

Virgins, Mothers, Monsters: Late-Medieval Readings of the Female Body Out of Bounds

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Abstract

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(Under the Direction of Eric S. Downing and Maura K. Lafferty)

This dissertation examines representations of female corporeality in three late-medieval texts: the Pseudo-Ovidian poem, *De vetula* (*The Old Woman*); a treatise on human generation erroneously attributed to Albertus Magnus, *De secretis mulierum* (*On the Secrets of Women*); and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, an autobiographical account of visions she experienced during an illness in 1373. These texts present female bodies whose anatomical structures and physiological processes mark them unstable, permeable, and overflowing – attributes associated with medieval monstrosity. These bodies not only exceed their own physical borders, but vex the ontological and epistemological boundaries that discursively structure the texts themselves.

Chapter One considers how the transformation of a virgin into the eponymous old woman forces the poet of *De vetula* to confront the slipperiness between the erotized and repulsive female body. I also show how the poet's conversion to philosophy and Christianity does not free him from the troubling significance of corporeal instability, now extended beyond the economies of individual bodies to the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and resurrection of the body. Chapter Two analyzes how the

gynecology and natural philosophy of *De secretis mulierum* construct a leaky, contaminating female body whose superfluities threaten the integrity of proximate bodies with wounds, illness, and deformity. Although this text's disclosure of women's secrets depends on the legibility of the female body, I contend that the instability of female corporeality and the ambiguity of its signs trouble the text's claim over this semantic field. Chapter Three demonstrates how Julian's *Showings* recasts the unbounded female body by developing a theology of Christ's maternity predicated on the permeability of his flesh. I show how the perforated surfaces, uncontrollable flows, and overlapping enclosures of Christ's body are precisely what make possible communion between humanity and divinity.

This dissertation measures how these texts negotiate classical and medieval representations of female corporeality germane to their particular discursive traditions – that is, of Ovidian bodies, medicalized bodies, and mystical bodies. I also explore how the female body elicits both desire and disgust, and posit that an association between the reproductive female body, the monster, and the corpse invites these responses.

To Mom, Dad, Mary, Aaron, and Kamila

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Introduction:

Crossing Boundaries

Virgins, Mothers, Monsters is about bodies that exceed their proper physical boundaries and thereby trouble the conceptual boundaries according to which texts represent and find meaning in corporeality. Drawing from Aristotle's *Physics*, the fourteenth-century treatise on human generation, *De secretis mulierum*, defines monsters as "those individuals of a certain species which in a certain part of their body are outside the bounds of the common course of the nature of the species [*cursum communem illius speciei excedunt*]." ¹ This dissertation considers how the monster is "out of bounds" in a dual sense – because its corporeal excesses, deficiencies and deformities violate the boundaries of the proper human form and because these abnormalities violate the epistemological and ontological categories whose boundaries structure the very ideologies from which the monster is born. ² But the monster's predilection to exceed established categories of meaning far from renders it meaningless; indeed, the monster is a meaning-laden creature, this meaningfulness being rooted in its very name: the monster, *monstrum*, is etymologically the thing that signs, that shows, that reveals (from the Latin,

¹ *DSM* 6; Lemay (1992), 112. *Unde sciendum quod monstra sive peccata nature vocantur individua alicuius speciei quae in aliqua parte corporis cursum communem illius speciei excedunt*. See Aristotle, *Phys.* II, 8; 199a 32.

² Bynum (2001), 117. See also Cohen (1996): "This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (6).

monstrare).³ The monster therefore enmeshes body and text by corporealizing signs to become books of flesh, so to speak, whose meaning is not their own, but the one readers find there. Jeffrey Cohen has suggested that monsters invite a *modus legendi*, “a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender.”⁴ Thus the medieval monster acts as text for medieval readers, but because it is a text whose meaning is constructed and ascertained by medieval ideological systems, it also becomes a text in which the processes of those very ideological systems can be read. *Virgins, Mothers, Monsters* aims to uncover in monstrous bodies the process whereby specific medieval ideologies designate and recuperate monstrous signs, thereby solidifying the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural while also betraying the contingency of these categories. In other words, this dissertation is about reading late-medieval literary representations of monstrous bodies, and it is about reading those representations of bodies as acts of reading performed by the representatives in each text invested with the power to decipher bodies “out of bounds.”

The study of medieval monstrosity is now being recognized as a rich point of entry into matters of identity, corporeality, race, religion, and gender because the monster’s body is not simply peripheral, but “constitutive,” that is, “producing the

³ See Cohen (1996), 4; Bildhauer and Mills (2003), 14. For a discussion of monsters centered on their role as portents, see Friedman (1981) 108-130. This etymology was often underscored by classical and medieval readers of monstrosity, among them Augustine who wrote in *The City of God*: “From this power [of God] comes the wild profusion of those marvels which are called omens, signs, portents, prodigies. If I should try to recall and enumerate these, where would this treatise end? The various names *monstra*, *ostenta*, *portenta*, *prodigia* come from the verbs *monstrare* ‘show’ because they show something by a sign, *ostendere* ‘display,’ *portendere* ‘spread in front,’ that is, display beforehand, and *porro dicere* ‘say aforetime,’ that is, predict the future” (Augustine of Hippo, ed. and trans. McCracken [1966], vol. vii, 57 [book 21, ch.8]).

⁴ Cohen (1996), 3. For Cohen’s own practice of this *modus legendi*, see also Cohen (2006, 2003a, 1999, 1994).

contours of both bodies that matter and bodies that don't.”⁵ Among the numerous groups whose bodies were marked as monstrous in the Middle Ages were demons, non-Christians, Saracens, Jews, the so-called monstrous races, freaks of nature, deformed infants, miscarried fetuses, and women. Precisely because monsters make up a genus too diverse and too polysemous to be contained within the bounds of any single conceptual system, medieval teratology must, in Cohen's words, “content itself with fragments.”⁶ This dissertation is concerned with one of these fragments of medieval teratology: the monstrous representation of anatomical features and physiological functions of the female body, particularly those germane to the process of reproduction. It explores how female bodies are imagined as “out of bounds,” permeable flesh that overflows, leaks, engulfs, doubles, and splits.

All monstrous bodies are in some sense “out of bounds,” where physical aberrancy signals the violation of categories of nature and categories of knowledge. But this dissertation explores several ways in which the female body exists in special relation to medieval monstrosity. First, the physiological processes socially and ideologically privileged as the tokens of female sexual difference are precisely those processes that verify female monstrosity. Elizabeth Grosz has argued that female maturation is “represented in terms of various cycles of bodily flow” and thus the trajectory of female corporeal development is inextricable from the processes of reproduction.⁷ Physiological processes germane to puberty and pregnancy (i.e. menstruation and lactation) are cast as

⁵ Bildhauer and Mills (2003), 2. See Friedman (1981), Williams (1996), Cohen (1999), Bynum (2001), McAvoy and Walter (2002), Jones and Sprunger (2001), and Bildhauer and Mills (2003), which contains a literature review (219-226) and a comprehensive bibliography.

⁶ Cohen (1996), 7, 6.

⁷ Grosz (1994), 207.

“modes of seepage” so that the female body and indeed womanhood itself (understood as a socially codified category) instance monstrosity.⁸ The representations of female corporeality in the late-medieval texts here analyzed bear out these claims. These representations, moreover, exist against a backdrop of Galenic physiology that described the bodies of *both* sexes as vessels precariously containing an ever-fluctuating economy of fluids. In her study of the relationship between embarrassment and corporeal porosity in early-modern English drama, Gail Kern Paster notes that despite the fact that the “constituent fluids” of this humoral body “were entirely fungible,” and despite the fact that the processes by which these fluids issued from the body—whether by natural or artificial means—were relatively equivalent,” corporeal flows and emanations were read and appraised differently according to the sex of the bodies from which they seeped.⁹ Thomas Laqueur has stressed the physiological and anatomical equivalencies of the two sexes of the Galenic body, namely that they are constituted by the same body fluids (though in differing proportions) and equipped with the same genital anatomy (though positioned inversely).¹⁰ But Paster argues that this “one-sex model” effaces the encoding of sex and gender difference in the flows and emanations of the humoral body, especially when the fluid seeping from that body is blood.¹¹ The relationship between male and female corporeality is a specular one where the male body is privileged over the female

⁸ Grosz (1994), 203. Grosz is not, of course, making claims about women’s experiences of their own bodies. In her study on how the contemporary pregnant body (of the early 1990’s) is constructed as a “mode of seepage,” Longhurst (2001) incorporates women’s own testimonials about their experiences of being seen as leaky or abject matter whose “unpredictable” boundaries are not fit for public spaces (33-65).

⁹ Paster (1993), 9.

¹⁰ Laqueur (1990), 25-27, 36-37.

¹¹ Paster (1993), 17, 21.

body as an original is privileged over a degraded reflection. Female blood, Paster notes, is inscribed with “cultural narratives of engenderment;” it is “slower moving, clammier, grosser,” shed involuntarily as menstrual fluid, and consequently “classifiable as superfluity or waste.”¹² Menstruation becomes, then, a natural sign of “woman’s inability to control the workings of her own body.”¹³

Aristotle’s theories of human generation certainly substantiated such claims. Despite the legacy of Galen’s two-seed model, Aristotle’s theory that women contributed the matter and men the form to the hylomorphic compound of the fetus was widely accepted in the Middle Ages. Not only did Aristotelian embryology associate female corporeality with unbounded, ill-formed stuff in need of the male principle to be contained and shaped, it identified as female those fetuses that failed to form properly. “Females” writes Aristotle in *Generation of Animals*, “are weaker and colder in their nature; and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity [*anapērian*].”¹⁴ This “natural” state of deformity renders the female body the first and most common form of monstrosity:

Anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity [*teras*] since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male.¹⁵

¹² Paster (1993), 79. Paster adds that “on the whole this is true no matter how soluble or evenly tempered a given individual woman might be either naturally or through the artificial evacuations induced by physic or surgery” (79).

¹³ Paster (1993), 83, 84.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (1963), 775a, II. 15-16 (4.6).

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (1963), 767b, II. 7-9 (4.3).

Returning, then, to the “constitutive” power of the monster to construct “the contours of both bodies that matter and bodies that don’t,” we can say along with Bettina Bildhauer that monstrous bodies—but particularly female monstrous bodies—are precisely “those that do not *form*, that *are* mere matter, which has not been shaped or formed sufficiently.”¹⁶ The monster’s body *is* a body that matters (in the sense that it is meaningful) because it is a body that *shows* (*monstrum*), but, following Aristotle, the process of human generation itself crafts a female monster whose meaning is precisely its matter.¹⁷

These medical and philosophical theories are among the medieval ideologies—others of which this dissertation later visits—that piece together the problematic message that about half of humanity is classified as monstrous by its very nature. The female body therefore resists the (spatial) marginalization that defined the circumstances of most other monstrous groups in the Middle Ages. Saracens and Jews were excluded from the body of Christ, the corporealized borders of the Catholic Church. Medieval maps located the monstrous races on the distant margins of the civilized world. The monstrous female body, however, took the form of mother, sister, wife, and daughter. So in addition to female monstrosity being grounded in the very nature of her sex, it is also inextricable from the familial and social roles the female sex was made to play. This is the second sense in which the female body exists in special relation to medieval monstrosity: it was

¹⁶ Bildhauer and Mills (2003), 2; Bildhauer (2006), 86.

¹⁷ Bildhauer contextualizes her discussion of “bodies that matter” as a reading of Judith Butler’s book by that name (1993). Butler builds on both senses of the phrase “bodies that matter” – as in hegemonic bodies and as in material bodies. Bildhauer argues that the Aristotelian distinction between matter and form is more helpful for understanding representations of female and monstrous bodies in the Middle Ages: “Matter is shared by both coherent and abject bodies, while only the former have form. Women’s bodies are granted matter in this sense in medieval physiological theory; it is not matter that the bodies of women are lacking, but form” (86-87).

pervasive, proximate, and necessary on social, sexual, and reproductive grounds. The late Middle Ages witnessed a proliferation of misogynist literature, especially among clergy for whom celibacy was becoming codified as intrinsic to their station, but neither extreme illustrations of the hardships of marriage stemming from the vices, dangers, and contaminations of the female body, nor mounting charges of sorcery and witchcraft could nullify the essentiality of this body for the reproduction of the species—indeed the essentiality of its most troubling seepages. Bodies come from female bodies and medieval embryological theories underscored the troubling materiality of this truism. Bodies, monstrous and not, are gestated within the borders of the female body, fashioned and nourished by superfluities increasingly characterized as contaminants in late-medieval medical literature. The constitutive power of the monstrous female body to produce “the contours of bodies that matter and bodies that don’t” is thus inexorably material, for both sets of bodies emerge from the matter, the stuff of the female body.

Virgins, Mothers, Monsters compares representations of monstrous female bodies in three principal texts written within the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in France and England: the Pseudo-Ovidian poem, *De vetula* (*The Old Woman*); *De secretis mulierum* (*Women’s Secrets*), a philosophically informed text on matters of reproduction wrongly attributed to Albert the Great; and Julian of Norwich’s autobiographical *Showings*, her meditations on a series of mystical visions she received during an illness in 1373. By gathering these readings of the monstrous female body under one title, this dissertation explores how divergent discursive traditions in the late Middle Ages contributed to the representation of the female body as unbounded, permeable flesh. I also posit that the border crossings of the monstrous female body are specifically related

to the exudations, distortions, and breaches relevant to the process of reproduction by which dominant medieval discourses defined female subjectivity.

The first chapter, “Stable and Unstable Body Boundaries in Pseudo-Ovid’s *De Vetula*,” examines the emphasis on borders and orifices of the female body in the longest and most complex example of medieval pseudo-Ovidiana. I argue that representations of monstrous female corporeality in the poem form a subtext that runs through its disparate episodes, and that attention to this subtext is crucial for appreciating *De vetula* as a cohesive text as well as for understanding how it draws from the Ovidian corpus in both its classical and medieval incarnations. Written in an autobiographical voice, *De vetula* tells the story of Ovid’s renunciation of amorous pursuits for a life devoted to philosophical continence and Christianity after being duped by way of a bed-trick substitution into embracing an ugly old woman (*vetula*) instead of the beautiful virgin (*puella*) he had expected. Meticulous descriptions of the bodies of these two women fashion virgin corporeality as a study in order and containment: none of the *puella*’s features transgresses its proper boundaries, none of her orifices opens inappropriately wide, and nothing flows from the inside of her body to the outside. By contrast, the orifices of the *vetula*’s body gape, allowing continual commerce between inside and outside. Pseudo-Ovid, who elsewhere in the poem deems eunuchs to be “monsters” on the grounds that their bodies violate all systems of rational classification, confronts in the transformation of virgin into *vetula* the permeable border between two female identities, and therefore the slipperiness between the erotized and repulsive female body. I propose in this chapter that the *vetula*’s monstrosity issues from an association between the reproductive life cycle—embodied in her unstable, seeping flesh—and mortality, a

deeper violation of the boundaries demarcating life and death: female bodies inevitably change from something stable and attractive (i.e. the virgin body) into something loose and leaky (i.e. the multiparous body) before the final dissolution into old age and eventual decay. Pseudo-Ovid asserts that the transformation of virgin into *vetula* was more amazing than any “he” recorded in the *Metamorphoses*, but the most troubling aspect of this *mutatio* seems to be its utter familiarity.

The second chapter, “Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’ *De Secretis Mulierum*: Decoding the Monstrous Female Body,” focuses on the “hidden, secret things [*occulta et secreta*] about the nature of women” that this treatise promises to disclose to its cleric readers.¹⁸ Drawing from natural philosophy and medical theory, Pseudo-Albertus, and two medieval commentators whose notations were frequently copied along with the text, enumerate the “secret” corporeal signs that communicate a woman’s sexual experience, the pathogenic potential of her superfluities, and the circumstances under which she may give birth to a monster. This treatise thus explicitly identifies the female body as a site of reading, and the message *De secretis mulierum* deciphers there is that the monstrosity of the female body is inextricable from its role in the natural process of human reproduction. Woman therefore becomes both the destructive and productive force of her own species.

De secretis mulierum is also about mis-reading the monstrous female body. This chapter thus examines how Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators substantiate their representations of the female body by distorting earlier gynecological authorities including Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, Averroës, and Avicenna. Whereas Pseudo-

¹⁸ *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 59: *Dilecto sibi in christo socio et amico. N. clerico de tali loco: vere sapientie et augmentum continuum vite presentis. Cum vestra favorabilis et gravita me rogavit societas. ut quaedam dicantur a nobis de his que apud mulierum naturam et conditionem sunt occulta et secreta lucidius manifestare.*

Albertus' sources held that the female body could fall ill if its superfluities were unable to find proper egress, *De secretis mulierum* holds that these superfluities become pathogenic when they leak from the orifices of the female body to disorder the bodies of others. Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators thus transform a condition associated with the retention of superfluities into one associated with the seepage of superfluities. Menstrual fluid becomes the monstrous medium *par excellence*, seeping not only from the boundaries of the female body but also across the boundaries of proximate bodies. The secrets concerning menstrual fluid certainly corroborate Pliny's claim in *Historia Naturalis* that "nothing could be found that is more remarkable / monstrous (*monstrificium*) than the monthly flux of women."¹⁹ But Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators add to Pliny's claims that this superfluity destroys crops, kills bees, and dulls the edges of steel claims that contact with menstrual fluid causes cancer, leprosy, and monstrous deformation in the bodies of men and children. Most troubling of all, it can seep in the form of invisible vapors from the eyes of menopausal (i.e. old) women to kill babies in their cribs. The absence of any detectable sign of this secret of women evinces the problematic hermeneutic process whereby monstrosity is inscribed on the female body to be read in the form of secret signs. Although this text's disclosure of women's secrets depends on the legibility of female corporeality, the instability of its boundaries and the ambiguity of its signs trouble the text's claim over this semantic field. Inconsistent codifications of virgin genital morphology suggest that female flesh finds ways of keeping its sexual experience secret. Similar challenges to Pseudo-Albertus' hermeneutic enterprise arise from his conflation of female seed and menstrual fluid under

¹⁹ Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 7.15.64.

the word *menstrum*—a conceptual boundary violation with possibly grave consequences considering that (according to *De secretis mulierum* itself) sexual intercourse exposed the male body to female seed and contact with menstrual fluid virtually ensured self-pollution. This chapter also suggests that the unspoken secret in *De secretis mulierum* is that all bodies, normative and monstrous, are fashioned from abject superfluities and gestated in contaminated receptacles so that the female body becomes the materialization of a most troubling series of boundary violations: illness infecting vitality, the dissolution of corporeal integrity infecting the primeval coalescence of flesh, death infecting life.

In the first and second chapters of this dissertation, I posit that the misogyny of *De vetula* and *De secretis mulierum* is symptomatic of their associations between female reproductive functions, the monster, and the corpse. In the third chapter, “Julian of Norwich and the Permeable Body of Christ,” I consider how the theology of Julian’s *Showings* is built upon just these associations. Julian’s long text represents the most complex elaboration of the motif of Christ’s maternity. The *Showings* fashions a “Moder Jhesu” whose maternity is specifically corporeal, predicated not on “maternal” characteristics such as unconditional love or mercy (as were most examples of the motif among medieval theologians and mystics), but on the maternal capacities of his body. Julian recasts the pains of crucifixion as the labor pains of birth and the Eucharist as bodily nourishment offered by Christ to his children. The wound in Christ’s side is imagined as the threshold to a large womb where humankind may dwell, enclosed forever in Christ’s body. This chapter explores how Julian recasts the monstrous qualities of the reproductive female body—its perforated surfaces, uncontrollable seepage, enclosures, and fragmentations—as precisely those qualities that, materialized in Christ’s maternal

body, make possible communion between humanity and the divine. I argue that Julian draws from her visions of Christ's permeable body to formulate an elaborate theology in which the persons of the Trinity, humankind, and the Virgin Mary participate in a process of continuous enclosures and births that simulates the overlapping concentric spheres of anchorhold, womb, and tomb. Through comparative analysis of other late medieval anchoritic literature such as the *Ancrene Riwe*, this chapter also demonstrates how Julian's articulation of maternal corporeality challenges the normative boundaries by which the monstrous was circumscribed in mystical and anchoritic discourses.

The organization of *Virgins, Mothers, Monsters*—each chapter geared toward a specific discursive authority on female corporeality—attempts to grapple with the monster's semantic flexibility while simultaneously working towards a composite image of late-medieval female monstrosity whose features are stable enough to define. Whether this body is discursively constructed as an Ovidian body, a medicalized body, or a mystical body, its corporeal boundaries fail to form properly. It should also be said that the discourses and ideologies represented in this study are in no way mutually exclusive. The newly Christian Ovid of *De vetula* forsakes his preoccupations with the erotized boundaries of Ovidian bodies for the intact body of the Virgin Mary and the eternally stable boundaries of the resurrected body. Among those symptoms associated with menopause, Pseudo-Albertus' commentators cite mystical visions.²⁰ Several medieval scholars have argued, in turn, that images of illness, bloodshed, and gestation in Julian's *Showings* are informed by medieval gynecology.²¹ These three texts, therefore, represent

²⁰ *DSM* 11.132.

²¹ See especially Robertson (1993).

the contributions of particular discourses to medieval teratology, but, read together, they also illustrate the imbrication of scholastic Ovidianism, natural philosophy, gynecology, and Catholic mysticism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In some sense, the monstrous female body united these discursive traditions by violating their generic boundaries.

Because the monstrous female's fluctuating matter embodies the metaphors of incoherency, inconsistency, irrationality, and crisis that threaten the conceptual categories on which these various discursive systems depend to "read" its signs, the female body destabilizes the hermeneutics mobilized to read it. Luce Irigaray has underscored the identification of female corporeality with what is *not* philosophical, rational, and solid in Western thought. Anxieties about fluidity and leakiness are related to the anxieties about ambiguities incommensurable with the conceptual boundaries that structure these dominant systems of knowledge.²² The boundary violations excluded from these (masculine) ideologies are then associated with the seepage of the female body.

Although I do not pursue the possibility here, this is a claim that could apply to other incarnations of medieval monstrosity since the monster's body always troubles categories of knowledge. This dissertation suggests, however, that the boundary violations of the female body extend beyond the plane of the scholastic categories violated by Pseudo-Ovid's monstrous eunuch (grammar, mathematics, logistics, etc.) to categories whose integrity is more deeply consequential: those that demarcate desire and disgust, life and death, self and other.

These late-medieval incarnations of female monstrosity may share a certain set of corporeal features—porosity, instability, transgression—but monstrosity is not reducible

²² Longhurst (2001), 31; Irigaray (1985), 113.

to the monster's discrete body nor to the conceptual categories the monster is made to concretize and violate. Monstrosity is indelibly marked by affect, by the viscerally emotive responses it calls forth from those who find themselves in the monster's proximity. The representations of female monstrosity in *De vetula*, *De secretis mulierum*, and *Showings* illustrate that the monster's intrigue cannot be sustained by fear, revulsion, and hate. The monster also beckons and entices. In Cohen's words, "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire," and this desire is especially troubling when the monster is a woman.²³ Pseudo-Ovid addresses the tale of his renunciation of erotics to male readers for whom the "yoke" of desire "is loathsome."²⁴ He confesses that he too used to think that no man could live without the female sex, but his encounter with the *vetula* caused the divisions to disintegrate between the object of intense erotic fantasy and the object of overwhelming loathing.²⁵ Many of the secrets disclosed by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators warn of the dangerous and unsavory nature of the female body whose orifices, exudations and emanations can infect the penis or disorder a man's internal organs. These admonitions cannot, however, eradicate the exigencies of desire, sex and reproduction. One commentator compares the female genitals to a sewer drain, yet the other commentator grants that "the vulva [*vulva*] in itself possesses an exceeding sweetness for the male."²⁶ In *Showings*, Julian describes a vision wherein Christ's head

²³ Cohen (1996), 16; see 16-20.

²⁴ *Venerit unde michi subito mutatio tanta,
Discite vos, quos ferre iugum fastidit amoris* (DV 2.200-201).

²⁵ *O quam carus erat michi quamque optabilis ille
Femineus sexus, sine quo nec vivere posse
Credebam quemcumque virum ...* (DV 1.24-26).

²⁶ DSM 11, Lemay (1992), 133-134; DSM 12, Lemay (1992), 138: ... *vulve in se continet magnam delectationem viro. Sed tantum de illo non multum dico ad praesens.*

streams blood beneath a crown of thorns in this way: “Thys shewyng was quyck and lyvely and hydows [hideous] and dredfulle and swete and lovely.”²⁷ In another vision Christ spreads open the wound in his side so that Julian can gaze through this fissure his severed heart and the empty space where he will hold humankind in an eternal gestation. While he performs this disquieting, even grisly, gesture, he smiles and says, “*Lo, how I love thee.*”²⁸ The complication of the hideous and sweet, the dreadful and lovely, in these texts lends the monster’s body a certain power, and this lends the exegesis of the monster’s body a certain urgency. The monstrosity of the erotized and reproductive female body is especially troubling for Pseudo-Ovid and Pseudo-Albertus because of its “excessive sweetness,” its *necessity*. For all of Pseudo-Ovid’s optimism about freedom from the yoke of erotic desire, his didactic message is flawed: man *cannot* live without the female sex. The *vetula*’s body, its boundaries deformed by multiple births, may no longer elicit lust but it is nevertheless the body that houses and feeds the bodies of all men. *De secretis mulierum*, perhaps the most misogynist treatise on human generation to emerge from the Middle Ages, operates under the burden of this truth, that the most monstrous secret about the reproductive female body is that its borders cannot be disentangled from one’s own. On these grounds, this dissertation claims that the female monstrous body is a special case of “the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities,” because it is also the abjected fragment that, in a deeply visceral sense, is at the heart of human formation.²⁹ Thus the complicated affective response to

²⁷ *LT* 1.7.13.

²⁸ *LT* 10.24.37, italics are Baker’s.

²⁹ Cohen (1996), 19. “Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual” (7).

the enveloping, fissured, and leaky boundaries of the female body is also a response to the murky origins of the bounded and whole embodied self.

The monster, read in this sense, is closely connected to what Julia Kristeva calls the abject and defines as that which “disturbs identity, system, order,” what “does not respect boundaries, positions, rules.”³⁰ The abject is urine, feces, menstrual blood, nail parings, vomit – those bits of corporeality that are contiguous with and yet offend the “self’s clean and proper body.”³¹ To confront the abject is to be entangled in a “twisted braid of affects,” a worried fascination, a sickened desire, directed toward an object that clings, “something rejected from which one does not part.”³² Kristeva traces abjection to the contiguous boundaries of body and subjectivity that define the archaic relationship with the maternal body. Because pregnancy is “the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech,” the maternal body occupies the threshold between self/other and inside/outside; it is, therefore, the domain of abjection.³³ Abjection preserves “the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order *to be*.”³⁴ And, “the violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back” that occurs across the limens of the maternal body is a source of both comfort and alarm, an amalgamation of the familiar and foreign. The

³⁰ Kristeva (1982), 4.

³¹ Kristeva (1982), 72. The abject thus corresponds to what Mary Douglas calls “dirt”: “Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death.” Dirt is “matter out of place,” out of its proper bounds (Douglas [1966]), 35.

³² Kristeva (1982), 1, 4.

³³ Kristeva (1986b), 206.

³⁴ Kristeva (1982), 10, emphasis added.

affective power in abjection provides a framework for theorizing what is so reassuring about the controlled *puella*'s body and horrifying about the overflowing *vetula*'s body. Abjection offers insight into what is so monstrous about menstrual fluid in *De secretis mulierum*, and how this superfluity can be read as both waste to be shed and (according to medieval embryology) the primordial pool of human life.

The abject also infects these texts in the form of the corpse, which Kristeva names “the utmost of abjection.” In the corpse the boundaries of the self, and therefore the boundaries between the self and the abjected other, forever dissolve. The corpse is “death infecting life ... something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.”³⁵ Like Christ's dreadful maternal body, “it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.”³⁶ In *De vetula* and *De secretis mulierum*, the female body is also a reminder of mortality, if less fully acknowledged than in *Showings*. Drawing from Kristeva's connection between the abject mother's body and the corpse, we might speculate that Pseudo-Ovid's ultimate object of revulsion is the old and ill female body because it is a reminder of the intransigence of death. But the transformation of a young and attractive girl's body into a hag's body represents more than the latent sickness and decay of mortal flesh; it represents the specifically maternal body that must be repelled in order to *be* mortal. Women's secrets conceal the ideological truths about female bodies whose pervious borders abort fetuses, infect men with incurable diseases, and kill sleeping infants—in other words, whose borders are limned with death. Yet these are the same bodies from whose borders life springs. The

³⁵ Kristeva (1982), 4.

³⁶ Kristeva (1982), 4.

abjection of menstrual fluid borders on the abjection of the corpse, and the living body struggles to extricate itself from both. “Such wastes,” in Kristeva’s words, “drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains of me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver.”³⁷

The animated corpse of Christ that visits Julian on her sickbed is paradigmatic of Kristeva’s abjection.³⁸ He is both marvelous and familiar, dreadful and, to quote Julian, *homely*. Freud would have called him *unheimlich* (uncanny), the opposite of and yet kindred to what is *heimlich* (familiar, intimate, “home-like”).³⁹ *Showings*, however, is not simply an acknowledgement or portrait of Christ’s hideousness and homeliness; it is a record of the transformative experience of yielding to the boundaries of the most “intimate stranger”: mother, monster, and God.⁴⁰ Reading a message of love in the fissured borders of Christ’s body, Julian can be understood as one of the “devotees of the abject,” who “do not cease looking, within what flows from the other’s ‘innermost being,’ for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body.”⁴¹ The devotee’s relationship to language and hermeneutic approach to the maternal body signals that her attraction to abjection is not reducible to

³⁷ Kristeva (1982), 3.

³⁸ On abjection and Julian of Norwich, see Lochri (1991), 41-42.

³⁹ Freud (1990), 339. See Coiner (1993) for a full analysis of the *Unheimliche* and *Heimliche* in *Showings*. According to Coiner, the uncanny nature of Julian’s visions is deeply related to her “vision of the soul as doubled and split, familiar and yet hidden from itself” (311). Christ’s maternity embodies this “doubleness in unity” at the heart of human identity (316): “For both Julian and Freud, the self is disconcertingly split between two parts, each of which is hidden from the other’s view. Furthermore, for both Freud and Julian that split self is constituted by a deep connection to the maternal body. Both the *Showings* and the essay on the uncanny circle again and again around an elusive notion of the maternal body as a site where all categories (of life and death, of separation and unity) blur” (307).

⁴⁰ Cohen (1999), 180; Lochrie (1991), 41.

⁴¹ Kristeva (1982), 71.

the indulgence of symbiotic fantasies or the disavowal of lack because Kristeva's maternal body is always a breached space.⁴² Julian's compassion is corporeal, experienced through what Karma Lochrie has called "the physical tokens of defilement," but this encounter with Christ's body also leads to knowledge, pursued through speech and text.⁴³

Monsters may lurk around margins and they may materialize the marginal, but their marginalization brings into shape the contours by which the natural, normal, and healthy are constructed and reinforced. Monsters thus possess the power to draw from the margins what is uncannily familiar but marked as other. What is marginal then begins to look strangely like what is central.⁴⁴ The margins themselves begin to dissolve. The horror of the monstrous female is invoked by its dissolving corporeal margins in part because these porous borders fail the monster's task of bringing into shape the contours of the clean and proper self. Instead, they expose "the confusion of form and the lack of

⁴² Kristeva builds on Lacan's work inasmuch as she accepts his tripartite structure (real, imaginary, and symbolic). But in addition to Lacan's notion of the symbolic, she posits the *semiotic*, which is a register of drives, rhythms, and intonations roughly equivalent to the pre-oedipal phase and Lacan's Imaginary order. It is a phase before the infant's individuation from the mother's body, and Kristeva names this symbiotic space the *chora*. Following Lacan, Kristeva describes the fissure between the infant and the maternal body in terms of castration. Upon his realization of sexual difference, the "subject *separates* from his fusion with the mother, *confines* his *jouissance* to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility onto the symbolic order," where the gap between signifier and signified abides (Grosz 2002, 101). For Kristeva, pregnancy is the paradigmatic site of semiotic rupture into the symbolic order because it blurs the opposing positions that organize subjectivity. Although the semiotic must be repressed by the symbolic, it remains transgressive, erupting through the symbolic as "an interruption, a dissonance, a rhythm unassimilable in the text's rational logic or controlled narrative" (Grosz 2002, 152). Kristeva refuses to define the devotee of the abject by a "perverse" denial of castration. His grasp of language identifies him as "subject to castration to the extent that he must deal with the symbolic." But it is not "part of himself ... that he is threatened with losing, but his whole life. To preserve himself from severance, he is ready for more – flow, discharge, hemorrhage. All mortal" (Kristeva [1982], 54-55).

⁴³ Lochrie (1991), 41.

⁴⁴ Bildhauer and Mills (2003), 6.

singularity as the condition of all.”⁴⁵ The message of the monstrous female, the truth that it *shows*, is disturbingly reflexive and borders on something close to “the monster is you.”

⁴⁵ Shildrick (2002), 106.

Chapter One:

Stable and Unstable Body Boundaries in Pseudo-Ovid's *De Vetula*

An aging Ovid, having failed to persuade Augustus to allow him to return to Rome, sought comfort in the composition of one final poem. He arranged for this poem to be buried with his bones in Tomis with the hope that his physical remains and this final addition to his literary corpus might eventually make their way back to his motherland. This much we are told in the prose *accessus* of the poem, *De vetula* (*The Old Woman*), which was preserved in an ivory capsule, “consumed by no rot,” and discovered over a thousand years after Ovid’s death.⁴⁶ The poem was sent to Constantinople where it was translated and recognized as the last work of the great poet whose bones, by that time, had long since dissolved into dust.⁴⁷ Ovid had foretold as much in the closing lines of his

⁴⁶ Robathan (1968), 43. I here refer to the *accessus* as it is printed in Robathan’s edition. She acknowledges that it is “derived from that of the five principle manuscripts,” but does not preserve nor note differences in these five sources. The medieval *accessus* endured many vicissitudes, but it generally provided “information about the *circumstantiae* of the text: the author’s biography, the work’s title, the writer’s intention, the subject matter of the work, its utility, and its philosophical classification” (Allen [1992], 44). For the *accessus* as a medieval literary trope, see Quain (1945), 215-264, and Allen (1992), 35-58.

⁴⁷ Robathan (1968), 42-43: *In capite vero sepulcri capsella eburnea est inventa est in ea liber iste nulla vetustate consumptus. Cuius litteras non agnoscentes, indigene miserunt eum Constantinopolim Vatachii principis tempore, de cuius mandato Leoni sacri palatii prothonotario traditus est, et ipse eum perlectum publicavit et ad multa climata derivavit.* Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are my own.

Composed in thirteenth-century France, *De vetula* was accepted as genuine by many medieval readers, including Roger Bacon (1214-ca.1292) who quotes from it in his *Opus Maius* (Robathan [1968], 1). For a thorough account of those who, between the thirteenth and fifteenth century, did and did not accept Ovid’s authorship of *De vetula*, see Robathan (1957), 197-202. *De vetula* has been attributed to Richard de Fournival based on a list of Augustan authors penned in the fifteenth century by a Dutch scholar, Arnold Gheyvolen. *De vetula* is included among the texts of Ovid, but Gheyloven adds, “*quem librum scripsit magister Ricardus de Furnivallis cancellarius Ambianensis et imposuit Ovid*” (Robathan [1957], 202). For an account of the issues concerning Fournival’s authorship, see Robathan (1957), 202-206. As Robathan notes, the many citations of *De vetula* during this time period do not necessarily indicate evidence of

Metamorphoses – that his poetry would long outlast his body.⁴⁸ Indeed, the final word of the poem, *vivam*, demonstrates Ovid’s faith in the words he gives to Pythagoras, his philosopher of change: *omnia mutantur, nihil interit*.⁴⁹ That Ovid’s fleshy corpus would become his textual corpus is the final transformation promised in the *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁰ The *accessus* of *De vetula* thus announces two provenances; the story of this final text of the Ovidian corpus is inextricable from the story of Ovid’s body. It is fitting, then, that this final incarnation of Ovid’s corpus, which is everywhere about the vicissitudes of corporeal boundaries, survives intact while Ovid’s absent body serves as a testament to the exigencies of old age, death, and decay, to which the *vetula* and the author himself are vulnerable. Ralph Hexter has characterized the pseudo-Ovidiana of the high Middle Ages as supplements or grafts onto Ovid’s corpus, understood both as his literary body of

belief in its authenticity. Manuscripts from the fifteenth century suggest the popularity of the third book, sometimes the only one copied, which suggests that the Aristotelian philosophy, Arabic astrology, and prophecy of Christ’s birth in the third book may have been considered more useful (or less problematic) than the erotic and courtly material of the other two books (Robathan [1957], 201). In the fourteenth century, Jean Lefèvre circulated a French version of *De vetula*, which is properly speaking “an adaptation rather than a translation” (Robathan [1957], 200).

My citations of *De vetula* follow Robathan’s 1968 edition, which she establishes from seven manuscripts: Angers 506, London BM Add. 22014 and Royal 7.F.vii, Montpellier Bibl. de la Faculté de Méd. 366, Vat. Reg. Lat. 1559, Paris BN lat. 16252, Venice Marc. XII 57 (4120), which are “all 14th century except the Paris and London Royal texts, which are late 13th” (Colker [1970], 323). For a list of all 34 manuscripts known to Robathan, see Robathan (1957), 206. Klopsch’s 1967 edition of the text provides a stemma showing the relationship between the manuscripts, but, according to one scholar of *De vetula* “the high degree of conflation among them does not permit the complex stemma to be very serviceable ...” (Colker [1970], 323). For a thorough comparison of the Robathan and Klopsch editions, see Colker (1970), 322-326.

⁴⁸ *Metam.* 15.871-879.

⁴⁹ *Metam.* 15.165.

⁵⁰ See Hexter (1999), 345-346, n.15 for the classical use of *corpus* to refer to a body of literature: “While *corpus* can be used not only for a book but for a literary work (as Ovid does [*Tr.* 2.535] to denote the *Aeneid* and as Quintilian does [4.1.77] to describe Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), it is only in the third and fourth centuries that it becomes standard to employ *corpus* for the complete works of one author (e.g., *corpus Homeri*), though earlier authors had regularly used *corpus* for an assemblage of materials and literary works on a specific topic.” Hexter’s essay, “Ovid’s Body” (1999) plays on the dual meaning of *corpus* to talk about how Ovid’s body/texts were received, inhabited, and transformed in the Middle Ages.

work and the body of the poet himself, especially in those instances where Ovid himself appears as an embodied subject in these texts (as in *De vetula* and Ovid's medieval biographies).⁵¹ Read as an appendage to the medieval Ovid's body, *De vetula* is not, as the *accessus* announces, the final, definitively bounded incarnation of the poet, for it is a testament—together with other pseudo-Ovidiana—to the permeability of that body.⁵² Ovid's corpus, both body and text (*De vetula* does not allow the two to be put asunder) tends to spill from its proper boundaries.⁵³ In this regard, Ovid's body is not so different from the bodies that populate *De vetula* itself: it functions as a semantic system and a corporeal system, occupying an unsteady position where the two overlap. The "Ovid" who appears in *De vetula* —the poetic corpus within the autobiographical text— exemplifies this instability as he himself is a reader of unstable bodies, and by way of that reading, undergoes his own series of transformations.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Hexter (1999), 339.

⁵² Hexter (1999), 343.

⁵³ This *accessus* also affirms that texts, like bodies, tend to spill from their proper boundaries. The medieval *accessus* also took on the task of buttressing the authenticity of the text and exerting some control over its reception. For writers whose texts were meant to uphold Christian principles, but also in some measure "encouraged the free play of amatory and erotic fantasy," such as the medieval commentators on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the *accessus* was, in Allen's terms, a "highly debated field," as it is a hermeneutic instrument and a text itself, whose meaning was a matter of concern for both the author and the reader (Allen [1992] 45). This *accessus* of *De vetula* deftly performs such a mediation by placing the text under the authorship of Ovid, and avoiding the pitfalls faced by Ovidian commentators by announcing Ovid's conversion to Christianity. Maneuvers such of these, however, cannot successfully police the inherently unstable boundaries of texts, as Pseudo-Ovid's own plundering of Ovid's authorial name and literary corpus demonstrate. The proclamation of the discovery of this poem "consumed by no rot" disclaims such discursive instability, especially when juxtaposed to the ossified traces of Ovid's own decay.

⁵⁴ I mean for "Ovid" to denote Pseudo-Ovid and for Ovid to denote the classical poet, but this schema is problematic as it does not distinguish between the "Ovid" who wrote *De vetula* and the "Ovid" who narrates the poem and appears as a character in it. Because it is just as problematic to determine where one of these "Ovids" is not reducible to the other, I do not mark them differently. But it is my sense that the narrator of the poem is a poorer reader of bodies than its author, and that the moments of misreading by the narrator (the most significant being his misreading of the *vetula*'s metamorphosis) draw attention to the various ways that bodies are made to signify in the poem.

As the synopsis of this thirteenth-century Pseudo-Ovidian poem given in the *accessus* makes clear, *De vetula* is about change, and specifically about how changing bodies change categories of knowledge: the first book tells of “Ovid’s” way of life while he was giving himself over to love (*dum vacaret amori*); the second book reveals why he changed (*mutavit*) that way of life; and the third describes to what sort of life he changed (*mutavit*).⁵⁵ The poem is titled *De vetula*, we are told, “because an old woman (*vetula*) was the cause (*causa*) by which he changed (*mutaverit*) his way of living.”⁵⁶ The *accessus* is reticent, however, about the nature of the event that effected this change: “Ovid’s” experience of a horrific transformation. He is led into a darkened room where he believed a beautiful virgin awaited him, her body a study in order and containment. He embraces the figure reclining on the couch and discovers in his arms a revolting old woman, her body an ill-proportioned, overflowing jumble of parts. Like the *Metamorphoses*, *De vetula* is about changing bodies, but here one of those bodies belongs to “Ovid” himself, who emerges from his encounter with corporeal flux a reshaped embodied subject.⁵⁷

As a narrator well-versed in the language of metamorphosis, “Ovid” experiences as transformation what was, properly speaking, a case of mistaken identity: “I have sung of forms changed into new bodies,” he cries, “and no change more amazing than that one

⁵⁵ Robathan (1968) 42: ... *composuit librum istum in quo iam desperatus et undecumque solacia sibi querens, reducit ad memoriam modum suum vivendi quem habuerat dum vacaret amori, et quare mutavit eum, et ad quem modum mutavit.*

⁵⁶ Robathan (1968) 43: ... *De vetula vero ideo dicitur quia vetula fuit causa quare mutaverit modum suum vivendi.*

⁵⁷ Hexter (1999), 343.

is to be found there [i.e. in *Metamorphoses*].”⁵⁸ Thus, *De vetula* is also about reading and misreading the vicissitudes of body boundaries. The misreading of a changed body changes the semiotic valences of bodies: after the horrific transformation of the *vetula*, “Ovid” the poet-lover becomes “Ovid” the continent philosopher, a change that reshapes the epistemological and ontological boundaries that structure his world. The subtitle that appears in some manuscripts, *De mutatione vitae*, signals this close relationship between the *puella*’s transformation into an old woman and the narrator’s own metamorphosis.⁵⁹ As the *accessus* reminds its readers, the body does not endure. But *De vetula* also bears witness to the intransigence of body boundaries, not so much as containers of flesh and blood, but as discursive entities, objects of discursive inscription that in turn shape discursive systems. When “Ovid” abandons his amorous pursuits and dedicates himself to philosophy, science, and religion, he cannot cast these new interests as abstract refuges from the body. Rather, he expands the significance of corporeal boundaries beyond the economies of individual bodies, a move that serves to highlight the discursivity of bodies characterized as conglomerations of erotic or repulsive flesh. The body’s physical features, organ systems, and humors become to the poet, now immersed in natural philosophy, readable blueprints representing the order of the universe. This semiotic value of the body, however, exists in an uneasy relationship with the poet’s awareness that some bodies, because they fall short of, exceed, or confuse their proper boundaries, trouble this semiotics. They are instances of disorder in the very universe whose order is reflected by the microcosm of the human body, and they thereby destabilize the very

⁵⁸ ...*in nova formas*
Corpora mutatas cecini, mirabiliorque
Non reperitur ibi mutatio quam fuit ista (DV 2.495-497).

⁵⁹ Robathan (1957), 197.

categories of knowledge that designate the body as a sign system. The newly Christian “Ovid,” having fled the troublesome instability of flesh, finds this instability in the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the resurrection of the flesh. Monstrous bodies manage to haunt those individuals and institutions that mark them as such. This poem, then, illustrates the discursive plasticity of the body, the way it makes meaning in different discourses – scholastic exposition, autobiography, courtship narrative, natural philosophy, and Christian prayer, all of these invest “Ovid” with a semiotics of corporeality. This poem also illustrates the body’s resistance to discursive systems that would locate corporeal slipperiness in old, female flesh in order to stabilize those boundaries that delineate the erotic from the repulsive, the virgin from the *vetula*, the natural from the monstrous.

That virgin into *vetula* is the climactic body change that turns “Ovid” away from erotics suggests that the old woman’s monstrosity issues from an association between the reproductive life cycle—embodied in the instability of female corporeality—and mortality. This is, at least, among the hypotheses I argue in this chapter by examining the representation of several bodies in *De vetula* (among them, a *semivir*, *puella*, *vetula*, the body microcosm, and the virgin Mary), the affective and epistemological valences that the author locates in the boundaries of those bodies, and the specific function of female corporeality in shaping the discursive boundaries trespassed by the monstrous. The analysis of the function of body boundaries in the poem is crucial for appreciating it as a cohesive text, and for understanding how it draws from the Ovidian corpus which also demonstrates a keen interest in bodies, their beauty and repulsiveness, their transformations, and the questions about identity and the nature of the universe that arise

when the contours of the body change. Ovid and “Ovid” both convey the affective response that body contours elicit, particularly when they prove to be erotically, wondrously, or horrifically unstable. Both authors also explore how the body, volatile as it may prove to be, produces, substantiates, and makes intelligible the perceptible and imperceptible world. These thematic convergences, together with several specific references to Ovid’s works throughout *De vetula*, indicate that “Ovid” was a keen reader of his namesake, and this chapter also explores *how* “Ovid” reads (and mis-reads) bodies, what these readings suggest about Ovid’s medieval body (in Ralph Hexter’s sense), and how this medieval Ovid—an assemblage of classical and medieval models of corporeal semiotics—may himself be the monstrous creature who haunts the hexameters of *De vetula*. It should be stressed, however, that the many backward glances to the literary corpus of the Augustan poet in this chapter are not meant to detract from “Ovid’s” own poetic voice, which merits examination not simply for its ventriloquism, but for its own contribution to the literary history of the body.⁶⁰

Part One: The Monstrous Semivir

Before narrating the specifics circumstances under which he changed, Ovid confesses that a strong desire for the female sex (*femineus sexus*) had always gripped him, and, moreover, that “without it (the female sex), I used to think that no man could live.”⁶¹ In

⁶⁰ Ralph Hexter (1999) has suggested that pseudo-Ovidiana provided a context in which late-medieval poets could “learn to write about the body in a certain way” by “imitating and out-Oviding Ovid” (340).

⁶¹ *O quam carus erat michi quamque optabilis ille
Femineus sexus, sine quo nec vivere posse
Credebam quemcumque virum ... (DV 1.24-26).*

order to illustrate just how changed a man he is, he analyzes his valuation of a certain monstrous creature prior to and after his change, namely the half-man (*semivir*): “I used to praise only the man to whom nature had given power (*vim*), so that as many times as he could wish, he would be able to know a girlfriend (*cognoscere amicam*). But now, I praise half men.”⁶² He is fairly explicit about whom he means to indicate with the term *semivir*. He is a man whom “nature has denied” the power (*vires*) to have intercourse, and, at least initially, his examples of half men are exclusively mechanical: men who have been castrated by jealous husbands, or men for whom some physical abnormality has made intercourse impossible or prohibitively painful, those, for example, who have suffered hernias.⁶³ Their bodies prevent them from doing the deed.⁶⁴

For the remainder of the first book, however, he abandons this topic, and instead gives detailed accounts of his daily activities while he still held such a belief, very few of which touch upon the sexual desire that animated a substantial part of his life. But he does describe his erotic pursuits in a rather abstract way. He weighs the various benefits and liabilities of affairs with virgins, married women, and widows, and again mentions his envy of any man who can procure a girlfriend. (*DV* 1.121-245). Among the activities that fill the rest of the first book are horse riding, bird catching, hunting, fishing, and various types of game playing. Of the scholars who have shown interest in *De vetula*, those interested in the activities of the medieval court have been most attracted to book one, particularly for its detailed descriptions of the rules of dice and chess.

⁶² *Solum laudabam cui vim natura dedisset
Ut quotiens vellet, cognoscere posset amicam.
At nunc semiviros laudo ... (DV 2.6-8).*

⁶³ *At nunc semiviros laudo, quibus has modo vires
Componentibus, a primis natura negavit.
Sive quibus, solitis thalamos violare pudicos
Deprensus in adulterio, genitalia membra
Iracunda manus sponsi violenter ademit;
Sive quibus ruptura siphac ita magnificari
Cepisset quod non prohiberet in oscea casum
Intestinorum, vel tantus ad ova veniret
Fluxus aque putris, stomacho mandate, quod ultra
Herniam patiens non posset onus tolerare.
Aut aliis causis ita computresceret ovum,
Ne fieri posset, quin crudeli medicina
Ova recidisset medici reprobabilis usus. (DV 2.8-20).*

Fairly sophisticated medical terminology appears in several passages of the poem. I comment on some of these passages below, but “Ovid’s” description of the possible ways in which a man can become a *semivir* is characteristic in terms of its explicit vocabulary and scholastic tone.

