitt sees Hugh's work as "the most important theoretical text on gestures in the twelfth century."⁷⁹ In the Prologue, Hugh affirms that "no one can achieve beatitude unless through virtue, and there is no other way virtue can be truly understood unless the discipline of virtue (*disciplina uirtutis*) is attended to without negligence."⁸⁰ He defines *disciplina* as "the good and upright way of living (*conuersatio bona et honesta*), to which it is not enough to just avoid evil, but it strives to appear above reproach in all things that it does well. Discipline is also the ordered movements of all members of the body and a proper disposition in every

⁷⁶ Schmitt, *La Raison des Gestes*, 174.

⁷⁷ *Liber ordinis Sancti Victoris Parenensis*, ed. Lucas Jocqué and Ludovicus Milis, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis LXI* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984).

⁷⁸ Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 255: "It is a tract of spiritual instruction, but it lacks the gravity, coherence, and systematic conception of other representatives of the genre... Regarded alongside comparable works, it appears positively eccentric. It reads like a first draft."

⁷⁹ Schmitt, *La raison des gestes*, 174-205.

⁸⁰ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 18: "Ad beatitudinem autem nemo uenire potest nisi per uirtutem, et uirtus non alio modo ueraciter apprehenditur, nisi disciplina uirtutis non negligenter custodiatur." The English translation is all mine.

state and action (*membrorum omnium motus ordinatus et disposition decens in omni habitu et actione*).”⁸¹ Modern commentators have found the term *disciplina* a bit odd and his source nebulous: although Hugh’s usage shares with the monastic tradition the broad sense of regulatory norms (e.g. *The Rule of St. Benedict* talks about *disciplina regulari* and the *Liber ordinis Sancti Victoris* about *disciplinae claustrali*), Hugh’s concept of a “discipline of the members of the body” is unprecedented in monastic tradition.⁸² The terminology is certainly not an unwitting choice, as Hugh has some very concrete scenarios in mind: *disciplina* means appropriate appearance and well-governed conduct in dressing, in gesturing, in speaking, and in eating.⁸³ He then moves on to give some fastidious lessons on the color and quality of clothes and proper table manners.

But what is really novel about this work is Hugh’s general principle that the training of the mind begins with the training of the body. Virtue is acquired through physical training and restraint. One has to appreciate Hugh’s psychological insights when he argues that properly governed bodily discipline can control, constrain and suppress illicit desires and appetites of the mind.⁸⁴ The bodily movement is a transparent display of the agent’s interior mental status: “the disorderly movement of the body is born out of an inconstant mind; and similarly, when the body is restrained by discipline, the spirit (*animus*) is

⁸¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 48: “Disciplina est conuersatio bona et honesta, cui parum est malum non facere, sed studet etiam in his que bene agit per cuncta irreprehensibilis apparerere. Item disciplina est membrorum omnium motus ordinatus et disposition decens in omni habitu et actione.”

⁸² Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 257; *Liber ordinis Sancti Victoris*, 22.

⁸³ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 50: “Quatuor sunt precipue in quibus conseruanda est disciplina: in habitu, in gestu, in locutione, in mensa, id est in comestione.”

⁸⁴ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 48: “Disciplina est compes cupiditatis, malorum desideriorum carcer, frenum lasciuie, elationis iugum, uinculum iracundie, que domat intemperantiam, leuitatem ligat, et omnes inordinatos motus mentis atque illicitos appetitus suffocat.”

strengthened towards constancy.”⁸⁵ Hugh distinguishes three pairs / six modes of reprehensible gesture and perceives them in distinctly ethical terms: “the effeminate or the dissolute, the slow or the hasty, the impudent or the agitated (*aut mollis aut dissolutus, aut tardus aut citatus, aut procax aut turbidus*). The effeminate signifies lasciviousness; the dissolute, slovenliness; the slow, laziness; the hasty, inconstancy; the impudent, pride; and the agitated, wrathfulness.”⁸⁶ In other words, the “styles” of bodily movements can be translated directly into terms of virtues or vices. Hugh makes the even bolder comment that “the integrity of virtue (*integritas uirtutis*) is when, through the custodian of the internal mind, the members of the body are ruled in an orderly manner.”⁸⁷ The claim that the body *is* the locus of virtue can be contrasted with other theories of ethics in the twelfth century. Peter Abelard, for example, at the very beginning of his *Ethics* distinguishes the mental vices from the bodily ones and establishes interior intention as the sole determinant for moral responsibility.⁸⁸ Considering the founder of the School of St. Victor, William of Champeaux, had been Abelard’s former master and defeated opponent, this difference in

⁸⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 48: “Sicut enim de inconstantia mentis nascitur inordinata motio corporis, ita quoque, dum corpus per disciplinam stringitur, animus ad constantiam solidatur.”

⁸⁶ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 58: “Gestus est modus et figuration membrorum corporis ad omnem agenda et habendi modum. Hic sex modis reprehensibilis inuenitur, scilicet si est aut mollis aut dissolutus, aut tardus aut citatus, aut procax aut turbidus. Mollis significat lasciuam, dissolutus negligentiam, tardus prigririam, citatus inconstantiam, procax superbiam, turbidus iracundiam.”

⁸⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 48: “Integritas ergo uirtutis est, quando per internam mentis custodiam ordinate reguntur membra corporis.”

⁸⁸ Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, edited and translated by D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 2: “Mores dicimus animi uicia uel uirtutes quae nos ad male uel bona opera pronos efficient. Sunt autem uicia seu bona non tantum animi sed etiam corporis, ut debilitas corporis uel fortitude quam uires appellamus, pigredo uel uelocitas, claudication uel rectitude, cecitas uel uisio. Vnde ad differenciam talium cum diximus ‘uicia’ premisimus ‘animi’.”

moral principles perhaps revealed personal animosity as well as divergent approaches in philosophical reasoning.

Because virtue is made manifest in the body, it is something acquired through apprenticeship and imitation. Hugh conceives the knowledge (*scientia*) about virtue as something aiming at “the correct and upright way of living (*institutionem recte et honeste uiuendi*).” *Scientia* is pragmatic wisdom acquired through deliberative choice and comparison on the part of the moral agent “partly through reason, partly through teaching, partly by example, partly by meditation on the holy Scriptures, partly through assiduous inspection of his own work and manners.”⁸⁹ One should always deliberate upon how to behave appropriately “in all acts, in all places, at all time, in front of all persons (*in omni actu, in omni loco, in omni tempore, erga omnem personam*).”⁹⁰ This idea of *scientia* concerns primarily with outward appearance meticulously fashioned to suit the occasion, the timing and the audience. One may see in Hugh’s ideas the silhouette of the modern sociologist Erving Goffman’s theory on the “presentation of self in everyday life”.⁹¹ Goffman suggests that every man, inescapably, presents himself to others in everyday social scenario to form certain impressions, and attempts to sustain such impressions by employing techniques in the manner of an actor presenting a character to an audience.

⁸⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 22: “Primum igitur scire debetis quod hand scientiam, que ad institutionem recte et honeste uiuendi pertinet, multis modis hominem colligere et comparare sibi oportet: partim ratione, partim doctrina, partim exemplo, partim meditatione sanctarum Scripturarum, partim assidua inspectione operum ac morum suorum.”

⁹⁰ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 22: “Debet siquidem diligenter considerare et quantum ualet per semetipsum discernere quid liceat et quid non liceat, quid deceat et quid non deceat, in omni actu, in omni loco, in omni tempore, erga omnem personam.”

⁹¹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

Without explicitly using the metaphor of theatrical performance, Hugh anticipated Goffman's insights, in however cursory a form.

Hugh of St. Victor considers religious devotion as a set of human behaviors and attitudes choreographed to present a desired outward appearance in one particular social situation, i.e. in communication with God. He urges the novice to think very carefully about "how fearful, how agitated, how devoted and religious man should exhibit himself (*homo exhibere se debeat*) in the service of God."⁹² Religious emotions are highly controlled and premeditated behavioral forms that one is supposed to properly perform in front of God and before the religious community. For example, Hugh describes how one should behave in feast days, using a sequence of adverbs to qualify the manners one should walk, look, and act: "In those days (feast days), we should come to the church very eagerly and with alacrity (*studiosius et alacrius*), celebrate the divine mystery very devoutly (*deuotius*), and persevere in prayer prolongedly (*diutius*), to demonstrate in our disposition, our walk, and our acts (*habitu, incessu et actu*) the great devotion with regards to divine worship; to do nothing that is not holy, nothing that is not divine, and nothing that is not prescribed, to refrain the tongue from idle talk, to restrain the feet when coming and going, lower the eyes, bend the head, lift the spirit; surrender all the action and all the movement of heart as well as body (*omnem actum et omnem motum cordis pariter corporis*) to the holy ministry, and as I say, honor the feast days with a renewal of our way of living."⁹³

⁹² Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 24: "In omni actu, hoc est qualiter sacra et diuina mysteria impleri oporteat, qualiter humana officia et que ad usum corporis pertinent exercere conueniat. Quam timoratum, quam sollicitum, quam deuotum ac religiosum in Dei seruitio homo exhibere se debeat..."

⁹³ Hugh of St. Victor, *De institutione nouitiorum*, 26: "In illis nos oportet ad ecclesiam studiosius et alacrius conuenire, et ad celebranda diuina mysteria deuotius intendere, atque in oratione diutius perseuerare, habitu, incessu et actu maiorem deuotionem erga cultum diuinum demonstrare, nihil non sanctum, nihil non diuinum, nihil non ordinatum agere, linguam a uaniloquio cohibere, pedes ab excursu et discursu stringere, oculos comprimere, uultum inclinare, mentem erigere, omnem denique actum et omnem motum cordis pariter

Because Hugh of St. Victor was writing for an insider audience, it seems that his treatise is more like a spiritual exhortation that lays down the general principles than a manual of clearly-defined rules. His most influential thirteenth-century follower in the anthropological studies of human behaviors is the Parisian master, Peter the Chanter.⁹⁴ Peter's circle of disciples and friends, identified by John Baldwin, included powerful statesmen/bishops, such as Stephen Langton and Innocent III, and charismatic preachers, such as Jacques de Vitry and Thomas Chobham. They form a so-called "moralist" school of biblical exegesis and were keenly interested in concrete worldly affairs, economic or political, and their spiritual consequences.⁹⁵ Their theological priority was decisively more pastoral than speculative. Peter the Chanter dedicates his treatise, *De oratione et speciebus illius*, entirely to expounding the techniques of praying, central to which is a description of seven praying bodily positions.

First and foremost, Peter the Chanter understands Christian prayer in terms of behavior, alongside fasting and alms-giving.⁹⁶ More strikingly, he compares the supplicant to an artisan and praying to craftsmanship that not only requires raw material but also

et corporis ministerio diuino mancipare, atque, ut ita dicam, quadam conuersationis nouitate festos dies honorare."

⁹⁴ Richard Trexler, *The Christian at Prayer: An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d. 1197)* (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 36: "What is surprising, of course, is that a twelfth-century theologian should bother with a systematic study of the body at all. The treatise attributed to Hugh of St Victor and titled *De institutione novitiorum* initiated the tradition, but Hugh's brilliant work was concerned with purely human communications. Peter the Chanter, who gives no indication he knew this or any contemporary devotional work, seems to be the first to concentrate on the body in penitential prayer."

⁹⁵ Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants*; Stephen Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), esp. 184-277; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1964), 196-263.

⁹⁶ *De oratione et speciebus illius*, 178: "Omnis enim qui meritorie penitent tenetur habere hunc triplicem funiculum, qui difficulter solvitur, videlicet ieiunium, elemosinam, et orationem."

expertise: “The material of prayer are letters and syllables, dictions and prayers. The one who prays is an artisan (*artifex est orator*), for whom knowledge is necessary. It teaches him how to pray in one of the seven modes that will be stated.”⁹⁷ For him, praying is better conducted in the place of communal worship than in private,⁹⁸ and should be done in the seven approved bodily positions: the first is to stand erect and have arms and joined hands stretched over the head, towards the heaven (*brachia et ambas manus coniunctas et extensas supra caput tuum versus celum, inquantum prevalet extendere*).⁹⁹ The second position is also stand up, but extend the hands and arms in the shape of a cross (*manibus et ulnis expansis ad modum atque similitudinem crucis*).¹⁰⁰ The third mode is to stand and have “the hands joined together, contiguous, extended and directed in front of the eyes (*habens manus complosas, et contiguas extensas ac directas coram oculis suis*).” This is a standing and reading position without the book.¹⁰¹ The fourth mode is the kneeling posture (*positis genibus in terra*).¹⁰² The fifth mode is full prostration, that is when the man “throws himself fully on the ground on his face. (*quando homo proicit se planum in terra super faciem suam*).¹⁰³ The sixth mode is the bowing posture when the prayer stands erect but bow his head toward the altar. This posture is especially appropriate for the celebration of

⁹⁷ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 179: “Materia orationis sunt littere et sillabe, dictiones et orationes. Artifex est orator, cui necessaria est scientia, que instruat eum esse orandum aliquo septem dicendorum modorum.”

⁹⁸ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 183: “Quod sit melius orare in loco sacro quam in alio...”

⁹⁹ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 182.

¹⁰⁰ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 183.

¹⁰¹ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 184-85.

¹⁰² *De oration et speciebus illius*, 187.

¹⁰³ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 188.

the Mass.¹⁰⁴ The last mode is the “camel” position, when one’s elbows and knees touch the ground and the shape of the bent body looks like a camel.¹⁰⁵ Peter also discusses some other details about praying postures. For instance, one should always bare his head, citing the tradition of the Cistercian monks from the abbey of Clairvaux who always, even in the coldest weather, pray with their heads uncovered.¹⁰⁶ Sitting is an abhorrence that should always be avoided.¹⁰⁷

The underlying principle of Peter’s description of the praying modes is that one’s interior moral status is only manifest through exterior corporeal movements: “The gesture of the body is the demonstration and probation of mental devotion. The exterior appearance of a man teaches us his interior humility and affection.”¹⁰⁸ This idea clearly echoes with what Hugh of St. Victor insists in *De institutione novitiorum* discussed above. Moreover, Peter the Chanter proposes that the fault in the performance of the prayer (*vitium orationis*) is not excused by his intention when the supplicant is in distraction. Because with a wandering mind the supplicant is not focused on praying at all, there is no “intention” to talk about in the first place.¹⁰⁹ A careless mistake in the form does vitiate the validity of

¹⁰⁴ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 190: “cum orans, stans etiam erectus, toto corpore inclinat caput suum ante sacrum et sanctum altare. Item debent viri catholici et fideles semper facere quando dicitur ‘Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto,’ et cum sit transubstantioatio panis in carnem et vini in sanguinem in misse celebratione.”

¹⁰⁵ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 191: “Cumque corpus eius de more mortuorum ad lavandum esset nudatum, longe orationis usu in cubitis eius et genibus, camelorum more...”

¹⁰⁶ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 194.

¹⁰⁷ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 185.

¹⁰⁸ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 208: “Gestus vero corporis est argumentum et probation mentalis devotionis. Status autem exterioris hominis instruit nos de humilitate et affect interioris”

¹⁰⁹ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 224: “cum ille qui vagatur mente in tempore orandi, cogitet prorsus aliud quam de oratione. Itaque non excusatur vitium orationis per intentionem sive affectum orantis, cum non meditetur de oration, recedendo a se, illicita cogitando. Igitur quia non cogitate de oration, nichil de ea

the prayer because it indicates a false intention, Peter the Chanter argues. Therefore, in this instruction manual of Christian prayers, he gives concrete advice on the “substance” and the “form” of praying. The “substance” (*substantia orationis*) meaning the textual and verbal content of the prayers,¹¹⁰ while the “form” meaning appropriate behaviors to accompany the vocalization. Therefore, Peter the Chanter lists a set of prayer texts for each of the scenarios such as the adoration of the Cross or Virgin Mary, and immediately follows with specific instructions on genuflections, “effusion of a great amount of tears” (*multarumque lacrimarum effusionem*), or standing on one’s feet with the entire body erect.¹¹¹ In his treatise, Peter does not present any abstract spiritual doctrine or emphasize the transcendent inaccessibility of the divine; rather, a Christian prayer, for him, is a combination of precisely articulated verbal and properly executed ritual forms.