This identification of the *semivir* in terms of his physical status begins to falter as “Ovid” becomes increasingly less sure of precisely what the *semivir* is, and concordantly, less sure of his praiseworthiness. He first begins to wonder whether or not it is proper to say that he praises *istos semiviros*, “for there is doubt whether the *semivir* is a he (*iste*) or a she (*ista*).”⁶⁵ The *semivir*, he reasons, cannot be a “she” because there is no vulva (*vulva*). Yet the *semivir* cannot be a “he” because of the “grave defect” (*talis defectus*) that “unmans” (*devirat*) him.⁶⁶ “Ovid” then proceeds to rule out further possibilities through the sort of academic, deductive reasoning that he will later employ at length in the philosophical ruminations of book three. The *semivir* cannot be “neuter” (*neutrum*) because every animal (which, of course, is neuter in the Latin, *animal*) must be either a “he” or “she;” yet there is doubt whether or not the *semivir* can be considered an animal at all because all animals, the poet is sure, have a sex. After a lengthy passage on why the *semivir* cannot be a plant, “Ovid” summarizes all that he has thus far deduced about this troubling creature whom he claims to praise so highly:

Eunuchus porro cum non sit femina, non vir,
Non animal, non planta, quid est? Non est sine vita.
Ergo quid esse potest? Nihil esse potest nisi monstrum.
DV 2.42-44

⁶⁴ The word, *semivir*, though uncommon in classical Latin, appears several times in the Ovidian corpus. Chiron the Centaur is called a *semivir* at *Fasti* 5.380, the Minotaur at *Ars Amatoria* 2.24, and the hermaphrodite formed by the union of Hermaphroditus and Semele at *Metamorphoses* 4.386. The first two creatures are half man and half beast. the second half man and half woman. The Ovidian *semivir*, then, is monstrous in a corporeal sense. This creature is not simply an effeminate man or a eunuch, but a “boundary violation” in hybrid form. In the case of Chiron and the Minotaur, at least, the body boundary where man becomes beast is visible, the point where one sort of being is monstrously joined to another. The word *semivir* does, however, refer to effeminate men in classical Latin: the *semivir* Paris appears at *Aeneid* 4.215.

⁶⁵ *Istos semiviros nunc laudo si licet istos
Dicere, nam dubium an sit semivir iste vel ista.* (DV 2.21-22).

⁶⁶ *Ista quidem non est quia vulvam non habet, iste
Non est, quem talis defectus devirat ...* (DV 2.23-24).

What, then, is the eunuch, since it is not a woman, nor a man, nor an animal, nor a plant? It is not without life. Therefore, what can it be? It can be nothing but a monster.⁶⁷

As “a boundary or category violation,” the eunuch epitomizes Caroline Walker Bynum’s definition of the monster as it was characterized by twelfth and thirteenth century writers, academic and literary.⁶⁸ This period witnessed an increasing fascination (both positive and negative) with the monstrous, those “mixed things with no names.”⁶⁹ “Ovid” cannot categorize the *semivir*, and therefore defines him as a *monstrum*, but, in an exercise characteristic of medieval scholasticism, he proceeds to describe at great length the many categories of knowledge by which the *semivir*’s monstrosity can be defined. He is a grammatical monster (*monstrum grammaticae*), a taxonomical monster (*quod non cadit in genus et quod / Non cadit in speciem*), a rhetorical monster (*monstrum rhetorice*), a mathematical monster (*apud matheses indemonstrabilie monstrum*), a monster of nature (*monstrum nature*), a moral monster (*monstrum morale*), a metaphysical monster (*methaphisicum monstrum*), and a monster of religious laws and ceremonies (*monstrum fastorum*).⁷⁰ The crucial characteristic for placing the *semivir* in each of these categories

⁶⁷ The words *eunuchus* and *spado* appear interchangeably with *semivir*. During the period in which *De vetula* was written, eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and homosexuals were often conflated, both in terms of their physicality and the nature of their sexual desires. “Ovid’s” characterizations of the *semivir* reflect these hazy distinctions, despite the fact that some physical abnormality seems to be a necessary condition. See Matthew Kuefler (1996), 279-306.

⁶⁸ Bynum 2001, 117.

⁶⁹ Bynum 2001, 118.

⁷⁰ DV 2.45-55 (grammatical), 2.56-66 (taxonomical), 2.67-73 (rhetorical), 2.74-85 (mathematical), 2.86-99 (natural), 2.100-127 (moral), 2.128-134 (metaphysical), 2.140-195 (religious laws and ceremonies).

is precisely his continual violation of categories, his defiance of the internal laws of grammar, mathematics, morality, etc.⁷¹

This academic elaboration of the *semivir*'s defiance of these internal laws moves "Ovid" further away from his original characterization of the *semivir* as an unfortunate man who has been maimed by illness or castrated (for a virile act, no less: making a cuckold out of a violent husband). The *semivir* is instead increasingly depicted as morally destitute, physically repulsive, and finally as a monster worthy of murder. He is lazy, fearful, greedy, traits that eventually lead the poet to think of old women: "His face, wrinkled and very much like an old woman's (*vetuleque simillimus*), and his feeble voice demonstrate that his spirit does not belong to a man (*non esse virilem*)."⁷² This passage marks the first time that the word *vetula*—the monstrous creature whose physical contact turns "Ovid" away from women—appears in the eponymous poem. While imagining the possibility of the *semivir* performing priestly roles, "Ovid" again, this time implicitly, compares the body of the *semivir* and *vetula*: "A gaping maw (*rictus*), not a smile (*risus*) belongs to him, and he ought surely to be sacrificed rather than sacrifice."⁷³ In contrast to the mouth of the *puella*, soon to be praised as a "small mouth (*bucca brevis*), to be noted for its smallness alone," the *semivir*'s mouth gapes open. His wrinkled and gaping body, this *rictus* in particular, makes him worthy of sacrifice; but such an offering would be unacceptable to the gods, "a shameful, mutilated flock, more filthy (*fedius*) than a pig,

⁷¹ The relationship between the perversion of language and the perversion of sexuality is a subject pursued by Alan of Lille in his *De Placitu Natura*. See Ziolkowski (1985) and Alford (1982).

⁷² *Est piger et timidus presumentes ideo, quod
vultus rugosus vetuleque simillimus et vox
Exilis perhibent animum non esse virilem.* (DV 2.110-113).

⁷³ *Rictus ei, non risus inest, et sacrificari
Deberet certe potius quam sacrificare.* (DV 2.148-149).

more stinking (*fetidius*) than a he-goat.”⁷⁴ While the mouth of the beloved *puella* is characterized as tiny (*bucca brevis*), the mouth of the old woman will be imagined as perpetually open, stretched out (*distenta*), spewing forth a steady flow of foul-smelling liquid.⁷⁵

Although “Ovid” began book two by professing his praise for the *semivir*, this praise conceals an underlying aversion that arises in response to the *semivir*’s malformed body: his “in between” corporeality that escapes categorization, his deficient character, and his unattractiveness. His physical features—wrinkled, sagging skin and gaping animal-like mouth—blur the distinctions between *semivir*, *vetula*, and animal. They are not the features of a man, but a *monstrum*, a mixed thing that violates boundaries. The *semivir* may not be a “she” or “he,” but the defectiveness of his most masculine body parts, his lack of a beard (the *testis virtutis testiculorum*), and his similarity to an old woman construct him as feminine, and thereby establish a relationship between the feminine and monstrous that becomes more explicit as the poem progresses.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Cui tamen ex superis holocaustum tale placeret?*
Turpe pecus mutilum, quod porca fedius, hirco
Fetidius ... (DV 2.150-151).

A mouth open with laughter can be described as a *rictus*, but generally with a negative connotation. At *Ars Amatoria* 3.283. Ovid describes the overly wide and therefore unattractive mouth of a laughing woman as a *rictus*, and urges her to practice laughing with her mouth properly closed if she wants to find a lover. More often in classical Latin, a *rictus* is the gaping maw of an animal. Juvenal (*Sat.* 10.230) and Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura* 5.1064) use the word in this context. Ovid uses the word *rictus* in the *Metamorphoses*, always to describe the mouth of an animal, and most often the mouth of a human either in the process of transforming or having transformed into an animal. Among the many instances of *rictus*-bearing characters in the *Metamorphoses* are Io the heifer (1.741), Callisto the bear (4.481), a dolphin (3.676), frogs (6.378), and the dogs of Scylla’s loins (14.64).

⁷⁵ DV 2.290, 2.542.

⁷⁶ DV 2.36-38. In book one, “Ovid” describes in some detail the care he devotes to his own grooming. He is particularly vigilant that his body not exhibit certain characteristics which he associates with the *vetula* and *semivir*. He keeps his face free of oozing liquid (*fluxi vestigia putris*), and takes supreme pleasure in maintaining his beard. The importance of the male genitals, which is not discussed in book one, is represented by the presence of a beard, a better indicator, perhaps, of manliness because it is more visible. The importance of the beard as the sign of masculine identity becomes explicit in book two when, in

If we consider *De vetula* a poem crafted and cohesive enough to warrant a comprehensive literary analysis (and we should), the author's choice to preface the narrative portion of the second book with this extended discussion of the *semivir* must be analyzed, at least in part, as an introduction to the episode featuring the *vetula*. As we have seen, his assertion that the event he is about to relate has led him to praise these creatures who are incapable of having intercourse with a woman gives him a reason to describe the *semivir*, but does not sufficiently explain his decision to devote more than a fourth of the most dramatic book of the poem to this monster. This is the first body to be scrutinized in the text, a body that seems praiseworthy, but is not, and thus prefigures the other two bodies examined in book two: the transformation of *puella* into *vetula* suggests that even beautiful virgins mask something repugnant beneath their seemingly ordered flesh, that the praiseworthy conceals the monstrous. The *semivir*'s body also serves to consolidate the boundaries of the proper male body against what is monstrously feminine. In this regard, it shapes "Ovid's" own embodied subjectivity in such a way that prepares us for the change he will undergo when confronted with the permeable, loose flesh of the old female body. This change, after all, is characterized as a further consolidation of male flesh, now impervious to the demands of erotic desire.

We have also seen that it is not simply the *semivir*'s impotence or ugliness that make him monstrous, but his violation of semantic categories. Although "Ovid" never returns to the *semivir*, the specter of his defective body casts its shadow over the signifying function of the body for the remainder of the poem. In particular, it remains a monstrous category violation in defiance of the scrupulous categorizing of the human

reference to the *semivir*'s beardlessness, "Ovid" calls it *spermatis augmenti signum* (2.38). The punning phrase, *testis virtutis testiculorum* (2.37), reinforces the conflation of beard and male genitals.

body that characterizes the scholastic discourse of the final portions of the poem. “Ovid’s” discussion of the *semivir* also establishes the importance of boundaries, categories, and order for him, not only as a narrative technique (which also characterizes the catalogue of his daily activities in book one), but also as an affect-laden strategy for approaching the world, especially when matters of sex and body are concerned. Finally, the analysis of the *semivir* suggests that ours is a narrator who undermines his own assertions: he praises the *semivir* whom he simultaneously vilifies, a contradiction that may, nevertheless, say more about “Ovid’s” view of women than half-men. Despite his monstrosity, the *semivir* is to be envied as a creature free from the troubling attraction to the female body that “Ovid” himself experienced for most of his life. The descriptions of the women’s bodies that follow bear out this conclusion. Before turning to them, he addresses his readers directly, reminds them once again how he used to esteem only those men who were capable of intercourse, and then ominously commands: “Learn how such a great change came to me, you for whom it is loathsome to bear the yoke of love.”⁷⁷ This change came to him via two female bodies, one virgin, the other *vetula*.

Part Two: Virgin into Vetula

The virgin body: order and moderation

Because “Ovid” never narrates how he first encountered the *puella*, nor any words or even glances they might have shared, she appears only as a silent, inert body described meticulously by the poet (from head to toe) over the course of nearly one hundred lines

⁷⁷ Venerit unde michi subito mutatio tanta,
Discite vos, quos ferre iugum fastidit amoris (DV 2.200-201).

(2.243-336). She is, in other words, a supremely textual body despite “Ovid’s” emphasis on her physical features and figure. She is also a fantastical body, as “Ovid” gives us no reason to believe that he has ever had the opportunity to observe her up close at any length, especially not such that he could compose a realistic description of her head and face that would span almost fifty hexameters. This element of erotic fantasy, combined with the meticulous method by which he describes each of her body parts separately, does not produce an animated composite of a young woman’s body, made realistic by its detail. It effects instead a series of disconnected corporeal fragments, each one selected and magnified in turn, so that the *puella* begins to seem like an immobile and distorted creature. This is another instance of “Ovid’s” narration undermining its stated meaning, particularly when he is consciously aware of his narrative technique as a technique and allows that he has chosen it over other possible techniques that might have contributed to a more organic image of a speaking, moving woman. He is expressly preoccupied with describing the parts of the *puella*’s body as *individual* parts, as the following passage demonstrates:

Verum cur ad eam laudandam **particularatim**
 Descendisse velim? Cur ad preconia cuique
 Debita membrorum modo describenda laborem?
 Omnis eis minor est descriptio; **singula** lustres,
Singula sunt meliora satis quam dicere possem.
 Sed quem miminisse iuvat tot divitiarum
 Formose dotis, modicum per **singula** libans,
 Membra **sigillatim** discuro, **singula** mirans,
 Ad que lustrator oculus permittitur ire.
Singula contendunt se vincere, cum tamen unum
 Omnibus aspectum presto, simul omnia summa,
 Pace reformata et sopita lite, quiescunt.

DV 2.230-241

But why would I want to sink to praising her part by part? Why should I struggle to describe now the praises owed to each part?

Every description is inferior; should you survey them one by one, they are one by one better than I could say. But for the one whom it pleases to mention the many riches of her beautiful endowment, taking a little taste of each one, I will run through her parts one at a time, admiring them one by one, where the surveying eye is permitted to go. One by one, they compete with each other to be the best, but since I offer one appearance to all of them, the sum of all of them grows calm as peace is restored and the contest is laid to rest.

As the words in bold illustrate, the *puella*'s body must be fragmented, categorized into little pieces, in order for its beauty to be put into words. The words *lustres* (2.233), *libans* (2.236), and *lustrator oculus* (2.238) call attention to the magnification of the *puella*'s body parts by suggesting that the eye cannot view her all at once, and so must gaze on, taste, or even “kiss” (another possibility for *libans*) one feature at a time. This is a narrative strategy in which eyes and mouth are employed as erotized reading instruments while the mixed metaphor conveys the eroticism of the gaze, imagined as sensual contact with the mouth or lips. The notion of a struggle between body parts (2.239-241) recurs throughout the long description, and contributes as well to this sense of disunity, of several separate parts contending with each other rather than forming a unified body.

This account is also preoccupied with intactness, and, if not always smallness, avoidance of extremes. The *puella*'s nose, for example, is neither too long nor too short. Its nostrils are moderately contracted. They are open enough to allow comfortable breathing, but do not gape (*ricta*) to allow fluid or a stench (*fetor*) to escape from them:

Nasus in excessum nullum se transvehit, ut sit
Longus vel curtus, aquilus simusque nec ullam
Tractus in obliquum portendit prodicionem.
Nec stillas cerebri naris cava pandit hiatu,
Nec libertatem negat halitui neque ricta

Passibiles auras tristi fetore minatur.

DV 2.273-278

Her nose does not run over into any excess to become long or short, beaked or snub, nor does its length portend any treachery when viewed from the side. Her nostrils do not spread drops of her brain from their round openings, nor do they deny freedom of breath, nor, when they flare wide, do they threaten the air with a foul stench.

Her mouth is beautiful precisely because it is small, and quickly returns to its constricted size after she smiles.

Bucca brevis, sola brevitatem notanda, nisi tunc
Cum ridet, tunc namque statum redit ad mediocrem.
Labra tument modicum ...

DV 2.290-292

A small mouth, to be noted for its smallness alone, if not, then only when she smiles, for then indeed it then returns to its ordinary state. The lips swell a bit.

The adverb *modicum*, its synonym *parum*, and their variations occur regularly in the description of the *puella*'s body: her forehead is *a bit* convex (*Frons spatiosa parum convexa* [2.251]); a hairless area separates her eyebrows *a bit* (... *parum discriminat area quedam* [2.262]); the tops of her cheeks rise *a bit* (*at modicum consurgit apex hinc inde genarum* [2.279]); her lips are *a bit* plump and turn outwards *a bit* as if they want to be kissed (*Labra tument modicum* [2.292], *Que cum sint inversa parum, se velle parare / Seque offerre videntur ad oscula suscipienda* [2.294-295]); her chin moves *with moderation* (*Ad labra se tollit, ad utrumque tamen moderate* [2.303]). No part of the *puella*'s body exceeds its proper boundaries, and none of her orifices opens inappropriately wide. The description of her mouth offers a rare moment when the *inside* of her body appears. But this glimpse confirms that the *puella* is inside as she is without:

Sed domina ridente loquenteve seve cibante,
Intus cuiusdam spectabilis ordo cathene
Clarius argento vivo se visibus offert
Dispositis ibi dentibus in serieque locatis
Firmis, consertis, equalibus atque minutis.
DV 2.296-300

But when my mistress is smiling or talking or eating, the visible
line of a certain barrier, brighter than quicksilver, comes into
view, inasmuch as her teeth have been set in order there, placed in
a line, strong, neatly fit together, of equal size, and small.

When “Ovid” peers into the momentarily open mouth of his *puella*, it is her small, shiny-hard teeth resting in a perfect row that he sees rather than liquids, amorphous tissues, or macerated foods on their way to becoming waste – all of which spill from the soon-to-be-described *vetula*. Order, restraint, and properly delimited borders constitute the beauty of the *puella*’s body.

“Ovid’s” methodical narrative strategy mirrors the body it describes, and suggests that his mode of reading corporeal signs is transparent, a pure reflection of the body in question. Yet this mode of description also undermines his project in a way that recalls his repetitive categorization of the *semivir* who was monstrous for his violation of categories. The fragmentation and magnification of the *puella*’s body manages to distort and break down the body that is meant to be beautiful in its perfect proportionality and wholeness. The anxiety that presses him to work against his own intentions—an anxiety about inseparability, the possibility of one thing flowing into and contaminating another—becomes increasingly clear as the second book of the poem progresses, and culminates with his curse of the *vetula*, whom he fantasizes will suffer from the distortion and transgression of her own bodily boundaries. The human body, and particularly the female body, become the focal point of these anxieties, where boundaries are always

about to collapse and openings always threaten movement between two importantly distinct categories. “Ovid’s” portrayal of the *puella*’s body carefully regulates and compartmentalizes her physical parts, but *because* of this meticulous order, the *puella* becomes monstrous: distorted, lifeless, an uncanny simulacrum of a woman. In some sense, then, “Ovid’s” portrayal of the *puella* is symptomatic, an anxiety-produced compromise: it prevents the possibility of uncontrollable spillage only by breaking apart the skin’s surface, the integrity of which is essential for the maintenance of body boundaries. His semantic approach to the perfect virgin body is, we might say, already contaminated by his location of all that is repugnant in the *vetula*’s body, for virgins do indeed become old women, and for “Ovid” this transformation occurs not only through the slow passage of time, but in an instant, thereby confirming the very anxious fantasies that his semantic approach to female corporeality was meant to suppress.

The *vetula*’s body: flux and filth

As “Ovid” reaches out in the dark to embrace the body of the *puella* whom he has arranged to meet through the ministrations of an old woman, this poet of metamorphosis finds himself witness to the most unbelievable and disturbing transformation: the beautiful, pure, meticulously ordered body of the *puella* has become the ugly, disordered body of a *vetula*. “Ovid’s” reading of this experience as *mutatio*, rather than a practical joke orchestrated by both the *puella* and the *vetula*, reinforces the importance of body boundaries to this poet, their stability and the consequences of their distortion. The vocabulary of metamorphosis that prefaces the account of the *vetula*’s body underscores how different, how alien that body he described in such scrupulous detail has suddenly

become. Yet metamorphosis establishes a connection between two bodies whose contours may not resemble each other. *Puella* into *vetula* is a *mutatio* that creates a story: “the virgin will become an old woman,” or, “the old woman used to be a virgin,” depending on whether the story is read forward or backward. Like the transformations of the *Metamorphoses*, this is one that complicates rather than demarcates two identities, and this complication can be detected in “Ovid’s” renunciation of all women, virgins included, after his experience of this change. “Ovid’s” semantics of metamorphosis also demonstrate that he is working within an Ovidian framework, reading bodies, rightly or wrongly, as changing flesh, and so we might look back toward the *Metamorphoses* to consider what sort of semantic framework “Ovid” may be borrowing from his namesake, and why his misreading of metamorphosis is so transformative for himself.

Ovid may have been clear about his subject when he introduced the *Metamorphoses* as a poem about changing bodies, but the poem never clarifies the nature of these changes. Some transformations seem to replace one identity with an entirely different one. Some change the outward shape but preserve the former identity to various degrees. Io, for example, feels alienated by her body, now shaped like a heifer, to the point of startling at the sound of her own (mooing) voice and being frightened by her own reflection in the river.⁷⁸ Gods take on various appearances, but these changes, usually in the service of deceit, are temporary. Pythagoras describes a universe in constant flux populated by transmigrating souls reborn in new bodies when their former ones perish. Described as “pliant wax,” the body seems not to change its fundamental makeup; rather, it is “marked with different designs and does not remain as it was or preserve the same

⁷⁸ *Metam.* 1.635-641.

shape (*formam...eandem*), but nevertheless is the very same wax (*ipsam eadem est*).”⁷⁹

King Lycaon’s transformation into a wolf is the first instance of humans taking on the shape of animals in the poem, and the model it establishes is precisely one of ambiguity:

fit lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae:
canities eadem est, eadem violentia vultus,
idem oculi lucent, eadem feritatis imago est.

Metam. 1.237-239

He becomes a wolf and yet preserves traces of his old shape:
there is the same grey hair, the same ferocity in his face, the same
eyes shine, the image of savageness is the same.

His new shape is not *entirely* new. The greedy and blood-thirsty king takes on the shape of a greedy and blood-thirsty wolf, as if his wolfish features now materialize what was less visible in his former shape. His change confuses the boundaries between man and animal, as well as self and other, and by doing so, replicates through punishment Lycaon’s transgression of the bounds of piety when he blasphemed the gods and served human meat at the dinner table.⁸⁰ This *mutatio*, though in some ways a complete transformation (he *becomes* [*fit*] a wolf), preserves Lycaon’s identity; not only are there “traces” (*vestigia*) of the king, he is emphatically *the same*:

(*eadem...eadem...idem...eadem*).⁸¹ *Metamorphoses* refuses to answer the questions it

poses: what is the relationship between shape and self? why do bodies change? and why

⁷⁹ *utque nouis facilis signatur cera figuris,
nec manet ut fuerat signatur cera figuris,
nec manet ut fuerat nec formas seruat easdem,
sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem
esse sed in varias doceo migrare figuras.* (*Metam.* 15.168-172).

⁸⁰ In a universe populated by reincarnated souls, cannibalism becomes even more problematic. Or at least this is the conclusion of Pythagoras, who condemns meat eating on the grounds that it poses a risk of unintentionally cannibalizing a human reborn in the body of a cow (*Metam.* 15.455-478).

⁸¹ Bynum (2001), 169. For a comparison of Ovid’s Lycaon to other werewolves, medieval and modern, see Bynum (2001), 166-170.

do they take on the particular shapes that they do? In a poem populated by myriad characters, narrated by different voices, and set in various places and times, the one unifying feature—transformation—remains an enigma at its end. “Ovid’s” Ovidian epistemology is thus especially attuned to the troubling implications of transformation not assuaged in the *Metamorphoses*, a poem that, in Charles Segal’s words “exults in the body’s seemingly endless subjection to physical change and continually finds new metaphors and situations that intensify rather than allay anxiety.”⁸²

When we consider the liabilities posed by such an ambiguous model of transformation for those who would read bodies according to an Ovidian semiotics, we might conclude that “Ovid’s” insistence that the identities of *puella* and *vetula* are absolutely different is best understood as symptom of the fissure between his semantic model and his own horrified response to changing female corporeality. His method of reading this metamorphosis attests to his versification in Ovidian transforming bodies, but this reading of metamorphosis also demonstrates his propensity to mis-read as Ovidian what is not when his own body—and therefore his reactions of lust and disgust—is implicated. This is a transformation that he, the very author of the *Metamorphoses*, can hardly comprehend:

...in nova formas
Corpora mutatas cecini, mirabiliorque
Non reperitur ibi mutatio quam fuit ista.
Scilicet ut fuerit tam parvo tempore talis
Taliter in talem vetulam mutata puella.

DV 2.495-499

I have sung of forms changed into new bodies, and no change
more amazing than that one is to be found there [i.e. in

⁸² Segal (1998), 10.

Metamorphoses]. Namely that such a girl had so much changed in such a short amount of time, into such an old woman.

The vocabulary of metamorphosis (*mutatas...mutatio...mutata*) coupled with the emphatic adjectives (*talis...tam...Taliter...talem*) signal “Ovid’s” efforts to fathom the possibility of such a change both familiar (as any corporeal change would be to the authorial persona of the Ovid who penned *Metamorphoses*) and horrific (as it is to “Ovid,” the man who finds himself grasping the body that has transformed from the ultimate object of his desire to the ultimate object of his disgust). These lines seem to crescendo, the repeated sounds drawing strength from each other, and culminate in the four words that succinctly convey the cause of his horror: *talem vetulam mutata puella*. We would be neglecting the significance of metamorphosis as a method of reading bodies if we consider “Ovid’s” horror only as a response to the supreme ugliness of the *vetula*’s naked body, for “Ovid” is overwhelmed by the *mutatio* itself, the interpretation by which he categorizes his experience. Yet by seeing the *vetula* as his transformed *puella*, “Ovid” not only insists that his *puella* has become something entirely other; he also draws closer together the identities he insists are absolutely different. The ambiguities that surround transformation in the *Metamorphoses* may explain why “Ovid’s” expertise on the subject failed to prepare him for his personal encounter with a changed body. Lycaon’s “becoming” a wolf blurs the boundaries between what he was and what he is. The *mutatio* of *puella* into *vetula*, then, may shore up troubling suspicions that the female body exists precariously between beautiful moderation and revolting extremes. It is a *mutatio* that may substantiate anxieties about the passable boundaries between the virginal ordered body and the disordered old body. Desirable girls become repulsive old women.

“Ovid’s” narration of the *puella*’s transformation represents precisely how he experienced it. He finds himself embracing a changed creature, and without any means of speculating how this change came about. The bodies in the *Metamorphoses*, by contrast, amaze as they slowly mutate, their body boundaries losing shape and then reshaping again, and Ovid enhances this sense of wonder by discursively drawing out the event of transformation. Callisto’s transforming body, to take just one of countless possible examples, occupies nine hexameters during which she is neither virgin nymph nor bear, but some unnamable identity in the process of coalescing:

Dixit et adversa prenis a fronte capillis
stravit humi pronam; tendebat bracchia supplex:
bracchia coeperunt nigris horrescere villis
curvarique manus et aduncos crescere in ungues
officioque pedum fungi laudataque quondam
ora Iovi lato fieri deformia rictu;
neve preces animos et verba precantia flectant,
posse loqui eripitur: vox iracunda minaxque
plenaque terroris rauco de guttore fertur.

Metam. 2.476-484

[Juno] spoke, turned toward her, and grabbing hold of the hair at her brow, flung her down facedown on the ground; [Callisto] was stretching out her arms as a suppliant. Her arms began to bristle with black, shaggy hair, her hands began to curve, grow into hooked claws, and perform the task of feet, and her face, once praised by Jove, became deformed by a wide, gaping maw. So that prayers and beseeching words cannot soften hearts, her ability to speak is taken away: an angry, threatening sound, full of terror, issues from her hoarse throat.

This narrative strategy tells the story of metamorphosis in the sense that it presents a process, tells the story, so to speak, of each of Callisto’s body parts, and thus of her bear’s body. It also effects in the reader a voyeurism with both violent and erotic valences. These bodies are distorted and fragmented, sometimes, as in Callisto’s case,

cruelly; that Callisto's transformation is punishment for being raped by Jove—a corporeal violation not graphically narrated—suggests the transposition of rape which “transforms” Callisto from a favored virgin into a pregnant outcast onto the erotic spectacle of metamorphosis. There is no such account of the *puella*'s transformation, and this missing narrative is in part what renders this change more amazing (*mirabilior*) than those in the *Metamorphoses*. The *vetula* appears suddenly, her body already solidified and bearing no traces of its former shape. The narrative extension of time is deferred onto “Ovid's” curse of the old woman, which, as we shall see, is a narrative of metamorphosis, but of the change he fantasizes the *vetula*'s body *will* undergo.

Without the Ovidian narrative bridge between virgin and *vetula*, “Ovid” is left to exclaim in shock about *how different* this body is from the one it was. He then gives the corporeal description that is the antithesis—though in abbreviated form—of his account of the *puella*'s body:

Heu quam dissimiles sunt virginis artibus artus!
Accusant vetulam membrorum turba senilis,
Collum nervosum, scapularum cuspis acuta,
Saxosum pectus, laxatum pectus uber.
Non uber sed tam vacuum quam molle, velut sunt
Burse pastorum, venter sulcatus aratro.
Inflatumque genu, vincens adamantina rigore,
Accusant vetulam membrorum marcida turba.
DV 2.500-508

Oh, how different are her limbs from a virgin's limbs! The aged crowd of parts betrays the old woman: the fibrous neck, the sharp points of her shoulder blades, the rocky chest, the breast with loosened skin. Not a breast, but as empty and soft as the bags of shepherds, her stomach furrowed by a plow, and her swollen knee, harder than adamant, the withered crowd of parts betray the old woman.

Whereas the *puella*'s body was characterized by moderation, this old body is characterized by extremes, in particular hardness and looseness. Her sagging breasts and "stomach furrowed by a plow"—a reference to her sexual experience—mark her as a woman who has performed her reproductive role, and been disfigured by it.⁸³ Although "Ovid" declares that this body bears no resemblance to his *puella*'s body, the phrasing of his description echoes his account of the young virgin body. Twice he refers to the *vetula*'s body as a "crowd of parts" (*turba membrorum* 2.501 and 2.508), a phrase that could likewise describe the isolated parts of the *puella*'s body which he imagined to struggle among themselves vying to be recognized as the most beautiful.⁸⁴ Both women are conglomerations of parts rather than subjects, the *puella*'s parts rigidly ordered, and the *vetula*'s a jumbled mass. When he comes to his senses, "Ovid" thinks of killing the old woman, but, determining that death would free her from just punishment, he instead curses her to a life of perpetual suffering. This suffering is to be physical; she is to become the victim of her own body's disorder. The remarkably explicit curse reestablishes "Ovid's" approach to the female body. Whether in the service of erotic or sadistic fantasies, women *are* their body parts – to be inspected, evaluated, lusted after, or repelled.⁸⁵ It also confirms the extent to which the poet is preoccupied by corporeal boundaries and orifices:

⁸³ For sexual metaphors of plowing in classical Greece and Rome, see du Bois (1988), 38-85.

⁸⁴ *DV* 2.239-241.

⁸⁵ Because "Ovid" uses the female body for the purposes of erotic and sadistic fantasies, it is problematic to distinguish his perceptions about these bodies from their appearance in reality. The two descriptions of the *vetula*'s body are, from a narrative point of view, distinct, but from a psychological point of view, they are not. The first account of the old woman's body occurs when "Ovid" finds himself embracing her, and the second occurs in the form of a curse. Although the former could be considered a description of what *is*, and the latter a description of what "Ovid" hopes will be, both passages represent his fantasy of the *vetula*'s body – an amalgamation of thoughts and images pieced together from memories, perceptions, fears, and desires. Several other factors have led me to refrain from teasing apart reality and fantasy in this

Tussiat eternum, iuncturas gutta fatiget,
 Febriat absque crisi, sitis insatiabilis adsit.
 Adsit frigus iners sed et intolerabilis estus.
 (Si possint sint ambo simul saltemve vicissim).
 Fletus ei sit continuus lacrimaeque perhennes,
 Singultus subiti, suspiria crebra frequenter.
 Oscitet halitibus distenta rigoribus atque
 Feteat eructatio, non emungere nares
 Possit, in os sanies descendat tota corize,
 Nec spuat hoc etiam sed glutiat evomitura.
 Nec vesica vel anus contineat vel urinam
 Vel stercus, sed continuo fluat ante retroque.

DV 2.536-547

May she cough eternally, may gout plague her joints, may her fever never break, may her thirst be insatiable. May she feel immobilizing cold, but also intolerable heat (if possible, at the same time, or at least in turns). May her weeping be continuous and her tears perennial, may she often have heaving sobs and frequent sighs. May her mouth gape, distorted in stiff exhalations, and may her belches stink. May she be unable to wipe her nose, may her mouth dissolve into one big bloody catarrh. When she's about to vomit, may she not just spew it forth, but swallow it. May her bladder and anus not contain her urine and shit, but let it flow continually forwards and backwards.

This curse vividly contrasts the controlled, contained body of the *puella* and the body of the *vetula* overwhelmed with illness, convulsive movements, uncontrollable flows, and foul odors. References to two of the *vetula*'s physical features—her leaky nostrils and

context. First, although the shorter description is meant to be read as “Ovid’s” perception of a body in his actual presence, the same darkness of the room that prevented him from discovering the substitution would surely have made it impossible for him to see her body in any detail. Moreover, he could not have composed this description based on what he felt with his hands as he reached out in the dark. According to his own description of the encounter, he briefly embraced the old woman so that “her body was denied every movement” (this is, he claims, how virgins like to be touched), and then recoiled quickly in disgust. Second, the poet is clearly repulsed by the old female body, and details from the first “realistic” description reappear, only more floridly, in the curse. This curse, then, appears to represent the memory of his revulsion in the presence of the *vetula*, his fantasies about the degenerating female body, and his sadistic wish that this body suffer perpetually in an extreme state of degeneration. Finally, there are ambiguities in the description of the *rendez-vous* with the aged *puella* towards the end of the second book that suggest that even when “Ovid” is confronted with an attractive older body in reality, he continues to fantasize about its latent unappealing material. Inasmuch as “Ovid” never had the opportunity to speak with the *puella*, it is likely that his scrupulous account of her body is based less on memory than fantasy. Recall that how he signals this fantasy when he refuses to even speculate about what lay beneath his *puella*'s clothing.

fibrous neck—appeared in the description of the *puella*'s body by way of negation (that is, what her body does *not* have), so that the body of the *vetula* has taken on specific features whose absence defined the *puella*'s beauty.⁸⁶ Features of the *puella*'s body specifically praised by “Ovid”—her moderately sized nostrils, her small mouth full of shiny teeth—become instruments of the *vetula*'s suffering: she is unable to wipe her leaking nose, her mouth is perennially stretched open by sobs and vomit. The *puella*'s rigidly demarcated body boundaries have collapsed and her orifices have lost the capacity of self-regulation so that the surface of her body allows continual commerce between the inside and outside.

To what extent is this graphic depiction of the *vetula* a symptom of “Ovid's” (the author's or the narrator's) concerns about body boundaries and his fetishization of the supremely ordered body of the virgin *puella*? To what extent is this depiction an instance of “Ovid's” (the author's or the narrator's) misogyny, or the cultural misogyny of the late Middle Ages? Does “Ovid's” revulsion and curse stem from a deep ambivalence about the female body and its ineluctable transformation from its erotized virginal form to its unattractive post-partum form? Or, is this response less directed at the old *female* body than the old (non-gendered) body? In other words, does it stem from a more general fear of the pain and impotence of old age, and the changes the mortal body must suffer on its way toward that final change: death? Is the *vetula*'s hemorrhaging body better understood as a literary trope particular to late-medieval meditations on old age or on women? Or, is the *vetula* an Ovidian figure, reaching back to the transforming bodies of the *Metamorphoses*, the figure of Dipsas in *Amores* 1.8, or the female students of the *Ars*

⁸⁶ Nostrils: 2.276 (*puella*) and 2.543-5 (*vetula*); Neck: 2.306 (*puella*) and 2.503 (*vetula*).

Amatoria who must conceal their basic unattractiveness with an artful facade attractive to male suitors? To these questions, the first response is surely that they are everywhere deeply embedded in each other, and that boundaries between culture and literature, the Augustan Ovid and the medieval Ovid, literary trope and real misogyny are pervious. When we ask, moreover, what is contained in this term misogyny, or culture, or Ovidian, we quickly find that such categories are internally unstable, and thus problematic for structuring answers to these questions. With those caveats in mind, however, we can look into (classical) Ovidian and medieval representations of old age and old women to explore how Pseudo-Ovid draws from and contributes to this motif. We can consider how *De vetula* draws from the Ovidian corpus, and how the “medieval” Ovid shapes this reception. And, we can hypothesize about the unspoken thoughts and affects that shoulder the representations of female corporeality in *De vetula*.

Part Three: Ovidian Bodies in *De Vetula*

Monstrous metamorphosis: two maternal bodies in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

Considering the amount of sexual activity that takes place in its verses, the *Metamorphoses* could very well be considered erotic poetry. But it is erotic poetry of a very different sort than, for example, Ovid’s elegiac or didactic verse. As Charles Segal writes, “it is not flirtation and seduction *per se*, but the very unelegiac experiences of impregnation and birth that carry the plot forward.”⁸⁷ As all bodies in the *Metamorphoses* are subject to transformation, metamorphosis itself is not circumscribed by gender, but there are enough instances where female bodies transform in the context of sex, pregnancy, and childbirth to make a claim that it is the erotized and reproductive

⁸⁷ Segal (1998), 38.

female body that is supremely vulnerable to change. Both virgin and maternal bodies populate the *Metamorphoses*, and both experience transformations in connection with the sexuality and reproductive functions of the female body. Like the *puella*'s body, the virgin body in this text is precariously bounded, inscribed by a cohesiveness that cannot be sustained. Instances of rape, mutilation, pregnancy, and childbirth in the *Metamorphoses* tell the stories behind the transformations of virgins into mothers (rape by a god inevitably leads to pregnancy) and virgins into monsters.

Both *De vetula* and the *Metamorphoses* feature virgin bodies whose fleeting integrity underscores the instability of the female body. The transformation that underpins Pseudo-Ovid's poem is instantly recognized by "Ovid" as a metamorphosis analogous to those in the *Metamorphoses*, and I would like to consider how the *vetula*'s body is an Ovidian body not simply because it wondrously transforms, but because it transforms from virgin into *vetula*, a change that "Ovid" associates with excessive intercourse, multiple births, and the dissolution of proper corporeal boundaries. Scylla and Philomela are just such Ovidian bodies, virgins who beget monstrosity, and I have chosen to focus on them because their monstrosity is represented as maternity, though in quite different ways.

Scylla, still then a virgin nymph, caused the sea-god Glaucus to burn with love. But she refuses his advances, and flees, not knowing whether he is "a monster or a god" (*monstrumne deusne*) with his strange coloring, long hair, and groin (*inguina*) formed into the shape of a twisted fish.⁸⁸ For spurning this monstrous suitor whom she herself desired, Circe transforms Scylla into a monstrous thing:

Scylla venit mediaque tenus descenderat alvo,
cum sua foedari latrantibus inguina monstros
aspicit; ac primo, credens non corporis illas
esse sui partes, refugitque abigitque timetque
ora proterva canum. sed quos fugit, attrahit una,
et corpus quaerens femorum crurumque pedumque
Cerbereos rictus pro partibus invenit illis;

⁸⁸ *constitit hic et tuta loco monstrumne deusne
ille sit ignorans admiraturque colorem
caesariemque umeros subiectaque terga tegentem,
ultimaque excipiat quod tortilis inguina piscis. (Metam. 13.912-915).*

statque canum rabie subiectaque terga ferarum
inguinibus truncis uteroque exstante coercent.

Metam. 14.59-67

Scylla comes and had lowered herself up to the middle of her waist when she sees her own loins disfigured by barking monsters. And at first, thinking that those parts did not belong to her own body, she shrinks back and pushes away and fears the violent mouths of the dogs. But that which she flees, she drags along with her, and feeling for the body substance of her thighs, legs, and feet, she finds the gaping maws of Cerberus in place of those parts. She stands upon a frenzy of dogs and she restrains the backs of the beasts beneath her, her loins mutilated and her womb visible.

The alienation Scylla feels from her own body is a common experience in the *Metamorphoses* where physical transformation often preserves, in unspecified ways, the mind, memories, and impulses of the original body. This passage, perhaps more than any other in the poem, expresses how disconcerting, even frightening, metamorphosis can be. Divided from herself, Scylla does not so much *experience* her transformation as witness it from an outside perspective. Ovid draws out the moments of Scylla's confusion as she realizes that the "barking monsters" that mutilate her loins are parts of her own body (as was Glaucus' fish tail). There is no clear boundary between her own body and these creatures, she is one and many, beautiful virgin and beast. She becomes the boundary violation, the monster. The emergence of these "gaping maws" from between Scylla's legs, the disfiguring of her loins, and the exposure of her womb associate Scylla's monstrosity with female sexuality and reproduction.⁸⁹ In this episode, then, the virgin body becomes transformed into a monstrous maternal body not through intercourse, but by avoiding it, an illustration of the impossibility of sustained (virginal) integrity in the

⁸⁹ Segal (1998), 31.

poem. The suggestion that Scylla's suffering is one of perpetual pregnancy and birth becomes fully developed in the character of Sin in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Raped by her own son, Death, herself the product of her incestuous intercourse with Satan, Sin gives birth to "yelling Monsters ... hourly conceived and hourly born."⁹⁰ The bodies of Scylla and Sin are entanglements of self and other, inside and outside. For both women who improperly managed their wombs, one by bedding her father and the other by refusing intercourse, the corporeal consequence is the disfiguring and rending of these wombs. There are other instances of monstrous maternity in the *Metamorphoses* (e.g. Pasiphaë's monstrous desire for the bull generates a bona fide *monstrum*, the Minotaur), but Scylla embodies a continuous monstrous maternity that conveys the sense that the virgin body inevitably deforms.⁹¹

The tale of Tereus' abduction, rape, and mutilation of his sister-in-law, Philomela, is also a tale rife with boundary violations culminating in a monstrous maternal body. The rape itself represents the violation of a corporeal boundary, but Philomela emphasizes Tereus' violation of less material boundaries entailed by the penetration of her body. Once her "mind returned" (*mox ubi mens rediit*) after the rape—a phrase that illustrates the violation of the bounds of her consciousness—she reproaches Tereus for monstrously violating moral and familial boundaries: "you have thrown everything into confusion" (*omnia turbasti*), she says, and mourns the loss of her own identity once structured by categories now mixed together.⁹² The rape has confounded familial relationships (sister is now enemy [6.538]), brother-in-law is now "husband"

⁹⁰ *Paradise Lost* 2. 794-795, 776-809.

⁹¹ *Metam.* 8.169-170.

⁹² *Metam.* 6.531, 6.537.

[Philomela's word 6.538]). Tereus responds to Philomela's threats of broadcasting his deeds by cutting out her tongue, which, in one of the most uncanny passages of the *Metamorphoses*, murmurs as it lies upon the ground, and lurches toward Philomela's feet as it dies.⁹³ The excision of Philomela's tongue is not only a consequence of the rape, nor only a (simple) repetition of it; rather, it "reads" the rape; it more fully articulates the rape, its disembodiment effect, its destruction of Philomela's subjectivity and thus her ability to fully communicate her experience.⁹⁴ The excision of Philomela's tongue, in other words, expresses rape as "both symbolic violation and physical mutilation."⁹⁵ Although there are certainly many ways to explain the prevalence of rape in the *Metamorphoses*, this episode highlights a fundamental connection between rape and transformation, both of which confuse corporeal and symbolic structures of subjectivity; but perhaps most significantly, rape and metamorphosis confuse the "physical body and

⁹³ *ille indignantem et nomen patris usque vocantem
luctantemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam
abstulit ense fero. radix micat ultima linguae,
ipsa iacet terraeque tremens inmurmurat atrae,
utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,
palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.
hoc quoque post facinus (vix ausim credere) fertur
saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus. (Metam. 6.555-562).*

The delay of the verbal object that receives Tereus' aggression (*linguam*) creates a synecdochic conflation between Philomela and her tongue. As we read, we learn that Tereus (*ille*) is doing something to an undeserving (*indignantem*) feminine object as it cries out (*vocantem*), struggles (*luctantem*), and is gripped by pincers (*comprehensam forcipe*). We expect that feminine object to be Philomela before we learn that it is instead her tongue, which, completely severed, proceeds to murmur (*inmurmurat*), tremble (*palpitat*), and seek out Philomela's footsteps (*dominae vestigia quaerit*) as it lies upon the ground. The scene, complete with the invocation of Pandion's name, the bloody and trembling victim, and the animal metaphors recalls the actual rape. This time, however, we do not read about the return of Philomela's mind, voice, and humanity. After her twitching tongue dies (*moriens*), Tereus rapes Philomela again and again, now reduced to a "mangled body" (*lacerum corpus*).

⁹⁴ Marder (1999), 161.

⁹⁵ Marder (1999), 163.

the metaphorical or symbolic structures through which that body can be represented.”⁹⁶

Rape itself is a monstrous thing that confounds the corporeal and symbolic registers of experience.

The revenge enacted by Philomela and her sister, Procne, also looks back to Tereus’ confounding of corporeal and symbolic categories, and “reads” this rape by developing these boundary violations into a most monstrous act. Accompanied by her sister, Procne sets out “to confuse right and wrong” (*fasque nefasque / confusura ruit*), speakable and unspeakable, by making Philomela’s rapist the cannibal of his own child, or, as Tereus himself laments, “the wretched tomb of his son” (*seque vocat bustum miserabile nati*).⁹⁷ This is a perverse pregnancy that violates corporeal boundaries (as did Tereus’ rape and mutilation of Philomela), familial boundaries (as did the rape of a sister-in-law by a brother-in-law), and symbolic boundaries constituted by the sexed body (the paternal mother, Tereus, encloses the dead son in monstrous maternity; the disembodied tongue of Philomela—that bloody part of the virgin body destroyed by rape—dies at her feet). Philomela’s episode, then, illustrates how the Ovidian virgin body of the *Metamorphoses*, like the *puella*’s body of *De vetula*, is a fragile fantasy, a body whose shape (*forma*) precludes its own subjectivity, and is ever on the verge of becoming something else—wilder, disordered, animalistic, monstrous—by serving the function of its shape, namely to be sexually objectified. Philomela eventually transforms from a crazed child-murderer into a nightingale in order to escape Tereus’ sword, but she and her relationship to symbolic meaning have in essence already changed. Rape throws

⁹⁶ Marder (1999), 163. For comprehensive discussions of rape in the *Metamorphoses*, see Richlin (1999) and Curran (1984).

⁹⁷ *Metam.* 6.585-586, 6.665.

everything into confusion, to borrow Philomela's words, and one of the confusions that issues from her own violation is Philomela's transformation into the agent of this confounding of categories. When she stuffs the body of her rapist with his child, the maternal body becomes the most perverse boundary violation of all.

The *Metamorphoses* is about monstrous things because it is about boundary violations and bodies "pushed beyond normal limits."⁹⁸ When it is the female body whose boundaries are trespassed, more often than not intercourse and pregnancy are inextricable from those breaches. The tales of Scylla and Philomela thus provide a context for Ovid's misreading of the *puella*'s metamorphosis, without having to suggest that Pseudo-Ovid had these particular episodes in mind when he wrote the second book of *De vetula*. These episodes from the *Metamorphoses* "read" Ovid's misreading because they contribute their own bits and pieces to the Ovidian body that "Ovid" found waiting for him in the dark. This was not an Ovidian metamorphosis to be allegorized into something less corporeal, as many were in the late Middle Ages, but flesh and blood mutating wondrously and dreadfully from virgin to monster. In his mind, "Ovid" has been corporeally assaulted, but not in a way that throws everything into confusion. He knows precisely how to define this assault, and that definition—*mutatio*—is written on Ovidian bodies like Scylla's and Philomela's.

Dipsas and her ilk

When we look into the figure of the *vetula*, we find that *De vetula* was an early and powerful instance of late-medieval literary constructions of sexualized, deceptive old

⁹⁸ Hexter (1999), 331.

women. We find that Pseudo-Ovid reiterates and reshapes Ovidian models of erotized, repulsive, delusory, and transforming female bodies. And, we find that old flesh is not the same as old female flesh, at least not in the late-medieval literary tradition of France, England, and Italy, which expressed clear concerns about female destructive powers. This was a trend that intensified between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and culminated in the execution of at least 60,000 women, most of them old women, on charges of witchcraft.⁹⁹

References to old age in late-medieval Latin and French literature are predominantly negative.¹⁰⁰ A familiar conceit was the identification of the current “decadence of the world in its preapocalyptic state” with the “old age” of mankind.¹⁰¹ Old age was seen as a time when the pleasures, strengths, and hopes of youth must be relinquished. But while overtly unattractive portraits of old men were “relatively rare” in late-medieval literature, “work after work features repulsive, toothless, stinking, ancient women” who lie, cheat, and lure younger characters, both men and women, into sex.¹⁰² *De vetula* represents an early instance of the motif, and is the text from which many later authors borrow their own portraits of the *vetula* or *anus*.¹⁰³ In courtly and didactic

⁹⁹ Mieszkowski (2007), 300.

¹⁰⁰ Pratt (2007), 321-324.

¹⁰¹ Pratt (2007), 323.

¹⁰² Mieszkowski (2007), 299.

¹⁰³ An earlier, and likewise influential example of the *anus* is found in the early-twelfth-century *Pamphilus*, one of several Latin comedies featuring deceptive and sexualized old women (e.g., *Alda* (ca. 1170), *Baucis et Traso* (1150-1175), and *Pamphile et Galatée*, a fourteenth-century adaptation of *Pamphilus* [Mieszkowski (2007), 303-307]). The *vetula* entered the French fabliau in the late-thirteenth century, and can be found as well in Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria*, Adam’s de la Halle’s *Jeu de la feuillée*, the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Lamentations of Matheolus* and Villion’s “Regrets of the Belle Heaulmière in his *Testament*” (Pratt [2007], 333). In the late-fourteenth century, Jean Lefèvre wrote a French version of *De vetula* (*La Vielle ou les dernières amours d’Ovide*) in which he extended the narrative section concerning the *vetula* in the second book (Pratt [2007], 332).

literature beginning in the early-twelfth century, the old woman plays the beggar go-between and procuress; sometimes she aids a young man's pursuit of a young woman; sometimes she protects the chastity of a young woman under pursuit (for which she is oddly more maligned than when she facilitates the pursuit); and sometimes—the most condemnable of all—she pretends to procure a *rendez-vous* for the young man but instead lures him into her own bed.¹⁰⁴ This figure is a descendant of the “classical figure of the tale-telling bawd turned go-between,” and the closely related *lena*.¹⁰⁵ Within the Ovidian corpus, we have Dipsas, the *anus* of *Amores* 1.8, who is versed in magic and full of advice about fleecing men. Her education of Corinna so angers the eavesdropping love that he has to restrain himself from tearing apart her “wrinkled cheeks” (*rugosas...genas*).¹⁰⁶ Although Pseudo-Ovid's *vetula* is not a procuress but the *puella*'s former nurse, she has been called “the prototype for this figure.” She presumably acts to satisfy her own sexual desires, but she also acts on behalf of the *puella* who is herself an active plotter in the bait-and-switch scheme.¹⁰⁷ This sexualization of old age is specific to women, whose physical makeup and insatiable desire meant that they were always ready for intercourse, while old men bemoan their impotence and resign themselves to the celibacy of old age.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Pratt (2007), 331. See also Arden (1994), 3. While the portrait of the *vetula* was most popular in courtly literature, she can also be found in the writings of “preachers, moralists, and pamphleteers who accuse old women of sorcery and magic” (Mieszkowski [2007], 299). For many examples of the motif, see Pratt (2007) and Mieszkowski (2007).