Thus, it is not surprising that the Parisian intellectuals associated with the School of St. Victor or Master Peter the Chanter prove to be remarkably receptive towards the performative forms of sanctity in the southern Low Countries. Jacques de Vitry, a committed disciple and great admirer of Peter the Chanter, found his spiritual inspiration in the person of Mary of Oignies and first installed the hagiographical tradition about the Liégeois “living saints.” Jacques de Vitry decided that a devout lay woman who had been alive in recent memories and with whom he had an intimate personal friendship was a worthy subject for a hagiographical work. The past scholarship on this surprising decision

intendit, ergo nullum habet affectum circa illam orans. Et ita habes quod affectus talis non purgat vitium precis.”

¹¹⁰ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 204: “De substantia orationis sunt omnes littere, sillabe, dictiones perfecte et imperfect orationis que sunt de integritate psalmi vel alterius orationis, verbi gratia, u test dominica oratio, scilicet, Pater Noster, qui es in coelo, vel Gloria in excelsis deo...”

¹¹¹ *De oration et speciebus illius*, 228.

tends to emphasize the immediate context of the supposed dualist heretics in Southern France who held a contemptuous attitude towards the human carnality and the sacramental rituals.¹¹² Along this vein of logic, Jacques de Vitry's "new hagiography" was an orthodox reaction against the heretical positions by going a little overboard and extolling the bodily asceticism and sacramental efficacy. This explanation is certainly valid in the particular case of Jacques's *Vita Mariae*, as he dedicated this work to the Bishop of Toulouse who had fled the persecution of the said heretics and sought refuge in Liège.¹¹³ But it is equally important to point out that Jacques de Vitry's education at Paris under the influence of Peter the Chanter at the turn of the century made him especially prone to find appeal in such bodily forms of sanctity. The overriding concern with the pastoral care at the local level, with reforming the *mores* of the Christian people, motivated him to choose a contemporary lay woman as a "living example" for the lay society.

The Parisian theologians and the Liégeois saints share a common concern over the elaborate devotional forms. For them, interior emotions are only realized through exterior bodily gestures. There is no wide cultural rift between these two groups in this regard. The theoretical treatises by intellectuals are by nature more systematic and coherent. These works also tend to appear more conservative. They claimed authority by creating this façade of tidy and unchanged tradition, marshaling biblical and patristic quotes. By contrast, in the narrative sources, the performance by an Elisabeth or an Arnulf was eclectic, spontaneous, fragmentary, chaotic, and hard to categorize. To characterize such

¹¹² The classical work on this explanation is: André Vauchez, "Prosélitisme et action antihérétique en milieu féminin au XIIIe: la vie de Marie d'Orignies," in *Problèmes d'histoire du christianisme 17: Propagande et contrepropagande religieuses*, ed. J. Marx (Brussels: Éditions de l'université, 1987), 95-110.

¹¹³ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oegnies*, 44-45.

performance in terms of “para-liturgical” or “mystical” as opposed to “liturgical” is rather misleading. There is no evidence that they, their local audience, or the learned hagiographers distinguished their behaviors based on those generic terms. In a predominantly oral and performative culture, those categories hardly made much a difference in practice. The lay performers freely selected elements from codified monastic liturgy, popular dance, biblical imageries, or gestural forms they saw fit and create something they deemed most expressive. The clerical observers might question their sincerity or “excessiveness,” but not the boundary-crossing. The intellectuals might also distance themselves from such theatrical exuberance when they saw its potential to be interpreted as denoting either divine or demonic possession, as demonstrated in Philip of Clairvaux’s cautious “probation” of Elisabeth of Spalbeek’s Passion play and in Goswin of Bossut’s uneasiness with Arnulf of Viller’s thundering laughter. But au fond, a renowned Parisian Master such as Peter the Chanter, when he recommended abundant tears to accompany prayers, was no less prone than an illiterate lay woman towards an embodied approach to the divine.

Chapter 4 The Spectacle of Piety in the Culture of Popular Preaching

The last chapter has examined the prevailing notion of devotion as essentially gestural and performative in both hagiographical and theoretical sources from Liège and its neighboring regions. Ritual behavior generates religious feelings, rather than the other way around. Enthusiastic religious practitioners such as Elisabeth of Spalbeek were motivated by an impulse to use the human bodies as the monumental site to stage liturgical performances. This chapter moves to a related phenomenon: ritual performances in the culture of popular preaching in the early thirteenth century.

The argument consists of two parts. First, it has been an underlying thesis throughout this dissertation that the ritualistic and the behavioral elements were at the heart of the devotional culture in northern Europe. To further strengthen this argument, this chapter examines sources about preachers, who held the unquestionable spiritual authority through their ordination and supposedly represented the institutional and “elitist” strands of the religious culture. It is to be shown that the performative and the theatrical was conspicuous in the contemporary culture of preaching. It should not be a too audacious claim to say that the body language was more important than words in its power to convey meaning. There was no hard line between an “intellectual” or “textual” culture of the clergy and a “physical” and “performative” culture of the laity, if we consider the fact that for most clergy preaching constituted a more important obligation of their daily life than writing theological treatises. What marked the thirteenth century a new age in the history of Christianization was, arguably, not the messages, which were fairly conventional, but the means of communication. The theatricality of contemporary popular preaching has

received more systematic treatment from historians of Italian civic religion.¹ This chapter, instead, focuses on the northern sources that have not been adequately dealt with before. Second, a comparison will be drawn between the preachers and the *jongleurs* or the professional musician-entertainers in northern Europe. They were considered by their contemporaries as sharing some very similar talents and functions.

If we believe our hagiographer Thomas of Cantimpré's chronology, around the year 1200 (the *terminus ad quem* is the end of the Fourth Crusade in 1204) an intricately choreographed preaching event was brought to the city of Cambrai.² A former usurer, Alard, known as "the Priest," made restitution for his past frauds and distributed the rest of his wealth to the city poor. What culminated this penitential sequence, however, was Alard's "spectacle of piety" (*pietatis spectaculum*) in front of the "people and clergy of the city," organized by the popular preacher John of Cantimpré:

He asked that a pit be dug beneath the threshold of his house and that he be pulled out of it naked with a rope around his neck, so that he might go forth poor and naked from his house as one who knew he possessed nothing of his own. To set an example for others (*ad exemplum reliquorum*), John shrewdly granted this request. So the clergy and people of the city were assembled and this moneylender Alard, stripped of his clothes, descended into the pit beneath his threshold. At the blessed John's command, one of the brothers approached, tied a rope around his neck, and pulled him out naked---as naked as he had come from his mother's womb. At once the naked man was dressed in clothes presented to him and led in procession to the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, surrounded by throngs of clergy amid great praise to Christ. I will not pass over this remarkable incident: as he was being led

¹ For example, Augustine Thompson, *Revival Preachers and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Italy: The Great Devotion of 1233* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). The scholarship on northern European preaching culture seems to be more textually focused given the abundant written sources, Latin or Vernacular, on the subject. The amount of scholarship is immense, and recent examples are: Claire Waters *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and her *Translating Clergie: Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

² Strictly speaking, the protagonists of this *Vita* were not from Liège. But Cambrai was very close to the Diocese of Liège and, more importantly, the hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, was liégeois, who also composed the *Vita* of Christina the Astonishing analyzed in Chapter 1.

along, he realized that he had a little fur cap on his head and violently threw it off, casting it to the ground with the words, ‘I do not have even this much that I can rightly call my own’. A great crowd of spectators were present, weeping abundantly. Who could contain his tears before such a piteous spectacle (*pietatis spectaculum*)? Even the vicious cruelty of our mutual alienation could hardly bear the sight. After this procession Alard was led into the church, and as a sign of spiritual absolution, he was released from the material rope around his neck. Upon receiving the cross to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was set in a place of eminence right next to the blessed John as a solemn spectacle (*ad spectaculum sollemne statuitur*).³

This passage is worth quoting in its entirety for two reasons: first, it recounts a beautifully choreographed public penitential procession rich with peculiar symbolism that has few parallels in contemporary sources. It is a classic example of “ritual performance” which enacts the person’s symbolic transformation from death to life, from sinner to saint. A rite de passage par excellence, the performance revolves around a liminal stage where the person is reduced to a state of vulnerability and identitylessness as a new born, symbolically represented by his nakedness.⁴ Another layer of liminality is further added as

³ Thomas of Cantimpré, “Une oeuvre inédite de Thomas de Cantimpré, la ‘Vita Ioannis Cantipratensis,’” edited by Robert Godding, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 76 (1981): 296: “Inter hos quidam Alardus, presbiter cognominatus, in usuris et fraudibus famosior et ditior, in tantum penitentie exarsit feruorem ut, restitutes rebus et copiis que per usuras exegerat, et ceteris pauperibus distributis, beatum uirum deposceret quatinus, fossa sub inferiori limine domus sue parata et fune eius collo innexo, nudus extraheretur, ut qui nichil se proprium possidere conscius erat, domo sua nudus et pauper exiret. Et paruit uir beatus et discretus ad exemplum reliquorum annuitque petenti. Collecto igitur et adunato clero et populo ciuitatis, idem fenerator Alardus, parata fossa sub limine domus, uestibus spoliatus incubuit, accedensque quidam ex fratribus iussu beati uiri, funem eius collo innexuit, et sicut de utero matris nudus exierat, nudum eduxit. Nec mora, uestibus exhibitis nudus induitur, dispositoque clero in turmas, ad ecclesiam beate Dei genitricis et Virginis Marie cum processione et maxima Christi laude deducitur. Nec preteribo id uehementer egregium, quod interim cum duceretur, calamistrum, quod huram uulgariter uocant, in suo capite sentiens, iniecta manu uiolenter detraxit, deiiciensque in terram dixit: <<Nec tantum proprii habeo quod iure possideam.>> Mira uulgi suspectatio nec <non> spectantium profusion lachrimarum. Quis enim tante pietatis spectaculum uidens, lachrimas contineret? Nec hoc uique posset uiciosa humane alienationis ipsa crudelitas. His itaque gestis, ad ecclesiam perductus est, et in signum spiritalis absolutionis, a fune materiali collo eius innexo absoluitur, cruceque suscepta, Iherosolimis profecturus in eminentiori loco iuxta beatum uirum ad spectaculum sollemne statuitur.” The English translation is from *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, edited by Barbara Newman and translated by Margot King and Barbara Newman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 99.

⁴ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 57-58.

he then takes the cross and embarks on a journey to the crusading states as a penitential pilgrim, temporarily outside the everyday functioning of the Christian society. This text is also an elaborate narrative about a “social drama” in the classical Turnerian sense.⁵ The ritual marked a social offender (i.e. a usurer)’s secession from his community, then a transitory suspension stripped off social identity, and his ultimate reconciliation with his community.

Second, the hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, showed an acute sensitivity to the performative nature of the event. Every character in the narrative was plainly aware of the fact that it was a *show*, a spectacle meant to be seen, a melodrama that intended to shatter its audience into profusion of tears (*profusio lachrimarum*). The mastermind behind the scene, John of Cantimpré, “discretely” previewed and pre-proved the scripts for the performance “to set an example for the others (*ad exemplum reliquorum*).” He deployed extensive visual and theatrical technique to stage life and death, damnation and salvation, with compelling rhetorical power. For him, the ritual is “performative” in that it affects and transforms both the performer and the audience. The significance of every nicety of the ritual is collectively constructed by them. The performer, Alard, was also keenly aware of himself being under public gaze. He even designed a small dramatic climax by throwing away the little hat followed by a proclamation of total renunciation of material possession.⁶

⁵ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982). A discussion of the utility of Turner’s theory of liminality and social drama in medieval hagiography is Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women’s Stories, Women’s Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner’s Theory of Liminality,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 27-51.

⁶ Thomas of Cantimpré, “Une oeuvre inédite,” 296.

This conversion ritual was embedded in a preaching event. It tells the fundamentally performative nature of popular preaching in this period. Thomas of Cantimpré's hagiographical narratives centers upon the ritual, the theatrical, and the spectacular, rather than the verbal content of the preacher's sermon. It is not to say that ideas are not important, but what is more important is to "act out" those ideas. In other words, the rhetorical power of the preacher rested in the ritual drama rather than his words. Apparently Alard the money lender had already been in the penitent mode when he made restitution for his previous wrongs and distributed his properties to the poor. The public penitential ritual, nonetheless, was considered the true marker of his spiritual conversion. It serves both as a prelude to John of Cantimpré's subsequent preaching, and also its lived *exemplum*. Instead of a narrative tale to illustrate the preacher's point, Alard acted it out. It has also to be noticed that Alard's epithet *presbiter* may suggest a previous priestly career and possibly some familiarity with the ritual language to fully cooperate with John of Cantimpré in this elaborately designed performance. Essentially, this was a spectacle scripted, directed and played by a priest and a renegade priest.

What Thomas of Cantimpré reported is a staged conversion ritual that was deeply embedded in some curious northern European popular customs: Alard the moneylender was reenacting the scenario of suicide. The first obvious reference is, of course, the rope on the neck. Hanging seems to have been the most adopted means of suicide as testified in medieval sources.⁷ The peculiar ritual of digging a pit under the threshold was mimicking a local custom of transporting a suicide's corpse out of the house. Alexander Murray, in his comprehensive survey of medieval suicide, has found some fourteenth- to sixteenth-

⁷ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Le suicide au Moyen Age," *Annales* 31.1 (1976): 5.

century legal sources dictating a suicide's body to be dragged from the house other than through the main threshold, and the evidence are predominantly from the German-speaking territories.⁸ Cambrai, although a French bishopric, may have shared similar customs with its adjacent German-speaking regions. The belief underneath, as expressed in one seventeenth-century legal opinion from Flanders, seems to be a desire for ritual purity and proper separation of the living and the dead.⁹

A hanged suicide conjures up the image of the most ignominious in Christian history, Judas Iscariot. The association of Judas with hanging seems to have been popularized since the later twelfth century. The Gospel of Matthew asserts that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5), but the Acts says he “burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18)—two accounts that later exegetic traditions struggled to reconcile.¹⁰ The iconographical representation of Judas as a hanged criminal appears in the late twelfth-century sculptures at Cathedrals of Autun and Vézelay.¹¹ The linkage of Judas with hanging was further strengthened in popular accounts such as that in Jacobus de Voragine's immensely influential compilation of saints' lives, *The Golden Legend*. In an excerpt in the life of St. Matthias, Judas was said to have hanged himself and simultaneously “burst asunder in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.” Thus his

⁸ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages, Vol.2 The Curse on Self-Murder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23-28. See also: Schmitt, “Le suicide au Moyen Age”; Henri Platelle, “Conversions spectaculaires et langage symbolique (Cambrai XIIe siècle),” *Bulletin philologique et historique (jusqu'à 1610)* (1980): 27-38.

⁹ Quoted in Platelle, “Conversions spectaculaires,” 34, no. 21: “Consuetudine item observatum est ut quoties hoc scelus in domibus commissum est, corpus hoc examine funibus e domo pertrahatur, non per ostium, sed per foramen et foveam sub limine domus effosam, utpote quod indignum sit ob propriae vitae extinctionem eodem ostio et limine egredi, per quod prius vivum valensque exiverat.”

¹⁰ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 335-339.