¹⁰⁵ Pratt (2007), 321.

¹⁰⁶ *Amores* 1.8.110-112. The old procuress also appears in Propertius 4.5 and Tibullus 2.6. For how the bawdy go-between figure of Roman elegy makes its way into romantic medieval literature, see Rouhi (1999), 32-47.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt (2007), 331-332.

¹⁰⁸ Mieszkowski (2007), 299; Pratt (2007), 326-327.

In this medieval tradition, the sexual potency of the *vetula* is closely related to her polluting and magical powers, and this potency, in turn, is closely related to her menstrual status. Menstrual fluid is not commonly mentioned in courtly portraits of old women, nor does it appear in *De vetula* among the various effluvia “Ovid” prays will overwhelm the *vetula*’s body, an omission that suggests that menopause may factor more in her repugnance than would an uncontrollable flow of menses. The effects of menopause on the old female body are, however, featured in several late-medieval medical and scientific treatises, including the popular *De secretis mulierum*. One of the “secrets” divulged by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators concerns the noxious powers of old women poisoned by their own accumulated menstrual fluid which, finding no outlet in the menopausal body, festers and generates venomous vapors that seep invisibly from their eyes to infect men and infants with various diseases.¹⁰⁹ But misogynist views about old women among late-medieval authors need not have been informed by medieval physiology, for when women’s lives are “reduced to having sex and giving birth to children, a post-menopausal woman is indeed without worth.”¹¹⁰ As Pseudo-Ovid’s account of the *mutatio* of virgin into *vetula* testifies, “behind the much celebrated flesh of the young woman lurks the crone: joy and misery, bliss and disgust, death hovering over the best of life.”¹¹¹ The transformation calls forth this hidden crone whose collapsing corporeal boundaries body forth, so to speak, the uneasy borders between virgin and *vetula*.

¹⁰⁹ Mieszkowski (2007), 318; *DSM* 10; Lemay (1992), 129-131.

¹¹⁰ Mieszkowski (2007), 300

¹¹¹ Mieszkowski (2007), 301.

Monstrous didacticism:
The double Ovid and disordered female bodies in *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*

The popularity of Ovid's poetry among the literate classes and its prominence in the school curricula in the high and late Middle Ages is well known.¹¹² The function of *De vetula* in this period when Ovid's works "permeated the literary culture" is not, however, so clear. *De vetula* has been judged to be "by no means typical of the medieval Ovid, not even of the bulk of other pseudo-Ovidiana," but it is a text that embodies the medieval uses of Ovid while demonstrating a dialogue with Ovidian texts through its preoccupation with body boundaries, its gendering of ordered and disordered bodies, and its illustration that matters of sex, violence, identity, and ontology are bound to corporeal matter.¹¹³ *De vetula* may not be a typical incarnation of pseudo-Ovidiana, but it is one that illustrates a particularly medieval form of Ovidianism which Michael Calabrese has called the "problem of two Ovids."¹¹⁴ Calabrese thinks of this problem as a textual one, namely that certain parts of the Ovidian literary corpus were read in terms of the lust they might elicit in readers, while other parts were read in terms of the moral principles they could communicate.¹¹⁵ These Ovidian semantics represented an effort among certain medieval authors to "try to work out the problems of desire" by way of Ovid's texts while reckoning with "two non-Ovidian forces arising out of their own culture: Christianity and

¹¹² Allen (1992), 52. For the medieval Ovid, see Calabrese (1997, 1994), Ghisalberti (1946), Hexter (2002, 1992), Martindale (1988), Viarre (1966).

¹¹³ Hexter (2002), 442. See Hexter (1999), 339-40, for a brief bibliography of Ovidian apocrypha and pseudepigrapha.

¹¹⁴ Calabrese (1997), 7.

¹¹⁵ Calabrese (1997), 7.

antifeminism.”¹¹⁶ The *aetas Ovidiana* thus fed on efforts to find moral and philosophical truths in Ovid’s tales of transformation, and produced, for example, two fourteenth-century allegorized versions of the *Metamorphoses*, Pierre Bersuire’s *Ovidius moralizatus* and the 70,000-verse *Ovide moralisé*.¹¹⁷ The *aetas Ovidiana* also fed on an increasing sophistication of school systems where Ovid’s *Remedia* was put to good use for its advice on curing lust.¹¹⁸ And, finally, it fed on an “increasing concern about women, sex, and marriage” that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would grow into “fear and revulsion” directed especially toward the female body and its connection with witchcraft.¹¹⁹ Ovid’s texts were easily plumbed for examples of lusty women, many of whom provided opportunities for ugly anecdotes about the female sex. So complains Chaucer’s Wife of Bath who names “Ovides art” among the misogynist texts included in Jankyn’s book of “wikked wyves.”¹²⁰ The problem of two Ovids thus grew out of a literary corpus that could be made to speak out of multiple mouths.

Drawing from Ralph Hexter’s notion of Ovid’s body, we can see how the problem of two Ovids is not only a textual problem but a problem of Ovid’s corpus, understood as

¹¹⁶ Calabrese (1997), 6.

¹¹⁷ Allen (1992), 57.

¹¹⁸ Calabrese (1997), 7. See also Ghisalberti (1946).

¹¹⁹ Allen (1992), 48. Allen believes the antifeminism that proliferated in the late Middle Ages, especially in clerical circles, can be traced to the eleventh century when celibacy was “affirmed as the norm” (48). He is rather silent, however, about how the virulently misogynist literature of later centuries (*De secretis mulierum* among them) grew out of the formalization of clerical celibacy, and he is unclear about the place of misogynist literature within the wider (and surely more diverse) context of late-medieval views about women, sex, and marriage when he claims that this genre grew out of a deep shift in the nature of marriage. This claim also entails a certain narrow view of the history of the institution: “Marriage, formerly an association of equals, became a state in which men dominated women, and as they exercised more control over their wives and the process of reproduction, they began to fear those whom they repressed” (48). On medieval misogyny, see also Bloch (1991).

¹²⁰ III.669-685, Benson (1988), 114.

that medieval hybrid of text and body. And this is especially so in a pseudo-epigraphical text such as *De vetula*, prefaced in the *accessus* with a *vita* of Ovid, spoken in the voice of Ovid, and showcasing the final formation of Ovid as an embodied subject, which moreover occurs through an intimate corporeal encounter. We can find an illustration of how this “double-bodied” Ovid animates his texts by considering the common medieval uses of the *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*.¹²¹ In medieval classrooms and clerical libraries, the lustful Ovid was embodied in the *praeceptor* of the *Ars* who encourages lust by teaching erotic techniques to be practiced outside the bounds of legitimate marriage; while the moral Ovid was embodied in the *praeceptor* of the *Remedia* who offers cures for lust.¹²² Yet the relationship between these two texts, and thus between the two Ovids, was not simply antagonistic, but symbiotic by way of their dissonance: the *Remedia* were “not an infringement on the erotic fantasy of the *Ars* but were in fact essential to its success.”¹²³ Without the *Remedia*, that is, the meaning of the *Ars* changes into something more dangerous. Ovid’s body, then, is a conjoined twin of sorts, a creature that cannot survive divided, but which speaks in two voices emanating from the same poetic breast.

This double Ovid specific to the *Ars* and *Remedia* inhabits *De vetula*, which, as Ralph Hexter has noted, moves “from an *ars amatoria* to a *remedium amoris*.”¹²⁴ *De vetula* may draw explicitly on the subject of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but it is also a didactic treatise that informs its male readers how to be men while abstaining from the

¹²¹ For the transmission of Ovid’s amatory works throughout the medieval period, see the Appendix in Allen (1992), 111.

¹²² Calabrese (1997), 7.

¹²³ Allen (1992), 57.

¹²⁴ Hexter (2002), 440.

feminine sex. “Learn,” “Ovid” exhorts his readers, “how such a great change came to me, you for whom it is loathsome to bear the yoke of love.”¹²⁵ The remedy for Ovid’s love and the cause of his conversion is the *vetula*’s transforming body: she is the *remedium*. In this sense, it is the *vetula* who allows the *puella* to survive, who keeps alive the promiscuous activities and licentious fantasies “Ovid” enjoyed before his conversion. The *vetula*’s unstable body boundaries are therefore essential for the survival of the “two Ovids,” the one lustful, the other chaste. In this poem, then, “Ovid” finds himself inadvertently the pupil of his own Ovidian edicts. We see “Ovid” following his own erotic *ars* in his courtship of the *puella* whose body in the end is all artistic facade, concealing the *vetula* within. This *vetula*, like the women who populate the *Remedia Amoris*, extinguishes love simply by revealing her true nature – the female body stripped of its *ars*. In order to look more closely at how the *puella* kindles lust and the *vetula* “cures” it, we must consider how these bodies have been shaped by Ovidian models of female corporeality, and how “Ovid’s” misreading of the *vetula*’s *mutatio* occurs within an Ovidian framework wider than can be found in the *Metamorphoses*. I would like to consider how the surface of the female body in Ovid’s didactic poetry elicits male desire and conceals the unappealing interior that remains intractable to *ars*. This dual role of the external boundary of the female body sustains the conceit under which the *Ars* and *Remedia* operate (in their classical and medieval incarnations), namely the curing of lust through revulsion where the object of both affects is the same female body.

An instructor of both sexes, the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria* gives accounts of both male and female bodies, but despite pretences to equal treatment of the sexes, there

¹²⁵ *Venerit unde michi subito mutatio tanta,
Discite vos, quos ferre iugum fastidit amoris.* (DV 2.200-201).

are fundamental differences between the nature of the male and female body.¹²⁶ Men need not depend so heavily on *ars* to make their bodies attractive to the opposite sex; neatness and cleanness are enough. They should keep themselves shaven, their fingernails pared and free of dirt, their toga should fit, and they should exercise regularly. Although the *praeceptor* does warn his male readers of the ill-effects of bad breath and long nose hairs, “a neglected appearance suits men” (*forma viros neglecta decet*).¹²⁷ They should instead avoid the feminine excesses of the toilet: no curling irons, no pumiced legs. Indeed, additional efforts are not only unnecessary, but render the male unattractive, feminine, a poor example of a man:

cetera lascivae faciant concede puellae
et si quis male vir quaerit habere virum.

Ars Am. 1.523-524

Allow wanton girls to do the other things, and if any effeminate man seeks to have a man.

Women, on the other hand, must take care to hide defects and cover up their unattractive body parts. Whereas men can focus on cultivating their latent good looks, women must focus on concealing their latent flaws:

rara tamen menda facies caret: occule mendas
quaque potes, vitium corporis abde tui.

Ars Am. 3.261-262

Yet rare is the face that lacks a blemish: hide your blemishes, and so far as you can conceal any fault in your body.

¹²⁶ For a thorough treatment of these differences, see Downing (2002), 235-51.

¹²⁷ *Ars Am.* 1.509.

With these words, the *praeceptor* begins to elaborate the types of faults women often have and the ways these faults should be concealed *as far as possible*—a qualification suggesting that even the *praeceptor* himself doubts the power of *ars* to render the female body attractive enough. Much of his advice focuses on covering up body parts, restricting bodily movement, and contracting bodily orifices. If you are short, don't stand, but lie on a couch and cover your legs with a blanket. Boots can hide ugly feet, long skirts dry legs, padded bras flat chests.¹²⁸ Hand gestures should be limited in order to conceal fat fingers and scaly nails.¹²⁹ Bad breath and ugly teeth should be hidden by speaking little and keeping the mouth closed. Even laughter makes a woman unattractive, and should be kept under strict restraint:

si niger aut ingens aut non erit ordine natus
 dens tibi, ridendo maxima damna feres.
 quis credat? discunt etiam ridere puellae,
 quaeritur aequae illis hac quoque parte decor.
 sint modici rictus parvaeque utrimque lacunae,
 et summos dentes ima labella tegant.
 nec sua perpetuo contendat ilia risu,
 sed leve nescio quid femineumque sonet.
 est quae perverso distorqueat ora cachinno;
 risu concussa est altera, flere putes;
 illa sonat raucum quiddam atque inamabile: ridet,
 ut rudit a scabra turpis asella mola.

Ars Am. 3.279-290

If you have a tooth that is black or too large or grown out of place, you'll pay a high price for laughing. Who would believe it? Girls learn even how to laugh; here too seemliness is required of them. Let the mouth be but moderately opened, let the dimples on either side be small, and let the bottom of the lip cover the top of the teeth. They should not strain their sides with continuous laughter, but laugh lightly in some kind of feminine way. One distorts her face with a hideous guffaw, another, you would think,

¹²⁸ *Ars Am.* 3.263-74.

¹²⁹ *Ars Am.* 3.275: *exiguo signet gestu.*

was weeping while doubled up with laughter. That one's laugh has a strident and unlovable harshness as when a mean she-ass brays by the rough millstone.

A woman who gives herself over to laughter cannot remain vigilant about the appearance of her body, and specifically the possibility that the unappealing insides of her body might erupt beyond the external surface. While she allows herself a hearty laugh, her disordered teeth come into view, her body begins to swell (*contendant ilia*), becomes deformed (*distorqueat*), shakes violently (*concussa est*), and oozes (*flere putes*). The sounds that escape from her mouth seem more proper to an animal (*turpis asella*) than a woman. She should even take care that her dimples not sink too deeply as she smiles. Constant self-scrutiny focused on self-containment is demanded. The *praeceptor* struggles for words to describe how a woman *should* laugh: “in some kind of feminine way.” It is, after all, difficult to imagine how a woman could laugh genuinely while keeping her mouth nearly closed, covering her teeth with her lips, and carefully monitoring her dimples. The ambiguity of such advice also suggests the primacy of *ars* itself in the *praeceptor*'s regimens. Self-regulation and self-stylization become nebulous ends in themselves.

This sort of advice underscores the necessity of *ars* to compensate for the female body's tendency to reveal unappealing sights and do unappealing things. The *praeceptor* styles himself as a benevolent instructor who, because he is aware of those female body parts that are likely to trouble and even repel men, shares his expertise with women who may not be aware of the utility of *ars* for attracting the opposite sex. Several of these same body parts trouble the author of *De vetula*, whose fantasies, for example, about his *puella*'s *bucca brevis* and the shiny-white teeth fleetingly glimpsed in the moment

between her smile and the return of her mouth to its properly closed position suggest that she has no need for the *ars* that would conceal the black, ill-arranged teeth betrayed by a gaping mouth. Anxieties about distended orifices and the material that such openings threaten to reveal are common to both texts. We might even say that the *praeceptor*'s extensive illustration of the woman practiced in the art of love anticipates the pseudo-Ovidian account of the lovely woman. Lovely women are those who have measured their movements, speech, and expression of emotion to avoid arousing anxiety in the amorous male spectator. The *puella* of *De vetula* has studied well the lessons in the *Ars*. Or, put differently, "Ovid," privy to the ugly truth behind feminine *ars*, presents his *puella* as the ideal erotic object, her body so motionless, ordered, and carefully compartmentalized as to deny any need for deceptive *ars*. His description of the *puella* insists that no *vetula* lurks behind an artistic feminine facade while at the same time betraying his fear that signs of this *vetula* might be glimpsed at any moment within the orifices of the *puella*'s body. And, this feared body soon appears.

Several of the prescriptions for falling out of love given by the *praeceptor* require the male pupil to look carefully at his lover's body, the very body that elicited his lust. In the *Ars*, female pupils are urged to keep their lovers from seeing them applying the various liquids and pastes that give them the appearance of beauty. In the *Remedia Amoris*, by contrast, the *praeceptor* informs men about this process of fabrication and suggests that an early arrival at the beloved's toilet, before she has completed the applications of her cosmetic *ars*, is one of the best ways to fall promptly *out* of love.

tum quoque, compositis cum collinet ora venenis,
ad dominae vultus, nec pudor obstat, eas:
pyxidas invenies et rerum mille colores

et fluere in tepidos oesypa lapsa sinus.
illa tuas redolent, Phineu, medicamina mensas;
non semel hinc stomacho nausea facta meo est.

Rem. Am. 351-356

Then, too, when she is painting her cheeks with concoctions of dyes, go (let not shame hinder you) and see your mistress' face. You will find containers, and a thousand colors, and juices that melt and drip into her warm bosom. Such drugs smell of your table, Phineus; not once only has my stomach grown queasy at them.

Here, the instruments of *ars* are themselves repulsive, even if the final result is a more attractive exterior; but there is more to this cure than revealing the ugly process that fabricates beauty. This cure also operates by associating the *puella* in her natural state and the revolting facial treatments she uses in private. By invoking the name of Phineus in this context, the *praeceptor* compares the fluids that drip from the *puella*'s face to the notoriously foul pollution that issues from the body of the Harpies, monsters with female faces.¹³⁰ Later advice in the *Remedia* further complicates the relationship between the stuff that the *puella* applies to the surface of her body and the stuff that hides within her body. The *praeceptor* recalls how one man fell immediately out of love by looking at his lover's genitals when she spread her legs (literally, when she "opened her body" [*aperto corpore*]).¹³¹ Another man was cured of love when he saw the stains his girl left behind on the "filthy couch" when she got up from lovemaking – traces of some offensive liquid that had seeped from her interior:

ille quod obscenas in aperto corpore partes
viderat, in cursu qui fuit, haesit amor,
ille quod a Veneris rebus surgente puella

¹³⁰ The Harpies' pollution of Phineus' table is related by Apollonius of Rhodes in *Argonautica* 2.234-434.

¹³¹ *Rem. Am.* 429.

vidit in immundo signa pudenda toro.

Rem. Am. 429-432

One lover, who was in the middle of the deed, had caught sight of the obscene parts when his girl spread her legs. His passion was checked. Another saw the shameful marks on the filthy couch when his girl arose after lovemaking.

These cures for love do not require any alterations to the female body. The male pupil is asked to read his lover's body differently, to see the monstrous signs formerly obscured by female artifice and male lust. This is a remedy that works by exposure to the disease. It is one of the ironies of Ovid's eroto-didactic poetry that the *Remedia* promises to cure a sickness generated by the practices recommended in the *Ars* ("Naso should have been read then when you learned to love. The same Naso must now be read by you."¹³² This irony is further complicated by the fact that the male reader in need of a cure for lovesickness is advised to expose himself to the orifices and exudations of the female body whose beauty was the cause of his illness. This, of course, is the very sort of cure that transformed "Ovid" from a sick indulger in lust to a healthy Christian philosopher.

Yet the "sickness" for which the old woman provided a cure does not in any discernible way seem to affect "Ovid's" body, and in this, he is similar to his male counterparts to whom the *Remedia* is addressed. In both texts, the disordered bodies are female, despite the conceit of male illness under which they operate.¹³³ The lovesick

¹³² *Rem. Am.* 71-72: Naso legendus erat tum cum didicistis amare; / idem nunc vobis Naso legendus erit. The verb *sanare* appears 8 times in Ovid's poetry, 5 times in the *Remedia* (43, 113, 527, 551, 814), 0 times in the *Ars*; *sanus* appears twice in the *Ars* (2.508, 3.713) and 5 times in the *Remedia* (493, 504, 546, 621, 794); *medicina* appears 3 of 9 times in the *Remedia* (91, 131, 795), 0 times in the *Ars*; *aeger* appears 3 times in the *Ars* (2.320, 2.333, 3.642) and 5 times in the *Remedia* (109, 129, 228, 313, 314). These numbers only mean to show that the vocabulary of sickness and health is notably present in the *Remedia* and notably infrequent in the *Ars*, especially when we compare the length of the two poems. The possibility of lovesickness is understandably not advertised in the poem that leads to sickness while the poem that promises a cure is keen to point out its readers' ill-health.

¹³³ Although both men and women are addressed as possible "students" of the *praeceptor* in *Remedia Amoris*, it is clear that the poem is primarily addressed to men. The addressee of lines 15 and following is

addressee of the *Remedia* rarely shows signs of physical suffering, and when male discomfort does appear, it is largely disembodied, characterized instead by an inability to control his desire. The *praeceptor*, for example, warns his male readers that their bodies must suffer in order to regain their health, but he qualifies this statement by focusing on the importance of mental health:

ut corpus redimas, ferrum patieris et ignes,
arida nec sitiens ora levabis aqua:
ut valeas animo, quicquam tolerare negabis?
at pretium pars haec corpore maius habet.

Rem. Am. 230-233

To rescue your body, you will suffer iron and fire, and, though thirsty, you will not relieve your dry mouth with water. To be well in mind, will you refuse to tolerate anything? But this part has greater worth than your body.

That part of the male that has the greatest worth—his *animus*—is the seat of his illness, a non-corporeal site. Although the male body is supposedly sick (*ut corpus redimas*), its discomfort and disorder come from an external source—the very treatments that will make him well: female flesh. The male pupil of the *Remedia* is urged to “avoid contagion” (*facito contagia vites*) by keeping the greatest possible distance between himself and his mistress. “Many things,” he warns, “harm bodies by infection (*transitio*).” Animals of the flock become afflicted simply by looking at other afflicted animals. Illness spreads from one body to another like water seeping from a river bed into dry soil¹³⁴ One man, “already recovered [*sanus*]” from his lovesickness felt his

most certainly male: *at si quis male fert indignae regna puellae, / ne pereat, nostrae sentiat artis opem*. Much of the poem, moreover, focuses on particular male activities (court business, dicing, managing a country estate, military service, hunting, etc.) and cures for love designed specifically for men, such as visiting his beloved in the morning, before she has completed her beautifying regimen.

¹³⁴ *si quis amas nec vis, facito contagia vites
haec etiam pecori saepe nocere solent
dum spectant laesos oculi, laeduntur et ipsi,*

“barely hardened scar (*male firma cicatrix*) open into the old wound” when he happened to meet his mistress on the street.¹³⁵ By way of these examples, lovesickness begins to look like an illness passed from one body to another. It is something that seeps into and penetrates healthy or recovering flesh: *transitio* is infection by way of movement over boundaries. Under the conceit of the poem, the female body is the source of this infection which spreads through contact, physical or visual, into the male body. Male bodies may be being harder and less porous than infectious female bodies, but illness nevertheless finds an opening, a weak spot in the flesh, for example a recently closed wound.

At the same time, as we have already seen, close contact with the disordered female body is posited as a means to masculine health: open the windows after sex and gaze at your lover’s “ugly limbs,” look between her legs, or observe the liquid that oozes from her body after sex.¹³⁶ Such tactics are sure to free you from love-sick urges for further contact. To force the eyes to look when she “opens her body” is to inoculate oneself to the infectious agent. The orifices and internal material of the female body are abject: they must be hidden in order for men to find the female body attractive; but they also pose a threat to the soundness of the male body. In this context, it is relevant that the ultimate abject female body in *De vetula*, the cursed old woman’s body, is sick. She

*multaque corporibus transitione nocent
in loca nonnumquam siccis arentia glaebis /
de prope currenti flumine manat aqua (Rem. Am. 613-618).*

¹³⁵ *alter item iam sanus erat; vicinia laesit:
occursum dominae non tulit ille suae.
vulnus in antiquum rediit male firma cicatrix,
successumque artes non habuere meae. (Rem. Am. 621-623).*

¹³⁶ *tunc etiam iubeo totas aperire fenestras / turpiaque admisso membra notare die (Rem. Am. 411-412);
429-432: see above.*

coughs, her nose runs, she is fevered and chilled, plagued by ulcers, vomiting, incontinence, and diarrhea. In a moment of trauma-induced rage, “Ovid” graphically expresses in his curse what “he” intimated to his male readers through the voice of the *praeceptor*: the boundaries of the female body do not hold.¹³⁷ The “natural” female body (stripped of *ars*) and the old female body (racked with illness) offer evidence enough for such a claim.

The popularity of the *Remedia* in the Middle Ages was not entirely able to preserve the viability of the *Ars*. In the thirteenth century, the third book of *Ars Amatoria*—the one addressed to women—began to be eliminated. The suppression of this book has been read as “a symptom of the period’s growing uneasiness toward women.”¹³⁸ “Symptoms” arising from an uneasiness toward women are not, as we have seen, restricted to conflicts between the two medieval Ovids, but are endemic to the *Ars* and *Remedia* themselves, namely that female bodies are objects of both lust and disgust. One of the two Ovids, the one speaking in the voice of morality, began to lose his strength to the other Ovid, his conjoined twin (to borrow from the iconography of medieval monstrosity), so that by the fifteenth century even the *Remedia* had been removed from school handbooks. These handbooks “became known by a name that explained Ovid’s exclusion from them: the ‘auctores octo morales,’” a title under which there is no place for the lustful Ovid and his lustful students.¹³⁹ With these conflicts in mind, we can see how *De vetula* offered one solution to conflicts between these two

¹³⁷ The risk of contagion posed by erotic contact with the female body becomes a matter of medical concern in *De secretis mulierum*. Intercourse with women may infect the male body with contaminants, especially noxious menstrual fluid. The following chapter explores this subject in detail.

¹³⁸ Allen (1992), 56.

¹³⁹ Allen (1992), 56.

Ovids. The leaky and repulsive *vetula* that lurks within the beautiful body turns “Ovid” away from sexual promiscuity and toward the truths of natural philosophy and Christianity. This conversion is not fully complete however before one final encounter with the *puella*, her body now changed such that it is less easily decipherable than its incarnations as tempting virgin and transforming *vetula*. This final encounter suggests that, at least in *De vetula*, there may be a final incarnation of Ovid’s body, one that is neither overwhelmed by lust (for virgins) or sexual purity (in a retreat from aged female flesh). The “Ovid” of *De vetula* comes to embody both Ovids. But, as we shall see, even this “Ovid” who praises himself on his newfound balance is not free from the traces of his former selves.

Part Four: The Aged *Puella* and “Ovid’s” Mixed Thanks

Time passes quickly after “Ovid’s” climactic curse, twenty years in the course of just over ten hexameters. The *puella*, with whom he has had no contact in the meantime, has been recently widowed and must return to her father’s home in the city where “Ovid” still lives. When he hears this news, “Ovid” determines to pay her a visit. Once again he finds that she has changed: her body, once the perfect object of intense fantasy is now “worn out by frequent childbirth” (*partuque effeta frequenti*), but despite “the costs” (*dispendia*) her body has suffered, “Ovid” is eager to speak with her.¹⁴⁰ For the first time in the poem they share words, and recall together, almost playfully, the bed-trick substitution of the *vetula*. The aged *puella*, once only the silent object of erotic wishes,

¹⁴⁰ DV 2.564-565.

now expresses her own amorous interests, but sees no point in remembering the past now that they are both old (*senes*) and “not fit for embraces.”¹⁴¹ “Ovid,” however, resolves to make an amorous proposal to the aged *puella* after reading through some of “his own” writings on the subjects of love and older women:

Quodam mane meos me forte revolvere libros
Contigit, adque locum veniens ubi dicitur illud:
Precipue si flore caret et cetera, risi,
Perque fenestrellam vidi dominam venientem.

DV 2.580-583

One morning it happened by chance that I was turning through my books, and coming to that place where it says, “Especially if she lacks the flower, etc.” I laughed, and I saw through a little window my mistress coming.

“Ovid” is here referring to a passage in the second book of the *Ars Amatoria* (2.665 ff.) where the *praeceptor amoris* discusses the benefits of older female lovers. He advises his pupils not to offend such a woman by asking her age, especially if she is no longer a virgin (*praecipue si flore caret*) or is showing grey hairs.¹⁴² Perhaps sensing his young readers’ doubts about intercourse with older women, the *praeceptor* guarantees:

utilis, o iuvenes, aut haec aut serior aetas:
iste feret segetes, iste serendus ager.

Ars Am. 2.667-668.

Useful, o youths, is this or an older age: that field will bear fruit,
that field must be sowed.

Metaphors of sowing and reaping were often employed in classical literature to describe impregnation, but this fruit is not to be confused with offspring. It is clear that neither the

¹⁴¹ *DV* 2.576-577.

¹⁴² *Ars Am.* 2.665.

praeceptor, nor the imagined older woman has such a goal in mind. By plowing the field of an older woman's body, her lover will reap a crop of sexual pleasure.¹⁴³ This is her utility. She may also reap pleasure herself (Ovid is not explicit on this matter), but her own experience of intercourse, as long as she proves useful, is not expressed as a relevant factor.

Elsewhere Ovid's texts are ambivalent about the attractiveness of older women, but hopeful about their ability to please men sexually, as in *Amores* 2.4 where Ovid admits an erotic attraction that even verges on a preference for them, even though young girls are prettier.¹⁴⁴ As an expert in erotic matters, it behooves the *praeceptor amoris* to have enjoyed different amorous experiences with different types of women. The *Ars* and *Remedia* are, after all, styled as erotic handbooks written for the benefit of a wide range of readers with a wide range of erotic tastes. The *praeceptor* even claims to find every girl in Rome desirable whom *anyone* could find attractive.¹⁴⁵ Add to this his assurances that the bodies of older women are "useful" fields "worthy to be sowed," and an alternate image of the older female body than the one we find in *De vetula* begins to emerge.

Experience (*usus*) has made the older woman good in bed:

adde quod est illis operum prudentia maior.
 solus et artifices qui facit usus adest.
 illae munditiis annorum damna rependunt
 et faciunt cura ne videantur anus,
 utque velis, Venerem iungunt per mille figuras:
 invenit plures nulla tabella modos
 illis sentitur non irritata voluptas.

Ars. Am. 2.675-681

¹⁴³ Recall that the *vetula*'s body have been over-plowed and over-reaped. On this metaphor, see DuBois (1988), 39-85.

¹⁴⁴ *Ars Am.* 2.4.45-46.

¹⁴⁵ *Ars Am.* 2.4.47-48.

Add the fact that their knowledge of their business is greater.
And they have experience which alone makes them skilled. They
pay back the losses of the years with their elegance/cleanliness
and take care that they not seem like old women. And, according
to your wishes, they make love in a thousand positions. No tablet
has found more ways. They experience pleasure without
stimulation.

This passage warrants close speculation because it illustrates the complicated relationship between the natural and cultivated female body as well as between the young and old female body in the *Ars Amatoria*. These relationships, in turn, bear upon the readings of Ovidian bodies in *De vetula* —*puella*, *vetula*, and aged *puella*.

First, it appears that older women make good bed partners because of their past experience, “which alone makes them skilled.” They know more sexual positions than can be learned from any book including, we might presume, the *Ars Amatoria* itself. In this sense, they do not require the sort of education that the *praeceptor* teaches his younger, more attractive, but inexperienced female pupils. But when we take into account that the sexual expertise of the older woman is in many ways similar to the artificial experience that the *praeceptor* imparts to the female readers of his erotic handbook, we begin to find in the older woman’s “experience,” something more like good practice in *ars*. Later in his book addressed to female readers, the *praeceptor* offers a list of the various sexual positions that can effectively hide physical flaws.¹⁴⁶ He also teaches how to pretend to be aroused, and even how to believably fake an orgasm.¹⁴⁷ The older woman’s knowledge of a thousand different sexual positions and her ability to feel pleasure without stimulation (*irritata voluptas*) suggest that she may be the *praeceptor*’s

¹⁴⁶*Ars Am.* 3.769-389.

¹⁴⁷*Ars Am.* 3.797-804.

most accomplished pupil. The older woman is praised, after all, for knowing an array of sexual positions chosen, at least in part, so that she not *seem* to be an old woman. To this end, a more accurate rendering of line 2.676 (*solus et artifices qui facit usus adest*) may be, “and they have practice which alone makes them accomplished in *ars*.” They are artificial (*artifices*), and thus have mastered the *praeceptor*’s precepts. Finally, despite his insistence on the benefits of older women, the *praeceptor* expresses a certain ambivalence about their bodies. Like the aged *puella* of *De vetula*, older women have felt the losses of old age; but: *illae munditiis annorum damna rependunt*. By “*munditiis*” the *praeceptor* could mean elegance and niceness, but most literally, the word suggests cleanliness, and the aged *puella* receives just such praise from “Ovid” who is relieved to find her more “clean” (*munda*) and “good smelling” (*melioris odoris*) than any other woman her age; she does not *seem* like an old woman.¹⁴⁸ Learning in erotic *ars* has taught older women to hide those dirty and unattractive features of their bodies, so well indeed that the *praeceptor* can advise his pupils to take older women as lovers in part *because* they do not seem like older women. This passage, then, corroborates the necessity of *ars* for women – both young and old. It also raises questions about “Ovid’s” perusal of his “own” poetry (i.e. the *Ars Amatoria*) in order to prepare himself for his *rendez-vous* with the aged *puella*. What does he learn by reading these Ovidian bodies is “his own” book? And how does he bring this corporeal hermeneutics to bear in his intimate encounter with the aged *puella* whose body he once mis-read through the lens of “his own” *Metamorphoses*?

Pseudo-Ovid has shown no indication of sharing these Ovidian sentiments concerning the advantages of older women, but he seems pleased to have happened upon

¹⁴⁸ DV 2.672.

these words of his: he chuckles. Perhaps he chuckles upon recalling his youthful scrupulosity about the status of a woman's body orifices now that he is attracted to a woman who has "lost her flower" long ago, even worn out her body with childbearing. Or perhaps he chuckles to discover that despite the change that the *puella*'s body has experienced, she is somehow still the same person he once desired. This is not the sudden and graphic transformation he witnessed that fateful night when he embraced a *vetula* in her place, but a gradual change that he, too, has experienced and yet he has remained, in a deep sense, the same.

Much of "Ovid's" second courtship of his *puella* recalls the first. He is prevented from speaking freely with her, and so requires another female go-between (her age is not specified; she is a "faithful mediator" [*mediatrix fidelis*] and a "female attendant" [*pedisseca* and *ancilla*]).¹⁴⁹ This third party, filling the original role of the *vetula*, arranges their *rendez-vous* and leads "Ovid" into a dark room where his beloved is waiting for him. This time he is cautious and gentle. Instead of tightly embracing the figure that lies on the bed, he searchingly runs his fingers over her face, testing her identity, making sure that each part of her body "seems as it should":

... ipsam
Attrecto manibus, respondent sufficientur
Singula; frons, sedes oculi, nasus, labra, mentum.
Sentio ridentem, ruo totus in oscula. Quid plus?
Nudus suscipior cum mansuetudine multa;
Totus in antiqui delector amoris odore.
DV 2.662-668

I feel her with my hands, and each part seems as it should:
forehead, the position of the eyes, nose, lips, chin. I feel her
laughing and my whole body rushes into her mouth. What more

¹⁴⁹ DV 2.592, 2.635, 2.661.

can I say? Naked, I am received with much gentleness. My whole body delights in the smell of old love.

This description of the parts of her body is much more abbreviated and not nearly as meticulously structured as his first. The fewer details allow the aged *puella* to appear more organic and alive than the (fantasized) virgin *puella* whose body was fragmented and magnified to monstrous degrees. Although the body of the aged *puella* is being evaluated, it is not so much in the interest of “Ovid’s” arousal as verifying the identity of his lover. The aged *puella* is the silent object of this anxious touching, but she smiles, even laughs, as he explores her body. Perhaps she is remembering the bed-trick and is amused at “Ovid’s” caution, for her body has indeed transformed, aged, given birth, but she is not the dreaded *vetula*. There is passionate kissing (*ruo totus in oscula*), “each satisfied the other,” each received the other “with peace.” And that is all “Ovid,” so practiced in scrupulous readings of the female body, has to say: “I am silent about what remains; it is enough to have said that we came together on one couch.”¹⁵⁰

This account of the long-awaited union with the *puella* is pleasant, more “romantic” than any lovemaking depicted in the Ovidian corpus, more reciprocal, with an emphasis on gentleness and unity. Perhaps the closest *comparandum* is *Amores* 1.5 where Ovid tells of his *rendez-vous* with Corinna one hot afternoon:¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ *Quod superest taceo, satis est dixisse quod unum
Venimus in lectum, quod uterque satagit utrique,
Qui cum pace receptus eram, cum pace recessi* (DV 2.673-675).

¹⁵¹ I have tried to maintain a practice of referring to the narrator of the *Amores* and the *Metamorphoses* as Ovid, and the narrator of the *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris* as the *praeceptor amoris*. It should be clear that, by this arrangement, I do not mean to imply that the narrator of the former two poems represents the “true” voice of Ovid while the narrator of the latter two represents a literary persona. While no narrator is really Ovid, the *Amores* and *Metamorphoses* more often preserve than undermine the illusion, the one by creating an autobiographical voice, the other by maintaining a more distant, objective style of narration in which the first person voice is nearly absent. I have avoided assimilating Ovid and the *praeceptor amoris* because, as a developed character within the text, the *praeceptor* takes on a voice of his own. Needless to

ut stetit ante oculos posito velamine nostros,
 in toto nusquam corpore menda fuit:
 quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!
 forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
 quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!
 quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur!
 singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi,
 et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.
 cetera quis nescit? lassiqueuimus ambo.

Amores 1.5.17-25

As she stood before my eyes, her clothing cast off, there was no flaw in her whole body: what shoulders, what arms I saw and touched! How fitting to be squeezed was the shape of the breasts! How flat the stomach beneath the slender chest! the shape of her side! how youthful the thigh! But why should I describe her piece by piece? I saw nothing unworthy of praise, and I squeezed her, naked, close to my body. Who doesn't know the rest? Exhausted, we both rested.

Like Pseudo-Ovid's earlier description of the virginal *puella*, Ovid's account of Corinna's body focuses on individual parts, but Ovid gazes as a prelude to lovemaking, while Pseudo-Ovid's (fantasized) gaze leads only to further elaboration, the narrative fragmentation of the *puella*'s body becoming an end in itself.¹⁵² Corinna of *Amores* 1.5 is more akin to the aged *puella*; the evaluation of her body parts leads to mutually desired erotic activity, but with an important difference. Where Ovid "squeezes" Corinna's naked body to him and makes love to her in a way that leaves them both "exhausted," "Ovid" and the aged *puella* receive each other "in peace," the phrase repeated twice for

say, the same caveats apply to using the name "Ovid," to refer to the author, first person narrator, and protagonist of *De vetula*.

¹⁵² Ovid's ability to gaze upon the naked body of Corinna by the light of midday, however, underscores the part that visual objectification plays in the eroticism of the poem. Inasmuch as the poem moves from Ovid's looking to the two of them tired from lovemaking, Ovid's gaze is *the* erotic activity expressed in the poem. Where the intercourse occurs, we have instead a rhetorical question emphasizing the certain effect of looking at a woman's body parts one at a time: "Who does not know the rest?" There is a sense that the lovemaking is secondary to the gazing. The Pseudo-Ovidian author, by contrast, his eyes blinded by darkness, must physically engage with the body he desires.

emphasis in his account: *Qui cum pace receptus eram, cum pace recessi.*¹⁵³ This is not the salacious tryst of a young man convinced, as “Ovid” admits he once was, that he could not live without the female sex. This is *eros* in moderation as befits an aged man of philosophy and an aged *puella* worn out from birthing babies. In this romantic affair, the problem of two Ovids recedes, and in its place is a mixture of the two, an “Ovid” who has found his remedy for lust while not utterly renouncing the pleasures of the female sex, now understood in much broader terms than when he lusted after the virgin *puella*.

Yet this engagement is not entirely free from the anxieties about the female body that animate the poem. We might expect as much, considering that this encounter with the aged *puella* seems so much like a repetition of the encounter with the *vetula*. His caution demonstrates his own doubts about the possibility of another traumatic *mutatio*. We might also expect as much from an author whose words and narrative techniques conflict with his surface message. Just as his use of fragmentation and magnification made monstrous the *puella*’s pure and ordered body, phrases in this passage suggest that, despite “Ovid’s” apparent attraction to the aged *puella*, female bodies and especially old ones, threaten disorder and contamination. His assertion about the pleasure he takes in the “smell of *old* love” seems to echo the stench of the *vetula*. The poet’s use of *antiquus*, rather than the more negative *vetulus*, to describe the love he finds in this encounter indicates some effort to represent the aging female body as more than an object of disgust. Yet it is clear that “Ovid” is relieved to find his aged *puella* instead of a foul *vetula*. One of the most poignant phrases in the passage—*sentio ridentem, ruo totus in oscula*—suggests a similar stirring of anxiety. This phrase artfully conveys the feeling of abandoning oneself to kisses, of collapsing into the body of a lover, but it also suggests

¹⁵³ DV 2.675.

“Ovid’s” relief at not finding the *rictus* of the *vetula*. He pours himself into the aged *puella* in kisses that replace the fantasized rush of foul liquid from the cursed *vetula*’s mouth. Finally, “Ovid’s” later meditations on the sexual encounter evince lingering anxieties about the nature of the female body:

Quod fuerat meminisse iuvat, quantique fuisset
Integra fracta docet; numquam matrona totennis,
Precipue post tot partus, fuit aptior ulla.
Nullaque munda magis fuit aut melioris odoris.
DV 2.669-672

It is pleasing to have recalled how she had been. Broken, she teaches how great she would have been whole. Never was a woman of such an age, especially after so many births, better than her. None was cleaner or better smelling.

Beneath his words of approval and pleasant chuckles about pursuing an older woman who “has lost her flower,” crude ruminations about the fundamental categorization of the female body—virgin or not virgin—persist. “Ovid” praises her “broken” body as an object onto which he can project his fantasies about the intact body he once desired but failed to experience.¹⁵⁴ His efforts to substantiate this fantasy are palpable in his insistence on the cleanliness and good smelling older body *despite* its many births. Each instance of pregnancy and birth reconfirm that this body has been penetrated by a male body, distended by the fetal body growing within, ruptured in the throws of labor, and expelled amniotic fluid, mucous, flesh, and blood. This is not the horrific, instantaneous

¹⁵⁴ DV 2.699 (*Quod fuerat meminisse iuvat, quantique fuisset*) echoes *Aeneid* 1.203 (... *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*). To my knowledge, this is the only instance of a reference to the *Aeneid* in *De vetula*, a poem where the mock-epic voice scarcely accords with the material. In the analogy, the hardships suffered by Aeneas’ men corresponds to the “intact” body of the *puella*; Aeneas hopes these hardships will someday be recalled with pleasure and “Ovid” recalls with pleasure the virgin body he has not enjoyed. It is a rather incongruous intertext, but—because of its incongruity—satirizes “Ovid’s” reminiscing about the *puella*’s virgin body which he only experienced in fantasy.

transformation of a virgin into a *vetula*, but the mundane metamorphosis of the female body from which no woman is exempt.

Immediately following the *rendez-vous* these anxieties surface in the form of oppressive doubts about how to interpret the encounter. How is he to read it? How is he to read the aged *puella*'s body and his attraction to it? Our author may not have proved himself an accurate reader in the case of the transforming *puella*, but he has never before been at a loss for a hermeneutics. "His own" Ovidian model seems to fall short. He begins to think over what fortune has given him (a *fracta* woman) and what chance has taken away (an *integra puella*). He begins to lament the fact that only now, so late, has he achieved his goal of sleeping with his *puella*, and he is plagued by scruples over whether or not he owes the aged *puella* any thanks. He is torn by conflicting emotions (*laetitia, desiderium, desperatio, tristitas*), and his inability to reconcile these conflicting thoughts and emotions, rather than the thoughts and emotions themselves, trouble him the most.¹⁵⁵ They cannot be resolved, they cannot be categorized so that one wins out; within his own mind there is slippage between concepts, a spilling over and mixing together of things that should remain separate. This encounter with the aged *puella* has brought within him a mixture of the sort embodied by the monstrous *semivir* and the porous *vetula*. His conclusion is fitting if surprising, that he owes the aged *puella* "mixed thanks" (*grates mixtas*), "neither good nor bad."¹⁵⁶

This "mixed thanks" (which he nevertheless proceeds to describe in the most balanced and ordered fashion) illustrates his capacity to think of mixture as an end, a

¹⁵⁵ DV 2.686-693.

¹⁵⁶ DV 2.696-697.

thing in itself rather than a conundrum or a monstrous boundary violation. Instead of *either* love and desire (his feelings for the *puella*) *or* hatred and revulsion (his feelings for the *vetula*), he feels ambivalently. Instead of erotically fetishizing *or* cursing the aged *puella*, herself a mixture of young virgin and old woman, he hopes for her a mixture of fortunes: her sadness should not be without a hidden laugh; her happiness should not be without a hidden tear; she should be honorable, but not without stain (*macula*); her losses should be partly repaid, her gains partly lost; fear should come with comfort and comfort with fear.¹⁵⁷ He sums up this anti-curse, however, with this morose conclusion:

Sed semper morbo careat, satis est morbus
Pessimus, irretinebiliter ruitura senectus.

DV 2.707-708

But let her always lack disease, the worst disease is enough:
irrevocable, rushing old age.

Instead of the rupturing liquids of the sick *vetula*'s body, old age itself has become the rushing, disordered thing that cannot be held in check, the *morbus pessimus* that neither the *puella* nor anyone else, including the poet himself, can avoid. Perhaps this view represents the conclusions of an aging "Ovid," who has begun to feel old age transform his own body. However we might interpret these sentiments, this confused poet who believes briefly in the meaningfulness of inseparable mixtures vanishes within the break between the second and third book. Within this break "Ovid" takes on a scholastic voice that speaks not about individual bodies but about the universal body—the body microcosm—in which is written the truths of nature. In order to read this body, the philosophical "Ovid" returns to a hermeneutics of division and categorization.

¹⁵⁷ DV 2.699-706.

Part Five: Cosmic Body Boundaries

The third book of *De vetula* leaves behind “Ovid’s” amorous adventures as well as the autobiographical narrative style of the second book. The narrator of the third book is the philosophical “Ovid,” who surveys a wide range of topics, moving freely between natural philosophy and theology, often using his conclusions about the former to pursue questions about the latter. He discusses the motion of the planets, the creation of the world, the composition of the earth, and the nature of God in the scholastic style of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries¹⁵⁸ His attraction and aversion to the body as a system of order (i.e. the virgin *puella*) or disorder (the monstrous *semivir* and the *vetula*) persists in this book, but philosophical inquiry shifts his focus from particular female or feminized bodies to the human body as a miniature blueprint for the entire cosmos. For the continent and philosophical “Ovid,” the ordered body, its parts delineated and compartmentalized, once an object of erotic desire, becomes a fleshy assurance of the precise order of every element in the universe. The following passage may be taken as a representative example of “Ovid’s” elaboration of the body microcosm motif.¹⁵⁹ Note that this body is explicitly male:

Sol in corde manet et in arteriis dominatur,
Vivificans per eos totius corporis artus.
Mercurius patulam pulmonis habet regionem,
Tracheam quoque vociferam linguamque loquacem,
Testiculos Venus et que semen vasa ministrant
Sortitur, sed epar Iovis est stomachusque cibator,
Splē Saturnus habet, Mars fel, et Luna cerebrum.
DV 3.243-251

¹⁵⁸ For a survey of Pseudo-Ovid’s philosophical sources for book three, see Robathan (1968), 11-12. Among the most significant are Albertus Magnus and Avicenna.

¹⁵⁹ Other late-medieval examples of the motif can be found in Alain of Lille’s *Anticlaudianus*, Bernard Silvester’s *Cosmographia* and *Architrengius*, and Hildegard’s *Scivias*.

The sun rests in the heart and is lord of the arteries, imparting life through the limbs of the whole body. Mercury holds the broad area of the lung, the vocal trachea, and the loquacious tongue. Venus is granted the testicles and the vessels that direct semen, but the liver and eating stomach belong to Jove. Saturn holds the spleen, Mars the gallbladder, and Luna the brain.

This passage is one of many that match each planet with a human virtue, or a particular combination of bodily humors with a celestial body, or a body part with a natural element, etc.¹⁶⁰

The metaphoric relationship between the human body and the universe was a trope familiar to medieval philosophers.¹⁶¹ This microcosmic-macrocosmic similitude required that the human body, symbolically conceived, be organized normatively and legibly, at least by those trained in its sign systems. In certain regards, this similitude solves problems of corporeal instability. “Ovid” maps stability onto the (male) human body by identifying it with the supremely ordered natural universe, thus reinforcing the boundaries of both. The microcosmic body’s structure endures over the course of changes in individual bodies, and its lack of female body parts preserves it unmarked by reproduction and, therefore, mortality. The microcosmic body is not transformed by intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, death, or decay. It lacks those parts specific to individual female bodies—vagina and uterus—through which liquids flow and amorphous substances coalesce into other living bodies destined to be born and die.

¹⁶⁰ The precise physiological vocabulary in the third book has been taken to support the identification of the author of the poem as Richard de Fournival, who was the son of a doctor and pursued some medical studies himself. Fournival was named as the author of *De vetula* in an “unpublished encyclopedic work, written in 1424, entitled *Vaticanus*” (Robathan [1968] 3). Since the discovery of this statement in 1867, there has been speculation as to whether or not this evidence of authorship is sufficient. For a fuller discussion, see Robathan (1968), 3-10.

¹⁶¹ See Barkan (1975) and Ziolkowski’s careful analysis of the trope in Alan of Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae* (1985). For the motif in Hildegard and Hrotsvitha, see Reiss (2003), 269-302.

At the same time, however, particular disordered bodies problematize the precise correspondences between the body microcosm and macrocosm. The resulting disaccord fuels anxieties about monstrous bodies, the very existence of which require, in the words of one scholar of medieval conceptualizations of the monstrous, the “recognition of the corresponding deformity of the cosmos for which the body is a figure.” The universe itself then risks becoming “a monstrous construct.”¹⁶² In “Ovid’s” philosophical ruminations, we find evidence of what is intimated elsewhere, namely that more is at stake in *De vetula* than the bodies of some eunuchs, one girl, and one old woman. Bodies that transgress their proper bounds destabilize the boundaries that structure truth, knowledge, and the universe itself. By marking the *semivir* and the *vetula* as monstrosities, “Ovid’s” systems of knowing become less vulnerable to boundary violations; the structures of these systems of knowing are reinforced, so to speak, by designating instability elsewhere. But the monstrous returns.¹⁶³ The *semivir* and *vetula* haunt “Ovid’s” philosophical third book by casting an incongruous shadow over the human body microcosm.

This new universe that opens up before “Ovid” is a far cry from the one Pythagoras describes in book fifteen of the *Metamorphoses* where bodies are as pliant as soft wax and are forever taking on new shapes.¹⁶⁴ Bodies, moreover, are not the only things in a state of flux: *cuncta fluunt*.¹⁶⁵ Everything in the universe “contains four

¹⁶² Williams (1996), 109-110.

¹⁶³ Cohen (1996), 20.

¹⁶⁴ *Metam.* 15.165-172.

¹⁶⁵ *Metam.* 178.

generative bodies,” the four elements: earth, water, air, and fire.¹⁶⁶ And these “bodies” continuously change position, gain and lose heft, separate and coalesce. “Nature,” which Pythagoras names “the renovator of things” (*rerumque novatrix*), is not to be found in a precise correspondence between the human body and the cosmos as “Ovid” asserts.¹⁶⁷ The correspondence between humankind and the cosmos is to be found in nothing other than what unites all matter: its shifting materiality. Pythagoras’ Ovidian universe is, beneath the given “seals” (shapes) imprinted on the “wax” (matter), amorphous, but the philosophical “Ovid” insists otherwise, and his relentless mapping of the body microcosm corroborates his claims. God’s body, however, is more difficult to read and monstrously haunts “Ovid’s” fledgling Christianity.

God’s body—a difficult concept in itself for “Ovid”—does not in any rationally conceivable way maintain the boundaries required of bodies by natural law. “Ovid” proves God’s uniqueness, pre-existence, and omnipotence relatively easily with the sort of deductive reasoning he used to determine that the *semivir* is a monster. A theological argument typical of this book unfolds in the following way. Having just proven that divinity is omnipotent, “Ovid” questions whether the divine is one or many: some say that there are numerous gods. But if there are two gods, both of whom must be omnipotent, they must be absolute equals. If not, one would be subordinate to the other, in which case they could not both be omnipotent. If one cannot, then, be subordinate to the other, it may occur that they have contrary opinions. If one god yields to the opinion

¹⁶⁶ *quattor aeternus genitalia corporea mundus continet ... (Metam. 15.239-240).*

¹⁶⁷ *Nec species sua cuique manet, rerumque novatrix ex aliis alias reparat natura figuras (Metam. 15.252-253).*

of the other, he is not omnipotent. Thus, omnipotence cannot exist in two gods.

Therefore, there is only one God.¹⁶⁸ But when “Ovid” comes to discuss prophecies of Christ’s birth, his philosophical method falters. Certain men, he writes, have been granted the gift of prophecy by cultivating a spiritual life and mastering the flesh.¹⁶⁹

“Ovid” has heard from such men a prediction that a God-man is to be born:

Tales dixerunt quod sic de virgine nasci
Debeat unus homo simul deus, et quod utramque
Humanam atque dei sit naturas habiturus.

DV 3.665-668

Such men have said that there needs be born of a virgin one man,
a human and at the same time God, and that he will have (two)
natures, one human and the other of God.

This dual nature and the mixture of categories (mother/virgin, human/God) it entails
provoke a rare emotional outburst in the impersonal philosophical tone of the third book:

Sed via possibilis non est, hec clausa videtur
Porta meis oculis, quia non intellego plane.

DV 3.668-699

But the way is not possible, this gate seems shut to my eyes since I
do not clearly understand.

Although it is difficult for “Ovid” to comprehend why God would want to mingle his
nature with the flesh of man, he grants the possibility if God so desired – he is, as “Ovid”
has already proven, omnipotent.¹⁷⁰ But the categories of knowing in which “Ovid” trusts
cannot abide, for example, a triune God. The laws of mathematics forbid that “God is

¹⁶⁸ *DV* 3.105-116.

¹⁶⁹ *DV* 3.655-664.

¹⁷⁰ *DV* 3.680-685.

three and no less one.” “My intellect,” he confesses, “abhors such a thing as this,” and is finally compelled to admit having a “defective” intellect in the matter of this prophecy: *defectivus in hoc meus intellectus abundat*).¹⁷¹ He must conclude as much if he intends to pledge his faith to this God.¹⁷² In these theological ruminations, we see “Ovid” continuing to grapple with the troubling corporeal boundary violations he hoped to leave behind with his licentious lifestyle. His flight from erotic and reproductive practices does not free him from the grips of the human body; rather, the privileged position of the human body in the school of medieval philosophy to which “Ovid” devotes himself, and the centrality of the incarnation of God in the religion to which he pledges his faith, intensify the meaningfulness of body boundaries. Thus the poem closes with “Ovid” tempted yet unwilling to submit the Christian God to the scrupulous analysis that earlier confirmed the monstrous nature of the *semivir*. Instead, he vows to worship this God whose own boundary violations must be accepted with an *intellectus defectivus*, a phrase that echoes “Ovid’s” own words about the *semivir*: *iste / Non est, quem talis defectus devirat*.¹⁷³ To do otherwise would inevitably lead to the inconceivable conclusion that God is a *monstrum*.¹⁷⁴

That Christ is to be born from the body of a virgin is perhaps the most incomprehensible element of “Ovid’s” newfound faith. Readers familiar with this narrator before his *vetula*-induced change might conjecture that this difficulty is not

¹⁷¹ DV 3.717: *Quod deus est trinus et quod nichilominus unus. / Hoc autem tantum meus intellectus abhorret.*

¹⁷² DV 3.752.

¹⁷³ DV 2.20-21.

¹⁷⁴ This conclusion may be inconceivable for “Ovid,” but “monstrous” representations of Christ appear in late-medieval iconography. See Mills (2003) in Bildhauer and Mills (2003), 28-54.

reducible to his sheer adherence to philosophical rationality. The experiences that “Ovid” recounted in the second book of the poem do not allow for a virgin body to experience childbirth and yet remain pure, ordered, and untransformed. His erotic desire for the neatly compartmentalized body parts of a *puella*, his disgust at this body’s sudden transformation into the gaping and overflowing body of a *vetula*, and even his ambivalent attraction to an aged *puella* whom he wishes to have enjoyed before she was “broken” by intercourse, childbirth, and aging—these are the experiences that have shaped “Ovid,” while continuing to create an incongruity between what he has become and what he would like to be. He cannot read these bodies, his semiotics founders, this gate, as he puts it, is shut before his eyes, an impassible *porta clausa*.

This metaphor, rich in Marian imagery, expresses the limits that “Ovid’s” reason sets on his faith, while it also resonates with the specific nature of those limits through its reference to the intact (virginal), yet permeable (maternal) body of Mary. In Ezekiel 44.1-2, the Lord grants the prophet a vision of a *porta clausa*, and tells him that it “will be closed, it will not open and man will not pass through it since the Lord God of Israel has entered through it, and it will be closed.” Biblical scholars writing from the early Church through the high Middle Ages read in this Old Testament passage the prophecy of Christ’s incarnation. Ambrose identified the *porta clausa* as the physically intact body of the virgin mother of God. In his *De virginitate perpetua*, he asks, “what is this gate, unless Mary, for that reason remained closed because she is a virgin? The gate, therefore, is Mary through whom Christ entered into this world when he was brought forth (*fusus est*) in a virgin birth and did not loosen (*solvit*) the closed genitals of virginity (*genitalia*

virginitatis claustra).¹⁷⁵ The virgin body of Mary is just as impenetrable as the mystery of Christ's nature; both are contained by impassible boundaries. Yet Mary's body and Christ's nature are not definitively bounded, and are both affronts to the laws of reason: she is somehow both virgin and mother, and he is father and son, one and many, human and divine.

As if to signify that faith now indeed trumps his intellect, "Ovid" concludes the poem with a hymn to the Virgin Mary where he dwells at some length on the process by which Christ borrowed flesh from Mary, and how he will eventually return that flesh to her. "Ovid" assures the Virgin that she will be enthroned beside Christ at the Resurrection, not because she has earned this position through her obedience, purity, or any other virtue. Christ is obliged to place his mother at his side in order to rejoin the pieces of her flesh separated by the process of Christ's incarnation:

Te superexaltans celosque locans super omnes,
Et sibi concathedrans, ubi namque locaverit illam
Electam carnis partem, quam sumpserit ex te
Et carnem de qua fuerit sua sumpta, locabit.
Fas etenim non est quod postquam portio carnis
Una tue fuerit sic cum deitate levata,
Reliquias alibi locet, ut sua diminuantur
Munera circa te, dum quod bene ceperit hac in
Parte tui non in te tota prosequeretur.

DV 3.781-789

Greatly exalting you, placing you above all the heavens, and
enthroning you next to him, for where he will have placed that
chosen piece of flesh which he took out of you, he will also place
the flesh from which his own was taken. For it is not right that,
after one piece of your flesh was elevated with divinity, he should
place the remaining pieces somewhere else, thereby diminishing

¹⁷⁵ *De virginitate perpetua* 8.52-53: *Quae est haec porta, nisi Maria; ideo clausa, quia virgo? Porta igitur Maria, per quam Christus intravit in hunc mundum, quando virginali fusus est partu, et genitalia virginitatis claustra non solvit.*

his rewards toward you, inasmuch as what he took in this part of you would not accompany your whole body.

These lines are complicated, but so is the process of partition and assemblage of flesh that they describe. Christ's incarnation is here seen as the election and extraction of a part of Mary's flesh which becomes, in turn, the flesh of Christ. This hymn imagines that Christ will place this extracted piece of flesh (i.e. himself) in the same spot where he will place the flesh from which his own flesh was taken (i.e. his mother, Mary). It would not suffice, "Ovid" insists, for that part of Mary's flesh that was divinely elevated to remain eternally in some place other than where the remainder of Mary's flesh will be. Because that elevated part of Mary's flesh cannot be returned to her in its original form, "Ovid" imagines that Christ will set it as close as he can to the body of which it was once a part. Taking into account "Ovid's" preoccupation with the body boundaries of the *puella* and *vetula*, his concerns about the proper arrangement of Mary's body parts is not simply academic.

In Mary, "Ovid" finds a generative female body that is nevertheless virgin and unchanging, the sort of body he has sought throughout the poem. The changes in the ordered body of the *puella*, one sudden and the other over a twenty-year period, may have confirmed the body's eventual fragmentation, but Mary's resurrected body has experienced a change that permanently binds together body parts, and preserves them in this properly arranged state never to transform again. And those who exalt her can hope for the same stabilizing change. Yet there remains a discernable sense of unease in the hymn about the truths to be read in the organization of Mary's body parts. "Ovid" is

unable to map out this female body as systematically as the (male) body microcosm allowed. Indeed, Mary's body is in some sense fragmented, divided, and mixed up.

That "Ovid" foretells the birth of Christ but yet remains shut out from the truths to be read in Mary's body is, in some sense, a result of the problem of two Ovids, and here I am using this concept not to talk about the symbiotic lustful Ovid and moral Ovid who inhabit the borders between the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Remedia Amoris*, but the two Ovids who read metamorphosis differently. We saw evidence of "Ovid's" penchant for finding Ovidian bodies where they are not when he misreads the *puella*'s transformation; is it possible that "Ovid's" anxiety about Mary's body parts represents a further misreading, this time one that does not read metamorphosis where it might? In order to pursue this thought, we must return to the *Metamorphoses*, this time in search of Mary's body. The author of the fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé* found this body in several books of the *Metamorphoses*, but most poignantly in the story of Myrrha, which he expanded to twice its original length. Like Mary, Myrrha gave birth to a child conceived by her father. This child was named Adonis, or, as Mary would know him, Lord (Adonai).¹⁷⁶ Ovid's (medieval) body (understood as Hexter's corpus/text) holds within its boundaries both Myrrha and Mary, Adonis and Christ. How does this body animate "Ovid," the uneasy singer of Mary's praise in the closing lines of *De vetula* ?

¹⁷⁶ Possamai-Pérez (2006), 80.

Part Six:
Myrrha and Mary: Models of Maternal Metamorphosis

Myrrha's tale provides one of only a few instances of pregnancy and labor depicted in the *Metamorphoses*. Having developed a "filthy desire" for her own father, she insists to herself that incestuous sex will confuse categories that should remain distinct:¹⁷⁷

nec quot confundas et iura et nomina sentis?
tune eris et matris paelex et adultera patris?
tune soror nati genetrixque uocabere fratris?

Metam. 10.346-348

Do you not sense how many laws and names you are confusing?
Will you be the rival of your mother and the mistress of your
father? Will you be called sister of your child and mother of your
brother?

Myrrha employs a bed-trick similar to the one fabricated by "Ovid's" *puella* and *vetula*, and departs from her bedchamber "full of her father" (*plena patris*), bearing "the impious seed in her awful womb (*diro utero*)."¹⁷⁸ Soon exiled, she wanders until she can "scarcely carry the burden (*onus*) of her womb (*uteri*)."¹⁷⁹ Desperate, she prays for a transformation of her body, and bark begins to work its way up her legs, her "heavy womb" (*gravem ... uterum*), and neck.¹⁸⁰ Unable to bear the delay, Myrrha plunges her face into the rising wood.¹⁸¹ Enclosed in bark, her body is now impenetrable from without but also within: her child cannot find a way out of her when the time for birth arrives. Now a myrrh tree, Myrrha is unable to summon the help of Lucina, the goddess

¹⁷⁷ *Metam.* 10.319.

¹⁷⁸ *Metam.* 10.469-470.

¹⁷⁹ *vixque uteri portabat onus* (*Metam.* 10.481).

¹⁸⁰ *Metam.* 10.495.

¹⁸¹ *non tulit illa moram venientique obvia ligno / subsedit mersitque suos in cortice vultus* (*Metam.* 10.497-498).

who loosens the bodies of women in labor, but Lucina is aware of Myrrha's plight, takes pity and lays her hands on the "groaning branches:"

arbor agit rimas et fissa cortice vivum
reddit onus...

Metam. 10.512-513.

The tree cracked and, the bark having split open, gave up its burden...

Myrrha's pliable and porous flesh now gone, her arboreal body cracks and ruptures. The appearance of Lucina, whose assistance *all* women in labor require, calls attention to the mutation, rupture, and reconfiguration that the female body experiences, not only in marvelous cases of metamorphosis, but in the quotidian experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. Her post-transformation delivery of this fetal body designates the pregnant and transformed maternal body as a site of rupture, so that childbirth seems to recapitulate Myrrha's metamorphosis. Like so many of the virgins in *Metamorphoses*, Myrrha's intact body boundaries exist only potentially, destined to be violated by monstrous sex (incest in Myrrha's case, but so often rape in others), deformed, and then reshaped into something else. This is the paradigm of corporeality that "Ovid" applies to Mary because it is the paradigm he applies to female bodies.

In *Ovide moralisé*, Myrrha's illicit desire is mapped onto Mary's obedience, and Myrrha's anxieties about incest become Mary's absolute willingness. But the allegorized version of Myrrha's tale does not efface her confusion of "laws and names," for these boundary violations—the monstrosities of Myrrha's deed—are shared by Mary who is impregnated by her father. The author of *Ovide moralisé* finds Christ and Mary everywhere in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and although the allegories often seem forced,

they do say something as a group about the border crossings fundamental to Ovid's representation of myth and to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. There is, to use the words of Possamaï-Pérez, a "jointure" at the heart of Christ's identity that allows him to be "la figure essentielle" in *Ovide moralisé*.¹⁸² "La double nature de la Vierge" makes her, too, at home among Ovid's transforming creatures.¹⁸³

But the graphic corporeality of the *Metamorphoses* proves sometimes to be unfit for Christian allegory. There is one part of Myrrha's incestuous body that cannot be transposed onto Mary's body. The author of *Ovide moralisé* omits Myrrha's "gravem uterum" in his account of her transformation.¹⁸⁴ The virgin mother of God is not burdened by the body that grows inside of her, and remains sealed where Adonis violently splits open Myrrha's arboreal body. The monstrosity of the maternal body is not commensurable with Mary's other boundary violations.

In order to read in Myrrha's Ovidian body the mysteries of the incarnation, *Ovide moralisé* must retain Myrrha's monstrosity while overlooking the corporeal site of that monstrosity: the heavy, rupturing womb. "Ovid" attempts a similar turn away from the monstrosity of the female body toward the (male) microcosmic body and the virgin body of Mary. But he cannot fully shake his own Ovidian framework: Mary's body seems too much like Myrrha's – fragmented, confused, problematically mingled with the bodies of both her father and her son. Even a reformed, Christian Ovid cannot decipher Ovidian bodies for all their holy significance. Perhaps it is not only "Ovid's" strict categories of female corporeality (virgin, mother, *vetula*) and his experience of a traumatic *mutatio*

¹⁸² Possamaï-Pérez (2006), 606.

¹⁸³ Possamaï-Pérez (2006), 608.

¹⁸⁴ Possamaï-Pérez (2006), 80.

(wherein these categories are suddenly collapsed) that keeps the full meaning of Mary's body behind a "closed gate." Perhaps those men who have indulged in the pleasure of the flesh, those who have not fully mastered the flesh as had the prophets who foretold Christ's birth, are kept from crossing over the boundaries of paganism into the mysteries of Christ.

"Ovid's" uneasy hymn to Mary, the virgin mother, may then issue from the fissure between his two voices, the pagan voice of lust and the Christian voice of morality. It is a symptom of the monstrous identity of the medieval Ovid. In the face of increasing anxieties about the attractiveness and repulsiveness of the female body among thirteenth and fourteenth century clerics, the "Ovid" of *De vetula* may himself be a symptom of medieval unease toward Christ's incarnation and Mary's virginity among those men schooled in the representations of unstable female bodies in the *Metamorphoses*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*. It would seem, then, that the two Ovids embodied by Pseudo-Ovid are not in the end reducible to a pagan-lustful and Christian-moral Ovid. The final incarnation of "Ovid" in *De vetula* is born of an Ovidian corpus whose representations of female corporeality have been made to accommodate the repulsiveness and licentiousness of women as well as the holiness of the Virgin Mary.

"Ovid's" meditations on Mary's body occur in connection with his meditations on the resurrection of the body, which was a subject of anxious fascination not only for Pseudo-Ovid, but for many medieval theologians and academics.¹⁸⁵ We should also take into account how "Ovid's" hymn to Mary is implicated in a wider dialogue about this final metamorphosis of the bodies of the elect. In her study of the beliefs and practices

¹⁸⁵ See Bynum (1992).

surrounding the resurrection of the body during the later Middle Ages, Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that unease about the fragmentation and dissolution of the body existed together with an enthusiasm for dividing and disseminating the bodies of holy people in order to spread the powers that each fragment was thought to contain. Pope Boniface VIII passed legislation in 1299 prohibiting dividing or embalming corpses, a practice that had spread to include not only the bodies of saints to create relics, “but also the bodies of the nobility to enable them to be buried in several places near several saints.”¹⁸⁶ This legislation does not seem to have reduced these practices. “Indeed,” Bynum adds, “immediately after Boniface’s death, opponents charged that he was a heretic because his concern for the fate of cadavers proved, they said, that he did not believe in resurrection.”¹⁸⁷ Many of the popes that followed had their own bodies divided after death. In academic and theological circles, the truth of the resurrection of the body was not the point of contention, but *how* this resurrection would occur. How could the parts of a human body known to age, lose and regenerate hair and nail parings, grow fat and thin, suffer wounds and disease, and dissolve into decay, be reassembled once again?

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a growing fascination with change in the form of resurrection and miracles. This was also, of course, a period of renewed interest in Ovid.¹⁸⁸ The first book of the *Metamorphoses* (which describes the creation of the world) and the fifteenth book (which includes Pythagoras’ philosophical speech about

¹⁸⁶ Bynum (1992), 270.

¹⁸⁷ Bynum (1992), 253-254

¹⁸⁸ For the appearance of Ovidian texts in medieval schoolbooks, see Hexter (1986); for his influence on medieval literature, see the collected articles in Martindale (1988).

the constant flux of the universe: “all things are changing, nothing dies”) seem to have been the most popular of Ovid’s tales of change.¹⁸⁹ Bynum does not think this renewed interest in Ovid’s poetry testifies a late-medieval exploration of “the relationship between shape, story, and identity so often emphasized in modern Ovid criticism.” The attention paid to books 1 and 15, the emphasis on moral failure, and “the avoidance of the topic of physical metamorphosis [in favor of “biological multiplicity”] masks a deep disquietude at the possibility of slippage of the human body away from the soul.”¹⁹⁰ Yet, *De vetula*, born from this renewed interest in Ovid, complicates Bynum’s distinction. By presenting “Ovid” himself as a mis-reader of metamorphosis, who sees physical transformation when confronted with the mortality of the body, this text draws together the slipping boundaries of the body changed by metamorphosis and the body changed by old age, disease, and decay.

The transformation of the resurrected body is a source of both hope and unease for this poet. It raises questions that have animated much of the poem, questions about the proper order of the body, its vulnerability to dissolution, and the possibility of eternal coalescence. It promises that disease, death, and decay need not be the final circumstances under which the boundaries of the body change, but not in a way comprehensible to “Ovid.” Surely this glorified body must be organized and impervious to further change. But Christ’s own body fails to confirm that the parts and boundaries of resurrected bodies conform to the ideal of corporeal order exemplified by the fantasized *puella*.

¹⁸⁹ *Metam.* 15.164.

¹⁹⁰ Bynum (2001), 100.

Resurrection raises questions about the process by which body boundaries break up and then become reconstituted, but such questions are also germane to pregnancy and birth. Christ's conception and birth were certainly not average, but his "borrowing" of his mother's flesh did not depend on his divinity or even his sole reliance on Mary's body for the material of his incarnation. Quotidian pregnancy, especially understood through medieval physiology, involves the overlapping of body boundaries, the borrowing and splitting of flesh from flesh. "Ovid" cannot disentangle the mother of God from the associations between the reproductive female body and the monstrous body that shape his poem. Concerns about these reproductive functions in *De secretis mulierum* substantiate the view that normality is the bedrock of monstrosity, and that the maternal body from which every body splits is, as one scholar of medieval teratology has put it, the epitome of the monstrous "intimate stranger."¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Cohen (1999), 180.

Chapter Two:

Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' *De Secretis Mulierum*: Decoding the Monstrous Female Body

Part One: Reading Secrets

In his introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault identifies in the medieval institutionalization of confession the infancy of the modern subject.

Discrediting the “repressive hypothesis” associated with the psychoanalytic narrative of subjectivity, Foucault insists that subjectivity is bound to “the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of power itself.”¹⁹² The modern society is one that dedicates itself to “speaking of it [sex] *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret.”¹⁹³

The medieval institutionalization of confession was thus simultaneously an institutionalization of secrecy, one that not only generated speech but also an esoteric literature of confession in the form of the Catholic pastoral and increasingly articulate guides for self-scrutiny to aid the translation of one’s own secrets into discourse.¹⁹⁴

Karma Lochrie’s book on the function of secrecy in medieval literary texts builds upon Foucault’s thesis that, as she puts it, “[s]ecrecy ... contains the act of disclosure, and the pressure to reveal is intimately associated with the obligation to conceal;” but she faults

¹⁹² Foucault (1990), 18.

¹⁹³ Foucault (1990), 35, italics in original.

¹⁹⁴ Lochrie (1999), 14, 22.

Foucault for his reduction of medieval technologies of secrecy to the discursive performance of confessions, a maneuver that allows him to reduce “the complex designations of the medieval term ‘the flesh’ to a single referent, ‘sex.’”¹⁹⁵ Lochrie grants Foucault’s acknowledgment that the “sex” confessed was not so much the *content* of secrecy as the function of secrecy, a “technolog[y] of the self, and the systems of power and knowledge in the Middle Ages.”¹⁹⁶ Lochrie demonstrates, however, that this technology of secrecy is not reducible to the discursive practices surrounding the confession of sex. The secrecy of the flesh also fed a body of literature dedicated to revealing to its readers secrets about the natural world, the female body, and human generation.¹⁹⁷

One of these books of secrets is *De secretis mulierum* (*DSM*), which was composed in the late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth century, perhaps by a pupil of Albertus Magnus.¹⁹⁸ The number of surviving manuscripts (at least 83) and printed editions (120 dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) attest its popularity in the years following its authorship.¹⁹⁹ Monica Green regards this text as “one of the most

¹⁹⁵ Lochrie (1999), 22.

¹⁹⁶ Lochrie (1999), 41.

¹⁹⁷ See Lochrie (1999), 118-131; Green (2000), 5-39. Other influential medieval texts in the “secrets” genre include the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum* and Michael Scot’s *De secretis naturae*. The first is a letter in Arabic addressed to Alexander from Aristotle which includes an array of subjects, some of them medical; but, according to Lemay, it “resembles the *Secrets of Women* only insofar as it gives summary treatments to many overlapping subjects.” Lemay (1992), 12. The second, which shares the same volume as the Lyons, 1580, edition of *DSM* has much to say about the contaminating effects of menstrual fluid (Lemay [1992], 12-13).

¹⁹⁸ See Thorndike (1955) for proof that the attribution of *DSM* to Albertus Magnus is spurious. In addition, the author of *DSM* also refers more than once to Albertus Magnus as a reference. See also Lemay (1992), 1-3.

¹⁹⁹ Margaret Schleissenger (1987) lists all 83. For a comprehensive list of manuscripts and printed editions, see Lemay (1992), 181-82. According to Lemay, over 50 editions were printed in the fifteenth century and over 70 in the sixteenth. The Latin text of *DSM* has not been yet been published as an edited

influential documents in the history of medieval scientific attitudes toward women,” but has acknowledged that it is only recently beginning to receive the scholarly attention it deserves.²⁰⁰ Some of these “secrets” concern female anatomy, physiological processes, and illnesses, but the text is not particularly concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of female pathology, obstetrics, or childrearing – the subjects germane to gynecological treatises, both ancient and medieval. *DSM* is not a gynecology proper, and was not consulted in a therapeutic context; it is, rather, an educative treatise on human reproduction that focuses primarily on the female body’s role therein. More broadly, *DSM* pulls from the interior of the female body secrets about the process of human generation, the planetary influences on the formation of the fetus and its temperaments, nature’s production of monsters, and spontaneous generation.

Lochrie draws from Foucault’s emphasis on the performance of secrecy to argue that the secrets about the female body so often disclosed in this genre of literature must be analyzed not simply as the content of the discourse, but “repositioned back into the discourse” that produces it, conceals it, and reveals it.²⁰¹ This maneuver allows us to

edition. There has been no scholarly consensus as to which of the surviving manuscripts is the oldest, but the contenders for this title have been provisionally dated c. 1300; see Bildhauer (2006), 176 n. 37. Lemay’s English translation of most of the text and selections of its commentaries (1992) is based on two sixteenth-century manuscript prints: the Venice, 1508 edition (contains commentary B) and the Lyons, 1580 edition (contains commentary A). Lemay sees her translation as “a working text of the *De secretis mulierum*” and calls for closer textual analysis of the manuscripts. Lemay has “corrected” unclear passages in the Latin text of the 1580 edition by referring to other manuscripts,” and indicates such correction in her notes (2). I have consulted *De secretis mulierum et virorum*. Argentine: Mathiam Hüpfuff, 1510. National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland (contains commentary A) and *De secretis mulierum cum commento*. Venice: Petri Bergomatis, 1508. New York Academy of Medicine Library (contains commentary B). Unless otherwise noted, citations of Pseudo-Albertus are taken from the Argentine, 1510, edition, which corresponds more closely to the Lyons, 1580, edition Lemay uses for her translation. English translations of *DSM* and its commentaries in this chapter are Lemay’s, emended where noted.

²⁰⁰ Green (2000), 14-15.

²⁰¹ Lochrie (1999), 41.

consider how the female body is made to materialize monstrous qualities by systems of power claiming knowledge of its corporeal signs, how these monstrous qualities are marked as secrets, and how these monstrous secrets become a commodity to be dispensed within these same systems of power. This repositioning of the secrets of female flesh into the discursive systems that mark female flesh as a subject of secrecy opens up possibilities for analyzing the multiple layers of inscription, interpretation, and dissemination of the monstrous female body that make up the process of secrecy. This methodology proves particularly fruitful for uncovering how the preservation and transgression of boundaries function in *DSM*'s performance of secrecy.

Secrecy creates and reinforces boundaries between the one who possesses the secret knowledge and those who do not. The demarcation of these boundaries, as Lochrie observes, “ensures the value—the capital—of ... knowledge, rendering it esoteric, dangerous, and desirable because it is secret.”²⁰² Within the textual economy of *DSM*, these take shape between writer and readers, as well as between the “object” being read (i.e. the female body) and the informed reader (i.e. Pseudo-Albertus). *DSM* is dedicated to “a beloved cleric and comrade in Christ,” who had requested that Pseudo-Albertus “bring to light [*lucidius manifestare*] certain hidden, secret things [*occulta et secreta*] about the nature of women.”²⁰³ Pseudo-Albertus sets out to do just this, he writes, in a style “partly philosophical, partly medical, according to the material.” The dangerous and desirable content of these “secret things” about women likely satisfied not only

²⁰² Lochrie (1999), 95.

²⁰³ *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 59: *Dilecto sibi in christo socio et amico. N. clerico de tali loco: vere sapientie et augmentum continuum vite presentis. Cum vestra favorabilis et gravita me rogavit societas. ut quaedam dicantur a nobis de his que apud mulierum naturam et conditionem sunt occulta et secreta lucidius manifestare.* I have preserved the spelling and punctuation, but expanded the abbreviations in the Argentine, 1510, and Venice, 1508, editions.

“philosophical,” but prurient curiosities of male monastic readers.²⁰⁴ Pseudo-Albertus’ request that his treatise not fall into the hands of “any child, either in age or in morals” both draws his intended readers within the boundaries of those who are deemed worthy of possessing these secrets, and enhances the attractiveness of the material by betraying his awareness of its potentially titillating effect.²⁰⁵ Two commentaries (A and B) which were transmitted in many manuscripts and most printed editions of *DSM* contribute secret material to the text, but they are also internal readers. By making the function of readership more visible (more *readable*), these commentaries underscore the significance of readership in textual performances of secrecy. But perhaps more importantly, the dissemination of these commentaries vex the boundaries between the master-author and the student-reader insofar as their contributions to the text itself make it difficult to distinguish definitively between what secrets things about the nature of women were originally communicated by the master and what secret things were supplemented by the students.²⁰⁶ The commentators are readers made writers who have introduced themselves into the process of disclosure. They may not be the master-author, but they are not, or are no longer, ignorant student-readers. Lemay incorporates portions of both commentaries in her translation of *DSM* (1992) in order to “further illustrate ideas about women’s

²⁰⁴ As Monica Green has shown, late-medieval monastic culture played an important role in the transmission of gynecological texts. Although she believes that this literature was being used, she grants that “we cannot tell if ‘used’ means to satiate monkish curiosity about female nature or to serve as the basis of real medical practice” (Green [1985], 202). Thomas of Cantimpré, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and Vital du Four, all of whom were affiliated with the Dominican order, wrote about gynecological matters (Lemay [1992], 7-8).

²⁰⁵ *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 59: *Ne alicui puero tam in etate quam in moribus ad presentiam deveniant.*

²⁰⁶ Lemay (1992) notes that there is confusion in some *DSM* manuscripts between the text and the commentary: “For example, the MS Paris B.N. lat 7148, which does not contain a formal commentary, nevertheless incorporates into the text material that is printed as part of Commentary B” (2).

‘secrets’ current among some thirteenth and fourteenth-century clerics.”²⁰⁷ Some of these ideas communicated in the commentators’ references, anecdotes, and elaborations, especially about the dangers that the female body poses to men, proved just as influential as the secrets communicated by Pseudo-Albertus. Indeed, the most misogynist material disseminated by way of *DSM*—concerning the corruptive powers of menstrual fluid—is much more prevalent in the commentaries than in (what appears to be) the text itself. According to Commentator A, *DSM* was written for two reasons: to provide confessors with information about how to treat women’s infirmities (this, despite the text’s overall lack of gynecological therapies) and to aid confessors in assigning suitable penance to women for their sins (the nature of such sins remains at this point unspoken). Illustrating what Lochrie has called the “slippage of secrecy’s reference ... characteristic of this treatise and its commentaries,” Commentator A promptly identifies a further “moving cause” for *DSM*’s promulgation:

... a certain priest ... asked Albert if he would write for him a book on the secrets of women. The reason for this is that women are full of venom in the time of their menstruation and so they poison another person by their glance; they infect children in the cradle; they spot the cleanest mirror; and whenever men have sexual intercourse with them they are made leprous and sometimes cancerous. And because an evil cannot be avoided unless it is known, those who wish to avoid it must recognize and abstain from this unclean coitus, and from many other things which are taught in this book.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Lemay (1992), 2-3. Lemay bases her translation of commentary A on the Lyons, 1580, edition and commentary B on the Venice, 1508, edition.

²⁰⁸ *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 59-60, translation emended: ... *quidam sacerdos qui rogavit dominum Albertum ut sibi scriberet librum De secretis mulierum. ideo quia mulieres sunt tempore menstrui venenose itaque intoxicant alium per visum et inficiunt pueros in cunis. et maculant speculum bene tersum. Et quandoque faciunt coeuntem cum ipsis leprosum fieri. quandoque cancrosum. quia malum non evitatur nisi cognitum. ideo necesse est se volentibus abstinere et cognoscere immundiciam coitus et multa alia que docentur in ipso libro.*

Secrets of this nature were among those most commonly adopted in other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century misogynist literature, including the important *Malleus Maleficarum*, an inquisitorial treatise on witches which Lemay has demonstrated drew largely upon the secrets of Pseudo-Albertus' commentators in order to corroborate claims about the venomous nature of women.²⁰⁹ Thus the dissemination of the most dangerous and therefore desirable secrets proved to be the most potent for the multiplication of discourse, both within and beyond the boundaries of the text. We can see, therefore, how Pseudo-Albertus' warnings about the potential dangers involved in the dissemination of secrets are simultaneously seductions that draw the student-reader into the performance; secrecy "impassions the acts of writing and reading."²¹⁰

In addition to forging a boundary between the (male) writer of secrets and the (male) readers of secrets, the medieval discourse of secrecy surrounded knowledge with an air of mystery to create a hierarchical boundary between the object of the secret and those who share it, those who *are* the secret and those who *have* it.²¹¹ In *DSM*, women's bodies *are* the secret, and especially the material that hides within the boundaries of women's bodies which Pseudo-Albertus promises to "bring to light." In one of the most intensely emotional passages of his text, Pseudo-Albertus addresses his readers directly to warn them about one of the most dangerous secrets of women. Under certain phases of the moon, he explains, the already humid male member swells with increased "humidity" so that it becomes particularly vulnerable to sharp objects. Certain evil women, he

²⁰⁹ Lemay (1992), 49-58.

²¹⁰ Lochrie (1999), 96.

²¹¹ Lochrie (1999), 123.

writes, though ignorant about these laws of nature, take advantage of this vulnerability in male flesh:

O my companions you should be aware that although certain women are unaware of the cause of this matter, nevertheless certain women are familiar with the effect, and they work many evils as a result from this. For when a man is having sexual intercourse with these women, a large wound and serious infection of the penis occurs because of iron that has been placed in the vagina by them, for some women or harlots are instructed in this and other similar ill deeds.²¹²

Here, women are not characterized as the possessors of secret knowledge, of the so-called cause of male vulnerability during certain times of the month. These are not secrets *belonging* to women. In the title, *De secretis mulierum*, the genitive *mulierum* cannot be said to function possessively since the male writers, commentators, and readers of these texts are in the process of disseminating or acquiring possession of secrets about which women are said to be ignorant. There is a boundary drawn and reinforced between the male knower of secrets and the female who embodies the secrets; and there is also a boundary between the female subject and her own female secrets. Evil women may know the means of their ill deeds, but not the cause by which they occur.

In her study of the transmission of late-medieval “secrets” literature, Monica Green theorizes that the principal imagined audience of gynecological texts shifted in the thirteenth century from women to men, and that it was “*men’s* perspective on women’s

²¹² *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 88, translation emended: *Sciatis autem socii mei quamvis quedam mulieres causam rei huius ignorant. tamen quedam mulieres effectum cognoscunt: et plura mala ex isto operantur: Ut cum vir est in coitu cum ipsis: accidit quandoque viris magna lesio et gravis infectio ex infectione membri virilis per ferrum appositum per eas. prout quedam mulieres vel meretrices docte sunt in illa nequitia et in aliis similibus.*

bodies that rendered the topic ‘secret.’”²¹³ Within this developing genre of gynecological secrets, then, women’s secrets are not secrets *for* women (an objective sense of the genitive *mulierum*), even if, according to Green, they once were. These books of secrets were called ‘secrets *of women*’ because, “from the male perspective, women are a distinctive category only in the sense that they represent sexuality and generation.”²¹⁴ This close relationship between gynecology and late-medieval “secrets” literature demonstrates the “gendered interests” of the genre, and the gendered boundary between masculinized knowing subjects and feminized objects of knowing.²¹⁵ Yet Pseudo-Albertus’ emotional warning about women who have been “instructed” in “ill deeds,” presumably by other women, provides another instance of “the slippage of secrecy’s reference,” but this slipperiness occurs across the hierarchical boundary between master-author (Pseudo-Albertus and his informed pupils) and the object-text (female corporeality). Women may not be granted the possession of their own secret meanings, but *DSM* is consistently concerned about the risks posed by secret female knowledge.

Green notes that the medieval vocabulary of secrets “did not enshroud women’s bodies with a protective barrier to the male gaze,” but advertised the female body as an

²¹³ Green (2000), 12, italics in original. Green describes three ways in which the transmission of gynecological information changed beginning in the thirteenth century: juxtaposition, adaptation, and renaming. Gynecological texts began to be juxtaposed with texts on human reproduction in medieval manuscripts. Translations of earlier gynecological texts began to incorporate material from more contemporary misogynist literature, especially about the dangers of menstrual fluid. Finally, “[b]y the fifteenth century, the association between gynecology and generation had become so strong that interpreting gynecological texts as compendia of ‘women’s secrets’ became an automatic reflex” (25). The highly popular *Trotula* texts, which many scholars—including Green herself—believe to have been written by women for women, began in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to be renamed with the vocabulary of secrets (25).

²¹⁴ Green (2000), 18.

²¹⁵ Lochrie (1999), 97, 107. See Keller (1992), 40.

object to be opened, scrutinized, and then displayed to men.²¹⁶ The hierarchical boundary between male possessors of secrets and the female materializations of those secrets thus depends on the penetration of the boundaries of the female body. Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators found within these breached corporeal boundaries secret things whose instability and deceptiveness vex the definitive hierarchical boundary between the bodies that *are* the secret and the bodies that *have* the secret. As *DSM* progresses and the commentators' monitions about female bodily fluids increase in number and rhetorical insistency, the female body boundaries that they have opened up to "bring to light" through masculine technologies of knowing—natural philosophy, academic gynecology, Aristotelian laws of human generation—the "hidden, secret things" of the female body seem rather to resist that light of knowledge and wield a certain epistemologically impenetrable power over the male writers and readers who would transform their secrets into text. Although Lochrie is concerned with the methods by which secrecy is inherently destabilized because of its dependence on disclosure, she does not consider how the female body—its anatomical and physiological secrets as designated and disclosed by the discursive regimes of Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators—troubles those very boundaries on which their identification as material secrets depends. These slippages that occur as secrets are designated, procured, and disseminated, highlight the discursive performance of secrecy, the process, that is, whereby a secret is read as secret "in order to be fixed, controlled, neutralized, and ultimately recuperated by masculine authority, or mastery."²¹⁷ It is not only secrecy that is a process masquerading as fact, but

²¹⁶ Green (2000), 7.

²¹⁷ Lochrie (1999), 131.

monstrosity itself. The destructive power of the monster, writes Jeffrey Cohen, “is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process rather than in fact (and that “fact” is subject to constant renegotiation and change).”²¹⁸

There are, then, multiple layers of reading at work in *DSM*, and thus in this chapter. This chapter presents the secrets of women as read and disclosed in *DSM*, a task that requires analysis of the discursive systems—medical, philosophical, gynecological, astrological—employed by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators to build and support their readings. This first level of reading, in other words, brings to light the process whereby female corporeality is designated as a (secretive) sign system that embodies medieval discursive formulations of monstrosity. Although Pseudo-Albertus juxtaposes philosophical and medical subject matter in his preface, *DSM* is a testament to how closely the disciplines it cites, brought together under the heading of science, were related in this period, and how readily they could be called upon to substantiate secret things about the female nature. The “medical” material in *DSM* is explicated in philosophical terms, so that, for example, uterine suffocation is presented as a phenomenon of nature, an “accident” of the womb rather than an ailment to be diagnosed and treated; the formation of the fetus is presented as an astrological subject.²¹⁹ The conscious employment of references and citations to authorities within these discursive traditions underscores the textuality of medieval secrecy in *DSM*, specifically the hermeneutic loop whereby the secrets of the female body are designated and then discovered by these discursive regimes. Commentators A and B consistently cite the texts of Avicenna,

²¹⁸ Cohen (1996), 14-15.

²¹⁹ Lemay (1992), 6.

Averroës, and, most often, Aristotle.²²⁰ So many of the citations in the text are incorrect, however, that Lemay considers false attribution “a definitive characteristic of the *Secrets*.”²²¹ Spurious references occur most often to substantiate assertions about the corrupting powers of menstrual fluid. Pseudo-Albertus, and (most often) his commentators become, therefore, mis-readers of the very discursive frameworks they use to structure their own readings, chronically so at the points when the secrets of the female body are most threatening, and, I suggest, most resistant to *DSM*’s own methods of reading.

The second layer of reading is concerned with such mis-readings, mis-attributions, and contradictions that constitute the fissures in *DSM*’s reading of women’s secrets. The unstable borders, leaky fluids, and corrupting powers of female corporeality evince the monstrosity inscribed by the discursive systems of power cited in *DSM*, but this monstrosity—these boundary violations—extends beyond the economy of female corporeality to vex the very epistemological and ontological frameworks structuring the text. Pseudo-Albertus’ injunction to reveal the secret things about female nature requires that the female body be readable, that its signs be interpretable by those who possess knowledge about how it signifies. Yet, in the process of disclosing secrets about women and clarifying obscure female anatomical structures and physiological processes, *DSM* fails to define a female body that fully defers to its own claims or accommodates its own readings. So, the secrets of women seem to recede further into the depths of the body rather than translate into the academic vocabulary of Pseudo-Albertus and his

²²⁰ Although Avicenna and Averroës are generally cited as medical authorities, Pseudo-Albertus “chooses their metaphysical and not their medical works” (Lemay [1992], 18).

²²¹ Lemay (1992), 18.

commentators. The permeable corporeal borders and problematic bodily fluids that make up the semantic field of the female body, as constructed by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators, therefore trouble *DSM*'s own objective. The virgin female body, the menstruating female body, the copulating female body, the sick female body, and the gestating female body—these are secretive bodies that make up *DSM*'s body of knowledge, but a wily body of knowledge it proves to be. Thus the secrets in this treatise spectacularly evince the medico-philosophical inscription of monstrosity in the female body; but the medico-philosophical act of reading that underpins *DSM* finds cryptic those inscribed signs of monstrosity. This second layer of reading is therefore attuned to the disintegration of the first layer.

Thirdly, this chapter posits why the monstrous signs of the female body prove resistant to the project of corporeal reading in this text. The third layer of reading is directed towards diagnosing why *DSM*'s technologies of secrecy become entangled. Monica Green finds the instability of secrecy's reference and thus the instability of the hierarchical boundary between the bodies that *are* the secret and the bodies that *possess* the secret rooted in the textual processes by which this "secrets" literature about the reproductive functions of the female body developed. What were once the secrets women kept from men and shared with each other became the secrets men designated in women and transmitted to men. Karma Lochrie identifies this instability within *DSM* as a symptom of "the deliberate mystification of its contents," and stresses that the performance of secrecy is more important than the secrets themselves.²²² That *DSM* never makes clear the precise nature of its secrets is a strategy of "deliberate

²²² Lochrie (1999), 129.

mystification.” Both hypotheses, the one attuned to the historical construction of secrecy literature and the other concerned with the function of secrecy within masculine systems of power and knowledge in the Middle Ages, are certainly accurate. But I would like to suggest another reason for the slipperiness of secrecy’s reference in *DSM* that relates directly to the content of secrecy, namely the unstable borders and leaky fluids of the reproductive female body. Lochrie refers to the content of secrecy as “dark matter,” a “most un-matter-like” stuff that, in the discourses of physics and astronomy, “occupies the invisible realm of physical properties.”²²³ Yet, as Bettina Bildhauer notes in connection with the truth-producing values of blood in the Middle Ages, the secrets of *DSM* and its commentaries are “indeed material.”²²⁴ They are the secrets of female flesh and blood. The darkest secrets lingering unacknowledged—and thus preserving their power to destabilize what is spoken—in *DSM* bear upon the processes of human reproduction, which is itself a monstrous “rebuke to boundary and enclosure.”²²⁵ Opened up, the reproductive female body discloses the secrets of the dark and viscous origins of human flesh, secrets that can only be uttered through the language of teratological alterity.

Part Two: The Semiotics of Virginity

Among all of the subjects treated in *DSM*, virginity is situated most conspicuously within a semantic framework. The secrets of virginity become legible under two groups of signs

²²³ Lochrie (1999), 1.

²²⁴ Bildhauer (2006), 32.

²²⁵ Cohen (1996), 7.

[*signa*]: the signs of virginity [*castitas*] and the signs of virginity [*virginitas*]

“corrupted.”²²⁶ This observation communicates several significant facts about the virgin body as a site of reading. First, the signs about the sexual experience of the female body can and should be noted. Second, these signs are legible, if only by those who have been instructed in the proper exegetical method. Third, these signs are legible in the observable surfaces of the female body: some are detectable in a woman’s face, while others require inspection of the orifices and excretions of the body. Unlike the female subject who might keep these secrets from father, husband, and lover, the female body confesses to the informed reader. Finally, some of these signs are less reliable than others, liable to be misread or capable of being feigned; in other words, the signs of virginity preserved, lost, or performed tend to resist conformation to *DSM*’s hermeneutics, thereby exemplifying the interpretive challenges of the project, and destabilizing the hierarchical boundary between corporeal text and reader. This is not a problem confined to Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators. We may infer from the rich legacy of virginity codification—one that spanned medical, religious, and literary discourses for well over a thousand years before the writing of *DSM*—that the “hidden, secret things” about female virginity prove particularly resistant to verification. In her

²²⁶ *DSM* 9-10, Lemay (1992), 126, 128. Although chastity was often distinguished from virginity in post-medieval periods—the former being a state of the soul and the latter a state of the body—Pseudo-Albertus uses both words to mean the physical state of a female who has not experienced sexual intercourse by penetration. That being the case, he chooses *castitas* when describing sexual inexperience (“On the signs of *chastity*”) and *virginitas* when describing the signs indicative of sexual experience (“On the signs that *virginity* has been corrupted”). This usage seems to suggest that the terms are not entirely equivalent. Commentator B distinguishes two senses of *virginitas*; one is “corrupted” by the experience of penile penetration, the other by the emission of female seed. Lemay (1992), 67. Within Christian religious discourses, negotiations of these terms extended beyond considerations about whether sexual purity was to be understood spiritually or physically: “Depending on the context, the patristic authors and their later commentators who use the terms *castitas* and *virginitas* may be referring either to one’s never having experienced coitus (that is, a ‘virgin’ in one, purely physical, sense); or to an individual’s commitment to the celibate religious life (regardless of whether or not that individual was single, married, or widowed); or to sexual faithfulness in a monogamous marriage” (Kelly [2000], 3).

recent book on this legacy and its medieval reception Kathleen Coyne Kelly argues that “[b]y interrogating the very systems that are predicated upon its verifiability, virginity defies close scrutiny and resists definition.”²²⁷ Medieval virginity tests, which differed in accordance to the exigencies of the genre of literature in which they appeared, manage to interrogate the very discourse that aims to examine virginity, and these tests thereby interrogate the very readability of the female body on which it depends.

Spiritual signs /corporeal signs

Methodologies of virginity verification in medical, religious, and imaginative literature rarely overlapped. In general, the medical tradition focused on the physical signs of virginity, those that could be read, for example, in the status of the uterus, the appearance of blood, or the transparency of urine. Religious discourses tended to emphasize “spiritual” virginity, and warn against privileging the integrity of the mortal body over the purity of the immortal soul. Virginity tests in imaginative literature often took the form of public ordeals.²²⁸ Because Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators class *DSM* as a treatise of medical and natural philosophy, they privilege corporeal virginity and the means of validating it germane to the medical tradition. Indeed, Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators consider possible non-corporeal signs of virginity and virginity corrupted, but only in order to dismiss them as unreliable in comparison to the corporeal signs privileged by the medical discursive tradition. There are, indeed, better and worse methodologies for reading female flesh.

²²⁷ Kelly (2000), 13.

²²⁸ See Kelly (2000), 63-91.

Before turning to the corporeal signs of virginity, Pseudo-Albertus identifies some signs of virginity that were favored among patristic writers and their commentators: shame, modesty, fear, a chaste gait and speech, casting down eyes before men and the acts of men.²²⁹ This gesture toward the signs of what writers such as Tertullian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine valued as indicative of “true” virginity, a state of spiritual purity rather than a strictly physical state, may represent Pseudo-Albertus’ acknowledgement of the religious environment in which his preface claims *DSM* was written. He and his commentators (as the remainder of their virginity tests bears out) are concerned with virgin anatomy and its validation by medical means, though broadly conceived. When Pseudo-Albertus quickly dismisses these signs generally associated with “spiritual” virginity on the grounds that “clever women” can feign them, he communicates to his readers that corporeal signs are less vulnerable to manipulation, and thus more transparently legible, than the signs of virginity privileged by those who would read this status of the female body as morally or religiously significant. He thereby invests in the flesh a constancy that the patristic writers insisted it could not abide, even though these signs of spiritual virginity are inextricable from the visible body. A woman’s comportment—her acts of piety, gestures, modest dress, observable obedience to fathers and confessors—these signs may not have been rooted in the mortal body, but they nevertheless required that the body communicate truths about the integrity of the soul. It is this transparency of the flesh that Pseudo-Albertus doubts when he warns that clever women can manufacture blushes of shame, choreograph bodily comportment, and force downcast eyes; yet Pseudo-Albertus simultaneously invests in the language of the

²²⁹ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 128. *Signa castitatis sunt hec: pudor: verecundia: timor cum casto incessu et loquela: et cum despectu applicant se viris et virorum actibus.*

body under the supposition that it speaks for itself free from the possibility of the ventriloquism of clever women.