¹¹ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 329.

mouth was spared defilement since nothing came out through it, for it would have been incongruous that a mouth which had touched the glorious lips of Christ should be so foully soiled. It also was fitting that the bowels which had conceived the betrayal should burst and spill out, and that the throat from which had merged the voice of the traitor should be strangled by a rope. Moreover, Judas perished in the air, so that the one who had offended the angles in heaven and men on earth was kept out of the regions belonging to angles and to men, and was left in the air in the company of demons.”¹² *The Golden Legend* fused together the two New Testament accounts and provided an explanation for hanging as Judas’s destined way of death: he was not to be accepted by either heaven or earth, but doomed at the limbo place in-between. This idea coincides with a particular medieval perception about the burial of a suicide’s body. It was sometimes recommended in medieval sources that suicides should be buried on boundary areas, such as that between two land jurisdictions or that between land and water, i.e., the river banks or marshes.¹³ A contemporary popular belief that a suicide might come back haunting the living also suggests the suicide’s ambiguous status as something between the living and the [properly] dead.¹⁴

The connection between Alard the money lender and Judas the suicide is not complete without two further ingredients: Alard was a “judaizer” or “became a Jew” in virtue of his money lending practice; Judas, despite of many other traits attributed to him in the New Testament, was increasingly identified with avarice, a “Jewish sin,” since the

¹² Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, translated by William Granger Ryan, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 168-169.

¹³ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

twelfth century. With the expansion of profit economy in European urban centers, anxious Christian moralists launched ideological attacks upon the money trade, which was considered exclusively the work of the Jews.¹⁵ The scapegoating was so sweeping that Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) notoriously accused the Christians of “becoming Jews” (*judaizare*) by virtue of their involvement in the financial business.¹⁶ Money lending was essentialized as a “Jewish” trade and a Christian money lender was really a Jew, as St. Bernard argued. Roughly during the same period, representations of Judas grew exponentially in European art and architecture.¹⁷ It is standard in later medieval iconographical tradition to use the image of Judas as allegory for two kinds of sins: one is Avarice because of his betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and one is Despair for his ultimate suicide as opposed to the theological virtue of Hope.¹⁸ These two strands were often conflated together. Judas’s hanged corpse with the bowels burst out and the silver coins around epitomized the fated end of a greedy usurer: death and damnation.

Alard’s religious conversion, then, was staged as a “resurrection,” being risen from the dead, but more fascinatingly, as a “rebirth.” He was dragged out of his house through

¹⁵ See for example, Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 42-57.

¹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera* vol. 8 *Epistolae*, 316: “Taceo quod sicubi illi desunt, peius iudaizare dolemus christioanos feneratores, sit tamen christianos, et non magis baptizatos Iudaeos convenit appellari”; Little, *Religious Poverty*, 56; On Bernard of Clairvaux’ attitudes towards the Jews, see: Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 219-245; on the Christian construction of “Judaism” as a figure, see: David Nirenberg, “‘Judaism’ as Political Concept: Toward a Critique of Political Theology,” *Representations* 128 (2014): 1-29; idem, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2014).

¹⁷ A study on the artistic and architectural representation of Judas from medieval Italy is Janet Robson, “Judas and the Franciscans: Perfidy Pictured in Lorenzetti’s Passion Cycle at Assisi,” *The Art Bulletin* 86.1 (2004): 31-57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the passage under the main threshold, naked, with a rope tied on his neck—like a child being pushed out of the mother’s vagina (with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck?). Thomas of Cantimpré made sure the birth metaphor was unmistakable by adding a note that Alard was “as naked as from mother’s womb (*sicut de utero matris nudus exierat*).” Such an element of stripping naked as a ritual gesture of conversion more famously appeared in Francis of Assisi’s story written by Bonaventure, when the young man dramatically took off all his clothes in front of the bishop and renounced his earthly, “carnally minded” father.¹⁹ Given what we know about the chronology of events, it is very likely that Alard’s conversion was earlier than Francis’s, although a direct chain of influence is hard to prove. Alard, after his conversion, took the cross and joined Baldwin Count of Flanders in the Fourth Crusade, which was concluded with the sack of Constantinople in 1204. Francis’s break with his father occurred a bit later, in 1206. John of Cantimpré died before 1210, and Francis died in 1226 while Thomas of Cantimpé was finishing up his *Vita* for John in the Low Countries.²⁰ Besides literary precedence, another virtue of Alard story is that it provides a more coherent narrative about a complete ritual process. The symbolic meaning of Francis’s nakedness might be translucently clear to the medieval audience, yet is open to interpretation for modern commentators because the episode appears to be a fragment taken out of a whole ritual drama. Caroline Bynum has proposed that Francis’s nakedness is an indicator of liminality and “womanly fertility” as

¹⁹ Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 193-194.

²⁰ See the “Chronology” in *Thomas of Cantimpré, Collected Saints’ Lives*, 55-56. For the chronology of Francis of Assisi’s life, I consult the table in André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael Cusato (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 341-344.

if he was giving birth like a woman.²¹ She has interpreted the gesture as a gender reversal. But it seems more convincing to me that the nakedness represents the status of a newborn rather than a woman giving birth. Thomas of Cantimpré gives a more coherent narrative of the ritual drama, from Alard's symbolic death of mortal sin, his liminal status as a suicide being dragged literally under the *limen* (*sub limine domus*), to his rebirth as a new man.

While Alard's spiritual death was compared with Judas's suicide, his spiritual rebirth invoked both the images of Christ's crucifixion and Lazarus's resurrection from the dead. When Alard led the ritual procession from his house to the Cathedral church, he was released from the noose and immediately took the sign of the cross.²² These two ritual gestures reinforced the contrast between "death" and "life," "damnation" and "salvation" underpinning Alard's entire ritual performance. In addition, the act of taking the sign of the cross was to embark on the pilgrimage journey as a penitent, a journey that is known to us as "the crusade". These themes must have been plain and obvious for his medieval audience. A certain Adam, the dean of the Cathedral chapter, stood up and started to expound on the meaning of Alard's conversion drama: while Lazarus's resurrection was a bodily one, what Alard had was a resurrection of the mind, an even greater miracle than the biblical story.²³

²¹ Caroline Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 35: "...the moment of conversion is a moment of womanly fertility: Bonaventure tells us that Francis took off his clothes and his shoes, renounces his father, threw away his money, prayed to Mary, and like her gave birth to his first child (his first disciple)."

²² Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 296: "His itaque gestis, ad ecclesiam perductus est, et in signum spiritualis absolutionis, a fune materiali collo eius innexo absoluitur, cruceque suscepta..."

²³ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 296-297: "Tunc uir in humana scientia et lege diuina eruditissimus, ipsius scilicet Dei genitricis cathedralis decanus, magister Adam nomine, pro auctoritate sua exurgens in medium, populo predicare aggressus est, dicens, <<Gratulari et mirari oportet, fratres, quia maius hodie in hoc homine dignatus est operari miraculum, quam dum Lazarum in monumentum quatuoriduanum a

Alard's conversion narrative follows a remarkably tidy ritual structure: a sinner, through a liminal stage as a suicide, to become a penitent; then through a liminal stage as a pilgrim/crusader, to become a saint. The finale of the Alard story is reached when he followed Baldwin IX, Count of Flanders and Hainaut, to Jerusalem and had a blessed death in the Holy Land. His sanctity was confirmed when, again, naked in the open air, the dying man's mouth, where a sweet odor was emitted, was stunned by some wasps.²⁴ Thomas of Cantimpré assures us that this fragrant odor was a sure sign that Alard would pass to into posthumous glory.²⁵ The belief underlying this account is probably that the dying was supposed to breath out his soul from his mouth, and that the fragrant smell was an indication of the blissful status of the postmortem soul. What is most interesting about Alard's story is that, although many of the bits and pieces appear sensational or absurdly frivolous, they in fact contribute to a coherent representation of Alard's three-stage development from a sinner to saint. The symbols, such as nakedness in the open air, repeated rhythmically to mark the transition of each stage. And of course, the most potent symbols are the concepts of life and death, physical or spiritual, symbolic or real.