This ambivalent position is one that Kelly finds endemic to methodologies of virginity verification in religious, medical, and courtly discursive communities. The precarious relationship between the virgin body and the virgin soul had fueled a relatively constant effort to articulate and rearticulate the definition of virginity, the vulnerabilities of virginity, and the proof of virginity lost among the patristic writers. If, as was commonly asserted, the state of virginity resided in the meditations and dispositions of the soul, it followed that virginity could be corrupted by failure to perform the acts and identifications that produced this spiritual state. “Virgins of the spirit,” Jerome (d.420) warned in his letter to the virgin Eustochium, “can cease to be virgins through a single thought.”²³⁰ Tertullian (ca.160-235) insisted that virgins be veiled in church on the grounds that under the gaze of fellow church-goers, a virgin “wholly ceases to be a virgin to herself; she has been made something else!”²³¹ A virgin without a veil destabilized neat sexual categories and vexed headship customs so that Tertullian knows not what to call her, “unless a virgin is some monstrous third sex [*tertium genus monstruosum*] without a head.”²³² The gaze of others might not alter the corporeality of the virgin, but this exposure of the surface of her body nevertheless changes her, and Tertullian expresses this change in the language of the body deformed, made monstrous—as it

²³⁰ Jerome, *Epistola* 22.

²³¹ Tertullian *De virginibus velandis* 3.5: *Denudasti puellam a capite, et tota jam virgo sibi non est: alia est facta.*

²³² Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 7.1: *Si caput mulieris vir est, utique et virginis, de qua sit mulier illa quae nupsit nisi virgo, tertium genus est monstruosum aliquid sui capitis.*

were, all body—by the lack of a supervising head, understood by Tertullian as a (male) guardian of her body.

Patristic opinions about virginity tests also evince this problematic relationship between corporeal and spiritual signs of virginity. Physical tests, where inspection of the genitals is meant, are thoroughly condemned as misdirected and inconclusive. “The virgin of the Lord,” writes Ambrose (d.397), “is weighed on her own scales in giving proof of herself ... And no inspection of hidden and secret parts [*obditorum occultorumque*], but modesty, evident to all, gives proof of her integrity.”²³³ The secrets of women, Ambrose insists, are not to be read in the morphology of her genitals, but it the signs most “evident,” by which he seems to mean the stylizations of dress and comportment Pseudo-Albertus dismisses as unreliable. In a letter to the bishop of Verona, Ambrose criticizes the manual examinations of Christian virgins by midwives on the grounds that such practices brought shame to the office of virginity and were scientifically unsound, objections that do not so much discredit the inherent truths of the virgin body as voice concerns about the effect of such exams on the fragile character of women unaccustomed to such corporeal manipulations. Manual exams, moreover, are not conclusive, liable as they are to misread the body parts over which they claim semantic jurisdiction. Yet even worse, Ambrose continues, manual examinations “might not only lead to temptation, but, horrible to say, provoke the very catastrophe whose occurrence it pretended to ascertain.”²³⁴ Augustine (354-430) also criticized the practice of submitting women to such exams; but, like Ambrose, he betrays some ambivalence

²³³ Ambrose, *Letter to Syagrius*, *Epistola* 5, *PL* 16. Cited in Kelly (2000), 34.

²³⁴ Ambrose, *Letter to Syagrius*, *Epistola* 5, *PL* 16, cols. 891-898. Cited by Sissa (1990a), 172.

about the nature of the virginity that the practice endangered. In *De Civitate Dei*, he tells how “a midwife, as she investigated the integrity [*integritas*] of a certain virgin, destroyed it either by ill intent or clumsiness or accident during examination.”²³⁵ Manual exams might be objectionable on several grounds, but the nearly unspeakable possibility (“horrible to say”) that the very signs they sought to verify—and here we must assume that these signs were corporeal—might be destroyed by the midwife’s touch demonstrates that the relationship between a woman’s genitals and her purity was not to be discounted.

Ambrose’s ambivalent views about the nature of virginity become consequential to his mariology.²³⁶ Despite his emphasis on virginity of the spirit, the significance of the physical integrity of the virgin body can be read in Ambrose’s arguments, against other theologians of the period, that neither conception nor birth had altered the condition of Mary’s body. In his *De institutione virginis*, he meditates on the meaning of the shut gate through which the God of Israel is said to enter in Ezekiel 44.2:

What can this gate be if not the Virgin Mary, a gate that is closed because of its virginity? Mary is the gate through which Christ entered the world, in a virginal birth, without undoing the genital locks. The hedge of modesty remained intact and the seals of virginity were preserved unbreached.²³⁷

Mary’s sealed genital locks were not only the signs of her modesty, but also of her sexual inexperience, and, in the wider context of Ambrose’s writings about Mary’s body and the incarnation, “stood for all that was unbroken and sacred in the world,” including the

²³⁵ *De Civitate Dei* 1.18.

²³⁶ See Brown (1988), 352-357.

²³⁷ Ambrose, *De institutione virginis*, PL 16, col. 319; See Sissa (1990a), 173-4; Brown (1988), 353-356.

boundaries of the early Church.²³⁸ Concern with Mary's seals of virginity was not of course specific to Ambrose or his contemporaries. In the second-century *Gospel of James*, the status of Mary's genitals come under a scrutiny that bridges the theological and medical constructions of the virgin body. In this tale of the nativity, Salome doubts that Mary's body has remained intact after Christ's birth. A manual exam, she claims, will divulge the definitive signs of virginity: "As the Lord my God lives, if I do not insert my finger and examine her condition," Salome dares to assert, "I will not believe that the virgin has given birth."²³⁹ The female foil to doubting Thomas who verified with his finger the penetrations incurred by Christ's crucified body, Salome tests with her finger that the mother of God's body has suffered no breach at all.²⁴⁰ In the version of this tale that appears in the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*, Salome's hand shrivels when she dares touch Mary's genitals, but is restored when she holds the baby Christ in her arms and swears to doubt never again. Jacobus de Voragine makes Salome a midwife who was summoned along with another midwife, Zebel, by Joseph "not that he doubted the Virgin would bring forth the Son of God, but that he was following the custom of the country."²⁴¹ Zebel probed around and realized that Mary had remained intact, even if it wasn't her intent to do so. If virginity was a matter of the spirit, it was nevertheless verifiable in corporeal signs, and even the mother of God was bound by the exigencies of this semantic system.

²³⁸ Brown (1988), 354.

²³⁹ Hock (1995), ch.19.

²⁴⁰ John 20: 24-29.

²⁴¹ de Voragine I (1993), 38.

Patristic writers may have given precedence to spiritual virginity, but they could not dismiss the significance of the integrity situated in the “hidden and secret parts” [*obditorum occultorumque*] of the female body.²⁴² It was the relationship between the two—the virgin spirit and the virgin body—that remained ambiguous, and this ambiguity became more pronounced in negotiations of virginity in the medieval period.²⁴³ Kelly writes that “[b]y defining virginity as an abstraction greater than the sum of its body parts, patristic writers and their later commentators were able to reconfigure the boundaries of the physical body, extending the ‘space’ of the virgin body into ecclesiastical space.” We might infer from the many efforts of the patristic writers to codify and recodify sexual purity that spiritual virginity tended to escape their formalizations despite the fact that its signs were prescribed, identified, and reinforced under the discursive domain of the early church. Despite the persistent codification of spiritual virginity by the voices of this discursive domain, or “perhaps *because* of it,” as Kelly adds, there remained a marked impulse “to return to the body as the site of the burden of proof.”²⁴⁴ This return to the body, this materialization of virginity despite protestations of the body’s deceptive semiotics, may have been even more consequential for late-medieval representations of the virgin body in gynecological literature than the medicalized representations of the virgin body in writers like Hippocrates, Aristotle,

²⁴² Ambrose, *Letter to Syagrius*, *Epistola* 5, *PL* 16. Cited by Kelly (2000), 34.

²⁴³ Both Jerome and Ambrose clearly valued virginity in a strictly physical sense, but acknowledged that physical virginity was meaningless without spiritual purity. Metaphor preserved this significance by identifying the virgin body with closed and sealed structures. See Brown (1988), 341-386.

²⁴⁴ Kelly (2000), 38.

Galen, and Soranus who, as I discuss below, were much more ambivalent about the sealed virgin body.²⁴⁵

Having dismissed the semiotics of virginity privileged by the patristic testing tradition, Pseudo-Albertus makes just such a turn to the body. In those cases where women might counterfeit virginity through modest gestures or speech, he writes, “a man should turn to their urine.”²⁴⁶ This turn toward signs associated with the female genitals and effluvia bespeaks *DSM*’s claim on the semantic field of the female body and the secrets buried therein, while simultaneously staking a claim about the deceptive nature of this semantic field. The account of urinalysis as a method of testing virginity leads Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators further into the ambiguities of female corporeality understood as readable text since urinalysis is directly dependent on the morphology of the female genitals and the alteration of that morphology that accompanies penile penetration. The signs of virginity continue to resist *DSM*’s decoding, even when Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators are armed with authoritative accounts of medicalized female bodies stretching back to those textualized in the Hippocratic corpus. This resistance persists despite *DSM*’s location of the semantic field of virginity within a corporeality under its own jurisdiction—the (medicalized) female body. This resistance becomes visible in the proliferation of tests said to disclose a wide range of, often ambiguous, signs, which as a group suggest that the female body finds ways to keep its secrets about virginity of the flesh. It is to these corporeal signs that we now turn.

²⁴⁵ Sissa (1990b), 357-361.

²⁴⁶ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 128. *Sed quaedam ita astute inveniuntur quae omnibus istis obviare sciunt: et tunc homo habet se convertere ad urinam.*

Virgin morphologies

As a method of virginity testing, urinalysis is exclusive to the medical tradition, but relatively uncommon. When medieval medical and scientific treatises prescribe urinalysis, it is generally to diagnose urinary or menstrual troubles rather than to verify virginity. The signs that urine divulged were considered more valuable for discerning pathology than sexual experience.²⁴⁷ But Pseudo-Albertus lists urinalysis first among several methods of virginity verification: a virgin's urine is clear, while the urine of a "corrupted" woman is muddy [*turbidam*].²⁴⁸ This difference in the quality of female urine, he writes, stems from two causes. First, in women who have experienced intercourse, "a certain skin [*pellicula*] in between the vagina [*vulva*] and bladder [*vesica*]" is broken.²⁴⁹ Second, "male sperm appears at the bottom of this urine [voided by a corrupted woman]."²⁵⁰ Pseudo-Albertus does not specify whether both signs should

²⁴⁷ Lastique and Lemay (1991), 63-4.

²⁴⁸ *DSM 10*, Lemay (1992), 128: ... *quia urina virginum est clara et lucida: quandocumque alba: quandocumque glauca ... Corrupte enim mulieres habent urinam turbidam per fracturam pellicule praecedentis: et sperma viri apparet in fundo urine talis mulieris*. For urinalysis and virginity testing, see Kelly (2000), 28-30; Lastique and Lemay (1991), 61-63; Jaquart and Thomasset (1988), 45.

²⁴⁹ *DSM 9*, Lemay (1992), 127, translation emended: ... *quaedam pellicula inter vulvam et vesicam rumpitur ...* (Lemay's text reads "a certain skin in the vagina and bladder"). The term *vulva* was not used by medieval writers to refer to the specific part of the female anatomy that the word signifies today. From late antiquity throughout the medieval period, the term covered "a vague semantic field." It was used "to designate either the woman's external genital apparatus taken as a whole, or, in the work of certain writers, more specifically the womb" (Jaquart and Thomasset [1988], 24). In his account of fetal formation under the astrological influence of Venus, Pseudo-Albertus glosses *pudenda* with the word *vulva*, but he elsewhere uses only the word *vulva* to refer sometimes to the vulva and sometimes to the vagina (*DSM 2*, Lemay [1992], 85). Commentator A offers an etymological definition of *vulva*, but without great clarifying effect: "the vulva is named from the word *valva* [folding door] because it is the door of the womb, and the extreme part of the vulva is called the 'membrane' because the 'member' of the anus is the end of the vulva" (Nota vulva dicitur quasi valva quod est ianua ventris. et eius ultima pars dicitur membrana quasi membrum ani id est finis vulve) (*DSM 1*, Lemay [1992], 66). Lemay translates *vulva* with 'vulva' or 'vagina,' depending on the context. I have preserved her translations, but supplied the Latin, *vulva*, in brackets in order to mark rather than mask this conflation of terms.

²⁵⁰ *DSM 9*, Lemay (1992), 127-128: ... *et sperma viri apparet in fundo urine talis mulieris*.

be visible in any given instance of corrupted virginity, or if one of the two signs is sufficient for determining that intercourse has occurred. This first set of corporeal signs germane to virginity verification provokes us to consider how this semiotic system draws from the discursive systems that inform *DSM* and its commentaries. How does the history of gynecology inform the epistemological systems of this text? The history of gynecology is also a history of the masculine designation and recuperation of secrets whereby the hidden things of female corporeality germane to reproductive health and sickness are brought to light.²⁵¹ Pseudo-Albertus' location of women's secrets in this *pellicula* and the effects of its rupture on the appearance of urine may not be a direct representation of classical truths, but the characterization of the surface and effluvia of the female body as a site of reading is a product of the history of gynecological methodologies. Human dissection was not among the technologies of knowledge employed by Hippocrates, Galen, and Soranus. Theories of female anatomy on which "[gynecological] therapies were based," therefore, "came from deducing the inside from outside manifestations, connecting bodily events by means of analogy and assumptions."²⁵² The history of gynecology is thus a history of the semiotics of female corporeality.

The precise location of the *pellicula* that Pseudo-Albertus identifies in the virginal genitals must be gathered indirectly from other references to genital morphology in *DSM* and citations of Classical and Arabic accounts of female corporeality, defloration, and menstrual ailments. Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators draw from these established

²⁵¹ Lochrie (1999), 133; see also Kapsalis (1997).

²⁵² King (1998a), 37. For the practices of what King calls "accidental anatomy"—for example, the inspection of female parts when they became abnormally visible (such as when the womb prolapsed during childbirth), and analogies to animal anatomy—see King (1998a), 37-38.

gynecological models, but they simultaneously depend on mis-readings, insinuations, conflicts, and absences in these models to craft the virgin body so that it becomes a site of overlapping, sometimes illegible inscriptions. The unstable textual construction of the virgin genitals, as we shall see, is embodied in this *pellicula* on which this first set of virginity tests depend. The location of this “skin in between the vagina and the bladder,” as Pseudo-Albertus ambiguously describes it, raises more questions about the anatomy of the virgin body than it answers.

We can assume from Pseudo-Albertus’s assertions about the relationship between the intact *pellicula* and the methodologies of urinalysis for the purposes of virginity verification that the breaking of this skin visibly alters the makeup of urine. Even if the precise structure signified by the term *pellicula* remains obscure, its status generates a series of more legible signs located, moreover, in female effluvia (urine) rather than female flesh so that the semiotics of virginity become detachable from the body, more readily subject to analysis, less potentially threatening to female modesty (and perhaps virginity itself), and transferable among the men who want to know. Intercourse also changes the appearance of female urine because it becomes clouded by male sperm after ejaculation. Both of these signs of virginity suggest that *DSM* takes the orifice that receives the penis and sperm during intercourse to be the same as the orifice through which urine is voided. Pseudo-Albertus identifies this same orifice as the one through which menses exit the body when he is asked by an imagined interlocutor whether menses flow through the anus with solid waste or through the vulva [*vulva*] with urine: “[T]he menses,” he asserts, “flow through the vulva [*vulva*] in the form of crude, thin

blood.”²⁵³ In the second century, Galen had distinguished the urethra from the vaginal opening in his *De usu partium*, but this text would not have been available to Pseudo-Albertus and his contemporaries such as William of Saliceto whose claim that “a virgin urinates with a more subtle hiss than a non-virgin, and it takes her longer to finish than it does a small boy” suggests that intercourse enlarges the orifice through which the female voids urine.²⁵⁴ As for the relationship between the broken *pellicula* and muddy urine in *DSM*, Pseudo-Albertus does not specify whether the rupture of this skin generates muddy urine because, when intact, it acted as a filter of sorts or whether the rupturing itself released muddying agents into the urine – an ambiguity that is a product of the transmission of medicalized readings of the female body. It is likely that the medieval legacy of the Galenic “one sex model” facilitated an assumption that “because a male voids urine through the penis, a female would do so through her vagina.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 73: *Secundum dubium potest esse utrum menstruum fluit per anum et hoc more secessus aut per vulvam modo eiectionis urine. Ad hoc breviter est dicendum quod per vulvam fluunt in specie crudi sanguinis et tenuis.*

²⁵⁴ Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 45-57. William of Saliceto, *Summa conservationis et curationis* (Venice, 1489), fol. i3ra, cited by Lastique and Lemay 61. See Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 37 and 45 for other medieval medical texts that conflate the urethra and vaginal opening, including the Pseudo-Galenic *Anatomia vivorum* (ca.1225) which states that “the opening of the cervix is so narrow that only urine can pass through.”

²⁵⁵ Lastique and Lemay (1991), 62-3. Commentator A lists several other methods for testing virginity by urinalysis that depend on another classical gynecological model, though not incompatible with the Galenism of Pseudo-Albertus’ assumptions. These methods imagine the existence of a passageway (*odos*) running from the mouth and nose to the urethral/vaginal orifice. A corrupt woman, Commentator A claims, will urinate immediately” when the ground petals and pollen of lily flowers are given her to eat, or “the fruit of lettuce” is placed before her nose (*DSM* 9, Lemay [1992], 127). The early medieval *Liber matricis* (*Harmoniae Gynaeciorum*, 2) and William of Saliceto’s *Summa conservationis et curationis* prescribe urine tests wherein odors are applied to the vagina rather than the nose. Lastique and Lemay believe that these tests also operate under confusion between the urethra and vagina, rather than the imagination of a passageway connecting nose and vagina: “If introduction of particular odors into the vagina causes urination, presumably the odoriferous substance passes directly into the bladder, leading the woman to void” (61).

If Pseudo-Albertus assumes that a *pellicula* is stretched over the urethral-vaginal opening in virgin bodies, this skin would have to be perforated or permeable enough to allow urine to pass through it before being “broken” at first intercourse. Wherever this skin is located (the specification, “in the vagina *and* the bladder,” is not so much imprecise as unintelligible), Pseudo-Albertus never uses the word hymen to describe it, here or when he has reason to return to this subject later in his text. Commentator B, however, does refer twice to a hymen specific to the virgin genitals. Read back to back, these two references to a virginal membrane illustrate the complexities involved in locating the proof of virginity in the morphology of the female genitals. Commentator B, who writes about the female anatomy more explicitly than either Pseudo-Albertus or Commentator A, explains that the pain virgins feel at first intercourse “is universal because in all virgins, when they first consort with men, a certain membrane [*pellicula*] is broken which is called the hymen [*himen*] and also the guardian of virginity [*custos virginitatis*] ... it is found in all women when they are first corrupted,” and is located “near the bladder and the opening of the womb above the vulva [*vulva*].”²⁵⁶ The second introduction of this term by Commentator B occurs in the context of a story he relates from Averroës’ *Colliget* concerning a certain girl who had confided to Averroës that she was pregnant despite never having had intercourse. Upon learning that she had bathed in warm water into which a man had ejaculated, Averroës surmises that “the female member, according to its entirely peculiar nature, extracted as much semen from the bath

²⁵⁶ *DSM* 9, Lemay (1992), 127, translation emended: *Sed secunda causa universalis est: quod in omnibus virginibus cum primum commiscetur viris corrumpitur quaedam pellicula: quae vocatur himen et etiam custos virginitatis: et locatur circa visicam: et orificium matricis supra vulvam. Et est ista universalis causa: quia repitur in omnibus foeminis cum primum corrumpuntur.* Lemay describes Commentator B’s style as “decidedly scholastic.” He offers “precise definition[s] of terms,” “explores and refutes possible objections,” and “seeks constantly to make distinctions,” all of which indicate his efforts to adhere to Aristotelian laws of logic. Lemay (1992), 15.

as it could.”²⁵⁷ Averroës thus solves the puzzle of the pregnancy, but he does not answer the question that Commentator B finds most pressing. What Averroës presents as a judicial matter (can the girl’s reputation be salvaged), he transforms into a philosophical conundrum: “was this girl a virgin or not?” Commentator B answers his own question about the codification of virginity in the following way:

We reply briefly that there are two types of corruption. The first takes place through the emission of seed. The second occurs through a wound in the skin of virginity [*lesio pellicule virginitatis*], that is, when the hymen is broken [*hymen frangitur*]. Thus I would say that she was corrupted in the first way because she attracted and emitted seed [*semen*], but in the second way she was not, for her skin [*pellicula*] was not broken.²⁵⁸

This anecdote complicates the signs of virginity and its corruption, even as they have been set forward by Commentator B himself. Evidence of a broken hymen is nowhere to be found on the body of this girl, but she is, nevertheless, corrupted, if only in one of two possible senses. The loss of her virginity must be deduced from the fact that she has conceived, there being no perceptible sign that she has emitted seed. In this case, pregnancy—ostensibly an infallible sign of corruption—becomes a sign that requires closer inspection before virginity can be verified or precluded. As for the girl’s unbroken hymen, Commentator B’s conclusions indicate that semen could be drawn through it into

²⁵⁷ DSM 1, Lemay (1992), 67, translation emended: *Unde sciendum: quod dicit commentato ubi supra: se quandam puellam habuisse in vivinia: cui bene confidebat: quae sibi veraciter iuravit: quod numquam fuit impraegnata per aliquem virum et tamen concepit: postulavitque ab eo remedia: ipse autem Averroës inquirens causas hinc inde perscrutatus fuit: et invenit: quod fuit balneata in balneo. et tunc membrum mulieris a tota proprietate extravit sibi semen quantum potuit: et istud possibile esse dicit commentator secundum operationes naturae ...*

²⁵⁸ DSM 1, Lemay (1992), 67. *Sed hic dubium est: utrum talis puella fuerit tunc virgo: vel non. Respondetur breviter: quod corruptio est duplex. Quaedam est per saeminis decisionem. Alia quae fit per lesionem pellicule virginitatis scilicet: quando hymen frangitur: tunc dico: quod primo modo fuit corrupta: quia attraxit semen: cum hoc emisit: sed secundo modo non: quia pellicula non fuit corrupta.*

her uterus. What, then, does it mean for this “skin of virginity” to be “broken”? Where does the “wound” of defloration occur?

The semiotic function of this skin which, as Commentator B puts it, is “found” only after it has been “broken,” merits close inspection, and for reasons beyond its privileged status in the codification of virginity in recent centuries. How does the *pellicula / hymen* function as a sign and a secret within the textual economy of *DSM*? How does this sign that is present only in its absence communicate virginity preserved or virginity corrupted when, as Averroës and Commentator B note, corruption may also occur without any notable effect on virgin morphology, that is, by the emission of seed. Outside of rare occurrences like the one experienced by the bathing girl, how is corruption of this sort to be detected? What signs communicate this woman’s secret?

It may be tempting to equate this skin with the anatomical structure that in later centuries came to be regarded as the definitive sign of virginity – the hymen, but this temptation would shift our focus to the discursive constructions of virgin genital morphology popular in recent centuries rather than the anatomical template available to Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators.²⁵⁹ The hymen, understood as a discrete anatomical structure specific to the female virgin body, was not invested with the significance in Greco-Roman and medieval medicine that it later garnered, even if the description of the *pellicula* in *DSM* can be identified as an antecedent to this specific anatomical part of the female defined in the most recent edition of *Grey’s Anatomy* as “a thin fold of mucous membrane” whose “internal surfaces ... are normally folded to

²⁵⁹ For a historical survey of the hymen and its precursors, with emphasis on the early-modern period, see Loughlin (1997), 27-52. For comparisons between pre-modern and contemporary, popular views on the hymen, see Kelly (2000), 119-141.

contact each other and the vaginal orifice appears as a cleft between them.”²⁶⁰ Historians of the hymen have called this structure “an abstract idea residing in an anatomical metonym,” “a hypostasis, a fetish, an article of faith,” and “the always folded ... space in which the pen writes its dissemination.”²⁶¹ Each of these definitions articulates the semiotic power invested in this structure, its position in “the epistemological instability of the virgin body,” and, more generally, the problematic indeterminacy of signs, corporeal and otherwise, but especially those signs—like the ones that communicate the sexual experience of the female body—veiled in a secrecy dependent on the discursive methods of unveiling.²⁶² *DSM* both exemplifies and effaces this complex relationship between semiotics and virgin anatomy by constructing a virginity that eschews interpretation. The semiotics of virginity that have in recent centuries hinged on the “anatomical metonym” that is the hymen grew out of an ancient semiotics of virginity less willing to identify the singular sign of sexual inexperience. Precisely because the semiotics of virginity were not reduced to a discrete corporeal sign by gynecological texts from the Hippocratic corpus to the influential early-medieval Arabic treatises written by Avicenna and Averroës, the potentialities and limitations of such a semantic indeterminacy are highlighted by the readings of virginity offered in these texts, the ways these readings are put to use by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators, and the slippages that occur between the masculine history of virginity codification and *DSM*’s determination to codify virginity’s signs by citing this history.

²⁶⁰ Kelly (2000), 10.

²⁶¹ Kelly (2000), 8; Sissa (1990a), 2; Spivak (1976), xvi.

²⁶² Loughlin (1997), 47.

The hymen is almost entirely absent from the medical formalizations of virgin anatomy that preceded the writing of *DSM*.²⁶³ Aristotle, and later Galen, wrote of a hymen in male and female bodies, understood as a membrane that covered and connected the surface of bones and organs. This membrane [*humēn*], Aristotle writes in *Historia animalium*, “is like a fine, tight skin [*dermati*], but it is of a different sort: it does not stretch or tear.”²⁶⁴ The second-century medical writer, Soranus of Ephesus, is the only classical figure to use the word hymen to refer to a discreet structure in the female genitals, and then only to argue that no such structure exists. For all their emphasis on gynecological matters, and for all the cultural investment in the legitimacy of children, Greek, Roman, and Arabic medical writers did not identify a specific corporeal structure that signified virginity. They did, however, mark distinctions between virgin and non-virgin bodies, and these distinctions were thought to be legible, if problematically and with varying degrees of accuracy. These marks that intercourse left on female corporeality were not designated and recuperated for the purposes of verifying virginity, but were part of the medical writer’s semantic field by which he extrapolated from visible signs invisible aspects of female anatomical structure or physiological processes, generally in order to diagnose pathologies associated with the virgin body. The chapters in the textual history of the hymen contributed by ancient and early-medieval medical writers inform the methods of virginity testing in *DSM* insofar as Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators cite and extrapolate from their forebears. But what is perhaps more important about this legacy is its designation of the female body, and specifically the

²⁶³ See Kelly (2000), 1-39; Holtzman and Kulish (1997).

²⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Historia animalium* III.13, 519a30 ff. Cited by Sissa (1990b), 352.

sexual experience of that body, as a semantic field. Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators may not have inherited from this legacy a discreet morphology of the virgin genitals, but they did inherit a methodology committed to “the elaboration of a series of secondary signs to (variously) reinforce, replace, or represent the ambiguous and inaccessible hymen”²⁶⁵

There has been some debate over whether or not the Hippocratic texts recognized a hymen-like structure specific to the virgin female body. Because these texts were geared toward diagnosing or prescribing treatment rather than giving comprehensive accounts of female anatomy, formalizations of the virgin body must be extrapolated from Hippocratic descriptions of female illnesses, most of which are said to stem from the makeup of female flesh. Menstruation was a one means of purging the female body of the superabundant wetness that plagued the dense and spongy flesh of the female body.²⁶⁶ In *Diseases of Young Girls*, virgins at the age of menarche are said to be particularly vulnerable to complications arising from the pooling of blood in the uterus because the narrow, compact passageways of the virgin body impede the flow of menstrual fluid and sometimes prevent it from finding egress. In these young girls, the “mouth of exit is not opened,” and “blood that has not found a way to flow leaps upward from its fullness to the heart and the diaphragm.” Lethargy, chills, fever, and madness follow. These virgins become “murderous from putrefaction” and distressed “by the foulness of their blood.” They “long for nooses” and cast themselves into wells.²⁶⁷ First intercourse was thought

²⁶⁵ Loughlin (1997), 39. In this context, Loughlin is speaking about the legacy of virginity verification inherited by sixteenth-century medical writers, but the dependence on secondary signs is also apparent in *DSM*.

²⁶⁶ Hanson (1992), 48.

²⁶⁷ *Virg.* I [VIII: 466-470]. See Hanson (1990), 315-320 and (1992), 48-52.

to be “one means to remove an impediment to the exit of retained menses.”²⁶⁸ Regular intercourse would keep this pathway open, while “pregnancy and childbirth brought to completion the process of breaking down the young girl’s body and opening up her passageways.”²⁶⁹ Up to this point, scholars of Hippocratic medicine agree. But, the precise nature of the “impediment” that first intercourse removes remains unclear.

Guilia Sissa has argued that the virgin vagina as described in the Hippocratic treatises was not obstructed by any barrier, but that before first intercourse it remained closed like a pair of pursed lips, or as Sissa provocatively suggests, like the edges of a wound: “The event of sexual initiation spreads open a pre-existing wound, a natural attribute of a body that is open, receptive, and fertile.”²⁷⁰ Ann Hanson acknowledges that Hippocratic gynecology imagined “the mouth *of the vagina*” protected by closed lips rather than sealed off by a structure to be broken at first intercourse; but she disagrees with Sissa’s extension of this argument to “the mouth *of the uterus*.” “It is this inner mouth,” Hanson writes, “that Hippocratic and popular anatomy thought was closed off in the young girl prior to menarche and/or first penetration.”²⁷¹ The uterus, Hanson argues, was most often thought of as a stoppered, upside down jug. This image informs *Diseases*

²⁶⁸ Hanson (1992), 40.

²⁶⁹ Hanson (1992), 40, and (1990), 318-320. Hanson cites the following passages from the Hippocratic corpus which suggest intercourse and/or pregnancy for women suffering uterine ailments: *Mul.* 1.37 (8.92.7-8 Littré), 1.59 (8.118.18 L), 1.63 (8.130.16-17 L), 2.119 (8.260.21 L), 2.121 (8.264.18-19 L), 2.131 (8.280.2-3 L), 2.135 (8.308.2-3 L), 2.162 (8.342.10-11).

²⁷⁰ Sissa (1990b), 360.

²⁷¹ Hanson (1992), 61-2, n.58, italics in original. She faults Sissa’s mistake to a conflation of two descriptions of the virgin genitals in *Diseases of Women I*: “Sissa denies that Hippok. *Virg.* I saw the body of the young girl as closed off, but in so doing she conflates the mouth of the vagina (e.g., *Morb. mul.* I.40 [VIII:96]) with the mouth of the uterus (e.g., *Morb. mul.* I.2 [VIII:14]), each of which was equipped with lips or rim” (Hanson [1992], 61, n.58).

of *Young Girls*, whose writer “seems to imagine a young girl’s uterus as a sealed-off space to be opened by the first intercourse, whenever accumulated menses fail to appear at the expected time and thereby cause disease.”²⁷² Sissa grants that *Diseases of Young Girls* describes the obstruction of vaginal genitals, but she regards these cases to be pathological.²⁷³ This interpretation would explain why only some virgins suffer from menstrual fluid retention.

Although a young woman’s virginity was conceivably a matter of great interest for the purposes of establishing paternity in Archaic Greece, no virginity tests appear in the Hippocratic corpus. The liabilities virginity posed to the health of women, coupled with the salubrious effects of regular intercourse and pregnancy construct a capricious virginity – one that suffers from obstruction, and itself obstructs the wider reproductive economy. Whether or not the female genitals were thought to be pursed, sealed, or stoppered, and whether or not the precise site of this closure was specified in the Hippocratic texts, the clearest signs of virginity were written in the symptoms of female pathology. Encouragement of the (legitimate) loss of virginity, rather than its verification, becomes the medical objective. Pseudo-Albertus and both of his commentators make direct, mostly spurious, reference to Hippocrates, but never in the context of determining virginity or treating its attendant health problems.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Hanson (1992), 330.

²⁷³ Sissa (1990b), 359; Lastique and Lemay (1991), 58.

²⁷⁴ *DSM* 12, Lemay (1992), 142: Pseudo-Albertus on menstruation during pregnancy being a sign of poor fetal health; *DSM* 2, Lemay (1992), 88: Commentator A on the dangers of approaching a menstruating woman; *DSM* 2, Lemay (1992), 79: Commentator B on pregnant women drawing their own blood to induce abortions; *DSM* 8, Lemay (1992), 126: Commentator B on an experiment to demonstrate the multiple levels of digestion in the stomach; *DSM* 12, Lemay (1992), 137: Commentator B on the inability of women with cold, wet wombs to conceive; *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 62: Commentator B on the inability of those men with small veins behind the ears to produce proper semen.

Medieval writers of the Roman period were also not particularly interested in locating a verifiable sign of virginity. Pseudo-Albertus himself refers to Galen (second-century A.D.) as “the great doctor,” and reports an anecdote from his case studies (which I discuss in more detail below) about a woman suffering from uterine suffocation.²⁷⁵ Galen claimed that male and female bodies were *materially* similar, but differed morphologically because of differences in body temperature.²⁷⁶ The heat in the male body pushes the genitals to the exterior of the fetal body *in utero*, while the genitals of the cooler female fetus remain internal, so that “all the parts ... that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing ... in women the parts are within, whereas in men they are on the outside.”²⁷⁷ Indeed, if someone should “turn outwards the woman’s [genitals], turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man’s ... you find them the same in both in every respect.”²⁷⁸ Neither in his careful description of the female genitals in *On the Usefulness of the Parts* (where he identifies the labia and clitoris), nor in his material on uterine ailments, does Galen refer to a membrane specific to the virgin genitals.²⁷⁹ Neither Pseudo-Albertus nor his commentators refer to the early-second century writer, Soranus, who does refer to a virginal membrane by way of refuting its existence. He does not specify whether he is addressing a popular or professional misconception when he writes in his *Gynecology*: “It is a mistake to assume that a thin membrane [*humēna*] grows across the vagina, dividing it, and that this

²⁷⁵ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 132.

²⁷⁶ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts* 14.

²⁷⁷ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, trans. May (1968), 623.

²⁷⁸ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, trans. May (1968), 628-629.

²⁷⁹ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts* 15. 3.

membrane ... bursts in defloration.”²⁸⁰ He bases this assertion on several grounds, namely that it is not found in dissection, probes do not meet with resistance when examining virgins, and the menstrual flux is not obstructed in virgins upon menarche.²⁸¹ Granting, however, that blood accompanies defloration, and suggesting that this blood is generally read as a sign of first intercourse, he offers the following anatomical lesson:

In virgins the vagina is flattened and comparatively narrow, since it possesses furrows held together by vessels which take their origin from the uterus. And when the furrows are spread apart in defloration, these vessels burst and cause pain and the blood which is usually excreted follows.²⁸²

Blood at intercourse is not, then, a sign that a discreet structure has been destroyed, but a sign that the shape of the virgin body has been altered in a way that ruptures internal blood vessels and causes pain. After this brief appearance of the virginal hymen in Soranus’ *Gynecology*, it again vanishes from the extant record of Greco-Roman medicine. It is not found in the late antique translations of Soranus’ text – Caelius Aurelianus’ *Gynaecia* (late-fourth to early-fifth century) and Muscio’s *Gynaecia* (fifth century).²⁸³

In their study of a fifteenth-century Latin treatise on virginity written by a certain physician called “Nicholus,” Esther Lastique and Helen Rodnite Lemay trace the paths by which “[t]he hymen was incorporated into the anatomical understanding of the

²⁸⁰ Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.17, trans. Temkin (1991), 15.

²⁸¹ Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.17, trans. Temkin (1991), 15.

²⁸² Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.17, trans. Temkin, (1991), 15.

²⁸³ Kelly (2000), 151.

medieval west by way of Arabic medical sources.”²⁸⁴ In the writings of Rhazes (ninth-early tenth century), Avicenna (eleventh century), and Averroës (twelfth century), the vagina is said to have a wrinkled (interior) surface which stretches to accommodate the male member at first intercourse. The stretching causes membranes (*panniculi*) and veins (*vene*) woven among these wrinkles to burst and release blood.²⁸⁵ In these accounts, the membranes and veins in question are said to be located in the “mouth of the vulva” (*vulve orificium*, Rhazes), the virginal neck (*collum virginale*, Rhazes), and the “mouth of the womb” (*os matricis*, Avicenna and Averroës). Albertus Magnus illustrates his exposure to this Arabic gynecological tradition when he gives the following account of defloration in his *De animalibus*:

[I]n the neck and at the mouth of the womb of virgins are membranes [*panniculi*] made of a tissue of veins and very fragile ligaments. These are the proven signs of virginity when observed, and which are destroyed by intercourse or even by the penetration of fingers, at which the small amount of blood in them flows out.²⁸⁶

Arabic sources do not, however, describe the hymen as Soranus did, nor as Commentator B represents it, nor as it came to be known in the early-modern period; that is, as a discrete anatomical structure, a singular membrane—*pellicula* or *hymen*—that is

²⁸⁴ Lastique and Lemay (1991), 59. See Green (1985), 130-194 for a comprehensive study of the paths by which Greek medicine was incorporated into the Latin medieval West.

²⁸⁵ Lastique and Lemay (1991), 59. Rhazes, *Liber ad Almansorem...continens*, Tractatus Primus, Cap xxxvi; Avicenna, *Liber canonis* (1507 reprint Hildesheim, 1964), Liber III, fen. xxi, cap i, f. 360v.; Averroës, *Colliget* (Venice 1549), f. 49v. Cited with Latin texts by Lastique and Lemay, 74, n.23-25.

²⁸⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De Animalibus libri XXVI*, ed. Hermann Stadler, Münster, Aschendorff, (1916), 164, cited by Kelly (2000), 27.

“broken” (*rumpitur, frangitur*) at first intercourse.²⁸⁷ By identifying virgin membranes (*panniculi*) as “proven” observable signs, Albertus Magnus associates his anatomical description with virginity testing, though he grants that such signs can be destroyed outside of the experience of intercourse. It should be said that the accounts of virgin morphology in the Arabic sources do not appear in the context of methods for verifying virginity.

“How,” then, in Kelly’s words “did the Greek word (*humēna*) originally and generically denoting any ‘membrane’ in the body, come to narrow in meaning to denote a *membrana virginalis* by the early modern period?”²⁸⁸ The answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but as this scant survey of the history of the hymen demonstrates, the answer is deeply embedded in the discursive history of female corporeality. The hymen was not widely regarded as a natural sign of virginity in the late-medieval period. Roger Bacon glosses *humēna* with the Latin *matrix* (uterus) in his thirteenth-century grammar, and thereby associates this membrane with the reproductive parts of the female body, but not the virgin body. Michael Savonarola’s fifteenth-century *Practica* is cited by Jacquart and Thomasset as the first instance of the word *hymen* meaning virginal membrane: “The cervix is covered by a subtle membrane called the

²⁸⁷ *DSM* 9, Lemay (1992), 127: ... *quaedam pellicula inter vulvam et vesicam rumpitur* (Pseudo-Albertus); *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 67: ... *per lesionem pellicule virginitatis scilicet: quando hymen frangitur* (Commentator B). Much work needs yet to be done in the area of Arabic influence on Western medieval medicine: “Is Soranus the only extant representative of a lost Western tradition? Did he influence Islamic writers? Was his work then retransmitted back to the West? Did Arabic writers develop their own descriptions of the hymen—structure or site—independently? Western scholars have just begun to examine, classify, and analyze the corpus of Arabic and Byzantine medical texts that underpin and influence Western medieval medicine. When this work is done, we will have a much clearer understanding of the transmission of medical and gynecological knowledge in the Middle Ages and the part that Soranus’ seemingly unique discussion of the hymen and the uterus plays” (Kelly [2000], 27).

²⁸⁸ Kelly (2000), 150-152, n.67.

hymen, which is broken at the time of deflowering, so that the blood flows.”²⁸⁹ That the hymen is here said to cover the cervix suggests the reception of an anatomical theory akin to the one Hanson (1990) finds in Greek literary texts and *Diseases of Young Girls*. Thomas Elyot defines the word *hymen* in his *Dictionary* (1538) as ‘a skinne in the secrete place of a maiden, which whanne she is defloured is broken.’”²⁹⁰ By the late-sixteenth century, Andreas Vesalius, Ambroise Paré, and their contemporaries had begun to dissect female bodies in search of the *claustrum virginale*.²⁹¹ Commentator B’s gloss of Pseudo-Albertus’ *pellicula* with the word *himen* represents an early instance of this word in its narrow sense.²⁹² By referring to a single virginal *pellicula* (rather than a network of membranes or a series of folds), Pseudo-Albertus seems to herald this shift in terminology. It would be a mistake, however, to over-emphasize the consolidation of models of virgin morphology in a text that primarily illustrates the instability of such a morphology. *DSM*’s author and commentator fashion their women’s secrets out of bits and pieces of previous textualizations of female anatomy. The contested textual history of the virginal genitals materializes in the multiple models layered haphazardly each over

²⁸⁹ Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 44.

²⁹⁰ Kelly (2000), 151.

²⁹¹ See Loughlin (1997), 29-52. Vesalius, who claimed to have found hymens in “a hunchback girl of seventeen” and “a nun [who] had died of pleurisy,” nevertheless remained ambivalent about the hymen’s universal existence (Loughlin [1997], 45). Paré insisted that the virginal membrane was myth, not having found a single instance of it in all of the girls, from age 3 to 12, that he dissected in Paris. Indeed, “[t]he strength of Paré’s rejection of the hymen as the *claustrum virginale* is further revealed in his 1573 treatise on monstrous births and marvellous events, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, where he uses the girl with the imperforate hymen as an example of those who are simply maimed as opposed to being truly monstrous” (Loughlin [1997], 31).

²⁹² Lemay does not venture to date these commentaries, other than to say that they “illustrate further ideas about women’s ‘secrets’ current among some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century clerics” (2-3). The earliest printed edition containing Commentary B is *De secretis cum commento*, Jo. Alvisium de Varisio, Venice, 1501.

the other by these readers who are conscious of previously asserted truths about the inextricability of female corporeality and sexual intercourse. In many ways, the contours of this virgin body become less legible as the signs it communicates multiply.

One final “sign” of virginity related to the virgin *pellicula* and its destruction illustrates how virgin morphology, despite—and because of—its many codifications in *DSM*, admits multiple semantic fantasies; that sign is pain. Virgins feel pain the first time they have intercourse, Pseudo-Albertus writes, “because [the vagina] is being enlarged and disposed for coitus,” *and* because a “certain skin [*pellicula*]” is broken.²⁹³ These two effects of defloration allow for a range of the virgin anatomies we have surveyed to be imagined, tested, and confirmed. As we have seen, the virgin body of the ancient and medieval medical tradition—which is, in effect, a phantasmic body onto which multiple bodies have been mapped—is a body that is opened up and torn by first intercourse, even as the configuration of its reproductive system and genital anatomy fades in and out of focus. This stretching and rending of the female body produces a variety of readable signs, pain and blood flow among them. It is striking then, that Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators primarily locate the pain of defloration in the *male* body, a transference of the reference that is symptomatic of the slippage between boundaries of bodies and boundaries of knowledge in secrets literature. The virgin vagina is so narrow, asserts Pseudo-Albertus, that “if a man can enter without any pain [*dolor*] to his member ... this is a sign that the woman was first corrupted.”²⁹⁴

²⁹³ *DSM* 9, Lemay (1992), 126: *Et etiam notandum: quare iuvenes mulieres quando primo corrumpuntur dolent pro parte in vulva: quia tunc vulva ampliatur in coitu. Alia autem causa est coadiuvans ad dolorem: quia quaedam pellicula iuxta vulvam et vesicam disrumpitur.*

²⁹⁴ *DSM* 9, Lemay (1992), 126: ... *quod vir sine dolore sui membri virilis coit.*

Commentator B concurs, adding that it is a “true sign” [*verum signum*] of virginity if a man has difficulty entering the woman, and if “it causes a sore [*laesio*] on his member.”²⁹⁵ Like other signs of virginity, this one might prove false. Commentator B notes that, “[t]his is only true, however, if she did not cause her vulva [*vulva*] to contract by using an ointment or another medicine, as many women know how to do, so that they are believed to be virgins.”²⁹⁶ He then tacks on a further “truest sign”: “if the man feels the woman’s seed flow abundantly,” she is a virgin. “And there are many other signs that make use of herbs and stones which are known to those who perform these experiments.”²⁹⁷ These final signs, it must be assumed, are secrets beyond the scope of the secrets divulged in *DSM*. These various “true signs,” some of which can be faked, are destabilized by the semantic ambiguity that plagued the signs of “spiritual” virginity dismissed by Pseudo-Albertus because “clever women” could fake them.²⁹⁸ The corporeal experiences of the male body (i.e. pain) and the legible signs inscribed upon the male genitals (i.e. a sore) are here incorporated into technologies of female virginity testing, but even these signs legible in male corporeality prove unstable. The slippage of the secret’s reference here marks the instability of the hierarchical boundary upon which the secrets of women are built. Here, clever women possess the secret knowledge of the semiotics of the female body, and because these secrets translate into male pain and

²⁹⁵ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 129: *Aliud signum est si vir sine sui membri laesione: et difficultate coeat cum foemina: signum est quod prius fuerit corrupta. sed si talis actus fit cum aliqua difficultate: et laesione in membro: verum est signum virginitatis.*

²⁹⁶ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 129, translation emended: ... *et hoc si talis foemina non procuraverit restrictionem vulvae cum unguento: vel alio medicamine: sicut plures sciunt facere: ut virgines credantur.*

²⁹⁷ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 129. *Item aliud est signum verissimum: si vir sentit sperma mulieris venire in magna copia. Multa alia signa fiunt per herbas et lapides: quae experimentatoribus committuntur.*

²⁹⁸ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 128.

genital lesions, clever women encroach upon the semantic jurisdiction of the male body. In this instance the epistemological penetration of female corporeal boundaries is inextricable from the physical (sexual/reproductive) penetration of female corporeal boundaries. To know the signs of virginity is to penetrate the female body in intercourse. But this penetrating knowledge simultaneously requires that the boundaries of the male body be violated in order for the sign of virginity, that is the sore on the male member, to become legible. These signs predicated on the narrowness of the virgin vaginal passage borrow experiences of first intercourse generally associated with the female body—pain, a “sore” on the genitals—and transfers them, so that it is the male body that suffers the wound of defloration. This transference of vulnerability from the female to the male body in *DSM* bears some consideration because it resituates the significance of virginity, its verification, and its loss. First intercourse is here shown to corrupt the integrity of the male body. Commentator B’s caveat facilitates a further transference: from the destructive capacities of the female genitals to the destructive capacities of the female will. The discursive potency of both these maneuvers is fully realized in the misogynist material of the latter half of the text.

This particular sign of female virginity—a sore on the male member—contributes to *DSM*’s construction of female monstrosity, and in several senses. The boundaries of the female body are here said to violate the boundaries delineated and reinforced by *DSM*’s discourse of secrecy: the clever woman, who possess the reference of her own secrets, can fake the signs of virginity by artificially altering the boundaries of her body, that is, by causing the borders of her “vulva” to contract. The slippage of these corporeal boundaries destabilizes the hierarchy between those who are known (the corporeal signs)

and those who know (the readers of corporeal signs). This is then a slippage that violates the discursive boundaries that structure *DSM*'s project. What is more problematic, this boundary destabilization materially violates the boundaries of the male body so that the legibility of virginity depends on the vulnerability of male body boundaries. Thus the stability of masculine epistemological boundaries, which is a function of the discursive domain of Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators, must be embodied in male corporeality in order to fix monstrosity in the female body; yet, this stability is violated by way of masculine dependence on the effects of female monstrosity – the deceptive possession of secrets, the manipulation of female corporeal signs, and the jurisdiction over the marks that such manipulation leave on the male body. The stability of masculine epistemological boundaries is inextricable from the stability of masculine corporeal boundaries, both of which meet on the surface of the male member in the legible lesion on which this sign of female virginity depends. This is a prime example of how the discursive boundaries on which *DSM*'s performance of secrecy depends designate the female body as a monstrous boundary violation, but yet how the “true” signs of virginity become visible by way of a female monstrosity that violates the very boundaries of its own inscription.

Part Three: Blood: Hymeneal, Seminal, Menstrual

Whereas Pseudo-Albertus preserves a certain ambiguity, and therefore element of seduction, when he identifies his subject “certain hidden, secret things about the nature of women,” Commentator B sums up the subject matter of *DSM* rather succinctly, but no less seductively, when he defines these secret things: venom, poison, leprosy, and

cancer—the secret dangers of menstrual blood.²⁹⁹ Blood and its derivatives (such as breast milk and menstuous vapors) are the most secret—and therefore the most profusively discussed—hidden, secrets things about women revealed in this text. As we have seen, virgins bleed, even if the source of that blood remains obscure. Pseudo-Albertus also reveals secrets about the circumstances in which the genitals of non-virgins bleed, and discloses the secrets written in that blood. By way of a personal anecdote, he illustrates the interpretive challenges posed by female blood. A worried comrade confided during confession to Pseudo-Albertus that “he found his abdomen covered with blood up to the umbilicus” after intercourse with his “beloved young girl.”³⁰⁰ Allaying his friend’s fears, Pseudo-Albertus assures him that this blood “was not a flow of the menses [*fluxus menstorum*], but rather a flow of seed [*semen*] during coitus because of an abundance of matter.”³⁰¹ Commentator B, however, gathers from this anecdote that “it is very helpful to women to have a great deal of sexual intercourse when they have their menstrual periods,” and thus fails to recognize the semantic distinction that Pseudo-Albertus seems to be drawing.³⁰² Female semen and menstrual fluid may emerge from

²⁹⁹ *DSM* preface, Lemay (1992), 59, 60.

³⁰⁰ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 135: *Audivi semel in confessione societatis ab uno inquirente a me causam: quare hoc esset quando ipse dormiret cum sua dilecta iuvenula. quod tunc ipse coitu finito inveniret ventrem suum usque ad umbilicum cum sanguine prefusum et timuit multum, causam ignoravit.*

³⁰¹ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 135: *Et ille fluxus non fuit menstorum sed seminis in coitu fluentis propter abundantiam mulieris [sic].* The Argentine, 1510, edition reads *mulieris* where the Venice, 1508, edition reads *materiae*. This error in transcription is a telling one as it appears in the context of the frightful leakiness of the female body and metonymically associates woman with her superfluities.