Now let us turn to the other line of plot in Alard's story, arguably the more important one from the hagiographer's perspective. The true protagonist of this ritual

mortuis suscitavit. Ille enim qui Lazarum resuscitavit in corpore, ipse Alardum resuscitavit in mente et, licet usitatus, tamen mirabilis...>>"

²⁴ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 298.

²⁵ A sweet, fragrant odor as an indicator of sanctity was a widely-held belief in the Christian cult of saints, see: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), esp. 208-214; Brigitte Cazelles, *Le Corps de sanité d'après Jehan Bouche d'Or, Jehan Paulus, et quelques vies des XIIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 1982); Michel Bouvier, "De l'incorruptibilité des corps saints," in Jacques Gelis and Odile Redon ed., *Les Miracles: Miroirs des Corps* (Paris: Presses et publications de l'Université de Paris VIII, 1983), 193-221.

drama was, in fact, not Alard, but John of Cantimpré, the revival preacher. As Thomas of Cantimpré emphasized, Alard's scripted performance was previewed and pre-proved by John, who strategically capitalized its didactic potential as an exemplar for the people (*ad exemplum reliquorum*). Theatrical performance served at least three rhetorical functions for John's preaching campaign: First, theater was a much more efficient and effective way of communication than verbose sermonizing. The complicated ideas that would require a treatise to explicate, the medieval audience could recognize instantly from Alard's simple yet potent symbolic gestures and props (e.g. the contrast between the noose and the cross). Second, this vivid exemplar prepared an attentive and emotionally receptive audience for John's subsequent preaching. The people and clergy of Cambrai who had accompanied Alard in the liturgical procession were already in a state of mania and frenzy, having shed a lot of tear and sung a lot of praises to God, before they moved on to listen to the sermon. Third, Alard's conversion was unfolded as a miracle, a divine approbation of John's unquestioned credential as a graced preacher. Miracle-working was essential in medieval popular preaching. In Alard's case, it both inspired the internal religious conversion for its spectators, and had an outward, social dimension. The former usurer was reconciled with his community. Social harmony was restored. John the preacher, therefore, was credited with both the personal and the social miracles. Thomas the hagiographer emphasized that Alard, completing his performance, "was put on a position of eminence right next to the blessed John as a solemn spectacle (*in eminentiori loco iuxta beatum uirum ad spectaculum sollemne statuitur*)."²⁶ The miracle-working preacher, not his handiwork, was the true

²⁶ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 296.

spectacle here. The preacher's spiritual authority was firmly established even before he opened his mouth.

In front of such an emotionally invested audience, the preacher only needed to deliver what they had already been convinced. Thomas of Cantimpré was more interested in the demeanor of preacher rather than the actual content of his sermon. To further show off John of Cantimpré's virtuosity as a preacher, Thomas added yet another dramatic twist. Adam, Dean of the Cathedral, a very erudite Master (*Magister*, a title that may indicate a university education), spoke first, yet could not finish his sermon. In great shame, he sat down and left the stage to John to save. John promptly and courteously asked: "Give me anything I can speak about (*Aliquid quid sim dicturus edicito*)."²⁷ The Dean whispered a certain sentence in his ear; lo and behold, John of Cantimpré fluently delivered a lengthy sermon with the utmost eloquence.²⁸ Whether this episode actually happened or was also by premeditated design is hard to say—it appears suspiciously like a didactic tale about the intellectual deficiency of certain preachers, a conventional trope in medieval exemplar literature. But the ability to speak extemporaneously added yet another miraculous, pentecostal quality to John of Cantimpré's persona.

Thomas the hagiographer chose to emphasize the ritual and the theatrical of the preacher's work, rather than the verbal content of his sermon. Admittedly, the image of John of Cantimpré is a textual construction subject to caprice of the individual hagiographer. The narrative may contain literary embellishment borrowed from a hagiographic stereotype or imagined for its entertainment value. Nevertheless, the literary

²⁷ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 297.

²⁸ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 297.

quality does not necessarily deprive the story of its significance. Thomas himself a Dominican friar created what he believed to be an idealized model for other preachers. Either he or his oral sources were willing to repeat certain qualities about a model preacher's life and work instead of others. More importantly, these literary choices can reveal about the popular image of a preacher and the needs, fears and hopes of those who chose to follow him.

What distinguishes a preacher's *vita* from a lay man or woman's, however, seems to be that the preacher usually was granted more conscious agency as the authorizer and enforcer of ritual procedures, rather than merely an actor involved. The parallel between Alard and John is obvious in their respective role in the meticulously designed performance. John is in the role of moral authority who emotionally manipulates both Alard and the audience. In other parts of the John of Cantimpré's *Vita*, he is as well presented a master manipulator. In an account about his singing the Office, a cliché prevalent in most of female saints' lives analyzed in Chapter 1 and 2, he is said to sing with such great energy "a marvelous song of exultation and confession," so as to compel others to sing with even greater vigor and even more elevated a voice. He incited a "pious competition" (*pia decertatione*) in fact.²⁹ This assertive competitiveness is rare in the descriptions about female houses. The literary effect is that John is represented not so much an entranced contemplative, but a goading admonisher that compels active work.

Thomas of Cantimpré emphasized the sacramental potency of the priest throughout his text. In another story, the priestly power of absolution seems to have undermined the efficacy of a ritual ordeal: a brother and a sister murdered a rich merchant who stayed in

²⁹ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 306.

their hostel and secretly buried the dead body without anyone else's knowledge.³⁰ However, murmuring of the neighbors revealed the crime and they were compelled to undergo a trial by hot iron—Thomas of Cantimpré was certainly familiar with canon law procedures and emphasized the rise of the notoriety and the lack of witnesses (*testibus egeret ueritas*), two conditions that would enact a judicial ordeal before it was banned at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.³¹ The brother chose the bishop as his confessor, while the sister chose John of Cantimpré. She thoroughly confessed her sins and wept vehemently, which led to John's absolution of her sin/crime (*absoluit a crimine*). When the people gathered together for the "spectacle" (*ad spectaculum*), the brother's wounds were worsened but the sister's burnt palm was clean and healed, so the sister alone was acquitted from homicide. This pre-Lateran-IV anecdote conveys a curious ambivalence towards judicial ordeal: its validity seems to be at the same time vindicated and undermined. The sister was acquitted from a crime she had committed, but paradoxically her acquittal did reveal God's merciful judgment on the truly contrite. Thomas of Cantimpré avoided a clear position on the usefulness of judicial ordeal; what he intended was to promote the sacerdotal power of confession and absolution, the increasing importance of which in the reforming program would be confirmed in the *Omnis utriusque* canon at the Fourth Lateran Council.³²

³⁰ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 281-282.

³¹ Thomas of Cantimpré, "Une oeuvre inédite," 282; on medieval judicial ordeal, see, for example: John Baldwin, "The Intellectual Preparation for the Canon of 1215 against Ordeals," *Speculum* 36.4 (1961): 613-636; Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Finbarr McAuley, "Canon Law and the End of the Ordeal," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 26.3 (2006): 473-513.

³² Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London and Washington DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 245.

Thomas of Cantimpré only modestly exerted his colorful imagination when composing the account about John's preaching career. In his massive collection of exemplars and anecdotes, *Bonum universale de apibus*, Thomas told a peculiar story about an Italian preacher John of Vicenza. This story, betraying more traces of oral tradition, reveals similar qualities expected from a preacher. It happened in the year 1231—Thomas was quite confident about this precise dating: John of Vicenza's friend had a talking magpie, who was taught to speak the human language. The pet could converse with John and love him very much. But a servant secretly killed the bird and ate it. When interrogated by John - "where are you now, my friend?" the magpie started answering from the servant's stomach "I'm here! I'm here!" People were amazed by the miracle and rushed to hear the magpie talking from the belly for many days.³³ What does this idiosyncratic tale tell us about the popular image of a preacher in the early thirteenth century, besides his apparent talent in ventriloquism?

Popular preachers, indeed, looked a lot like street performers in the sources of the thirteenth century. They created "spectacles of piety" whose entertainment value may widely range from the sentimental, as in the example of Alard's conversion, to the hilarious and ludicrous, as in the magpie anecdote. The performative and the theatrical was expected to outstrip the verbal in terms of communicative effectiveness. It is no news for medievalists that since the thirteenth-century popular preaching was a spectacle where the people were expected to be dazzled, entertained, agitated and ultimately transformed. But

³³ Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, 117: "Vulgatissimum miraculum referebatur sub anno incarnationis Domini M. CC. XXXI. Pica erat in domo hospitis, qui sanctum virum recipere solebat, quae humana verba loqui docta, sanctum virum praecipue diligebat. Seruus autem quidam in domo clam picam occidit, clamque comedit. Introgatus ergo vir sanctus hospitium, clamavit ad picam: Vbi es nunc amica mea, vbi es? Nec mora, de ventre comedentis respondit: Assum, assum. Mirantibus omnibus, vulgatum est verbum, concurrunt populi, de ventre comedentis pica diebus plurimis loquebatur."

medieval preaching as an event is difficult to reconstruct.³⁴ A meticulous account, albeit the hagiographical kind, like Thomas of Cantimpré's, is unusual. The most well-known group of popular preachers were the revival friars in the thirteenth-century northern Italian cities, about whom Salimbene de Adam's chronicle provides the main testimony.³⁵ "A preacher's impact depended on his audibility and visibility."³⁶ These popular sermonizers set up skyscraping towers to attract the attention of large crowds. They also planned staged miracles, particularly healing and resurrection, to impress their audience.

In Jacques de Vitry's vivid reminiscences of his student's days in Paris around 1200, three Flemish young men discuss their respective reason to pursue a university education in Paris: "I remember (*memini*), when I was in Paris, three young men from Flanders, who came to Paris to study, asked each other on route about their future plan. One replies: 'I will work hard and study so that I could become a Master in Paris'; another says: 'I want to study the letters so then I could become a monk in the Cistercian Order'; the third one says: 'It is difficult to work so hard. I would like to become a composer (*organizator*), actor (*hystrio*), and jongleur (*ioculator*).'"³⁷ Unsurprisingly, God granted the three students their

³⁴ Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record," in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 89-124; Carolyn Muessig, "Historiographical Essay: Sermon, Preacher and Society in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 73-91; Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, eds., *Prédication et performance du XIIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013).

³⁵ Vividly studied in Thompson, *Revival Preachers*.

³⁶ Thompson, *Revival Preachers*, 92.

³⁷ Jacques de Vitry, *Die Exempla aus den Sermones feriales et communes des Jakob von Vitry*, ed. Joseph Greven (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1914), 51: "Memini, cum essem Parisius, quod tres adolescents de partibus Flandrie, cum causa studendi venirent Parisius, ceperunt in via mutuo se querere, quale propositum haberent et ad quid tenderet vnusquisque eorum. Vno autem respondente: Volo laborare et studere, vt sim magister Parisiensis; alio vero dicente: Et ego volo litteris imbui, vt postmodum sim monachus Cysterciensis ordinis; tercio dicente: Durum est tantos labors sustinere, volo esse organizator, hystrio et ioculator: accidit vnique prout in corde suo destinauit. Et oculis propriis vidi quod primus fuit de summis magistris in artibus; alius postquam aliquanto tempore theologiam audiuit, factus est non solum monachus, sed de magnis spiritualibus abbatibus Cysterciensis ordinis, Domino vtrisque propositum perducente ad effectum. Tercius

respective wishes according to their merits, as Jacques de Vitry recalls: the first one did become a consummate Master in the Arts Faculty; the second was also an overachiever making a respectable career as a Cistercian abbot; the third ended up as a vagabond musician “shamelessly thrusting himself to the tables of others (*alienis mensis impudenter se ingerens*).” In this *exemplum*, Jacques de Vitry appears to be echoing a conventional clerical disdain for musician and performer whose lifestyle was considered scurrilous and immoral.³⁸ In a frequently quoted passage, the twelfth-century Honorius Augustodunensis unequivocally denied any hope of salvation to *joculatores*.³⁹ However, in Jacques de Vitry’s anecdote, the very juxtaposition of a musical career with becoming university master and abbot implies that it was a thinkable, plausible career choice for university graduates at that time.⁴⁰ The term *organizator* may imply some knowledge in polyphony (*organum*), an extraordinary musical innovation at Notre Dame of Paris at the turn of the thirteenth century.⁴¹ That is to say, the job did require a measure of clerical education and some familiarity with Parisian cultural circle. And it seems Jacques de Vitry is not condemning the jongleur career per se, but the student’s laziness for not wanting to study hard and the vagrant lifestyle associated with entertaining the clients.

dyabolo cooperante factus est scurra vagus, ioculator et organizator, alienis mensis impudenter se ingerens et laborare renuens, reddente vnicuique secundum opera sua et merita studiorum suorum Domino nostro Jhesu Christo qui vivit et regnat in secula...”

³⁸ See John Haines, “Appendix: Some Medieval Condemnations of Singing,” in *Medieval Song in Romance Languages*, 162-173.

³⁹ Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100-1300* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1989), 8.

⁴⁰ Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 74-75.

⁴¹ Craig Wright, *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Christopher Page identifies a radical change of attitudes among the Parisian intellectuals around the 1200 towards the musical and the theatrical, affirming its instrumental utility in the Church and the State affairs.⁴² Hugh of St. Victor in his *Didascalicon* famously incorporated theatrics in the category of mechanical arts, alongside commerce, agriculture and medicine.⁴³ His *theatrica scientia* comprehensively includes performing genres from pantomime, puppetry, instrumental music, choral dance, to gymnastics. More impressively, Hugh approves these arts for their sheer entertainment value: they are legitimate activities “because by temperate motion natural heat is stimulated in the body and by enjoyment the mind is refreshed.”⁴⁴ At the turn of the thirteenth century, Peter the Chanter and his circle in Paris showed a favorable attitude towards the instrumental music and approves its utility to the Church in alleviating distress and inspiring devotion. Continuing the Victorine tradition, Peter the Chanter emphasizes the practical usefulness of music and juxtaposes it with agriculture, tannery and carpentry.⁴⁵ But he seems to be cautious enough to include only instrumental music and exclude the jongleur art which may involve twisted or even exposed body parts. A most generous opinion is expressed by Pierre de Tarentaise, later Pope Innocent V (d. 1276), who

⁴² Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*. See also: Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, “Clerics et jongleurs dans la société médiévale (XIIe et XIIIe siècles),” *Annales* (1979): 913-928.

⁴³ Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, translated by Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 79.

⁴⁴ Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon*, 79; *Hugonis de sancto victore Didascalicon de studio legend*, edited by Charles Henry Buttimer (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1939), 44: “...ludos vero idcirco inter legitimas actiones connumerabant, quia temperato motu naturalis calor nutritur in corpore, et laetitia animus reparatur.”

⁴⁵ Peter the Chanter, *Verbum abbreviatum*, LXXXIV, col. 253: “Videndum ergo, qui opifices necessarii essent Ecclesiae et qui non; qui tolerandi in ea et qui non. Necessarii sunt agricolae, sicut pes mundi... Similiter pelliparii sutores, tannarii, carpentarii simplices... artifices etiam instrumentorum musicorum, ut eis trititia et taedium amoveatur, devotion non lascivia excitetur.”

sweepingly claims in his commentary on the *Sentences* that “all spectacles have been instituted for some purpose of utility, therefore are not inimical to penance.”⁴⁶ Familiar with the urban life and more engaged with worldly affairs and secular governance, these thirteenth-century Parisian intellectuals were prone to justify the musical and the spectacular for the purpose of indoctrination.