³⁰² *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 135. Commentator B holds that intercourse during menstruation is helpful to those women with an abundance of menstrual fluid, while it is harmful to those with scant menstrual fluid: *unde quandocumque foeminae multum abundant in materia menstrosa maxime prodest eis coitus: sed quando modicam habent nocet eis. Ratio primi est: quam coitus maxime optant: ut talis materia melius fluat ...*

the female body under similar signs, but the reference of these secret signs differ, and not in a simply academic manner.

The import of distinguishing among hymeneal, seminal, and menstrual fluids underpins much of the talk of female blood in *DSM* precisely because the ambiguities among these signs, the challenges they pose to the masculine desire to know, stress not only the weak hierarchical boundaries that structure the discursive project of secrecy, but also the weak corporeal boundaries of the male body confronted with menstrual contamination. It is a peculiarity in *DSM*, then, that, despite the fact that the shedding of these female body fluids are said to designate entirely different physiological events—each endowed with a heightened sense of significance in this text concerned with virginity verification, conception, and menstrual contamination—hymeneal, seminal, and menstrual fluids are all identified under the sign of sanguineous fluid discharged from the genitals. This single material sign harbors several meanings which Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators are keen to definitively categorize, but which epistemologically seep into each other. This semantic seepage most clearly occurs in the conflation of menses and female seed under the word, *menstruum*, such that the most monstrous and secret thing about women becomes the secret thing most resistant to manifestation. The conceptual boundaries on which depends *DSM*'s semantic claim over female secrets falter when they come into contact with (what might be) menstrual blood, the female superfluity gravely capable of damaging the integrity and health of other bodies.

Menstrual bleeding, when read with a layman's expertise (such as that of Pseudo-Albertus's comrade), is indistinguishable from less noxious bleedings; but Pseudo-Albertus, invested with the power to reveal the secrets of women, assures his comrade

that the female body he feared had bathed him in menstrual fluid had simply, and innocuously, emitted an unusually heavy amount of seed. When Commentator B, who, in comparison with Pseudo-Albertus and Commentator A, is most disturbed by the toxicity of menstrual fluid, misreads Pseudo-Albertus' efforts to stabilize the meaning of this alarming blood flow reported by his comrade, he underscores the ambiguities that plague the critical sign system of female blood, and even extends a reading that, in view of his other misogynist comments about menstrual fluid, would be supremely alarming. It may be salubrious for women to have lots of sex while menstruating, as he here asserts, but he does not betray the risks such therapeutic measures pose to the integrity of the male body. Pseudo-Albertus urges men to "beware of having sex with women in this condition (i.e. during menstruation)." Prudent women, moreover, "remain separated from men during their monthly flow" – relatively mild censures in comparison to those added by Commentator A and especially Commentator B who warns that intercourse with a menstruating woman causes leprosy and cancer in the male body.³⁰³

The semantic ambiguity of sanguineous genital discharge was a matter of concern in a few other late-medieval medical texts. According to thirteenth-century physician, William of Saliceto, the former is clearer and scantier than the latter.³⁰⁴ Pseudo-Albertus is silent about how he came to determine that his comrade had been bathed in semen and not menstrual fluid, but he does elsewhere disclose corporeal signs of menstruation: look

³⁰³ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 128: *et ideo sibi quisquis caveat ne coeat tunc cum eis quia nocivum est. unde prudentes mulieres sciunt se tunc custodire: et separantur a viris per tempus fluxus menstruorum.*

³⁰⁴ Kelly (2000), 29. The fifteenth-century physician, Nicholus, whose treatise is translated and discussed by Lastique and Lemay (1991) repeats this advice (60).

for watery eyes, changes in complexion, and loss of appetite.³⁰⁵ That these signs do not depend on a given woman's own report about the functions of her body suggests that she is not to be trusted either to confess that she is menstruating or that she herself is ignorant about the signs of her own body. Pseudo-Albertus' warning that children conceived during intercourse with a menstruating woman "tend to have epilepsy and leprosy" indicates that women may inadvertently conceive while menstruating. Commentator B, on the other hand, asserts that "out of vindictiveness and malice" some menstruating women try to lure men into bed "to wound the penis," and to infect it through the wound with the "venom" of menstrual blood.³⁰⁶

Since the secret signs of menstruation are legible in the female face and eating habits, reading them does not require direct contact with the female body, let alone the genitals, thereby reducing the risk of menstrual contamination. The legibility of female signs, therefore, also preserves a spatial boundary between the vulnerable male body and the potentially noxious female body. Pseudo-Albertus is, however, willing to suggest to his readers urinalysis as a method for discerning menstruation: having mingled with menstrual fluid in the urethral/vaginal passage, the urine of a menstruating woman will be bloody. Although this method does require some physical intimacy with the effluvia of the possibly menstruating body, it is a scientific method favored by Pseudo-Albertus for bringing to light secret things about women, as we saw in its application to virginity verification. If clever women can feign the signs of virginity such as a modest gait and

³⁰⁵ *DSM 10*, Lemay (1992), 128: ... *et in tali mense quando patitur habet oculos aquos alterius coloris in facie: et abominationem patitur in cibo.*

³⁰⁶ *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 89, translation emended: *quando mulieres patiuntur menstrua: si viri tunc coeant cum ipsis: solent aliquando vel propter vindictam vel propter malitiam vulnerare virgam virilem: et tunc menstruum existens in vulva mulieris intrat tale vulnus et inficit suo veneno.*

downcast eyes, it is likely—should they be motivated with the vindictiveness and malice cited by Commentator B—that they can obscure the watery eyes and loss of appetite that would betray their noxious potency.

Pseudo-Albertus' anecdote about his comrade indicates that menstrual fluid and female semen are, at least to the eye untrained in women's secrets, indistinguishable: his comrade was simply "covered in blood." The ambiguity of blood as a sign in *DSM*, however, is not simply a matter of its physical appearance. Pseudo-Albertus' own semiotics—the discursive systems of reading he brings to bear on the female body—is inherently ambiguous about the very nature of the material that exists under the sign, blood. There is no clear or consistent position in *DSM* about the relationship between female seed and menstrual fluid, despite his assurances to his comrade that the two are distinct superfluities. He also claims that "when a woman is having sexual intercourse with a man, she releases her menses [*menstruum*] at the same time that the man releases sperm, and *both seeds* [*duo semina*] enter the vulva simultaneously and one begins to be mixed with the other [and then] the woman conceives."³⁰⁷ In a more graphic formulation, he describes how the woman "ejects menses" because of the "great pleasure" she receives when "the nerves and veins in the vagina [*vulva*] are rubbed and moved by the penis in the vagina [*vulva*], so that the vagina [*vulva*] dilates."³⁰⁸ In an attempt to clarify the text,

³⁰⁷ *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 65, italics added, translation emended. The 1510, Argentinine edition reads slightly differently: in place of *vulvam* there is *agro mulieris*: *Unde mulier cum in coitu fuit cum viro si mulier in eadem parte mittit mesntruum in quo vir sperma quae ista duo semina in agro mulieris concurrunt simul et unum alteri incipit conmisceri concipit mulier. Concipere autem vocatur cum ista duo semina in matrice in tali loco deputata a natura ad fetum recipiuntur.*

³⁰⁸ *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 76, translation emended: *quando autem mulier est in coitu cum viro: tunc propter magnam delectationem quam habet: quia per virgam virilem existentem in vulva nervi et vene existentes in vulva confricantur et moventur: et sic vulva dilatando se menstruum emittitur: et hoc est naturale respectu coitus.*

Commentator B adds that menses has a “double nature.” The “pure” part of the menses is “the proper seed of the woman, which is transformed into the substance of the fetus.” The “impure” part is “a certain superfluidity and impurity caused by non-digestion of food.”³⁰⁹ He does not, however, suggest how the one is to be visually distinguished from the other. Pseudo-Albertus draws no such distinction, asserting simply that, “the menses in woman, just like the sperm in man, is nothing other than superfluous food which has not been transformed into the substance of anything else.”³¹⁰ This ambiguity is not reducible to the technologies of obfuscation that Karma Lochrie suggests is more important to the medieval performance of secrecy than the content of the secrets. This unstable epistemological boundary between female seed and menstrual fluid reflects the unstable corporeal boundaries that are designated in the anatomy and physiology of the female body to be recuperated by the discursive systems of knowledge and power implicated in that designation. In this case, those systems are figured by the use of the female body as a site of inscription and reading by Pseudo-Albertus, his commentators, and their medical and philosophical forebears. In other words, the monstrous border crossings embodied in female corporeality vex the boundaries structuring the dominant systems of knowing, systems that reify the metaphors of monstrosity—transgression, porosity, instability, mixture, boundlessness—in female flesh in the process of fashioning and reinforcing their own categories of meaning.

³⁰⁹ DSM 1, Lemay (1992), 68: *Ad intelligendum conclusionem, sciendum: quod menstruum est duplex: quoddam est purum: quoddam impurum: menstruum purum est proprium semen mulieris quod cedit in substantiam foetus.*

³¹⁰ DSM 1, Lemay (1992), 69, translation emended: *Juxta quod notandum quod menstruum in muliere nihil aliud est quam superfluum alimentum quod in substantiam rei aliunde non cedit sicut est in viris sperma.*

Questions about what the female body contributed to the formation of the fetus—menstrual blood, seed, blood, or some combination thereof—had, as Lemay puts it, “occupied scientists for at least two thousand years” before *DSM* was written.³¹¹ While Aristotle claimed that the female contributed menses (the matter) and the male contributed seed (the form), Hippocrates, Galen, and Soranus held that the female contributed her own seed, distinct from menstrual fluid. Pseudo-Albertus both acknowledges and effaces the history of debate on this question by briefly citing the disagreement between “the philosophers” (represented by Aristotle) and “the doctors” (represented by Galen), but concluding that “every human being who is naturally conceived is generated from the seed of the father [*saemine patris*] and the menses of the mother [*menstruo matris*], according to all philosophers and medical authorities.”³¹² It would at first appear that Pseudo-Albertus adopts a Galenic two-seed model, but he uses the word, *menstrum*, to mean both menstrual fluid and female seed, a conflation that suggests Aristotelian precursors where the contribution of the female to conception is the menstrual matter to which the male semen imparts form.³¹³ Lemay surmises that *DSM* “has no consistent or original position on this question [of female seed] and is more a compendium of information than a systematic treatise.”³¹⁴ This being the case, it is important to consider the consequences of this inconsistency in a text that holds

³¹¹ Lemay (1992), 21. On the two seed theory in medieval medical literature, see Green (1985), 39-42; Cadden (1993), 30-37; Siraisi (1980), 329.

³¹² *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 63, 20-26: ... *omnis homo: qui naturaliter generatur ex saemine patris et menstruo matris*.

³¹³ Albert the Great also grappled with the relationship between menstrual fluid and female semen. In matters of human reproduction, “[i]t is clearly the term ‘sperm’ that throws Albert into the greatest perplexity, as it does most medieval authors, even the Galenists” (Jacquart and Thomasset [1988], 69). On *DSM*’s conflation of Galenic and Aristotelian models of conception, see Bildhauer (2006), 84-91.

³¹⁴ Lemay (1992), 26.

menstrual fluid to be poisonous and that exercises a semantic claim over naming and disclosing the materials and processes of the female body germane to reproduction.

The specific concerns surrounding exposure to menstrual fluid expressed to varying degrees by Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators were certainly not innovative. In the first century A.D, Pliny the Elder had described in his *Natural History* the consequences of contact with menstrual fluid. It destroys crops, kills bees, dulls the surfaces of mirrors and the edges of steel, qualities that Commentator B repeats in *DSM*. According to Pliny, “nothing could be found that is more monstrous (*monstrificium*) than the monthly flux of women.”³¹⁵ Six centuries later, Isidore of Seville echoed these words in his *Etymologies*. The corruption of human bodies by menses does not, however, appear in the classical and early-medieval encyclopedic tradition, nor in the medical tradition. Writers of gynecology found no place for such subjects as fetal deformation or infection of the male member due to contact with menstrual fluid despite the comprehensive manner in which they treated the subject of menstruation. Most medical writers held that menstrual fluid could endanger health, but this capacity was understood quite narrowly: if the female body failed to purge itself of menstrual fluid, it would suffer, and not because menstrual fluid was contaminating *per se*, but because its retention further offset the already imbalanced physiological environment of the female body.³¹⁶ Whereas previous gynecological texts identified the ill-effects of menstrual fluid trapped within the boundaries of the female body, *DSM* is primarily concerned with the

³¹⁵ *Natural History* 7.15.64. For the impact of Pliny’s and other encyclopedists’ eclectic treatment of human generation and medicine on medieval medical writers, see Cadden (1993), 41-42.

³¹⁶ Soranus, however, held that menstruation, “does not contribute to ... health, but is useful for childbearing only.” Amenorrhea may indicate that a particular woman simply does not have excess blood to be expelled; it is not an illness in itself. *Gynecology* 1.29, trans. Temkin (1991), 26-27.

consequences of its movement beyond the boundaries of the female body, and its threat to the boundaries of other bodies. Beginning in the thirteenth century, menstrual taboos began appearing regularly in scientific and medical texts. *DSM* is not only an example of this shift, but an early and influential one.³¹⁷ As Lemay has shown, the advancement of condemnatory views about menstrual fluid and menstruating women in scholarly literature in this period fueled misogynist sentiments, now endowed with the esteem of science, in the centuries that followed.³¹⁸

Menstrual fluid bound and unbound

Uterine suffocation (*suffocatio matricis*) is the only gynecological ailment discussed in any detail by Pseudo-Albertus, a choice that reflects the significance of the condition that came to be known under the names of *hysterikē pnix* or *apnoia hysterikē* by gynecological writers of the early Roman Empire.³¹⁹ This choice also underscores the narrow gynecological scope of *DSM* – uterine suffocation is selected to exemplify an “accident” suffered by the womb. Those symptoms and treatments mentioned serve only

³¹⁷ Lemay (1992), 35. See McCracken (2003), 3-6. For views on menstruation in Judaism and Christianity, see Cohen (1991), 287-291. For medieval legislation prohibiting intercourse during menstruation, see Brundage (1987), 91-92, 156-157, 198-199, 242, 283, 451, 508.

³¹⁸ For the contribution of *DSM* to the fifteenth-century inquisitorial treatise on witches, *Malleus Maleficarum*, see Lemay (1992), 49-58.

³¹⁹ These conditions (*hysterikē pnix* and *apnoia*) do not appear in the Hippocratic writings as discrete conditions, but King (1993) has shown how womb movement, one common symptom of which is *pnix* (suffocation), is the cause of most female pathology described in the Hippocratic writings (14-17). For a comprehensive analysis of uterine suffocation and its connection to wandering womb and hysteria from ancient Greece through the modern period, see King (1998a), 188-247. Hysteria (from the Greek word for womb, *hysterā*) was read back into ancient medical texts by modern editors and critics. Subheadings that rendered various ailments of the womb with the word “*hystérie*” were added to the Hippocratic corpus in the Littré edition of 1839-61. Ilza Veith traced the term back to the ancient Greeks through these subheadings in her book, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (1965), which became the definitive text for modern scholarship on hysteria.

to better define this “accident,” and are not meant to educate potential medical workers to diagnose or treat uterine troubles. Most importantly, the presentation of uterine suffocation in *DSM* lays the groundwork for its own assertions about menstrual contamination by establishing the pathogenic capacities of menstrual fluid, buttressed with the textual support of medical authorities no less than Hippocrates and Galen.

Drawing from the Hippocratic tradition, Pseudo-Albertus claims that uterine suffocation occurs when “the womb is taken from its proper place” and compresses the “vital spirits” so that breathing becomes difficult.³²⁰ Other symptoms include chills, weakness of heart, and dizziness. Although Galen (and Soranus as well) asserted that the womb could not move, Pseudo-Albertus selects a case study from his *On the Affected Parts* to illustrate how “the great doctor” treated a woman suffering from uterine suffocation caused by displacement of the womb.³²¹ Galen “came on the scene,” writes Pseudo-Albertus, “considered the cause, and freed the woman from this illness.”³²² This breezy account neglects to say that the woman recovered, in Galen’s account, when a midwife manually massaged her vulva until she experienced the “contractions associated with the pain and pleasure similar to that experienced during intercourse,” emitted “a

³²⁰ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 131-132: *Matrix enim mulieris sepe patitur suffocationem. Suffocatio enim apud medicos: vocatur compressio spirituum vitalium ex vicio matricis egressa et impeditur anhelitus in muliere. Et illud evenit quando matrix de proprio loco tollitur.* On Hippocrates *Diseases of Women* 1.2, 1.7, 1.32 and *Diseases of Women* 2.123-131, see King (1993), 14-25. Both Galen and Soranus recognized that ligaments surrounded the womb and kept it anchored in place within the female body. They held, however, that slight shifts in its position could result in severe symptoms. See King (1993), and (1998a), 225-236.

³²¹ Galen, *On the Affected Parts*, 6.5, trans. Siegel (1976).

³²² *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 132: *Galienus enim magnus in medicina narrat de quadam muliere suffocationem matricis patiente: quod ex illa causa tantum patiebatur quod non potuit loqui et cecedit quasi mortua esset quia nullum signum vite habuit et vocati sunt medici plures qui videntes ipsam et causam ignorantes dixerunt eam veraciter esse mortuam. Galienus autem superveniens causam consideravit: et mulierem a passione illa liberavit.*

large quantity of heavy semen,” and no longer suffered any symptoms.³²³ Galen takes no responsibility for the cure of this ailment which he deems to have been caused by the retention of female seed; he takes the fact that the woman in question was a widow to corroborate this hypothesis. Pseudo-Albertus neglects to report the woman’s marital status, a matter of import to Galen because, although he accepts that the retention of menstrual fluid could cause uterine suffocation, he determines the most severe cases to be caused by the accumulation of female seed, an inordinately cold substance that endangers health when retained in the naturally cold and wet female body. Widows who had enjoyed frequent intercourse before the deaths of their spouses, therefore, are more vulnerable to this ailment than virgins. In this, Galen differed from the Hippocratics who diagnosed the ailment in women whose bodies had not been sufficiently opened up by intercourse and pregnancy to allow proper drainage of menstrual fluid. Pseudo-Albertus concludes from his Galenic illustration that “this sickness happens in women because they are full of corrupt and poisonous menses.”³²⁴ Once again illustrating the confusions between menstrual fluid and female seed that occur throughout *DSM*, he concludes that, “it is, therefore good that these women, whether young or old, often use men as remedies so that such matter might be expelled.”³²⁵ He does not here express any concern about the well-being of those men “used” to expel this poisonous substance, but he is compelled to add: “However, since this practice goes against custom, nothing more at

³²³ Galen, *On the Affected Parts*, 6.5, trans. Siegel (1976).

³²⁴ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 132: *haec autem egritudo contingit in mulieribus: ex eo quod abundantia eis menstruum corruptum et venenosum.*

³²⁵ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 132, translation emended: *et ideo bonum est tales mulieres quandocumque fuerint sive iuvenes sive antiquae sepe viris remediis utantur: ut materia talis expellatur.*

present is said about it.”³²⁶ To review, then, Pseudo-Albertus invokes the Hippocratic corpus when he attributes uterine suffocation to movement of the womb because of the retention of menstrual fluid; then, he illustrates this ailment by citing Galen’s case study about a widow who was relieved from her symptoms when she emitted the semen that had gathered in her body; finally he suggests intercourse as a method for expelling the accumulated menstrual fluid. Pseudo-Albertus’ treatment of uterine suffocation provides a clear illustration of his conflation of menses and semen.

This anecdote is also significant because it characterizes *menstruum*, however it is understood in *DSM*, as corrupt and poisonous by nature rather than because it has been pathologically retained, a view that does not appear in the classical and early-medieval medical tradition. In order to explain why only some women experience uterine suffocation when all women are periodically “full” of menstrual fluid, Commentator A borrows from the properties of venom. Venom, he writes, does not “act in itself but rather in another thing.” It follows that “since women are naturally poisoned, they do not poison themselves.”³²⁷ Drawing from analogies to venomous snakes and spiders, Commentator B concurs.³²⁸ Galen, too, illustrates gynecological pathologies by comparing female superfluities to poison, but in order to prove a quite different point. In order to explain how small quantities of retained female semen may gravely affect a woman’s health, he compares its hazardous potency to the venom of a spider, the sting of

³²⁶ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 132, translation emended: *quamvis autem hoc peccatum sit in moribus: de quo ad praesens nihil dicitur.*

³²⁷ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 130, translation emended: *si aliquis quaeret: si mulieres sunt venenose quare non intoxicant seipsas. quod venenum non agit in seipsum in aliud obijcitur. Cum ergo mulieres sunt naturaliter intoxicate tunc non intoxicant seipsas.*

³²⁸ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 131: *Et quod hoc naturaliter possibile apparet de animalibus venenosis: ut sunt arane et serpentes.*

a scorpion, poison, and dog's saliva infected with rabies. The perforation in a scorpion's stinger is so small, Galen says, that it could only inject a "breath" (*pneuma*) or "delicate moisture" into the flesh of another creature, yet its sting brings on immediate, violent symptoms.³²⁹ In *DSM*, this metaphor is not employed to illustrate how a very small substance can effect marked results; instead, the metaphor is transferred to explain why females poison others with their internal fluids instead of themselves. Women, that is, become the poisonous creatures (rather than the creature poisoned by her own fluids, as in Galen) and the bodies of men and infants become the victims harmed by this poison (rather than the bodies of the women themselves, as Galen would have it). Commentator A warns that menstrual fluid is a "stink" that will drain a man's color and strength as it "corrupts [his] entire insides."³³⁰ Even if men were willing to risk their own health by engaging in intercourse with a menstruating woman, they should think of the well-being of the fetus that might be conceived, which will "tend to have epilepsy and leprosy."³³¹

These admonitions cast the female body, rather than the female embodied subject, as the polluting agent, but this distinction does not hold in *DSM*. Some women actively connive to poison the bodies of others with menstrual fluid so that women themselves become the source of danger. Recall Pseudo-Albertus' warnings about women who insert pieces of iron in their vaginas because they are aware of the increased vulnerability

³²⁹ Galen, *On the Affected Parts*, 6.5, trans. Siegel (1976).

³³⁰ *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 88. *Si mulierem menstruosam scienter accesseris totum corpus infectum erit et multum debilitaris ... infra mensem verum colorem et fortitudinem rebabebis. Et sicut liquidum vestimentis tuis adheret. sic ille fetor omnia interiora hominis corrumpit.* Commentator A attributes this statement to a certain Diasidus, whom Lemay has not been able to identify; *DSM 1*, Lemay (1992), 77; *DSM 10*, Lemay (1992), 131.

³³¹ *DSM 10*, Lemay (1992), 129: ... *illic pueri qui tum concipiuntur inclinantur ad morbum caducum et lepram. quia talis materia est valde venenosa.*

of the penis to “a large wound and serious infection” under certain phases of the moon.³³² Despite the urgency of this admonition, he is compelled to abandon the topic: “And if it were right to talk about this, I would say something about [these women], but because I fear my creator, I shall say nothing more about these secrets at present.”³³³ Commentator A reads in Pseudo-Albertus’ reticence about this matter the fear that “someone might be able to work some evil through these secrets,” thereby insinuating that these particular secrets of women are to be kept secret because their potentially dangerous use outweighs informing men further about these dangerous female practices.³³⁴ It is as if Commentator A fears that women’s secrets can spread and gain strength through the act of disclosure. The infection of the penis induced by these pieces of iron hidden in the female body pose a much greater threat to male health than surface damage—sore or wound. Commentator B explains that the penis is “a porous and thin member” which quickly absorbs menstrual blood, and “because all veins come together there [in the penis], [menstrual blood] is quickly dispersed through the body.”³³⁵ By way of an inversion of intercourse imagined as penile penetration of the female body followed by ejaculation within it, this model of

³³² *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 88, translation emended: *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 88, translation emended: *Sciatis autem socii mei quamvis quedam mulieres causam rei huius ignorant. tamen quedam mulieres effectum cognoscunt: et plura mala ex isto operantur: Ut cum vir est in coitu cum ipsis: accidit quandoque viris magna lesio et gravis infectio ex infecctione membri virilis per ferrum appositum per eas. prout quedam mulieres vel meretrices docte sunt in illa nequitia et in aliis similibus.*

³³³ *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 88: *Et si phas esset dicere: hic quedam asscriberem. Sed quia per proprium creatorem meum timeo: ideo de illis occultis ad presens nihil manifestabo.*

³³⁴ *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 89, translation emended. Although it is in some ways more understandable that Commentator A would be concerned about hiding these secrets of women from other women who might put them into effect, he grammatically identifies this “someone” as masculine: *Nota autor timet deum in scribendo secreta usque ad vitium ne aliquis expertus forte malum operetur per illa secreta.*

³³⁵ *DSM 2*, Lemay (1992), 89: *... et tunc menstruum existens in vulva mulieris intrat tale vulnus et inficit suo veneno: quia virga est membrum porosum et rarum. ideo talis materia cito imbibitur ab ipso et quia ibi omnes venae concurrunt talis materia spargitur per totum corpus.*

intercourse imagines the female genitals to wound the penetrating penis and disperse female superfluities (menstrual fluid / seed) into the male body by way of this opening. These warnings about a secret weapon hidden in the female body, invisible as a sign to be read by the man educated in the surface-level semantics of female corporeality, destabilize the boundaries of hierarchy and masculine knowledge on which the technology of secrecy depends in *DSM*, and it does in the context of concerns about female fluids secretly seeping into male bodies, that is, in the context of a supremely dangerous (female) secret failed to be read by the (male) at-risk party. This is another instance of the effects of the inscription of monstrosity on the female body violating masculine boundaries –corporeal, but more significantly, the epistemological boundaries that structure the assumptions about the legibility of the female body on which *DSM* depends.

While the process of human generation explicated in *DSM* owns that female superfluities contribute corporeal material and nourishment to the fetus (under the sign of menstrual blood, semen, or some conflation of the two), these superfluities also carry illness and corruption. The female body forms and incubates the fetus within the womb, but the womb read as generative space is inextricable from the womb read as contaminated space. Erroneously citing Avicenna, Commentator B explains that the female womb is “like a sewer situated in the middle of a town where all the waste materials run together and are sent forth.”³³⁶ This receptacle where all humans take shape is thus the most abject of spaces. Commentator B does not consider how the

³³⁶ *DSM* 11, Lemay (1992), 133-134. Avicenna does describe menstruation as a purging of superfluities from the womb, but he draws no analogies to sewers (Lemay [1992], 179, n.119). This comment does not exist in the Venice, 1508, edition of *DSM*.

human body takes on its bounded form within such an environment and exits in a flood of these “waste materials” at birth.

Perhaps even more troubling than the vulnerabilities of the male and infant body when they breach the boundaries of the female body—men during intercourse and infants during gestation—is the “secret” that the corrupting powers of menstrual fluid can invisibly harm bodies which do not enter this pathogenic field. Menstrual fluid also emits poisonous vapors that radiate well beyond the immediate boundaries of the female body to penetrate proximate bodies. Once this contamination becomes unbound, its power to corrupt intensifies and its field of influence expands. Commentator A attributes to Hippocrates the command: “Do not go near a menstruating woman, because from this foulness the air is corrupted, and the insides of a man are brought to disorder.”³³⁷ Pseudo-Albertus warns particularly about the noxious powers of old women, especially those who are post-menopausal and therefore no longer purge their menstrual fluid, which putrefies and generates poisonous vapors. Citing Albert’s *On Menses* and Aristotle’s *On Sleep and Waking*, he describes how old women “poison the eyes of children lying in their cradles by their glance” when menstrual humors “first infect the eyes, then the eyes infect the air, and that air infects the children.”³³⁸ The contamination

³³⁷ DSM 2, Lemay (1992), 89: *Ille fetor omnia interiora hominis corrumpit ... Mulierem menstrosam non accedas quia ex isto fetore aer corrumpitur et omnia interiora hominis confunduntur*. Nowhere in the Hippocratic corpus are men said to be vulnerable to the ill-effects of menstrual fluid, whether in liquid or vapor form. Indeed, the most propitious time for fruitful intercourse is said to be while the flow of menses is tapering off because then the uterine mouth was open and demonstrably clear of obstruction. Hippocrates *Nat. Pueri* 15.3 (VII:494), *Morb. mul.* I.11 (VIII:46), 12 (48), 17 (56), 24 (64). Cited in Hanson (1992), 41 and 62, n.66.

³³⁸ DSM 10, Lemay (1992), 129, translation emended: *Est autem notandum quod mulieres antiquae in quibus menstrua fluunt: et quaedam in quibus menstrua sunt retenta. si inspiciunt pueros in cunis iacentes intoxicant oculos eorum visu: ut dicit Albertus in libro suo de menstruo mulierum. Causa huius quae in mulieribus apparet quibus menstrua fluunt. quia ipse fluxus humores quae moventur per totum corpus proprios inficiunt oculos: et oculis infectis aer inficitur: et tunc aer ille inficit pueros*. Both of Pseudo-Albertus’ citations are specious. Lemay suggests that Pseudo-Albertus may be referring to the material on

of the old woman is particularly pernicious to proximate bodies as well as to *DSM*'s project because the poison of menstrual fluid becomes detached from its—albeit ambiguous—material sign. It becomes an illegible secret.

According to Jacquart and Thomasset, the physiology on which these claims about menstrual vapors are based “agrees perfectly with Aristotelian and Galenic theories of vision, in which air plays the role of the necessary intermediary between the eye and the object.”³³⁹ Albert the Great also held that menstrual contamination could pass into the air via the eyes.³⁴⁰ Commentator B traces the path of “venomous humors” from the womb of menstruating women to the breath they exhale. A man may, then, inhale this “infected air,” which damages his “vocal cords and arteries causing him to become hoarse.”³⁴¹ Infants, he adds, are more vulnerable to this poison because their bodies are extremely porous.³⁴² With this transformation of menstrual contamination from a blood-colored liquid into an invisible vapor, the legibility of the female body on which the revelation of women's secrets depends stumbles further into semantic trouble. No urine tests or careful speculation of women's faces can assure men protection from female superfluities, let alone sexual abstinence. With every inhalation, the male body could

menstrual fluid that appears in the first chapter of *DSM* when he cites *On Menses*. No text by that exists: “Albertus Magnus treats the menstrual period in *De animalibus*, Book XVI, tract.1, cap.15 and does not state that menstruous women are poisonous” (Lemay [1992], 178, n.112). No reference to menstrual contamination appears in *On Sleep and Waking* (Lemay [1992], 178, n.113).

³³⁹ Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 75.

³⁴⁰ Lemay (1992), 48. Albertus Magnus, *Quaestiones*, lib. IX, Q.9, 206-207.

³⁴¹ *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 129: *Et ratio est: quod per humores venenosos existentes in corpore mulieris per anhelitum aer inficitur: et ille aer infectus trahitur ad instrumenta vocalia: et arterias viri: et sic fit raucus.*

³⁴² *DSM* 10, Lemay (1992), 131: *Sed dices: quare magis inficit infantem: infantes habent corpora magis porosa.* For the similarities between the image of the poisonous old woman and the “witch-midwife” who, in inquisitorial treatises, was said to kill infants, see Lemay (1992), 53-55.

potentially take in these poisonous emanations, while infants absorb them through their skin. As these instances demonstrate, the admonishments in *DSM* to read the female signs of menstruation in order to avoid conceiving a sick baby or contracting a disease oneself are simply not enough. No amount of education about women's secrets can train men to identify invisible signs. Barring complete isolation from the female body, which *DSM* makes clear is an impossible solution, women's secrets will work their way into the bodies of others. As boundary violators *par excellence* these secret things monstrously undo Pseudo-Albertus' attempts to fix them, know them, and disarm them of their covert meanings.

Part Four: The Embryology of Monsters

Pseudo-Albertus introduces the subject of monstrous births by way of a citation from Aristotle's *Physics*—that there are errors in nature as well as art.³⁴³ “This statement,” he writes, “is very pertinent to the present work and sheds light on our subject.” Defined by Pseudo-Albertus as “those individuals of a certain species which in a certain part of their body are outside the bounds of the common course of the nature of the species [*cursum communem illius speciei excedunt*],” monsters shed light on the secrets of women; teratology illuminates gynecology.³⁴⁴ These errors in nature can occur in myriad ways and for several reasons, some of which lay beyond the purview of female responsibility such as when certain “celestial influences” cause the birth of “two twins ... joined in the

³⁴³ Aristotle, *Physics* 2, 8; 199a 32.

³⁴⁴ *DSM* 6; Lemay (1992), 112. *Sicut dicit Aristoteles secundo phisicorum: quod sicut peccatum est in natura: sic etiam est in arte: et huiusmodi declaratio multum valet ad manifestationem intenti. Unde sciendum quod monstra sive peccata nature vocantur individua alicuius speciei quae in aliqua parte corporis cursum communem illius speciei excedunt.*

back, having different heads or members, and distinct hands, but not feet, etc.”³⁴⁵ A human with the head of a pig has also been born under the influence of a particular star.³⁴⁶ In these circumstances, writes Commentator A, monsters are created for the adornment of the universe: for if different colors on a wall decorate that wall, so different monsters embellish the whole world.”³⁴⁷ Neither Pseudo-Albertus nor Commentator B are as inclined to look favorably upon monstrous births, and are keen to associate fetal deformities with conception achieved through inappropriate sexual positions, and a defective wombs.

Pseudo-Albertus devotes a substantial portion of his text to astrological influences on human generation, and describes in some detail the physical and character traits that develop in the fetus under the “rule” of each planet.³⁴⁸ Although certain planets fashion less attractive bodies or temperaments, Pseudo-Albertus does not attribute monstrous births to any astrological influences. It bears considering that Pseudo-Albertus imagines these fetuses and the adults they will become to be male. A fetus conceived under the influence of Saturn will develop a “thick beard,” and under the influence of Mercury, a “thin beard.” A fetus influenced by the sun will likely become “a clergyman”

³⁴⁵ DSM 6, Lemay (1992), 113: *Item monstra etiam maxime fiunt per influentias celestes. quia quandoque regnant specealis constellatio est ab illa diverse figure [?]. Unde experta est quod generati sunt duo gemelli ramifici in dorso habentes distincta capita vel membra. et distinctas manus et non pedes.*

³⁴⁶ DSM 2, Lemay (1992), 83: *et ideo ... quod hominem cum capite porci gignatur.*

³⁴⁷ DSM 6 (1992), 113: *Diceres quare tunc fierent monstra. Ad hoc dicunt philosophi: quod fiunt ad exornationes et decorationem universi. Nam dicunt sicut diversi colores in pariete existentes decorant ipsum parietem. Sic etiam diversa monstra ipsum universum exornant mundum.*

³⁴⁸ Lemay (1992) characterizes Pseudo-Albertus’ astrology as “learned science” rather than “popular superstition”: “It has a theoretical basis in Aristotelian philosophy; it was clearly defined by Albertus Magnus as the ‘science of the stars;’ its texts became prescribed reading for medical students in European universities in the fourteenth century” (26-32).

(*religiosus*).³⁴⁹ *DSM* thus locates the normative process of human generation in the celestial realm under whose influence proper, male bodies are formed. The functions and influences of celestial bodies are, moreover, amenable to scientific inquiry while the functions and influences of female bodies prove to be recalcitrant to logic and veiled in secrecy.

Most monsters are born with either too much or too little matter: too much, and the infant will have two heads, eight fingers, or a humpback; too little, and the infant will have one foot or four fingers. Monsters of the latter sort are often generated by an ill-suited womb. Sometimes to blame are irregular sexual positions which throw the semen into abnormal spots in the womb or cause it to slip out. Hermaphrodites are formed from seed that falls exactly in the middle of the womb, thereby crossing an invisible boundary with monstrous results.³⁵⁰ Commentator B advises that women remain “absolutely still” during and after intercourse to prevent the seed from scattering within the womb (which can generate conjoined twins) or leaking out of it (which can generate a fetus lacking certain body parts).³⁵¹ A midwife, recalls Commentator A, once witnessed the birth of “a mass of flesh with seventy human shapes,” a monstrosity possibly caused by excessive

³⁴⁹ *DSM* 3, Lemay (1992), 91, translation emended: *Saturnus qui enim superior et obfuscurior et gravior et tardior aliis. facit natum qui sub eo nascitur fuscum in colore ex parte corporis et plenum in capillis nigris et duris: et caput turbidum et bonum barbatum.*

DSM 3, Lemay (1992), 93: *Sed inveni aliquos dicentes quod natus sub isto planeta est regularis: religiosus: profunde devotionis: sapiens: dives: diligens bonos et deprimens malos.*

³⁵⁰ *DSM* 6, Lemay (1992), 117: *Si in medio hermafrodita participans naturam utriusque est masculi et femelle.*

³⁵¹ *DSM* 6, Lemay, (1992), 115: *et in illo tempore ipsa mulier non debet hic inde moveri: ne fiat divisio seminis: quia tunc monstrum generaretur ...*

motion by the woman during intercourse.³⁵² Even if men are implicated in the use of irregular sexual positions, it is the womb that fails to properly contain and position the seed. Commentator B adds that woman's imaginative power can shape the fetus if a certain figure should spring into her mind at the moment of conception thereby indicating that not only the female body, but female thoughts and emotions bring corporeal boundaries into disorder.

Drawing from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*, Commentator B submits that "woman is not human [*homo*], but a monster [*monstrum*] in nature."³⁵³ This monstrous female body that exceeds its bounds, leaks fluids and emanates vapors that are harmful to men and children seems a poor environment for forming a bounded human body out of a slurry of superfluities.³⁵⁴ Monstrous female bodies generate haphazardly arranged bodies that violate the systems of knowing of which *DSM* is an example. The analysis of abnormal births in this text suggests too that monsters not only issue from within the boundaries of the female body, they materialize the disordered interior of the female body.³⁵⁵ Monstrous bodies become, then, the teratologically marked "other" that distances the properly ordered body belonging to the master of women's secrets and his pupils from the disordered bodies that materialize these women's secrets.

³⁵² *DSM* 4, Lemay (1992), 99, translation emended: ... *quia expertus est per obstetrices quam semel una domina peperit massam carneam continentem septuaginta figuras hominum modo certum est quod non sunt tot cellule matricis. Secunda causa est abundantia seminis et tunc dividitur et spargitur et fiunt plures fetus. Tertia causa est quia quando mulieres in coitu nimis movent se et tunc circum dispargitur semen et fiunt plures fetus.*

³⁵³ *DSM* 5, Lemay (1992), 106: *mulier non est homo: sed monstrum in natura.* See Maclean (1983), 30-31.

³⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 728a 17 ff. and 737a.

³⁵⁵ McCracken (2003), 90.

Given that, according to the classical and early-medieval medical tradition, the fetus is, at least in part, fashioned out of menses and nourished by it, all human life issues from an environment that *DSM* identifies as corrupt and corrupting. Nowhere in *DSM* are monsters said to be generated because of contact with menstrual fluid within the womb. As we have seen, *DSM* lacks a consistent representation of the role of menstrual fluid in the formation of the fetus. This text admits a marked level of ambivalence about the intersection of two of its most important sets of women's secrets: baby making and menstrual fluid. Pseudo-Albertus's position that conception occurs when a woman "releases her menses" at the same time that the man releases sperm and "the two seeds" are mingled in what he calls "the woman's field" suggests that the fetus is formed, at least in part, by menstrual fluid.³⁵⁶ Sometimes women "do not produce something with the nature of a man, but rather a certain fleshy and milky matter," not a monster, but a

³⁵⁶ *DSM* 1, Lemay (1992), 65, translation emended: *Unde mulier cum in coitu fuit cum viro si mulier in eadem parte mittit menstruum in quo vir sperma quod duo semina in agro mulieris concurrunt simul et unum alteri incipit commisceri concipit mulier.*

Several medieval medical writers and encyclopedists express concern about the function of menses in the formation and gestation of the fetus. According to MacLehose (1996), the twelfth-century scholastic philosopher, William of Conches, was among the first and most influential medieval writers to relate the corrupting powers of menstrual fluid in the context of embryology, and thereby "set a precedent for writers over the next century" (6). He held that menstrual blood was boiled into a "pure" blood before it reached the fetus, a view repeated by Commentator B. In the late twelfth-century *Prose Salernitan Questions*, the question as to whether or not children are nourished by menstrual blood is answered with a definitive no: "Menstrual blood is corrupt, [and] ought to generate corrupt and fluid humors. Therefore children are not nourished by menstrual blood because it is corrupt, since if they were nourished from thence they would be quickly corrupted" (cited in MacLehose [1996], 3; *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Brian Lawn (1979), B306, 144). William of Conches hypothesized that man cannot walk at birth because he has been nourished in the womb by menstrual blood. Towards the middle of the thirteenth century, Vincent of Beauvais distinguished three types of menstrual fluid in an effort to explain why the fetus was not more harmed by the nourishment it received in the womb. According to Thomas of Cantimpré, fetal exposure to menstrual fluid could result in miscarriage. For more on these examples and others, see MacLehose (1996), 3-24, who calls for the representation of women in late-medieval gynecological literature as "essential yet dangerous nurturers" to be viewed as paradoxical rather than contradictory: "The paradox of women as nurturers and corruptors, creators and destroyers, epitomized high medieval medical authors' ambivalence toward women. There is no contradiction when these claims are understood within medical discourse. The female role in childcare left fetus and newborn vulnerable to a threat that lay in women's inability to control their bodily functions and fluids" (16).

miscarriage, and this occurs when “the matter of the menses is corrupt” or the woman has moved too much and “breaks the womb.”³⁵⁷ Human generation thus constructed refigures Pliny’s “monstrous” menstrual fluid (*monstrificium*, from *monstrum facere*). This female superfluity does not make monsters; it makes humans. The Argentine, 1510, edition of *DSM* preserves in a miscopied word this unspoken secret. Where Pseudo-Albertus asserts that, “[m]onstrosity is caused [*monstra accidunt*]... also by a poor disposition of the womb,” this edition reads *menstruositas* for *monstra accidunt*.³⁵⁸ Thus this superfluity that violates boundaries by seeping from the female body into the bodies of others is transposed into a monstrosity – by definition, a boundary violation.

This monstrosity, in turn, is caused by the inability of the womb to properly maintain its own boundaries, one that is “slippery, defective, or harmful ... [and] ... does not retain all the semen,” a womb that “scatters it [the semen] before the moment when the seed is all collected in a mass and the womb closes by force.” This womb, like the female body itself, fails to retain (*non retinere*), gather together (*colligere*), and enclose (*claudere*) its contents, actions requiring impervious, stable boundaries, which are not among the corporeal secrets found and brought to light in the *menstruos* / monstrous

³⁵⁷ *DSM* 5, Lemay (1992), 102: *Quaedam vero mulieres solent parere in secundo mense et abortive in naturam hominis non perducunt: sed aliquam materiam carneam vel lacteam. Illud autem accidit eis propter plura. ut patet quia materia menstruorum corrupta est: vel per nimium motum per quem rumpitur matrix vel propter alia mala.*

³⁵⁸ *DSM* 6; Lemay (1992), 113-114: *Est igitur notandum quod menstruositas [sic] non solum ex parte materie contingit sicut nunc dictum est: sed etiam aliquando ex malicia matricis: quasi fuerit viciosa et maliciosa: totum semen non retinebit sed dispergit aliquando antequam totum semen in massa colligitur: tunc vita occupatur et matrix clauditur.* The Argentine, 1510, edition reads *viciosa* where the Venice, 1508, edition reads *lubrica*.

According to Bildhauer (2006), *menstrum* is “often” written by scribes as *monstrum*, but she gives only the following instance: where other manuscripts give the heading *per quem locum fluant menstrua* (through which place [the vagina or the anus] menstrual fluid flows, “Manuscript J [*Secreta mulierum*, ed. Schleissner, p.152; Erlangen, Universitätsbibliothek, MS B 33 (Irm. 1492) ... has the corrupted *per quem locum fluant monstrum*” (131-132).

female body. That human bodies take their shape in the viscous depths of the female body is the secret that silently shouts in this text, it is a secret everywhere written in female flesh but ultimately remains illegible to Pseudo-Albertus because reading this secret would further destabilize the multiple boundaries required for the discursive performance of secrecy. The collapse of these boundaries is represented in the menstuous / monstrous womb from which all flesh emerges, including those “men” who are opposed to the “women” in the title, *De secretis mulierum*. The assignation of both monstrosity and secrets in this text require that the signifying bodies be female and the disembodied readers of that signification be male. The male bodies that appear in *DSM* are either the victims of women’s secrets or the proper bodies generated under the influence of stars—ethereal, methodical, bloodless fashioners of human bodies, the antithesis, that is, of the maternal body.

Monsters (*monstra*) are fundamentally signs, things that show (*monstrare*), materialized in corporeality. Because the designation of the monstrous shores up the bounds of identity, monsters signal both the self and the other in their boundary-violating flesh.³⁵⁹ *DSM* demonstrates how such monstrous signs occupy an uneasy position within the semiotics of secrecy insofar as the violating boundaries of the monster’s body, designated by discursive systems of knowledge and power, simultaneously shape and reinforce the boundaries of stable, normative bodies. The reproductive female body is, in this sense, the most monstrous “intimate stranger” because it materializes the boundary violations entrenched in the very formation of the bounded corporeal self. Like all monstrous bodies, it enables the formation and solidification of identities by materializing

³⁵⁹ See Cohen (1996), 19-20.

that which “I” am not.³⁶⁰ The monstrous signs that *DSM* designates and then disseminates in the form of secrets manage to show the breaches in their own discursive formation, and the most destabilizing breach is the one that uneasily separates maternal flesh and blood from one’s own. The framework of secrecy in *DSM*—the boundaries that must separate those that know and those that are the secrets—does not, however, allow for the reflexive reading that would bring this most secret thing to light, that both normative and monstrous bodies are fashioned amongst abject superfluities and gestated within what Commentator B deems the body’s sewer. One of the most crucial but precarious boundaries structuring *DSM*’s semantic project is the boundary that separates its author and commentators from their own secret origins.

If we compare the body of Pseudo-Ovid’s *vetula* with the female body in *DSM*, a different image of boundary-violating corporeality emerges. Whereas the *vetula*’s monstrosity issued from her lax and diseased body’s inability to regulate its own boundaries, *DSM* locates the monstrosity of the female body in its proclivity to “bring ... to disorder” the bodies of others.³⁶¹ This monstrosity is inextricable from the natural process of human generation, and marks woman as “venomous by virtue of her very physiological mechanism,” making her the “principle of destruction” of the very species to which she belongs.³⁶² The female body remains, however, the principle of generation of her species, and it is the enmeshment of these two principles that render the reproductive female body such an enticing and repulsive subject in *DSM*. This body is

³⁶⁰ Cohen (1996), 19.

³⁶¹ *DSM* 2, Lemay (1992), 89, Commentator A: *Ille fetor omnia interiora hominis corrumpit ... Mulierem menstruam non accedas quia ex isto fetore aer corrumpitur et omnia interiora hominis confunduntur.*

³⁶² Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 75-76.

the secret of which every human shares a part. Despite the possibly grave consequences of sexual intercourse for men and potentially-conceived fetuses, Commentator A allows that “the vulva [*vulva*] in itself possesses an exceeding sweetness for the male.”³⁶³

Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators cannot dispense with turning toward, drawing near, and peering into the female body for the secrets harbored within its orifices, membranes, fluids, and emanations. This is the seduction of the secret as well as the dangerous enticement of the monster, here located in this exceedingly sweet but exceedingly dangerous orifice of the female body, dangerous not simply because of its proximity to matter without form, flesh and blood without boundaries, but also because of its proximity to the formation of all bodies out of that matter. Monstrous secrets such as these do not abide a firm boundary between fear and attraction. In women’s secrets are the origins of corporeal selfhood, the archaic history of body boundaries curdling into formation.

³⁶³ *DSM 12*, Lemay (1992), 138: ... *vulve [sic] in se continet magnam delectationem viro. Sed tantum de illo non multum dico ad praesens.*

Chapter Three:

Julian of Norwich's *Showings*: The Permeable Body of Christ

Sick women see things – holy and hellish things. This is the claim, at least, of the commentators of *De secretis mulierum*. There is an alternate name, writes Commentator A, for the “syncope” of the heart that Pseudo-Albertus identifies as a symptom of uterine suffocation: “ecstasy [*ecstasis*].”³⁶⁴ Commentator B notes that women suffering from the retention of corrupt menstrual fluid sometimes claim to have been snatched out of their bodies and borne to heaven or hell. “This is ridiculous,” he insists, for such women mistake poisonous vapors rising from their wombs to their brains for supernatural creatures:

If these vapors are very thick and cloudy, it appears to them that they are in hell and that they see black demons; if the vapors are light, it seems to them that they are in heaven and that they see God and his angels shining brightly.³⁶⁵

It was during a grave illness in May of 1373 that Julian of Norwich saw things holy and hellish, visions that Pseudo-Albertus’ commentators might have read as signs that menstrual fluid had pooled in her internal cavities and filled her head with vapors. But in the *Showings*, Julian’s meditative account of these visions, the blood of the reproductive

³⁶⁴ DSM 11.132.

³⁶⁵ Lemay (1992), 132-134: *Et ideo dicunt quod antiquae mulieres post liberationem a tali infirmitate: hoc passae sint ex extasi: eo quod rapiantur extra corpus ad coelum: verl ad iterum ut postea narrent quod ibi geruntur sed hoc est ridiculum: nam hic pervenit naturaliter: quamvis ipsae non sic opinentur: seed potius ex raptu: et causa quare sic credunt est: quae tunc vapores ascendentes ad cerebrum si sunt multum grossi et nebulosi: videtur eis se in inferno positas: et ibi videre demones nigras. Si autem tales vapores sint subtilis: et clari: tunc videtur ipsis: quod sint in coelo: et ibi videant deum et angelos eius clare spendentes.*

female body is not a superfluity that causes sick women to hallucinate divine creatures, but a divine superfluity—the blood of Christ—that a woman’s sickness privileges her to see.