In reality, the boundaries between a cleric and a performer were not absolute. In fact, they might look dangerously alike. The itinerant preachers, in particular, shared a similar vagrant lifestyle with the jongleurs. The rise of the mendicant friars in the thirteenth century made the confusion of the two even more frequent. Francis of Assisi’s self-styled label “jongleur of the Lord” is not only a rhetorical expression of supreme humility but also a statement of fact: Francis’s predilection for singing, dancing, and theatrics does make him look a lot like a street performer.⁴⁷ The early Franciscans so carefully cultivated Francis’s musical persona because it suited so well with their preaching mission among the laity. The musical and performative elements were central in shaping the early Franciscan identity and their tradition of affective spirituality. André Vauchez suggests that popular songs and theatrics were integral to Franciscan preaching in its early days until, unfortunately, the Order began to distance itself from the morally dubious association with the street performers in the later thirteenth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Quoted in Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 34: “Spectacula omnia ad aliquam utilitatem instituta sunt, ergo non repugnant penitentiae. Item in spectando non est peccatum nisi curiositatis; maior autem curiositas est in multis scientiis nec dicuntur impedire penitentiam. Item alia peccata graviora sunt quam spectacula et ludi, ergo magis deberent hec ab Augustino proibi. . . Item videtur quod negociatio et milicia penitentiam non impediunt quia sine quibus res publica non bene regitur.”

⁴⁷ Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*, 1-60; Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 312-323.

⁴⁸ Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 315-16.

To recapitulate, it was an emerging consensus at least among the northern European clerics in the thirteenth century that the theatrical and the spectacular was instrumental in the Church's mission of preaching to the laity. They held a tolerant even encouraging attitude towards what were deemed as "jongleur" or "popular" performative genres. In the carefully constructed narrative about Alard's conversion, John of Cantimpré is explicitly represented as a manipulative mastermind that strove to extract the full sensational potential of a "spectacle of piety." Alard's story, despite the entertainment value, had an intricate liturgical structure that presented a coherent set of religious meanings that should be readily intelligible to the thirteenth-century audience.

I intend to prove in this chapter that a preacher orchestrating a preaching event participated in the primarily performative culture of the central Middle Ages. Those quintessentially priestly function, from presiding over the sacraments to preaching the Word, constituted one end of the very wide spectrum of medieval ritual life, alongside a beguine's psalm singing, a monk's ecstatic vision when observing the Divine Office, or a beguine's dramatic reenactment of Christ's Passion according to the canonical hours. Arguably these activities, which modern scholars tend to lump together and classify as "mysticism" or "popular religion," were in fact what defined different religious groups in their respective role from a contemporary's perspective. In other words, the performative aspects to a significant extent defined religious roles and religious persona. This is not to say that the medieval audience did not distinguish these activities at all---of course, a very selected group of performances, such as the sacraments, are more doctrinally defined and more spiritually elevated than the rest. The point is that the boundaries among the majority of religious performances could be very porous and ambivalent. Very firm conceptual

decisions concerning which is unproblematically “liturgical” and which is idiosyncratically “deviant” are very difficult to make, given that the medieval sources seem not very interested in making them.

Epilogue: The Liturgical Body and the Performance of Piety

Let me end this dissertation by going back to its beginning. Jacques de Vitry, our author of the *Vita* of Mary of Oignies, once traveled from the Low Countries to Italy to seek papal approval of the beguine lifestyle. Unfortunately, when he arrived at the papal curia in Perugia, Innocent III, had just died the day before his arrival, on July 16, 1216. The pope's body was not yet buried. During the night before, somebody had "secretly" stripped it of all the previous liturgical vestments. The corpse was left on the church ground, "almost naked (*fere nudum*) and rotting with horrible foul smell (*fetidum*)," in the hot summer air of Italy. Witness to this shocking scene, Jacques reached a chilling conclusion: now he knew how "brief and vain is the illusory glory of this world."¹

In fact, what Jacques de Vitry saw in Perugia might have been some rather curious and ancient funerary rites in Rome.² When a pope died, the Roman people or his household would pillage his possessions, strip his body, and divide the riches among themselves. Such ritual spoliation was considered a way of the transfer of wealth and power. However, on a more symbolic level, Innocent's foul-smelled cadaver served a rhetorical purpose: as we

¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres*, 73-74: "Post hoc veni in civitatem quandam que Perusium nuncupatur, in qua papam Innocentium inveni mortuum, sed nundum sepultum, quem de nocte quidam furtive vestimentis preciosis, cum quibus sci<licet sepeliendus> erat, spoliaverunt; corpus autem eius fere nudum et fetidum in ecclesia relinquerunt. Ego autem ecclesiam intravi et ocul<a>ta fide cognovi quam brevis sit vana huius seculi fallax gloria."

² Important studies on ecclesiastical ritual spoliation include: Reinhard Elze, "Sic transit gloria mundi: zum Tode des Papstes im Mittelalter," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 34 (1978): 1-18; Agostino Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope's Body*, trans. David Peterson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago press, 1994); Alain Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 97-103; Joëlle Rollo-Koster, *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Schism (1378)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008); Bradford Bouley, *Pious Postmortems: Anatomy, Sanctity, and the Catholic Church in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). In the case of violence against the royal body, see: Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Burr Litchfield (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 39-61.

know, posthumous physical incorruptibility was recognized as one prerequisite proof of sanctity and holiness in the thirteenth century. It was a hagiographical commonplace that, for a true saint, his or her corpse was supposed to be resistant to corruption, crystal white with a shimmer of the precious stone, and, importantly, emitting fragrant smell. Jacques de Vitry certainly shared this common belief about the human body as a signifier of the person's interior spiritual condition. In the very same letter, as if setting up yet another contrasting example, he talked about a bodily relic he kept as talisman during his trip, a finger from the dead body of Mary of Oignies, the humble beguine from Liège. Jacques believed this little finger from a truly religious person worked miracles, protecting him from all perils during his journey.³ He also told a dream vision in which the saint's body was transformed into "a very brilliant precious stone," translucent and glorious, incorruptible and impassible.⁴ A central point of Thomas of Cantimpré's *Vita* of Christiana the Astonishing is her body being impermeable against water or fire.⁵ Therefore, Jacques de Vitry's anecdote about Innocent III's precipitately corrupted corpse amounts to a *damnatio memoriae*.

These vignettes demonstrate that the human body became a locus of great hopes and anxieties in later medieval religion.⁶ The physical status of the posthumous body would become the discursive focus especially when the problem of spiritual authority was upfront and anxiety-provoking, as in the contrast between the pope and the beguine saint

³ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres*, 72.

⁴ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Marie de Oignies*, 263.

⁵ See Chapter 1.

⁶ Paravincini-Bagliani argues that the thirteenth century is important when the previously obscure and contradictory discourse about the papal body became clear. *The Pope's Body*, 237.

in Jacques de Vitry's writings. An ardent church reformer, Jacques might have shared with many of his contemporaries the sense of tremendous uneasiness or even disappointment with what was happening in the early thirteenth-century world, where the Fourth Crusade met its infamous end and the papacy became suspiciously bureaucratic with worldly ambitions. It seems when the spiritual authority was in question, either to be justified or nullified, the status of the physical body became a focal point under intense scrutiny at this time.

It is important to point out that the medieval body was always a ritually framed one. The cadavers of the pope and the beguine were implicitly framed in the context of the funerary rites, and death was certainly a ritual moment in medieval culture. When the Liégeois authors started to construct the saintly images of the local religious men and women, they not only paid close attention to their bodily performance, but also consciously utilized the most authority-conferring sources available to them, i.e. the ritual and the liturgical.

Thus, the very sanctifying moments in these saints' lives are often when the body exerting itself in the ritual setting. Mary of Oignies and Christina of St-Truiden performed the liturgical chants magnificently in the church. Women's angelic voices made them potent intercessors for the agonizing souls in purgatorial fire. The monks and nuns, such as Lutgard of Aywières, claimed sanctity through visionary experiences that were part of their liturgical routines and result of their ascetic training. The ritual performance was how Elisabeth of Spalbeek achieved a mimetic identification with Christ's body and what marked Alard's transition from sinner to penitent and then saint. Liturgical piety, physical

and performative, was at the very heart of the religious culture in the thirteenth century in northern Europe.

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