In her preface to the *Showings*, Julian explicitly identifies her illness as a divine gift in itself, but also a corporeal experience that opened her eyes to an intimate vision of Christ’s passion. Julian tells us that in her youth, she had made three wishes, one of which was for a “bodily sicknes” with “all manner of paynes, bodily and ghostly, that I should have if I should have died.”³⁶⁶ By the time Julian began suffering what she, her family members, and her priest believed would prove a fatal illness in her thirtieth year, the wish for illness, she says, had passed from her mind; yet, it is nevertheless “bodily sicknes” that affords Julian the visionary experience by which she achieves the other two wishes she had formulated in her youth: for a vision of the passion whereby she “might have more knowledge of the bodily paynes of our Saviour” and for the experience of “thre woundys”—“the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion, and the wound of willfull longing to God.”³⁶⁷ By way of this prefatory account of her three wishes, Julian establishes the central role of the pained and perforated body in her text. This body provides the medium for her experience, the characteristics through which she identifies with Christ, and the hermeneutic by which she analyzes her revelations. That is

³⁶⁶ *LT* preface. 2.5. Citations of the *Showings* refer to the Norton Critical Edition of the Long Text, edited by Denise Baker (2005), and follow the format: revelation number, followed by chapter number, followed by page number. A short preface describing her three wishes and initial illness proceeds Julian’s numbered revelations. The *Showings* survives in two forms, a short text and a long text (*LT*). The short text is approximately one sixth the length of the long text and is primarily a descriptive account of her visions. In the long text, Julian expands her reading of these visions, emphasizes the maternity of Christ, and develops the theological views of the thirteenth and fourteenth revelations. It has become accepted as fact that the short text preceded the long text, but scholars are not in agreement about the number of years between their writing. It is generally accepted that Julian composed the short text soon after her visionary episode in 1373 and the long text about twenty years later (Baker [2005], ix).

³⁶⁷ *LT* preface.2.5.; preface.2.6.

to say, that it is through the refiguration of her corporeal boundaries—by illness, wounds, and pain—that Julian is able to encounter the body of Christ, whose corporeal boundaries are likewise pervious, indeed salvific by way of their permeability. Precisely how that happens is the subject of this chapter.

Julian's account of her own illness, the initial vision she receives on her sickbed, and the understanding engendered by this vision introduces several elements whose significance will be fleshed out in Julian's subsequent visions and theological meditations: the meaning of Christ's blood flow, the implications of his wounds, and the significance of the maternal body. A priest who had been summoned to read Julian her last rites holds a crucifix before her face and urges Julian to fix her eyes on the body of Christ. It is at this moment that Julian recalls her wish for the wound of compassion, that is, for the corporeal experience of Christ's pains. As she gazes upon the image, Christ's face begins to bleed:

And in this sodenly I saw the reed bloud rynnyng downe from
under the garlande, hote and freyshely, plentuously and lively,
right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed
on his blessed head.³⁶⁸

This vision, Julian reports, filled her with an understanding of the Trinity (which she does not here elaborate) and a vision of Mary, “yong of age, a little waxen above a chylde, in the stature as she was when she conceived.” Julian sees, too, the “marveling” in Mary's soul “that [God] would be borne out of her that was a symple creature of his makynge.”³⁶⁹ We find here that the sight of Christ's crucified body induces a vision of bleeding, the

³⁶⁸ *LT* 1.4.8.

³⁶⁹ *LT* 1.4.8-9.

“lively” flow of Christ’s internal corporeal matter through the wounds in his skin. This vision of the breached body of Christ inspires Julian to contemplate the Trinity, which she will later describe as a series of overlapping and interpenetrating enclosures among father, mother, son, humanity, and holy spirit:

And I sawe no dyfference between God and oure substance, but as it were all God. And yett my understandyng toke that oure substance is in God, that is to sey, that God is God and oure substance is a creature in God. For the almyghty truth of the Trynyte is oure Fader, for he made us and kepyth us in hym. And the depe wysdome of the Trynyte is our Moder, in whom we be closyd. And the hye goodnesse of the Trynyte is our Lord, and in hym we be closyd and he in us. We be closyd in the Fader, and we be closyd in the Son, and we are closyd in the Holy Gost. And the Fader is beclosyd in us, the Son is beclosyd in us, and the Holy Gost in beclosyd in us, all myghty, alle wysdom, and alle goodnesse, one God, one Lorde.³⁷⁰

This association between the porous boundaries of Christ’s body and the familial series of dizzying enclosures that is the relationship between humankind and the Trinity progresses to a vision of the enclosing body of Mary. The mother of God, in turn, wonders to herself how it came to be that she contains within her body the body of her maker: how could she “be beclosyd” in the Son who is herself “closyd” in him? Julian is probably best known for her meditations on the maternity of Christ, and in these meditations, she returns again and again to the image of a body that gives birth as it encloses and is enclosed in what it births. One of the crucial elements of Julian’s Christology is that Christ becomes “very Mother of lyfe and of all” when he takes on

³⁷⁰ *LT* 14.54.84-85.

flesh in Mary's womb, and that the wounds Christ incurs during the passion become the thresholds where Christ's children find egress from and entry into his body.³⁷¹

Christ's maternity is, for Julian, predicated on Christ's corporeality, and specifically the permeability of his body. Julian locates Christ's maternity in the anatomy and physiology of a body that bleeds, gestates, gives birth, and nourishes – functions that materialize the sacrificial and redemptive possibilities of pervious flesh. In the *Showings*, as in *De secretis mulierum*, the ebb and flow of blood occurs across the boundaries of the female reproductive body, but in *Showings* the body whose blood surrounds, nourishes, and pours forth in child birth belongs to Christ. The porosity of the crucified body also affirms Christ's fundamental promise to Julian that “alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thyng shalle be wele.”³⁷² In her long text, Julian develops an eschatological theology which she reads in the orifices, exudations, penetrations, and enclosures modeled in Christ's body. Drawing upon these corporeal signs, Julian develops her own readings of the problem of evil, the nature of sin, and the promise of salvation. After analyzing how Christ's wounded body provides the framework for his maternity, this chapter considers how this maternal body functions as a model for the complex theological meditations of the thirteenth and fourteenth revelations in the long text of the *Showings*.

If Julian's subject is a Christology that hinges on the boundary violations in Christ's body, her subject is also the monstrous. Both son and mother, man and God, corpse and immortal, Julian's Christ is a “puzzling amalgam, a bizarre mixture of roles, genders and body parts unresponsive to any singular framework of understanding”—in

³⁷¹ LT 14.60.94.

³⁷² LT 13.27.39.

some sense, Christ is a monster.³⁷³ Recall that “Ovid” intimated the potential monstrosity of Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the incarnation, and the resurrection of the body. He was troubled by the difficult task of sorting out the confused boundaries between Christ’s body and Mary’s maternal flesh, and of finding the proper places for the bits and pieces of resurrected bodies. Flesh is always in some sense inextricable from the maternal body that fashioned and nourished it *in utero*. These doctrines harbored the threat of unstable and mixed corporeal borders that “Ovid” associated with the monstrosity of the *semivir*, the transformation of virgin into *vetula*, and the hemorrhaging boundaries of the old female body. Pseudo-Albertus and his commentators uncovered all sorts of monstrous secrets traceable to the unstable and porous boundaries of the reproductive female body, whose own unstable corporeal boundaries threatened the bodies of others with contamination, deformation, disease, and death. The *Showings* recasts these associations between the maternal body, the monster, and the corpse by identifying the perforated surfaces, uncontrollable flows, enclosures, and fragmentations—in short, the boundary violations, the monstrosity—of Christ’s body as precisely those qualities that brook communion between divinity and humanity.

Rather than simply rejecting the cultural inscriptions of monstrosity we have noted thus far, the *Showings* exploits the inherent ambivalence of the monstrous. In *De vetula* and *De secretis mulierum*, the monstrous body is both an aberration of nature and commonplace; it is the “intimate stranger.”³⁷⁴ If the monstrous is inscribed on the reproductive and aged female body, then all human bodies harbor some visceral

³⁷³ Mills (2003), 31.

³⁷⁴ Cohen (1999), 180.

connection with monstrosity, albeit unspoken, denied, or renounced. This pliancy of the monstrous on the scale of normalcy and alterity becomes adopted in late-medieval christological contexts, of which the *Showings* is one example. Representations of monstrous bodies prior to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were often structured as “antibodies of Christ at the center.”³⁷⁵ The monster was the pagan, demonic, or debauched other whose brokenness was reflected in the inviolable, intact body of Christ, both Church and eucharist. Teratological metaphors were also used to critique the body politic: a state ruled by both pope and emperor, for example, was named a monster, an *animal biceps*.³⁷⁶ But Michael Camille has noted a trend in late-medieval art, which was repeated in late-medieval theological and mystical texts, whereby the image of the anomalous body, “which had been such a ubiquitous sign of the multiplicity of evil and even Antichrist in twelfth-century art” began to be “appropriated to represent central dogmas of the Catholic faith, such as the Trinity.”³⁷⁷ Likewise, representations of Christ’s body “began to assimilate some of the liquidity and liminality of these monstrous things.”³⁷⁸ The borders between the monster and God became porous as medieval bestiaries, sculptures, and manuscript illuminations depicted “the Christian deity as a bestial, hybridized figure.”³⁷⁹ In his article, “Jesus as Monster,” Robert Mills suggests

³⁷⁵ Camille (1997), 74.

³⁷⁶ Camille (1997), 72.

³⁷⁷ Camille (1997), 72. For an analysis of representations of the Trinity as a three-headed creature, see Mills (2003), 38-41. There remained opposition to such representations in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Mills cites Antonius, the Archbishop of Florence, who, in his *Summa Theologica* of 1459, criticized painters who “paint things against the faith, when they make an image of the Trinity one person with three heads, which is monstrous in the nature of things (*quod monstrum est in natura rerum*)” (38).

³⁷⁸ Camille (1997), 74.

³⁷⁹ Mills (2003), 29.

that “the hybridization of identity categories in the writings of female mystics” was both a contributing factor and a manifestation of late-medieval associations between Christianity and monstrosity.³⁸⁰ In *Showings*, Christ’s identity incorporates multiple hybridizations of identity categories, and, like the late-medieval representations of the Trinity as a three-headed deity, these identity categories are mapped out on Christ’s body, and negotiated along its borders.

In the pages that follow, I examine how the *Showings* contributes to this construction of the monstrous Christ. In order to do so, I analyze the function of the disordered, wounded, and female reproductive body in *Showings*, how Julian’s wishes for wounds and illness operate as an *imitatio Christi*, how her visions of Christ’s passion fulfill her desire for affective identification, and how these visions are “reiterated in the body of her written text, culminating in a fully realized depiction of God as divine mother.”³⁸¹ After exploring how Julian reads Christ’s wounds, blood flow, and internal body cavities, I demonstrate how the permeable limens of Christ’s body underpin his identity as *Moder Jhesu*, and how Julian builds the dense theological portions of her text upon the processes of birth and enclosure she finds in his body. Finally, I turn to the some example of late-medieval literature written for female anchoritic readers, principally, the *Ancrene Wisse*, a thirteenth-century rule for anchoresses, to show how Julian’s articulation of maternal corporeality challenges the normative boundaries by which the monstrous was circumscribed in anchoritic discourses.

³⁸⁰ Mills (2003), 29. David Williams (1996) traces associations between god and monster in the Middle Ages to the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita and his translator: “God is paradox, paradox is God, and as such, God is the ultimate monster” (133).

³⁸¹ McAvoy (2004), 15.

Part One: Textual Bodies / Compassionate Bodies

After visiting a monastery in the province of Liège in 1267, Philip of Clairvaux felt compelled to record what he witnessed the beguine, Elisabeth of Spalbeek, doing in her cell.³⁸² The resulting *vita* is a record of Elisabeth's physicality – her gestures, poses, gymnastics, trances, and bleedings. Philip summed up the corporeal nature of Elisabeth's religious praxis when he wrote in her *vita* that it is not enough to say that Elisabeth's "life" was a miracle. Rather, her "whole self" (*ipsa tota*) was a miracle, that is, her body and its performance by which she "fashions and explains" (*effigiat et exponit*) Christ, his crucifixion, and his "mystical body that is the Church."³⁸³ Philip faces the challenge of recording in words what takes place materially in space, without words on Elisabeth's part. Some passages of his text read as ekphrasis, as a detailed description of a living and moving object of art;³⁸⁴ in other passages, Philip glosses Elisabeth's movements, often by annotating their meaning with specific Bible passages.³⁸⁵ Philip conceptualizes

³⁸² This *vita* was later assembled into a fifteenth-century manuscript along with the *vitae* of some of the most remarkable of Elisabeth's fellow beguines: Christina Mirabilis, Mary of Oignies, and Catherine of Siena.

³⁸³ Vita Elizabeth sanctimonialis in Erkenrode, Ordinis Cisterciensis, Leodiensis diocesis, in Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum bibliothecae Regiae Bruxellensis, I. Brussels, 1886: vol.1, part 1, 378: 30.25-28: *Nostra igitur virgo, cuius tota vita miraculum, immo quae ipsa tota miraculum, ut ex suprascriptis apparet, non solum Christum et ipsum crucifixum in suo corpore, sed etiam Christi corpus mysticum, id est Ecclesiam, effigiat et exponit.*

³⁸⁴ This passage describes one of Elisabeth's more acrobatic feats: as in this passage where he narrates one of her more acrobatic feats: *...quia non potest incedere, cum pes semper sedeat super pedem, pro incessu pedum jacendo et, modo quem explicare nequeo, volvendo se super pectus et dorsum et latera, locum mutat. Et tunc super pedem qui solus adhaeret terrae, sine alterius pedis aut manus adminiculo surgit alacriter et stat recta* (370: 10.5-10).

³⁸⁵ *non in membranis aut chartis, sed in membris et corpore memoratae nostrae puellae* (373:16.6-14). After describing how Elisabeth rolls about on the floor, striking her head against it, and twisting her arms and hands as she weeps, Philip writes: *Tunc, si loqui valeret, vere diceret illud propheticum quod Domino patienti adscribitur: Circumdederunt me dolores mortis, etc.* (366: 6.35-36).

Elisabeth's movements as words expressed bodily which he, in turn, translates back into text, and this "readability" tells the story of Christ's passion even to the illiterate man who can read (*legere*) the story (*historia*) of redemption "not in parchments or papers, but in limbs and the body of our memorable girl."³⁸⁶ Yet, despite Philip's meticulous efforts to describe what Elisabeth does, he remains acutely aware that no amount of discursive detail can fully capture what happens in the flesh, that is, nothing less than Elisabeth becoming Christ via her performance.³⁸⁷ Judith Butler, who has worked to bring the notion of performance to bear on the subjects of identity, body, and gender, defines a performative act as a "discursive practice that enacts or produces what it names."³⁸⁸ A discursive practice can be vocal ("I now pronounce you man and wife,)" but it can also be corporeal, comprised of movements and poses, and this is the sort of discursive practice that creates a fissure in Philip's text. Elisabeth's *imitatio Christi* is a "becoming" Christ that is not reducible to her own corporeal discursivity, nor to the textual discursivity that her *imitatio* precipitates; it is one, moreover that vexes the boundaries between the mundane performative acts that constitute male and female, humanity and

³⁸⁶ ...*nihil excusationis praetendere possit homo, quantumque illitteratus aut simplex, quem intemeratae Virginis partus redemit, ut dicat: "Non possum legere aut intelligere tam profunda mystica, 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* (373:16.6-14).

³⁸⁷ Philip's lack of faith in his ability to express Elizabeth's physical maneuvers and his almost compulsive need to confess this weakness gives glimpses of its own writer in ways that other relatively contemporary hagiographic records do not. A sampling of his many qualifications and protestations: *prout fieri poterit describendi* (364: 3.19); *...longe gratiosius et mirabilius quam scribere aut cogitare...*(366: 5.16-17); *...longe solemnus et mirabilius quam meae parvitatibus stilus exarare sufficiat consummatis...* (368: 7.10-11); *...modo quem explicare nequeo...* (370: 10.7-8); *...quos non ut volui, sed ut valui, supra descripsi. Sed scio quod plene respondere non valuit facultas aut scientia voluntati.* (370: 10.18-20); *...omnino retinere non potero nec explicare ex toto* (363:1.17, 21-22); and finally, he says that he was forced to pass over many things *aut propter defectum memoriae aut propter difficultatem materiae, quam stilus refugit imbecillis* (373.18.23-24).

³⁸⁸ Butler (1993), 13.

divinity, the mystical gyrations of a beguine and the priestly eucharistic ritual. Philip calls what Elisabeth does *compassion*:

Not only with signs and gestures does she represent the Lord's passion, but truly with groans and tortures, as much in heart as in body, she presents her own compassion.³⁸⁹

The fulfillment of Julian's wishes (one of which was for the wound of compassion), like Elisabeth's performance, is fundamentally a sharing of pains, from the Latin *com-passio*, fellow suffering. Elisabeth's performance, like Julian's wishes—for a “bodley sight” of the passion, a “bodily sicknes,” and “thre woundes” (one of them being the wound of compassion)—privileges the material body as the most intimate site for communion with God.³⁹⁰ The textuality of compassion—the reading and writing of compassion—is tenaciously bound to the phenomena of the flesh. In some sense, this is necessarily so by virtue of the God with whom Elisabeth and Julian commune. Christ is and always was the Word, yet his performance of incarnation and crucifixion are the corporeally discursive acts by which Christ's salvific identity is materialized.³⁹¹ Through

³⁸⁹ ... *non modo repraesentat signis et gestibus Dominicam passionem, modo vero gemitibus et tormentis, tam corde quam corpore, suam exhibet compassionem* (371: 12.1-3). Philip also evokes Elisabeth's becoming Christ with similar mirroring vocabulary in the following passages: *Ceterum post multas maneries repraesentationum crucis Dominicae et multas percussiones virginis cruciatae...*(370: 10.15-16); *Quem igitur non delectet videre vel saltem mente recolere et tenere repraesentationem tam copiosae virtutis, tam gloriosae salutis: virginem scilicet in cruce et crucem in virgine contemplando?* (372:15.9-11); *...et in ipso momento quo os aperit et hostiam accipit, eiusdem puellae spiritus Spiritum Domini suscipiens, suscipitur a suscepto et rapitur in instanti ...* (374:20.25-27).

³⁹⁰ Julian divides describes her visions into “bodely” and “gostly” sights. Julian's interpretations of her visions often seem informed by an awareness of the various aspects of medieval exegesis, but I agree with Bauerschmidt that, although it is possible “to detect allegorical, anagogical, and tropological aspects of Julian's interpretation ... it is primarily this dual division into literal (“gostly in bodely lyckness”) and spiritual (“more gostly withoute bodely lycknes”) that is of primary significance to Julian” (1999, 128).

³⁹¹ John 1:1. Butler conceptualizes the consolidation of identity (the “becoming” of oneself) as a “process of sedimentation or what we might call *materialization*” brought about by “a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power” (Butler [1993], 15). Since performance must always cite the power structures through which meaningful citation occurs, the historical and cultural context

their respective stylizations of compassion, Julian and Elisabeth both participate in this materialization. As the creator of her own text, Julian especially underscores the textually discursive component of compassion. It has been said that the long text of the *Showings* “is the work of a writer, not a seer.”³⁹² As far as we know, Julian never experienced another visionary episode. After her recovery in 1373, she did become a writer, “in effect ... her own secretary or scribe.”³⁹³ But Julian continued to be a reader of her own visions, crafting her sense of their meaning for many years. “[F]or twenty yere after the tyme of the shewyng save thre monthys,” she “had techyng with in ... as it were the begynnyng of an ABC” about a vision of a servant falling into a ditch—a vision in which Julian would eventually find the meaning of sin and redemption.³⁹⁴ In the concluding section of the long text, Julian writes that she often desired to know “in what was oure Lord’s menyng.” More than fifteen years passed before she received the following answer:

“What, woldest thou wytt thy Lordes menyng in this thyng?
Wytt it wele, love was his menyng. Who shewyth it the? Love.
Wherfore shewyth he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou

surrounding performance is never negligible; it provides the very “language” by which citation occurs. The performances of Elisabeth and Julian are citations of the passion of Christ, but rather than “acting,” they are each a becoming that occurs through the materialization of citations. These performances are not so different in kind than the daily performance of any person in the process of becoming themselves, but they do differ in degree, and *this* difference magnifies the potential of performance to destabilize the very power structures that enable performance to take place. Elisabeth’s performance in particular parades its own process of production as well as the possibilities for destabilizing the citation of power. Elisabeth’s materialization of Christ’s body and her sharing of this body with her spectators, moreover, potentially calls into question the mundane performances of priests that continuously rearticulate their sole jurisdiction to materialize the body of Christ. Cf. Rodgers and Ziegler (1999), 303: “Elisabeth’s dances were implicit critiques of the idea that only the official church could mediate divinity and regulate believers’ relationships to the body of Christ.”

³⁹² Johnson (1991), 157 in Baker (2005).

³⁹³ Johnson (1991), 157 in Baker (2005).

³⁹⁴ *LT* 16.51.76, 72.

shalt wytt more in the same. But thou shalt nevyr witt therin
other withoutyn ende.”³⁹⁵

The textual process of compassion, then, will continue beyond the final words of the *Showings*. “This boke is begonne by Goddys gyfte and his grace,” Julian concludes, “but it is nott yett performyd [completed, accomplished] as to my syght.”³⁹⁶ In a sense, the text continues to be “performed” with every reading of it, and thus with every reading of Christ’s body. In this way, the meaning of the textual process is the “menyng in this thyng,” that is, love.

This textual process begins, both in time and in the textual arrangement of the *Showings*, with Julian’s three wishes, each of which stresses the significance of the malleable and vulnerable body, both hers and Christ’s. They are wishes, in effect, to encounter through her own body the consequences of Christ’s incarnation.³⁹⁷ When, on her deathbed, Julian requests “the wounde of kynd compassion,” she explains this wish as a desire that “his paynes were my paynes ... [w]ith him I desyred to suffer, livyng in my deadly bodie ...”³⁹⁸ This is a wish for compassion articulated in the corporeal vocabulary of “woundes.” Julian tells us in her short text that she conceived this desire for wounds after hearing a sermon on the death of St. Cecelia, who, according to the thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea*, was martyred in the early third century for converting Romans to Christianity and refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods. She was first boiled in a vat of water, but having endured this torture without “as much as a drop of perspiration” she

³⁹⁵ *LT* 16.86.124.

³⁹⁶ *LT* 16.86.124.

³⁹⁷ Bauershmids (1999), 37.

³⁹⁸ *LT* preface.3.7.

was sentenced to beheading. The executioner struck her three times in the neck with a knife, but failed to decapitate her. Cecelia continued to live for three days, and donated all of her possessions to the poor.³⁹⁹

Although Julian's desire for three wounds transfers into metaphor what were for St. Cecelia violent punctures in the flesh, the fulfillment of that desire entails the *bodily* vision of the passion, *bodily* illness, and the *bodily* experience of Christ's pain. It is intriguing, then, that Julian makes a point of emphasizing that she "desyred never no bodily sight ne no maner of schewing of God, but compassion ... that a kynd sowle might have with our Lord Jesu, that for love would become a deadly man."⁴⁰⁰ Thus, although Julian's vocabulary accentuates the corporeality of compassion, she stresses the figurative nature of this "wounde," characterizing compassion as an affective response to the knowledge that Christ died for love of humankind. Julian may have downplayed the intimacy, and therefore corporeality, of her desire in order to deflect charges of presumptuousness.⁴⁰¹ Regardless of her professed intentions, the inextricability of corporeal compassion, shared pain, and bodily seeing is confirmed as Christ's head immediately commences to bleed before her eyes. The *Showings*, then, is a testament to the textuality and the "bodiliness" of compassion. During her visions Julian no longer experiences the pain of her own gravely ill body, but "felte no peyne but for Cristes

³⁹⁹ Jacobus de Voragine (1993), vol.II, 318-323. Considering Julian's emphasis on female and maternal bodies, it is intriguing that she omits this reference to St. Cecelia as well as references to her mother own mother at her bedside in the long text.

⁴⁰⁰ *LT* preface.3.7.

⁴⁰¹ Generally, however, Julian effaces from her long text statements that undercut her authority in the short text, including a reference to her unwillingness to teach on the grounds that she is "a womann, leued, febille and freyell" Colledge and Walsh (1978), I.22. The omission of this disclaimer in the long text has led several scholars to speculate that Julian had become more confident of the import of her visions in the intervening years. McInerney (1996) suggest that Julian's "increased assurance may be located precisely in a redefinition of the value of her gender" (164).

paynes.”⁴⁰² This possibility of co-experiencing pain is one of the extraordinary circumstances of Julian’s “bodily vision,” but corporeal compassion also unites Christ and humanity by way of their shared flesh. As Julian puts it, there was a “grett onyng [great union]” on the day of the passion, for “when he was in payne, we ware in payne. And alle creatures that myght suffer payne sufferyd with hym ...”⁴⁰³

In many ways, this emphasis on Christ’s flesh, its capacity to suffer, and the corporeality of compassion in the *Showings* reflects certain trends in late-medieval mysticism well-documented by scholars such as Caroline Bynum, Rudolph Bell, and Karma Lochrie.⁴⁰⁴ The late Middle Ages witnessed an increase in devotions to the humanity of Christ and in religious practices that “sought bodily manifestations of God’s activity within the soul.”⁴⁰⁵ These manifestations, which ranged from sense perceptions of the divine to extraordinary corporeal phenomena, were more often associated with female than male piety.⁴⁰⁶ Bynum has documented the late-medieval increase in accounts of holy women who saw, smelled, or tasted Christ, and whose bodies swelled with miraculous pregnancies, exuded holy oils, bled at the palms, feet, and side, were sustained for years at a time on the eucharist alone for nourishment, and remained incorrupt after death.⁴⁰⁷ She argues that encountering the flesh of Christ—as infant, bridegroom, crucified man, and especially as food and drink—formed a powerful facet of

⁴⁰² *LT* 8.17.29.

⁴⁰³ *LT* 8.18.30.

⁴⁰⁴ Bynum (1987, 1992), Bell (1985), Lochrie (1991), Beckwith (1993), Weithaus (1993).

⁴⁰⁵ Bauerschmidt (1999), 37.

⁴⁰⁶ Bynum (1992), 194.

⁴⁰⁷ Bynum (1987), 122-123, 200-201, 210-211, 273-274; Bynum (1992), 186-195.

late-medieval female religiosity, and that the sometimes “bizarre” (this is Bynum’s word) corporeal phenomena recounted in mystical texts and hagiographical material reflect resonances between female corporeality and the flesh of Christ.⁴⁰⁸

When we consider what the *Showings* contributes to our understanding of corporeal compassion and affective mysticism in the religiosity of medieval women, we find that Julian has been somewhat of a divisive figure, particularly because of the interconnectedness of bodily phenomena and hermeneutics in her text. Contrasting the *Showings* with other late-medieval mystical texts that feature the body of Christ, David Aers has argued that, despite appearances to the contrary, the *Showings* does not represent an example of the trends in women’s mysticism documented by Bynum. Julian does, he grants, invoke the tortured body of Christ and express a desire to suffer his pains in her own flesh, but he reads these portions of Julian’s text as reproductions of “a dominant commonplace of late medieval devotion,” and argues that Julian’s rhetorical strategies work to “discourage any affective identifications with the crucified body.”⁴⁰⁹ I

⁴⁰⁸ Bynum (1992), 194. For Bynum’s views that such associations allowed physicality (and thus, the female body) to be “redeemed and expressed by a human God,” see Bynum (1992), 149-150. For a critique of this thesis, see Aers (1996), 28-42. Aers doubts that the imitation of Christ’s flesh “empowered” medieval women. I am inclined to agree with this critique, but do not here posit whether or not this religious praxis was, in general, “good” for women. Julian’s encounter with Christ’s flesh through illness, bodily vision of the passion, and three wounds, however, was ultimately “empowering” in the sense that she became a woman renowned for wisdom in religious matters. Although we do not know if this reputation was directly related to Julian’s visionary experience, we might conjecture as much from Margery Kempe’s visit to Julian in order to seek guidance about her own mystical experiences. For the account of this visit in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, see Staley, ed. (2001), 32-33: “And then she was bidden by our Lord to go to an anchoress in the same city, who was called Dame Julian. And so she did and showed her the grace that God put in her soul of compunction, contrition, sweetness and devotion, compassion with holy meditation and high contemplation, and full many holy speeches and dalliances that our Lord spoke to her soul, and many wonderful revelations which she showed to the anchoress to learn if there were any deceit in them, for the anchoress was expert in such things and good counsel could give.”

⁴⁰⁹ Aers (1996), 82. On this subject, see also McNerney (1996), 165: “Julian is often considered the most theological, the most logocentric, the least apophatic of medieval woman mystics; Colledge and Walsh’s entire commentary seeks to prove how systematic and rational her method is, how much of an heir she is of the tradition of the Church Fathers, even of Scholasticism. Attempts to validate Julian’s theology often

suggest, however, that by downplaying to convention the role of corporeal identification with the crucified Christ, and by emphasizing Julian's text as "a reasoning inquiry with carefully articulated questions and answers," Aers neglects the crucial interconnectedness of these two aspects of the *Showings*.⁴¹⁰ He is correct to recognize Julian's erudite employment of scholastic concepts and her careful work on arguably abstract problems such as concupiscence and the possibility of redemption. But his position that corporeally-centered affective mysticism "circumvented the analytic processes of rational exploration" discourages analysis of precisely how the bleeding, suffering, dying body of Christ functions in Julian's complex theology.⁴¹¹

Bynum's work, too, sometimes fortifies this division between affective mysticism and "rational exploration" by under-representing texts like *Showings*, which problematizes this division, and by over-emphasizing affective mysticism and corporeal phenomena in hagiographic literature (to some degree, however, this emphasis is generated by the specific subjects she has chosen to investigate.) Julian longed for illness and wounds, and graphically describes the crucified body of Christ, but these facets of her corporeal compassion produce rather than foreclose her inquiry into matters eschatological, soteriological, and psychological. Julian's *Showings* does differ from the *vitae* that illustrate many of Bynum's theses about *imitatio Christi* in late-medieval female religiosity. In it, we do not find her exuding healing oil from her breasts (as did Christina Mirabilis), driving her own fingers into her palms until the stigmata

coincide with efforts to distance her from the tradition of female mysticism, characterized as affective, emotive, and irrational."

⁴¹⁰ Aers (1996), 83-84.

⁴¹¹ Aers (1996), 85.

“miraculously” appear (as did Lukardis of Oberweimar), or bleeding from her eyes and finger nails (as did Elisabeth of Spalbeek).⁴¹² The spectacular *vitae* of these women were written by male hagiographers: Thomas of Cantimpré and Philip of Clairvaux. It is a problematic task, then, to determine to what extent such instances of extreme corporeal phenomena—whether or not they are thought to reflect mortification of the flesh or deep communion with the body of Christ—bespeak hagiographic enthrallment with the suffering of holy women or the religious praxis of the women themselves.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Life of Marie of Oignies, bk.1, chap. 4, par. 40, *Acta Sanctorum*, June, vol.5. Life of Christina Mirabilis, chap. 2, par. 19, pp.653-54. Life of Lukardis, *Analecta Bollandiana*, ch.7-12, 313-315; For more on Lukardis, see Bynum (1992), 131-132. Life of Elisabeth of Spalbeek, *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum bibliothecae Regiae Bruxellensis*, vol.1, pt.1, 371: 13.

⁴¹³ That the *Showings* is autobiographical renders this problem less acute, and it is not a primary task here to disentangle how much Julian’s representation of her own and Christ’s flesh subverts or recapitulates the medical, philosophical, and theological discourses that found evidence of inferiority in the female body. I shall argue below that Julian’s imagination of God does present alternatives to the views in the *De vetula* and *De secretis mulierum* that associate women’s bodies, orifices, and effluvia with the boundary violations of the monstrous. This inquiry, however, is more concerned with the specifics of Julian’s articulation of these alternatives than her conscious and systematic mobilization of them. Here, I find that Judith Butler’s concepts can also be constructive for grappling with some of the questions concerning the authenticity of mystical practices, the disentanglement of female mystical experience from the male-authored hagiographic records of that experience, and the mediation between the concepts of female medieval subjects as (powerful) agents or as (powerless) social constructs. Butler’s model of subjectivity has been characterized as pessimistically constructionist because she posits the materialization of the subject as an effect of discourse: “There is no ‘I’ who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse. On the contrary, the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated...” (Butler [1990], 225). She is careful to specify, however, that “discourse” or “power” or “culture” must not simply replace the void left behind by the banished subject: “...construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both ‘subjects’ and ‘acts’ come to appear at all. There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability.” Moreover, “it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm” (Butler [1993], 9-10). The *instability* inherent in the process of reiteration or citation is crucial for the possibility of critique, disruption, and change. Karma Lochrie sees female-authored mystical literature as a particularly fecund ground for the fissures and gaps that Butler claims exist potentially in any materialization of identity. Defining the mystical text as “a practice through which the body is translated into a written *corpus*,” Lochrie posits that if this practice takes place within a cultural construction that identifies woman with “the flesh, and specifically, fissured flesh,” then “the woman writer potentially occupies the site of rupture, where excess and unbridled affections threaten the masculine idea of the integrity of the body” (Lochrie [1991], 6). On the question of female mysticism as a “subversive” discourse, see Aers (1996), 34-37, where he asks not whether *imitatio Christi* within the religious praxis of late-medieval women was “empowering,” but, drawing from Foucault, asks “what technologies of power was Christ’s body being subjected, and with what consequences?” (37).

The absence of such phenomena (excepting Julian's deathly illness which I consider in more detail below) may reflect a further divergence in the *Showings* from other late-medieval mystical literature. Julian's corporeal compassion does not evince the powerful devotion to the eucharist that Bynum finds in the texts of "all thirteenth-century women who wrote at length on spiritual matters," with the exception of Margaret Porete.⁴¹⁴ As a fourteenth-century text, *Showings* is not *per se* an exception to this statement, but Bynum relies on texts written throughout the late-medieval period to substantiate her claims about female devotion to the eucharist. Although Julian recognizes the nourishing function of Christ's body, she nowhere mentions the eucharist, nor the ingestion of Christ under any species. This is a striking exclusion considering Julian's emphasis on corporeal communion with Christ whose body is specifically maternal – in other words, a body that feeds with its own substance.⁴¹⁵ In Julian's visions and meditations, Christ's body is legible space rather than food. It is a space whose boundaries may intersect and permeate the body boundaries of humanity, but Julian expresses this corporeal communion textually, through the vocabulary of conception, gestation, and birth rather than ingestion.

The movements from affective communion with Christ's body to literary analysis of its signs are what allow Julian, in Aers' words, to develop a theology that unites "creation, Crucifixion, and resurrection in a dialectical unity." It is also the case that Julian has exalted "the dying and nutritive body of Christ" into "the mysterious realm of the Trinity," but Aers overlooks the continuous presence of Christ's maternal body

⁴¹⁴ Bynum (1992), 124.

⁴¹⁵ Hagiographical writers like Thomas of Cantimpré and James of Vitry probably emphasized eucharistic devotion in their *vitae* to combat Cathar dualism (Bynum [1992], 143).

throughout this exaltation.⁴¹⁶ Corporeal identification and critical interpretation overlap in the *Showings*, and they do so on the surface and within the breaches in Christ's flesh. We can, then, confirm the significance of corporeal compassion in Julian's text, noting that it conforms to models of late-medieval affective piety, but also underscoring the significance of the semiotic as well as the phenomenological features of her experience.

Karma Lochrie has convincingly argued that medieval *imitatio Christi* was not "confined to the reenactment and self-infliction of his suffering," even among the women whose *vitae* were written by hagiographers such as Jacques of Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré:

Imitatio Christi began in the semiotic pilgrimage of the memory and the imagination through the signs of narrative and pictorial representation to the stirring of the mystic's affections and meditation. Imitating Christ was conceived of as a kind of reading and remembrance.⁴¹⁷

As reader of Christ's body and the writer of her own text, Julian especially exemplifies this translation of body into text, and her semiotics is inextricable from her direct experience of Christ's flesh: "Reading proceeds from the place of rupture—Christ's wounded body—to the mystic's flesh, and it is replicated in reading the mystic text."⁴¹⁸

The Monk of Farne, who wrote during Julian's lifetime underscored this textuality of the passion, urging his readers to read Christ's crucified body like a book:

The words of this book are Christ's actions, as well as his sufferings and passion, for everything that he did serves for our instruction. His wounds are the letters or characters, the five

⁴¹⁶ Aers (1996), 96.

⁴¹⁷ Lochrie (1991), 167, 37-47.

⁴¹⁸ Lochrie (1991), 168.

chief wounds being the five vowels and the others the consonants of your book. Learn how to read the lamentations—and alas! too, the reproaches, outrages, insults and humiliations which are written therein.⁴¹⁹

Julian's text represents her literary reading of Christ's body, but it is also a reading that takes place by way of her sensual experience of the passion, marked on Christ's body as well as her own. The *Showings* deploys what Lochrie has called "a semiotics of suffering," a textual process in which the mystic's body occupies a central place between the "book" of Christ's body and her reading of this body.⁴²⁰ The textuality of Elisabeth of Spalbeek's performing body transforms her spectators into witnesses of the passion, but also biblical readers. Lochrie's articulation of *imitatio Christi* as a "*lectio corporis*" that joins mystic and Christ as well as mystic and reader of the mystical text allows us to see how Julian's emphasis on the permeability of the body—her own, St. Cecelia's, Christ's crucified body, and Christ's maternal body—underpins her visionary experience and her textual articulation of that experience, some portions of which she crafted over the course of fifteen years before writing the long text of the *Showings*.⁴²¹ This text is quite conscious of the process of making the flesh word which occurs at the intersection of Julian's three wishes, and continues throughout the many years of Julian's meditations on the meaning of the visionary episode that fulfilled these wishes.

⁴¹⁹ Farmer (1961), 76. Cited in Lochrie (1991), 167.

⁴²⁰ Lochrie (1991), 36, 168.

⁴²¹ Lochrie (1991), 168.

Part Two: Compassionate Illness

In addition to the significance of communing with Christ's wounded body, the role of illness in Julian's text resonates with the *vitae* of late-medieval holy women. Julian's request for and receipt of a near-fatal illness is directly associated with the "bodily sight" of the passion this illness precipitates. Prayers for illness and the patient endurance of illness commonly appear in the *vitae* of late-medieval holy women. Male saints, too, fall ill, but physical suffering is more often given religious significance and even functions as a primary means to sanctity in the *vitae* of women. According to Bynum, "[i]llness was more likely to be described as something 'to be endured' when it happened to women;" for men, it was something to be miraculously cured.⁴²² Weinstein and Bell report that over half of the holy women canonized or publicly revered between 1000 and 1700 suffered some sort of physical illness.⁴²³ Among these women who "joined the crucifix through physical suffering" Bynum identifies Marie of Oignies, Villana de' Botti, Gertrude of Helfta, Dauphine of Puimichel, Margaret of Ypres, and Julian of Norwich.⁴²⁴ The experiences of these women, Bynum writes, demonstrates that there was no clear division among illness, asceticism, mortification, and self-torture, all of which were efforts to "plumb the depths of Christ's humanity at the moment of his most insistent and terrifying humanness – the moment of his dying."⁴²⁵ To Bynum's list, I would add Julian's English contemporary, Margery of Kempe, and the twelfth-century seer,

⁴²² Bynum (1992), 190.

⁴²³ Cited in Bynum (1992), 188. See also Bynum (1992), 131-134.

⁴²⁴ Bynum (1992), 133, 171-172.

⁴²⁵ Bynum (1992), 131.

Hildegard of Bingen, both of whom, together with Julian, convey further functions of illness in medieval mystical literature: to validate female authority and to impel textual production.⁴²⁶

Hildegard's *vita*, recorded in the twelfth century by Gottfried of St. Disibod and Dieter of Echternach, preserves several autobiographical passages dictated to the monks by Hildegard herself. In them, Hildegard explicitly associates pain and illness with her mystical vision (*visio*), both of which she experienced from early childhood. In these early years her sickness discouraged her from speaking out about her *visio*. For, she writes, "I was ignorant of much in the outer world, because of the frequent illness that I suffered, from the time of my mother's milk right up to now: it wore my body out and made my powers fail."⁴²⁷ "Exhausted by all this," Hildegard reports, she asked her nurse if she too could see anything other than what existed in the external world. Receiving the answer, "Nothing," Hildegard retreats into silence, too fearful and embarrassed to speak openly about the *visio* for many years.⁴²⁸ Although Hildegard had found a confidante in her guardian, Jutta, during her teen years, it was not until her fortieth year, when she was "forced by a great pressure of pains [*pressura dolorum*]" that she openly divulged her *visio* to a monk who urged her to record what she saw.⁴²⁹ At this time, she experiences a period of health previously unknown to her: "...my veins and marrow became full of that

⁴²⁶ For the relationship between Margery Kempe's physical symptoms and her visions, see Lochrie (1991), especially pp.167-202.

⁴²⁷ Dronke (1984), 145: *multaque exteriora ignoravi, de frequenti egritudine quam a lacte matris mee huc usque passa sum, que carnem meam maceravit, et ex qua vires mee defecerunt* (231: 7ra).

⁴²⁸ Dronke (1984), 145: *His valde fatigata, a quadam nutrice mea quesivi, si aliquid exceptis exterioribus videret; et "nichil" michi inde repondit, quoniam nichil horum videbat. Tunc, magno timore correpta, non ausa eram hec cuiquam manifestare ...* (231: 7ra).

⁴²⁹ Dronke (1984), 145: *Tunc in eadem visione magna pressura dolorum coacta sum palam manifestare que videram et audieram ...* (232: 7rb).

strength which I had always lacked in my infancy and youth.”⁴³⁰ Later in her life, however, her physical ailments returned when she found herself prevented from carrying out what she had learned through her *visio* to be God’s will. In 1150, she received a *visio* urging her to move her convent from Disibodenberg to Rupertsberg. Until she named this new location, she was “weighed down in body” and suffered such intense pains that she could not rise from bed.⁴³¹ But when the monks of Disibodenberg put up a resistance to the move, claiming she was “deluded by some vain fantasy,” her sickness returned: “... my heart was crushed, and my body and veins dried up. Then, lying in bed for many days, I heard a mighty voice forbidding me to utter or to write anything more in that place about my vision.”⁴³² Barbara Newman reads this illness as “passive resistance,” and notes that when the abbot finally consented, “the seer immediately rose from her sickbed,” but we need not speculate about the authenticity of Hildegard’s symptoms to observe the significance of illness for her *visio* as well as her textual production.⁴³³ As Peter Dronke has observed, Hildegard’s statement about her early exhaustion (*His valde fatigata ...*) may be deliberately ambiguous. It is not clear if Hildegard’s sickness is the condition of her *visio*, or if the experience of her *visio* contributes to—or is even the

⁴³⁰ Dronke (1984), 145: *Vene autem et medulle mee tunc plene virium erant, in quibus ab infancia et iuventute mea defectum habebam* (232: 7rb).

⁴³¹ Dronke (1984), 150: *Quodam tempore ex caligine oculorum nullum lumen videbam, tantoque pondere corporis deprimebar quod, sublevari non valens, in doloribus maximis occupata iacebam. Que ideo passa sum, quia non manifestavi visionem que michi osten-/sa fuit, quod de loco in quo deo oblata fueram in alium cum puellis meis moveri deberem. Hec tamdiu sustinui, donec locum in quo nunc sum nominavi, et ilico visu recepto levius quidem habui, sed tamen infirmitate nondum ad plenum carui* (232: 8va-8vb).

⁴³² Dronke (1984), 150: *me quoque quadam vanitate deceptam esse dicebant. Cumque hec audissem, cor meum contritum est, et caro mea et vene aruerunt, et per dies plurimos lecto decumbens, vocem magnam audivi, me prohibentem ne quaquam amplius in loco illo de visione hac proferrem vel scriberem* (233: 8vb).

⁴³³ Newman (1987), 9.

cause of—her physical frailty.⁴³⁴ When describing her mystical experiences in a letter to Guibert of Gembloux, Hildegard, now in the final years of her life, continues to underscore the association between her *visio* and physical sickness, but the nature of this association remains enigmatic. Insisting that she does not enter an ecstasy [*extasis*] during these moments, she concludes: “No, I see these things wakefully, day and night. And I am constantly oppressed by illnesses, and so enmeshed in intense pains that they threaten to bring on my death; but so far God has stayed me.”⁴³⁵ The point of ambiguity, here occupied by the syndetic coordination, “and,” leaves the relationship between these two phrases uncertain. It is clear, however, that Hildegard is more gravely plagued when she is prevented from acting as God’s instrument. Her illness, then, urges her to speak, to write, and, ultimately, to translate the images of her *visio* into the text of *Scivias*. In the words of Karma Lochrie, “[u]tterance is central to mystical discourse.”⁴³⁶

To speak of “illness” in mystical literature is inevitably problematic, as the meanings of sickness and health, even of anatomy and physiology, are labile and contested not only across wide spans of time and place, but also within a given time period, culture, or location. That illness intersected with the religious beliefs and practices of some medieval women is certain, but the task of analyzing how illness was read by the women themselves and their contemporaries (family, townspeople, church

⁴³⁴ Dronke (1984), 147. Barbara Newman notes that in Hildegard’s last book, *On the Activity of God*, she identifies her own temperament as *airy*, “so that she can by no means enjoy any security of the flesh.” (*Liber divinorum operum* 3.10.38, in *PL* 197: col. 1038A). Hildegard seemed to have associated her life-long health problems with an organic weakness, but, as Newman points out, this disposition is nevertheless a factor in spiritual matters. “Yet,” Hildegard adds, “otherwise the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would not be able to dwell in her.” The Holy Spirit, then, seems “literally a wind to which she had been physically sensitized” (1985, 167).

⁴³⁵ Dronke (1984), 168.

⁴³⁶ Lochrie (1991), 98.

officials, hagiographers, doctors) bears all the handicaps of medieval women's history and then some, since illness is not so much a phenomenon itself as a reading of a variety of phenomena. In the study of "sick" female mystics, the twenty-first century scholar is multiple readings removed from any semblance of these phenomena (or their immediate readings) and is embedded, moreover, in her own processes of corporeal reading. The scholarly analysis of illness in late-medieval mystical literature is largely yet to be written. Even beyond this narrow chapter of the history of pathology, scholarship on medieval medicine and literature has been likewise scanty.⁴³⁷ The extant analysis of the function of illness in texts written by and about female mystics has fallen into two groups. The first approach employs a methodology of diagnostic positivism; the second represents a new historical approach that draws from social constructionism, but this approach differs internally in the degree of sensitivity to the discursive formation of categories such as "the body," "humanity," "culture," and "history" itself. A brief foray into this scholarship is useful, I think, for drawing attention to modern and medieval methods of reading illness in medieval female religiosity, with an eye to the specific function of Julian's illness. When is illness *imitatio Christi*? When is illness a discursive practice? When is illness a corporeal text written with symptoms for its signs?

⁴³⁷ Most of this scholarship has focused on literary representations of leprosy and the bubonic plague. Of this vein of scholarship Brody and Levy (1974) and Leavy (1992) are important representatives. There have been a few studies of illness in Chaucer; a thoughtful example is Shoaf (2001). Much more work, of course, has been done on the broader subject of the history of medieval medicine. For an overview of this literature, see Grigsby (2002), 6-11. On the subject of women and medieval medicine, see Jacquart and Thomasset (1985) and Cadden (1993). Grigsby, who identifies himself as a social constructionist, centers on literary representations of leprosy and bubonic plague, but he is keen to avoid the positivist methodologies of previous treatments of this topic by aiming "to reconstruct the belief system surrounding these diseases, to demonstrate how this system changed over time, and to explore the ways literary authors used this information about disease" (11). Although mystical illness is not a subject of his book, Grigsby's analysis of the scholarship on medieval illness in mystical literature is the most comprehensive I have encountered.

The diagnostic positivist approach generally looks at mystical illness through the lens of current nosology to identify symptoms and posit diagnoses. Usually underlying this approach is the assumption that medieval diagnostic models were precursors to the enlightenment of modern medicine. Thus, if a twenty-first-century physician could go back in time and examine Hildegard, he would diagnose her with acute migraines or “scintillating scotoma.”⁴³⁸ James McIlwain has classified Julian of Norwich’s illness as an acute case of botulism after ruling out schizophrenia, diphtheria, inflammatory polyneuropathy, and tick paralysis.⁴³⁹ Despite this article’s appearance in a journal dedicated specifically to the medieval period, it does not attempt to contextualize Julian’s sickness with her religious devotion (other than to conjecture about what type of convent food might have carried the bacteria) or with medieval cultural assumptions about mysticism and women. Margery Kempe’s medical record includes postpartum psychosis, postpartum hysteria, postpartum depressive psychosis with features of agitation, hysteria with paranoid features, hysterical personality organization, tertiary hysteria, religious hysteria stemming from sexual repression, neurosis with infantile regression and reaction formation, temporal lobe epilepsy, and Tourette’s syndrome.⁴⁴⁰

Predilections toward the diagnosis of hysteria appears in this group of scholarship in tandem with a marked effort to shine light on the historicity of hysteria and its underlying psychoanalytic assumptions;⁴⁴¹ yet these articles less often perform this

⁴³⁸ Singer (1917), 230-234; Rose (1979), 2-6.

⁴³⁹ McIlwain (1984), 167-179.

⁴⁴⁰ Phyllis (1990), 169-190.

⁴⁴¹ Defending sufferers of hysteria from the popular charge of feeble-mindedness, Josef Breuer writes in *Studies in Hysteria*: “No amount of genuine, solid mental endowment is excluded by hysteria...After all, the patron saint of hysteria, St. Teresa, was a woman of genius with great practical capacity” (*Studies on*

maneuver reflexively and so do not take into account the possibility that their own diagnostic categories are similarly historically and culturally mediated.⁴⁴² This vein of scholarship expresses a general naiveté about the cultural production of medicine, and the production of the sick bodies that are the object of medical inquiry. It operates under the assumption that bodies are the same then and now, and so sickness is the same then and now. It may very well be the case that Julian suffered an attack of botulism in 1373, but this information affords little insight into the content of her visions and the meaning of her text. What do we gain from knowing that her visions were hallucinations caused by high fever? The important question is not whether she had botulism, but rather, how did it happen that a woman with a case of food poisoning experienced the passion of Christ, wrote the first known autobiography in the English language, and became a holy woman

Hysteria, Standard Edition Vol. 2 (1893), 232). He does not explain *why* he considers St. Teresa the patron saint of hysteria, but simply states the identification as if it could elicit no objection. Nearly one hundred years later Lacan would echo Breuer's association between mysticism and hysteria with his analysis of Bernini's statue, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*: "...you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she's coming. There's no doubt about it." Lacan relates Teresa's "coming" to her mystical experience of *jouissance*, which, he says, she is unable to articulate: "What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists of saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it" (1975), 76. Teresa's own celebrated description of her ecstasy does not support Lacan's opinion that the mystic knows nothing of her own *jouissance*. She is quite articulate about what she is experiencing. An "angel in bodily form" pierces her womb so deeply with his arrow that he pulls her entrails out when he withdraws it: "The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease...This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it – even a considerable share...I had no wish to look or to speak, only to embrace my pain, which was a greater bliss than all created things could give me...But when this pain of which I am now speaking begins, the Lord seems to transport the soul and throw it into an ecstasy. So there is no opportunity for it to feel its pain or suffering, for the enjoyment comes immediately" (210-211).

⁴⁴² For examples of scholarship in this group, see: Stork (1997), Freeman (1990), Garret (1995), Kroll (2002), Ober (1985), Weissman (1982), and Lacey (1982). Rudolph Bell's book, *Holy Anorexia* (1985), manages to tread lightly the fine line between the medieval and modern world. Although he simplistically concludes that the need to control one's own life lies behind both medieval and modern "anorexia," and that where social control was unavailable women turned to their own bodies, his quantitative research is very careful and indicates the extent to which he is entrenched in medieval history. The fulfillment of his endeavor to write the history of medieval mystics and their food behaviors, however, awaited the quickly following *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* of Caroline Walker Bynum (1987).

of local renown for her wisdom on spiritual matters?⁴⁴³ The other approach to studying sanctity and illness in mystical literature is more attuned to such questions.

Within the field of the history of medicine, the social constructionist has been defined as someone who “does not evaluate or privilege one type of medical belief over another,” but “points to the social forces that developed these ideas about disease.”⁴⁴⁴ The extent to which this approach is concerned about “the reality of disease or illness states or bodily experiences” varies, but it emphasizes the cultural and symbolic valences of illness within medieval discourses.⁴⁴⁵ On the subject of medieval mysticism and illness, this scholarship generally aims to investigate *medieval* assumptions about the female body, pathology, and religious praxis; it therefore attempts to slough off, or at least problematize, contemporary assumptions about these subjects in order to underscore their contextual contingency. Bynum, who has made the most significant contributions to this scholarship, argues that modern sensibilities read as illness what medieval women (and perhaps men) experienced as communion with the suffering body of Christ. Her body of work provides a good example of this approach and its genre of conclusions about unusual corporeal phenomena in mystical texts.

⁴⁴³ Richard Laws’ article, “Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Thomas Hoccleve” (2000), is one of the few diagnostic articles that considers the relationship between mystical illness and textual practices. He argues that the illnesses of Kempe (temporal lobe epilepsy) and Julian of Norwich (organic brain damage caused by high fever and respiratory infection) were instrumental in their desire to write. Their perplexing bodily experiences (i.e. brain abnormalities) caused them to search for their identities through autobiographical writing. The article’s dependence on developments in medical psychiatry in the 1990’s (a “pure science”), however, overlooks the nuances of the culturally and historically situated body. Self-scrutiny, moreover, is also an important feature in Christian examinations of conscience and confession, which Laws does not associate with the impulse to write. Why does illness-induced self-scrutiny lead to the production of mystical texts?

⁴⁴⁴ Lupton (1994), 11. See also Grigsby (2002), 2, where social constructionism is said to have “developed out of a combination of Foucauldian criticism, poststructuralism, and feminism.”

⁴⁴⁵ Lupton (1994), 11.

Even though Bynum has not written about Julian's illness in any other than a cursory way, her general conclusions about the stylizations of *imitatio Christi* among late-medieval women bear upon the *Showings*. Drawing from sources in medieval theology, natural philosophy, and medicine, Bynum has shown how these discourses shaped associations between female and flesh, and therefore between female flesh and Christ's flesh.⁴⁴⁶ Theologians tended to express the relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity in terms of the dichotomy male/female, and had done so from the patristic period.⁴⁴⁷ In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen concisely articulated this tradition when she wrote in the *Liber divinorum operum*: "Man ... signifies the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity."⁴⁴⁸ Building upon ancient physiological theories, medieval biology emphasized the equivalency of bodily fluids so that blood, breast milk, and menstrual fluid were—with some important exceptions which I consider below—analogous. Thus the female body, like Christ's body, feeds and cleanses with its blood. As Julian's *Showings* clearly communicates, Christ also performs the functions of gestation and birth.⁴⁴⁹ Medieval embryology provided a further context for identifications between female flesh and Christ's flesh. Although no consistent theory emerged in the Middle Ages, it was generally assumed—based on Aristotelian theories of conception—that female superfluities constituted and nourished fetal flesh.⁴⁵⁰ In this

⁴⁴⁶ Bynum (1992), 98-117, 206-222. See also Cadden (1993), Jacquart and Thomasset (1988).

⁴⁴⁷ Bynum (1992), 98, 336 n.46.

⁴⁴⁸ *Liber divinorum operum*, bk.1, ch.4, par.100 PL 197, col. 885. Bynum takes this phrase as the title of her essay on this subject: "... And Woman His Humanity," (1992), 151-179.

⁴⁴⁹ Bynum (1992), 101.

⁴⁵⁰ See Cadden (1993), 21-26 and Bynum (1992), 214-215.

sense, all human bodies were thought to be formed from the material of the female body, but because Christ's virgin birth precluded the contribution of any paternal substance, his flesh was composed of purely female flesh.⁴⁵¹ This quality of Christ's flesh was supported by theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, and was confirmed by the emerging doctrines of the virgin birth and immaculate conception.⁴⁵² All these factors contributed to an environment in which women identified (or were seen to identify) with the bleeding, suffering, feeding body of Christ. This identification translated into the "bizarre" corporeal phenomena that fill late-medieval hagiographical texts. In their illnesses, extreme self-mortifications, ecstasies, exudations of milk or oil, bleedings, and refusals to eat, they encountered and joined with Christ's body.⁴⁵³ Elizabeth Robertson, whose methodology shares many similarities with Bynum's, has argued that the images common in records of female mystical experience articulate cultural medical assumptions about the female body: a woman's excessive moistness may cause her to overflow with blood, tears, milk, or oil; her inherent coldness may be the cause behind her fiery desire for union with Christ's (that is, a warmer man's) body; her feelings of inferiority and incompleteness cause her to identify with Christ's wounds.⁴⁵⁴

Bynum has expanded the horizon of medieval cultural symbolism by highlighting the positive significance of food and flesh in female ascetic practices which scholarly

⁴⁵¹ Bynum (1992), 210-212.

⁴⁵² Bynum (1992), 210-212.

⁴⁵³ Bynum (1984), 245-259; (1992), 181-238.

⁴⁵⁴ Robertson (1993). Robertson's conclusions in this article are drawn from parallel readings of the *Ancrene Wisse*, *Showings*, and the *Book of Margery Kempe*. It is clear that Robertson is troubled by the apparent collaboration of female mystics with misogynist views about the inferiority of the female body. She ultimately adopts a rather unconvincing Irigarayan reading of these texts: female mystics "undo" male views "by overdoing them."

analysis had previously inclined to diagnose positively as organic disease or, focusing on the flesh as the source of temptation, reduce to masochistic self-deprivation and mortification. Several scholars whose own work has centered on gender and body in the Middle Ages have nevertheless faulted Bynum for basing her claims about medieval women's experience largely on evidence from male-authored texts. Amy Hollywood, for example, has argued that the texts of thirteenth-century women such as Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete, when compared to the male-authored texts on which Bynum heavily depends, include relatively little of the extraordinary corporeal phenomena that Bynum argues are characteristic of late-medieval female piety.⁴⁵⁵ While Bynum does incorporate material written by female mystics, she does not always distinguish women's perceptions of themselves and men's perceptions of women in the medieval textual record.

Kathleen Biddick's critique of Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* provides a good example of a social constructionist approach to medieval mystical literature more consciously informed by Foucauldian criticism, Judith Butler's notions of performativity, and post-colonial theory.⁴⁵⁶ Although Biddick is more concerned with the problems of studying medieval women, sex, and gender, rather than illness and female mysticism, her work might provide a new avenue for this topic in a way that would both build on and move beyond Bynum's techniques of reading. Biddick is troubled by Bynum's structuralist assumptions about body and gender rather than her choice of texts for

⁴⁵⁵ Hollywood (1992), 633. For a view of *imitatio Christi* likewise concerned with investigating the problems and limitations of the search for a history of the body and gender, see Lochrie (1991), 37-47.

⁴⁵⁶ Biddick lists the theoretical works that inform her method of reading: (1993), 88-89, footnotes 4 and 5, and *passim*.

analysis. She worries that Bynum reduces gender to “the female reproductive function” by framing the feminine “as an imagined unity of the maternal function and the mother-daughter relation.”⁴⁵⁷ Citing Judith Butler, Biddick insists that, “[o]nce we grant anatomy a history, so that it ceases to be a foundational category, then historians and theorists need to think about how gender is performative, meaning that ‘there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...’”⁴⁵⁸ The effects of the performance of gender, moreover, cannot afford “access to the body as referent” for such access “occurs only imperfectly in the performance ... there is no mystical body prior to the performance.”⁴⁵⁹ Biddick’s gesture toward the performative function of body and gender is useful (as I have already suggested) for approaching medieval mystical literature; but to say that Bynum’s scholarship is reducible to an equation of the female gender and the mother-daughter relation does not, to my mind, account for Bynum’s theses about the instability of medieval gender categories, the polymorphousness of the mystical body, and the deep associations among the female mystical body, Christ’s flesh, food, and eucharist.

Finally, within the social constructionist approach exemplified by Bynum and Robertson, I include efforts to understand mystical illness by uncovering medieval models of pathology. This group of scholarship’s focus on symptomology is comparable to the first approach I outlined above, but approaches diagnosis through medieval rather than modern conceptualizations of the female body, disease, and religious experience.

The work of Barbara Newman and Nancy Caciola, for example, explores how mystical

⁴⁵⁷ Biddick (1993), 95, 114.

⁴⁵⁸ Butler (1990), 25; Biddick (1993), 97. Biddick defines gender as “a theory of borders that enables us to talk about the historical construction and maintenance of sexual boundaries, both intra- and intercorporeal, through powerful historical processes of repetition and containment” (91).

⁴⁵⁹ Biddick (1993), 110.

sickness in the Middle Ages was regarded as a supernatural phenomenon, falling (neatly or not) within the categories of divine rapture or demonic possession.⁴⁶⁰ The “discernment of spirits” was required in order to judge whether or not a woman was simply peculiar, the receiver of a marvelous gift (rapture), or the victim of terrible abuse (possession).⁴⁶¹ Caciola has made the case that medieval medical views about the body reinforced theological views about how spiritual rapture differed physically (i.e., internally) from demon possession. Demons possessed the flesh, entering through a bodily orifice and inhabiting the stomach or the guts, while divine spirits infused the heart, requiring no corporeal opening to enter or exit the body. But both sorts of possession ultimately appeared the same on the surface of the body, so these guidelines managed to foment further ambiguity in discernment controversies: the corporeal text was unclear. The judgment that the fleshiness and porosity of the female body rendered it particularly vulnerable to demonic possession nevertheless stood firm.⁴⁶² The study of

⁴⁶⁰ Newman (1998); Caciola (2000).

⁴⁶¹ Historians of medieval discernment issues in this period want to know in particular whether or not the increasing difficulty to differentiate the saint from the demoniac was “good” for women. Newman (1998) says yes; Caciola (2000) says no.

⁴⁶² Caciola (2000). While arguing that discernment ambiguities obstructed popular and religious respect for mystics, Caciola has offered a model of inquiry that takes into account both the potential biases of male hagiographers and the relatively inarguable fact that women mystics of the later medieval period manifested—sometimes mild, sometimes alarmingly severe—signs of mental and corporeal sickness. Rather than attributing to misogyny the central place of the suffering female body in the sources and choosing to find more authentic and positive images of mystics elsewhere (as does Amy Hollywood [1994]), or aiming to find positive effects of what might at first appear to be female suffering (as does Barbara Newman [1998]), Caciola sticks to analysis of medieval views about the physiology of spiritual possession, and suggests that contemporary discourses about the body shaped both the experience of mysticism and its hagiographic record. Hollywood, however, proposes that male hagiographers were enthralled with sickness, suffering, and the body, not necessarily the mystics they wrote about (1994). According to Newman (1998), there was a shift in the thirteenth century from seeing the demoniac as a raving lunatic to a woman with supernatural abilities, sometimes for the purposes of confirming Church teachings. This shift allowed these saint-like demoniacs or demoniac-like saints to act as powerful, if ambiguous, religious authorities. Newman, then, is more concerned with probing the social atmosphere that permitted these women to fulfill their personal desires (for attention, power, freedom from traditional female rules) than probing why these desires were fulfilled in this particular way.

discernment is certainly a rich locus for the study of women, sickness, and sanctity in the medieval period. Contributors like Caciola succeed in investigating discernment controversies without neglecting the specific symptomatic expressions of illness and how they were read and resisted reading by medieval methodologies.

When we turn to *Showings*, we find that Julian is a keen reader of her own sick body. Before describing her symptoms, she looks back in time to report her reading of illness when she wished for it as a young woman. Julian desired to become gravely ill, she writes, in order to “be purgied by the mercie of God and after live more to the worshippe of God by cause of that sicknes.”⁴⁶³ This sickness was, to borrow Bynum’s words, something “to be endured,” but it was also something Julian actively requested, certain that it would transform her in the process. To experience a sickness “so hard as to the death” is to experience as fully as possible save for “the out passing of the sowle” the consequence of being human, of suffering the mortal body that Christ suffered.⁴⁶⁴ Although Julian was a young woman when she conceived this wish to experience the pains of death, she says that she prayed for the sickness to arrive in her thirtieth year, and it did.⁴⁶⁵ She would have lived by then approximately the same number of years as Christ had been in the flesh when he was crucified.

Julian tells us that she had been sick for three days and nights when she received the last rites, believing herself that she would die before sunrise on the fourth day. But she continued to suffer for two more days and nights, and again believed “in reason and

⁴⁶³ *LT* preface.2.5.

⁴⁶⁴ *LT* preface.2.5.

⁴⁶⁵ *LT* preface.2.6.

by the feelyng of paynes” that she would die.⁴⁶⁶ On the seventh day, her body becomes numb from the waist down and she can no longer speak. She is propped up in bed by those attending her. A priest is summoned to witness her death, and he sets a crucifix before her eyes, urging her to find comfort in “the image of thy Saviour.”⁴⁶⁷ She begins to lose her vision, and the sickroom becomes dark as night, and all is “oglye and ferfull” as if “much occupied with fiendes, save in the image of the crosse,” which remained illuminated.⁴⁶⁸ Then Julian feels the upper part of her body begin to lose feeling. She can scarcely breathe, and believes she is dying. Suddenly, Julian writes, “all my paine was taken from me, and I was as hole [whole], and namely, in the over [upper] part of my bodie, as ever yet I was before.” Likewise as suddenly, as if Julian just now realizes that her desire for the wound of a deathly illness has been fulfilled, she recalls her desire for the second wound, that her “bodie might be fulfilled with mynd and feeling of his blessed passion, with compassion and afterward langyng to God.”⁴⁶⁹ She desires that her suffering be joined with Christ’s, and this prayer is granted by the inception of her visions. Julian’s illness, in addition to the three wounds and bodily vision, also functions in the process of writing by giving birth to both a visionary experience and an analysis of that experience by an agent of her own suffering body, a reader of its corporeal signs, and a translator of its meaning into the written word.⁴⁷⁰ She moves from reading her own

⁴⁶⁶ *LT* preface.3.6.

⁴⁶⁷ *LT* preface.3.7.

⁴⁶⁸ *LT* preface.3.7.

⁴⁶⁹ *LT* preface.3.7.

⁴⁷⁰ McAvoy (2004), 10.

body to reading Christ's body. This textuality of the human body, her own and Christ's reconfigured by suffering, is the flesh and blood, so to speak, of Julian's hermeneutics.

Part Three: Blood, Dryness, and Desire

The late Middle Ages were, in several senses, a period particularly invested in the symbolic currency of blood.⁴⁷¹ Theologians meticulously debated the role of Christ's blood in transubstantiation.⁴⁷² The number of drops of blood shed by Christ's wounds became a contested subject.⁴⁷³ Charges of ritual blood-letting and cannibalism were laid against Jews, prostitutes, and homosexuals.⁴⁷⁴ Among these and other anxieties concerning the possible mistreatment of Christ's blood during the mass, the chalice began to be withheld from the laity beginning in the early twelfth century; in 1415, priests were forbidden under threat of excommunication to offer Christ's blood to the laity.⁴⁷⁵ In her book, *Wonderful Blood*, Caroline Bynum demonstrates that late-medieval blood imagery was not only "textual and literary," but it "erupted in iconography and vision as well."⁴⁷⁶ Images of the crucifixion became increasingly bloody, even though, as Bynum points out,

⁴⁷¹ See Bildhauer (2006); Bynum (2007), where she satisfies some of Biddick's critiques of her earlier work on medieval blood symbolism (1993, 99-110); for eucharistic blood and medieval doctrinal issues, see Rubin (1991); for the gendering of bloodshed in medieval literature, see McCracken (2003).

⁴⁷² See Bildhauer (2006), 16-18, 28 and Rubin (1991), 12-49.

⁴⁷³ Rubin (1991), 304-305.

⁴⁷⁴ See Biddick (1993), 99-110; Kilgour (1990); Biale (2007); Bildhauer (2006), 91-103.

⁴⁷⁵ Biddick (1993), 106. See Rubin (1991) 70-72, and Bynum (2007), 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Bynum (2007), 3.

“crucifixion is not a bloody death.”⁴⁷⁷ Devotions to the drops of Christ’s blood became increasingly popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and instances of miraculous bleeding proliferated.⁴⁷⁸ Parishioners witnessed hosts bleed at the moment of consecration; communicants felt their mouths fill with blood when they received the bread of the eucharist; and stigmata appeared on Christian bodies.⁴⁷⁹

Julian’s visions commence in the flow of blood from Christ’s head, “hote and freyshely, plentuously and lively,” and blood continues to spill throughout the first, second, and fourth visions as Christ is crowned with thorns, crucified, and then scourged—an anachronism characteristic of the *Showings*.⁴⁸⁰ In fourteenth and fifteenth-century England and Germany, Christ’s blood was commonly seen as payment for the debt of humanity’s sin or the scapegoating sacrifice necessary to counteract humanity’s disobedience. But the eruption of blood that initiates Julian’s visionary episode signals the deep message of *Showings*, one that Julian will only uncover after fifteen years of meditation on these visions: “What, woldest thou wytt thy Lordes menyng in this thyng? Wytt it well, love was his menyng.”⁴⁸¹ The outpouring of Christ’s blood prefigures this message, for, as so much of *Showings* confirms, “[l]ove and drede are bredryn [brethren].”⁴⁸² The permeability of Christ’s corporeal boundaries, initially exemplified

⁴⁷⁷ Bynum (2007), 1.

⁴⁷⁸ See Bynum (2007), 1-9. For the interest in quantifying the *guttae* of Christ’s blood, see Bynum (2007), 175-178.

⁴⁷⁹ For many such examples, see (2007) *passim*; (1987), 164-165, 177-178; (1992), 101-102.

⁴⁸⁰ *LT* 1.4.8.

⁴⁸¹ *LT* 16.86.124. This point is also made by Bynum (2007), 206-207.

⁴⁸² *LT* 16.74.112.

by the flow of blood from his body, is the feature of his incarnation that renders him both dreadfully monstrous and lovingly maternal.

Christ bleeds in fat drops that spread and eventually stream over his body. Julian takes special care to craft several metaphors in order to describe how it falls from beneath the garland of thorns “lyke pelottes semyng as it had comynn oute of the veynes:”

The plentuoushede is lyke to the droppes of water that falle of the evesyng [eaves] of an howse after a grete shower of reyne that falle so thycke that no man may nomber them with no bodely wyt. And for the roundnesse they were lyke to the scale of heryng [herring] in the spredying of the forhede. Thes thre thynges cam to my mynde in the tyme: pelettes for the roundhede in the comyng oute of the blode, the scale of heryng for the roundhede in the spredying, the droppes of the evesyng of a howse for the plentuoushede unnumerable.⁴⁸³

Through this remarkable series of metaphors, Julian strives to communicate precisely what she saw during the initial moments of her visionary episode. She chooses to describe what was surely a strange, and perhaps horrifying, sight of Christ’s hemorrhaging head through commonplace and domestic images.⁴⁸⁴ Her summation of this vision conveys the aptness of articulating the strange through familiar figurative language: “Thys shewyng was quyck and lyvely and hydows [hideous] and dredfulle and swete and lovely.”⁴⁸⁵ This is a monstrous vision by way of its resistance to categorization, and by its simultaneous elicitation of attraction and repulsion. It thus

⁴⁸³ *LT* 1.7.13.

⁴⁸⁴ For an intriguing reading of these images, see McInerney (1996), 166-167: “These images appeal to the experience of everyday life in a damp climate, where herring was a common winter food. Each expands and reinforces, even permeates, the other. The scales are silvery and round; raindrops are round as well as silvery as they drop from eaves; fish come from the water, rain is water. Both thus resonate with the moisture-related imagery so important to Julian. The ordinariness of such images is extraordinary in its application to something doubly extraordinary: the Savior’s mystic blood ...”

⁴⁸⁵ *LT* 1.7.13.

proves a fitting first vision in a series of visions that will convince Julian that Christ's meaning is love, and that this meaning is written in the broken borders of his body.

As Christ is scourged, Julian sees his “feyer skinne ... broken full depe in to the tendyr flessche.”⁴⁸⁶ Through these breaches, “[t]he hote blode ranne out so plentuously that ther wass neyther seen skynne ne wounde, but as it were all blode.”⁴⁸⁷ In these visions, Christ's body is not only penetrated by thorns, nails, and lash, but seems to dissolve as his body becomes “all blode.”⁴⁸⁸ His corporeal boundaries now liquefied, his body now blood, Christ—and thus his mercy—is entirely freed. It “overflowyth all erth and is redy to wash all creatuers of synne which be of good wyll, have been, and shall be.” This blood, Julian states, cannot be contained even by the bounds of space and time. It “descendyd downe in to helle and brak her bondes and delyvers them all that were there which belong to the courte of hevyn.” And, it “ascendyth up into hevyn in the blessed body of our Lorde Jesu Crist and ther is in hym bledyng, preyeng for us to the Father, and is and shalbe as long as us nedyth.”⁴⁸⁹ Thus, this blood, this “flode of mercy” flows in the present, past, and future into earth, heaven, and hell “to make us feyer and clene.”⁴⁹⁰ In this unstoppable flow of blood, Julian reads the “power of infinite and eternal fecundity.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁶ *LT* 4.12.22.

⁴⁸⁷ *LT* 4.12.22.

⁴⁸⁸ Bauerschmidt (1999), 88. For a reading of Christ's bleeding and desiccation likewise attuned to the mutability of his body boundaries, see Bauerschmidt (1999), 84-89.

⁴⁸⁹ *LT* 4.12.22.

⁴⁹⁰ *LT* 14.61.97.

⁴⁹¹ Bauerschmidt (1999), 85.

Although Christ's blood seems uncontainable itself as it passes from his body through space and time, Julian reads in its outpouring a message of envelopment and incorporation. "The blessed woundes of oure Saviour be opyn and enjoye to hele us" both as exit-ways and as entry-ways.⁴⁹² Similarly, Christ's blood both pours through the openings in his corporeal boundaries and it also binds and pulls in. This body that is "all blode" is nevertheless "our clothing," Julian writes, "that for love wrappeth us and wyndeth us, halseth us and becloseth us, hangeth about us for tender love that he may never leeve us."⁴⁹³ Thus, Christ's bleeding body performs multiple functions: on the one hand, it gapes open, hemorrhages, and dissolves; on the other hand, it envelopes and encloses. This outpouring both marks and troubles the boundary between what is inside and outside by flowing in a widening pool of love and mercy.⁴⁹⁴ By way of this outpouring, Christ embraces humanity within his body, a process that Julian later describes as gestation within the body of Moder Jhesu. Julian later associates the pains of the passion with the pains of a woman in labor, and therefore the crucifixion with the birth of Christ's children. Yet, the capacity of Christ's bleeding body to "halseth" and "becloseth" his children in these early visions is suggestive of conception. It is significant that, as Bynum has noted, "in Julian's visionary experience, the gushing out (or birthing) *precedes* the nestling within (conception)."⁴⁹⁵ That Julian's meditations on maternal gestation and enclosure follow the crucifixion suggest that Christ's conception

⁴⁹² *LT* 14.61.97.

⁴⁹³ *LT* 1.5.9.

⁴⁹⁴ Bynum (2007), 207.

⁴⁹⁵ Bynum (2007), 160. Italics are Bynum's.

is more precisely “a re-conception.”⁴⁹⁶ For Christ’s outpouring of blood both gives birth to and gathers in his children. An additional remark about these early visions of Christ’s bleeding anticipates Julian’s later meditations on Christ’s maternity. Struck by the amount of blood, Julian surmises that, had it been material, it would have “made the bedde all on bloude and have passyde over all about,” and thus associates Christ’s blood loss, the bed, and the suffering female body—Julian’s own.⁴⁹⁷

In *The Curse of Eve*, Peggy McCracken documents the gendering of blood in medieval literature. Sensitive to the multivalent ways which literature imagines a relationship between blood, gender, and cultural values, she demonstrates that the bloodshed of men was generally a public act, and often the result of battle wounds. Women’s bleeding occurred in private, and took the form of “menstrual blood, the blood of parturition, and any genital bleeding.”⁴⁹⁸ As is so often the case in late-medieval mystical literature, Christ’s bloodshed troubles these gendered paradigms. Christ bleeds publicly from wounds inflicted by men wielding sharp instruments—thorns, lash, nails, and spear; but Christ’s blood also flows privately for Julian from a wound that she will later identify as the orifice where humanity passes into and out of his maternal body. This blood, moreover, seems to spill into Julian’s bed, which, according to McCracken is the domain of female bleeding.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Bynum (2007), 160.

⁴⁹⁷ *LT* 4.12.22. On this association, see McAvoy (2004), 80-82; Robertson (1993), 154-156; McInerney (1996), 171.

⁴⁹⁸ McCracken (2003), *ix*, 110-111.

⁴⁹⁹ McAvoy (2004), 81. Several scholars believe that Julian was a widow who had born children when she experienced her visions. See Newman (2003), 223-224, and Ward (1988), 11-35.

Instances of bleeding in late-medieval medical, scientific, hagiographic, and mystical literature show that blood flow is indeed gendered. In particular, we find additional analogies between Christ's blood and female blood that both confirm and set askew the categories outlined by McCracken. Bynum has argued that late-medieval physiological theories created opportunities for a labile view of male and female bodies, as well as male and female body fluids.⁵⁰⁰ Blood miracles, for example, occurred among women more often than men. Indeed, the two best known stigmatics, Francis of Assisi (thirteenth century) and Padre Pio (twentieth century), are the only males to have claimed all five wounds. After Francis died in 1226, "stigmata rapidly became a female miracle, and only for women did the stigmatic wounds bleed periodically."⁵⁰¹ Bynum argues that holy women bled in imitation of Christ's bleeding, and that this corporeal phenomenon underscored analogies between their periodically bleeding bodies and the bleeding body of Christ.⁵⁰²

Medieval systems of physiology influenced by Galenism emphasized the equivalency of various body fluids, and thus of male and female body fluids: "all human exudations—menstruation, sweating, lactation, emission of semen and so on—were seen as bleedings; and bleedings—lactation, menstruation, nosebleeds, hemorrhoidal bleeding and so on—were taken to be analogous."⁵⁰³ Accounts of miraculous exudations confirmed Aristotelian associations between women, excess, and formless matter as well as Galenic views about the equivalency of superfluities: the holy bodies that seeped

⁵⁰⁰ Bynum (1992), 218-222.

⁵⁰¹ Bynum (1992), 186.

⁵⁰² Bynum (1992), 102.

⁵⁰³ Bynum (1992), 114.

blood, milk, tears, and oil were almost exclusively female.⁵⁰⁴ Medical and scientific writers periodically described menstruation as a purgation necessary to compensate for the humoral imbalance of the female body.⁵⁰⁵ Men, too, were sometimes in need of humoral calibration to rid their bodies of excessive blood. In this case, equilibrium was achieved naturally by nosebleeds and hemorrhoidal bleeding, or artificially by vivisection or the application of leeches.⁵⁰⁶ Although the periodic bleeding of the female body was, in this sense, a natural advantage, it tended to be seen as a sign of the deficiency of the female constitution.⁵⁰⁷ Thus, despite this recognition of relative equivalency, “menstruation was, like the womb, singularly and remarkably female.”⁵⁰⁸ It was both “an aspect of the reproductive function” and a “general principle of the female constitution or temperament.”⁵⁰⁹ Nevertheless, medieval theologians whose views about the body were shaped by this medical tradition “might ... see the blood of Christ shed in the circumcision and on the cross as analogous to menstrual blood or breast milk,” both of which are constitutionally equivalent and share with Christ’s blood the capacities to cleanse and nourish.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁴ For many examples, see Bynum (1987), 269-273, and Bynum (1992), 100-114, 186-187.

⁵⁰⁵ Bynum (1992), 100; Cadden (1993), 174-175. See also Bullough and Brundage (1996), 487-93 and Wood (1981), 710-727. Clearly, the *De secretis mulierum* of Pseudo-Albertus and its commentaries exemplify these negative views. It is intriguing, then, that in his *Quaestiones de animalibus* Albertus Magnus attributed the longevity of women, at least in part, to their capacity to menstruate (Cadden [1993], 176).

⁵⁰⁶ See Cadden (1993), 173-177; Bynum (1992), 100, 114; Bullough (1973); Wood (1981).

⁵⁰⁷ Cadden (1993), 175.

⁵⁰⁸ Cadden (1993), 173.

⁵⁰⁹ Cadden (1993), 173.

⁵¹⁰ Bynum (1992), 114. See Bynum (1982), 132-133, and Robertson (1993), 142-167. For the equivalency of humors in medieval medical thought, see Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 52.

The physiological equivalency of male and female superfluities opens up ways of understanding the miraculous bleedings and lactations of the female body in the medieval hagiographical record as materializations of the resonances between female flesh and Christ's male flesh. These permeable boundaries between male and female bleeding also open up possibilities that the blood shed by Christ during the passion may have been comparable to female body fluids. Menstrual blood approximates the appearance of Christ's blood more than other analogous female superfluities; yet the protean quality of these superfluities allow for identifications between Christ's blood and other female exudations less potentially troubling than menstrual fluid: milk, oil, or tears. Bynum has gathered an impressive roster of late-medieval women who achieved holiness through miraculous exudations, but there is not a single instance where the superfluity exuded is identified as menstrual fluid. Not only are there no accounts of mystics who copiously or continuously shed menstrual fluid in communion with Christ's bleeding, but there are several accounts of holy women who ceased to menstruate.⁵¹¹ Indeed, the very *vitae* that most stress miraculous exudings tend to also stress "unusual closure," which most often took the form of inedia, amenorrhea, or both.⁵¹²

Bynum's emphasis on the equivalency of male and female superfluities, and thus of male and female bleedings, neglects the significance of highly ambivalent and

⁵¹¹ Among these women are Lutgard, Colette, Columba, Elisabeth of Spalbeek (Bynum [1987], 122, 138, 148, 211, 214, 393 n.103).

⁵¹² Bynum (1987), 122. That severe fasting could result in amenorrhea was not unknown to late-medieval natural philosophers, including Albert the Great. Bynum posits that although there are many accounts of women who "delighted in the abnormal bleeding from nose, mouth, or stigmatic wounds ... it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that they may have desired cessation of that more ordinary female bleeding that their religion interpreted ambivalently at best" (1987, 214). For medieval views about amenorrhea and fasting, see Wood (1981), 710-727. For ecclesiastical taboos against menstrual fluid and menstruating women in the Middle Ages, see Elliott (1999), 3-7.

especially condemnatory views about female superfluities within the same discursive communities—primarily medical and theoloical—that provide Bynum’s evidence for “medieval assumptions” about the associations between female flesh and Christ’s flesh.⁵¹³ *De secretis mulierum* and texts of its genre may have nodded toward the equivalency of male sperm and female *menstrum* by identifying them both as the residue of excess food in the body, but alongside this characterization, we also find the urgent warnings about the contaminating effects of *menstrum*.⁵¹⁴ Methodologies for distinguishing among hymeneal, (female) seminal, and menstrual fluids in this tradition were not only an academic endeavor but a matter of public and private safety, as menstrual fluid and its airborne derivatives threatened the health of male sexual partners, sleeping babies, and other bodies in the general proximity of a menstruating woman.⁵¹⁵ Citing evidence from medical, religious, and courtly discourses, Bettina Bildhauer demonstrates the existence of a tradition “in which women’s bleeding was anything but productive and nourishing, and very much feared rather than welcomed.”⁵¹⁶ The nourishing qualities of female bodily fluids were “largely limited to breast-milk,” but

⁵¹³ Bynum (1992), 215. Here, I am focusing on the paucity of evidence concerning misogynist views about menstruation and menstrual fluid, but it is also Bynum’s tendency not to take fully into account the cultural misogyny of the Middle Ages that David Aers critiques when Bynum comes to conclusions such as: “Since Christ’s body was a body that nursed the hungry, both men and women naturally assimilated the ordinary female body to it” (Bynum [1987], 272). “This is a very strong claim about how ‘men and women naturally’ viewed ‘the ordinary female body,’” Aers writes, “and whether it could withstand the culture’s misogyny seems doubtful to me ...” (Aers [1996], 31). Aers cites the following passages as “examples of Bynum’s own awareness of medieval misogyny”: (1987), 22-23, 86, 261-263; (1992), 195, 200-205; (1982), 14-16, 143-144, 244-246.

⁵¹⁴ The confusion between female semen and *menstrum* in *De secretis mulierum*, which I discuss in chapter two, is symptomatic of the coexistence of such views within a single text. See also MacLehose (1996), 3-24.

⁵¹⁵ See *De secretis mulierum* 1, Lemay (1992), 69.

⁵¹⁶ Bildhauer (2006), 139. Among the late-medieval and early-modern texts Bildhauer cites are *De secretis mulierum*, a fifteenth-century German commentary to *De secretis mulierum*, *Malleus Malificarum*, *Prose Salernitan Questions*, Alexander Barclay’s *Life of St. George*, and passages from Wolfram’s *Parzival*.

evidence that “even this whitened blood was not without dangers for the infant” appears in late-medieval and early-modern concerns about the soundness of the mother’s milk, the diet best suited for breast-feeding women, and the proper selection of wet nurses.⁵¹⁷ Bildhauer also notes that Bynum “neglects the whole sphere of men’s bleeding,” and therefore overlooks valences between Christ’s bleeding and male bleeding, commonly characterized as publicly shed, heroic, and serving a sacrificial purpose.⁵¹⁸

Theological texts may have incorporated positive images of nursing, notably from the breast of Christ or monastic religious leaders, but theologians were notably ambivalent about the positive and negative properties of menstrual fluid. Some medieval theologians viewed menstruation as a consequence of sin, but one that carried health benefits for the constitutionally weaker female body. That the problem of Mary’s menstruation arose in debates about the immaculate conception indicates “the extent to which the Fall and the stain of womanhood haunted that physiological process.”⁵¹⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, whose writings bridge theological and medical discourses, furnished evidence of these complex views on menstruation. In *Causae et curae*, she asserts that menstruation is a consequence of the Fall. When Eve tasted the apple, “all her veins opened into a river of blood.” Emphasizing the curse of an imbalanced body requiring monthly purging over the pains of childbirth, she grieves that “all women’s veins would have remained intact and healthy if Eve had remained for the full time in

⁵¹⁷ Bildhauer (2006), 139.

⁵¹⁸ Bildhauer (2006), 139. See McCracken (2003), 6-20, 41-60.

⁵¹⁹ Cadden (1993), 174.

paradise.”⁵²⁰ Yet, in *Scivias*, Hildegard writes positively of menstruation as a woman’s “native foliage and flowering.”⁵²¹ And, speaking in the voice of God himself, she insists that he does not “disdain this time of suffering in woman,” but ordains that a menstruating woman “should be treated with the great medicine of mercy.”⁵²² God also grants permission for menstruating women to attend Mass, even though men with bleeding battle wounds are forbidden to enter.⁵²³

There existed, then, analogies between the fluids of male and female bodies in medieval medical discourses, but competing discourses—sometimes within the same text—communicated the power of at least certain female superfluities to disorder and contaminate the insides of male bodies rather than approximate them. The *Showings* underscores analogies between Christ’s blood and the blood shed by female bodies by evoking constitutional similarities between Christ’s overflowing flesh and the overly moist flesh of women. Julian’s Christ confirms identifications of the reproductive female body with “breaches in boundaries, with lack of shape or definition, with openings and exudings and spillings forth,” the model of female physiology prominent in medieval medical theories.⁵²⁴ The *Showings* can also be read as an instance of negotiation between

⁵²⁰ *Causae et Curae*, ed. Kaiser (1903), 102-103. For Hildegard’s views about menstruation, the female constitution, and the Fall, see Newman (1987), 117-120 and Cadden (1993), 70-88. For a broader account of menstruation in medieval academic and medical texts, see Cadden (1993), 173-177 and Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 75-78.

⁵²¹ Newman (1987), 118. *Causae et Curae*, ed. Kaiser (1903), 105. The dubbing of a menstruation as *flores*, however, is not limited to Hildegard. The writer of *Diseases of Women*, one of the *Trotula* texts, attributes this term to the *vulgus*: *menstrua, quae vulgus flores appellat ...* (Mason-Holh [1940], 2). Cited in Newman (1987), 118, n. 101.

⁵²² *Scivias* I.2.20, 27, Cited in Newman (1987), 118.

⁵²³ Newman (1987), 118-119.

⁵²⁴ Bynum (1992), 109.

discursive formations that underscore the analogies between male and female blood and discursive formations that insist on the monstrous alterity of female blood. By envisioning the blood of Christ's maternal body as a "flood of mercy" that makes his children "feyer and clene," the *Showings* not only exemplifies the permeability of boundaries between body fluids, but destabilizes boundaries between benign male superfluities and dangerously ambiguous female superfluities.⁵²⁵ This view suggests that Julian reflects medieval analogies between male blood and female blood while simultaneously recontextualizing the blood of the reproductive female body within a framework of cleansing, generation, gestation and nourishment.

We cannot then dismiss the possibility that Julian's remark about Christ's blood soaking the bed is "evocative of menstrual flow."⁵²⁶ While blood that flows in beds is, as McCracken has shown, associated with female blood loss, and while male and female bleedings were sometimes spoken of analogously, as Bynum as shown, we should also consider the blood-soaked bed as a scene of childbirth. This image resonates more congruously with Julian's meditations on the exudings and spillings forth of the maternal body of Christ.⁵²⁷ These early visions of Christ's blood flow express the significance of blood, but especially the blood of birth within the narrative of Christ's incarnation.

Christ was born in the blood of Mary, born again on the cross, and gives birth in the

⁵²⁵ LT 14.61.97. The *Showings* does reflect medieval medical ideology about the female body, but Robertson (1993) forces her own ideological interests when she claims that Julian refused to accept common notions about female physiology, and that "she takes an 'essentialist' stance only as a strategy, in an Irigarayan sense." Julian's text does not afford evidence that "she mocks male views by mimicking and hyperbolizing them ..." (159). For a critique of Robertson, see Aers (1996), 78-82.

⁵²⁶ LT 4.12.22; Robertson (1993), 155. Robertson also suggests a comparison with "hymeneal blood" (155).

⁵²⁷ LT 14.60.94.

blood of crucifixion. In this sense, “the blood of the passion is the blood of birthing.”⁵²⁸

The remarkable paradox of Julian’s representation of this maternal blood flow is that it simultaneously pours forth and gathers in. Considering that Julian later identifies the incarnation as the moment when Christ knits humanity together in his body, his blood is the maternal blood that forms fetal bodies.⁵²⁹ In this sense, the loss of uterine blood—figured as menstruation or the blood of childbirth—is simultaneously figured as conception.

Coexisting with gendered notions of blood and blood loss in the late Middle Ages, was a “deeper paradox”: “blood—all blood—signified life and death.”⁵³⁰ This is the thesis around which Bynum builds her book, *Wonderful Blood*, which documents countless examples selected from medieval religious praxis, theology, miracles, science, medicine, ecclesiastical politics, and art to illustrate this paradox.⁵³¹ In the burgeoning blood piety of fourteenth and fifteenth-century England and Germany, she finds evidence of this paradox in the concomitant emphasis on blood as something living, fertile, engendering and blood as something shed, separated, sacrificed.⁵³² The hemorrhaging

⁵²⁸ Bynum (2007), 159. “Medieval hymns and sermons had long stressed that all birth is in blood. As early as the eighth century, Bede, in commenting on the Song of Songs, drew a parallel between incarnation and the resurrection/ascension, arguing that Christ came into the world *de sanguine* (i.e., from his mother’s womb) and left also in the blood of the cross.” In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, “devotional texts regularly analogized the opening of Christ’s side by Longinus to giving birth” (159-160).

⁵²⁹ See Bynum (2007), 158-161.

⁵³⁰ Bynum (2007), 187.

⁵³¹ Bynum (2007), *xvi-xvii*.

⁵³² See Bynum (2007), 153-188, especially 186-188 where she discerns “this paradox of separation that provides access” in medieval “physical and physiological fact”: “Bloodshed was dying and violation; it was also source, origin, birth. *Sanguis* and *cruor*, blood was ambiguous because profoundly bipolar. Each term had both positive and negative connotations in the fifteenth century: the shedding of *cruor* could be heroic, health-bringing, criminal, or polluting; *sanguis* could be congested and unhealthy, or the very stuff of life itself.” See also Bynum (2002), 705-707. Bildhauer (2006) makes a similar point about blood’s capacity to signify life and death, but she sees the ambivalence rooted in notions of containment and

body of Christ might have been a “hydows [hideous] and dredfulle” sight, but Julian also sees something “swete and lovely” about Christ’s flowing blood.”⁵³³ Indeed she reads in Christ’s blood running “hote, and freyshely, plentuously and lively” a message of life, of the living, enveloping, birthing Christ. Exemplifying Bynum’s paradox, Christ’s blood flow represents both his vitality and his dying: as a fluid through which Christ conceives and births, it vivifies; but it simultaneously drains Christ’s human body of its life-force. Bynum has identified the expression of “this paradoxical sense of continuity in discontinuity” in a “curious motif of late medieval piety: the devotion to Christ’s complete exsanguination in the crucifixion.”⁵³⁴ Although Bynum does not consider the function of this motif in *Showings*, Julian’s vision of the transformation of Christ’s supple body into a desiccated corpse is a clear example.

Julian’s entire vision of the crucifixion focuses on the effects of exsanguination on Christ’s body, and in connection with this blood loss, the most graphic depictions of Christ’s body appear, “parte after perte dryeng with mervelous payne.”⁵³⁵ The “swete” face and lips, though recently “fressch and rody [ruddy],” become “drye and blodeles with pale dyeng, and deede, pale langhuryng [languishing], and than turned more deede in to blew [blue] and after in browne blew [bownish blue] as the flessche turned more

spillage: “If the body is seen either as enclosed and filled with blood, or as vulnerable and bleeding, then blood can also be interpreted either as life (when it fills the intact body) or as death (when it has left the body) (5). Bynum argues that Christ’s blood, even when it has left the body, signaled life in the late Middle Ages.

⁵³³ *LT* 1.7.13.

⁵³⁴ Bynum (2007), 163.

⁵³⁵ *LT* 8.16.27.

depe dede.”⁵³⁶ His nose shrivels, and his body turns black and brown. Under the weight of the garland of thorns, the wounds in Christ’s head stretch, his scalp and hair loosen from his skull and hang down “brokyn in many pecis.”⁵³⁷ As the drying body sags under its own weight, the “woundys waxid wyde” around the nails.⁵³⁸ “[A]ll chaungyd,” Julian says. “[T]he swet body was so dyscolouryd, so drye, so clongyn [shriveled], so dedly, and so pytuous [piteous]” that it seemed “as if he had be sennyght [seven nights] deede, dyeng, at the poynt of out passyng, alwey suffereng the gret peyne.” “And me thought,” Julian concludes, “the dryeng of Cristes flessch was the most peyne and the last of his passion.”⁵³⁹ The thorn-pierced and scourged body of the earlier visions had experienced pain as it bled, but “moch more harder and grevous it was when the moystur fayled and all began to drye thus clyngyng.”⁵⁴⁰

During this vision of Christ’s greatest pain, Julian herself suffers. “Cristes paynes fylled me fulle of peynes,” she writes, and “I felt no peyne but for Cristes paynes.”⁵⁴¹ This is the moment of her most acute compassion. Words fail her as she attempts to describe the extent of this pain—“alle is to lytylle that I can say.” She admits to regretting having wished for the wound of compassion, and wonders if there is “ony payne in helle lyk thys?.” The answer she receives distinguishes compassionate pain from the pain of hell, which is fruitless and is accompanied by despair. Yet the gravity of

⁵³⁶ *LT* 8.16.26.

⁵³⁷ *LT* 8.17.28.

⁵³⁸ *LT* 8.17.28.

⁵³⁹ *LT* 8.16.27.

⁵⁴⁰ *LT* 8.17.29.

⁵⁴¹ *LT* 8.17.29.

Julian's pain is confirmed: "But of alle peyne that leed to salvacion, thys is the most, to see the lover to suffer."⁵⁴² Julian immediately receives a vision of the compassionate suffering of Mary and the disciples, and comprehends through the pain she shares with these witnesses of the crucifixion that there is a "great onyng [union] between Crist and us" through pain. The co-experience of Christ's greatest pain (the drying of his body) and the greatest pain sufferable by living creatures (compassion) unifies by gathering individuals into a share of Christ's body: "I understode that we be now, in our Lordes menyng, in his crosse, with hym in our paynes and in our passion dyeng, and we willfully abydyng in the same crosse with his helpe and his grace in to the last poynt."⁵⁴³

The exsanguination of Christ's body represents what Bynum has identified in connection with other late-medieval instances of blood piety, "the paradox of separation that provides access – detestable breaching that is a ladder to God."⁵⁴⁴ The transformation of the scourged body of Christ—fresh, lively, overflowing (indeed seemingly "alle blode")—into the dry, shriveled, discolored body of the crucified Christ, represents the consequences of Christ's outpouring of sacrificial love, which, unlike his mortal body which dies as it bleeds, is bound by no limits. "*If I myght suffer more, I wolde suffer more,*" Christ tells Julian.⁵⁴⁵ Christ's dessiccated, dying body thus communicates the boundlessness of his love, the depths of his bliss for having suffered for love. "For the payne was a noble, precious, and wurschypfulle dede done in a tyme

⁵⁴² *LT* 8.17.29.

⁵⁴³ *LT* 8.21.33.

⁵⁴⁴ Bynum (2007), 186.

⁵⁴⁵ *LT* 9.22.35. Italics are Baker's.

by the workyng of love,” Julian concludes, “And love was without begynnyng, is and shall be without ende.”⁵⁴⁶

Christ’s desiccation figures unification through the pouring out of love and the pain of sacrifice. Julian also reads another meaning in this vision. It communicates Christ’s words, “I thirst,” recorded in the Gospel of John.⁵⁴⁷ In a way that recalls Philip of Clairvaux’s biblical glossing of Elisabeth of Spalbeek’s performing body, Julian here reads the textual record of Christ’s thirst concretized in his desiccated body. But the desiccation of Christ’s body is not reducible to the biblical text; it functions importantly in the context of Julian’s textual representation of Christ’s maternal body. Julian reads a double sense in Christ’s thirst, “oon bodely and a nother gostly.” The “bodely” thirst arises from a lack of “blode and moyster in the swete flessche.”⁵⁴⁸ It is a consequence of blood loss and exposure to the elements—wind and cold temperatures—as he hangs on the cross. This thirst is thus a marker of Christ’s humanity, of the vulnerability of his body, and it is experienced corporeally – this is the cause of Christ’s greatest pain.⁵⁴⁹ Christ’s “gostly” thirst, the full analysis of which is deferred until the thirteenth revelation, is defined as his “love longyng of us all to geder here in hym to oure endlesse blysse.”⁵⁵⁰ It is a desiring thirst that arises from lack, namely from the incompleteness of Christ’s body. The complex relationship between these two thirsts is crucial to Julian’s

⁵⁴⁶ *LT* 9.22.35.

⁵⁴⁷ *LT* 8.17.27; Baker (2005) notes that this was “the fifth of the seven words or phrases that Jesus spoke from the cross according to John 19:28” (27).

⁵⁴⁸ *LT* 8.17.27.

⁵⁴⁹ *LT* 8.17.28-29.

⁵⁵⁰ *LT* 13.31.43.

Christology, and consequently to her view of salvation. Indeed it is by way of her analysis of Christ's thirst that Julian grapples with the deepest tensions in the *Showings* between orthodox soteriology and Christ's personal promise to her that "alle maner of thyng shall be welle."⁵⁵¹ Though Julian associates Christ's "bodely" thirst with his permeable flesh, his "gostly" thirst also arises from the space within his body which he longs to fill with his children. Animated by these two thirsts, the maternal body of Christ becomes the crucible of Christ's promise.

Christ's "gostly" thirst importantly functions in the service of the eventual unification of his corporeal members. This thirst is his desire—his "love longyng" as Julian puts it—"that we be enclosyd in rest and in pees."⁵⁵² For, she explains, "we be nott now fully as hole in hym as we shalle be than."⁵⁵³ Thus, while the pain of "bodely thirst" generates a "great onyng" between Christ and his children through corporeal compassion, full communion, imagined here as enclosure within Christ's body, awaits the fulfillment of his "gostly" thirst. For, Julian grants that "anenst [in respect that] Crist is oure hede, he is glorified and unpassible." This is his divinity, nevertheless characterized corporeally. But, "as aneynst [in respect to] his body, in whych alle his membris be knytt, he is nott yett fulle glorified ne all unpassible." Here, Julian locates Christ's "gostly" thirst in the lacking portions of his flesh, so that even the non-bodily sense of thirst is inextricable from Christ corporeality. But Julian goes on to say that

⁵⁵¹ *LT* 13.31.43.

⁵⁵² *LT* 13.31.43.

⁵⁵³ *LT* 13.31.43.

Christ's thirsty desire is not traceable to the incarnation or even to the crucifixion. It is not bounded by time:

For the same thurst and longyng that he had uppe on the rode tre,
which desyre, longyng, and thyrste, as to my syght, was in hym
from without begynnyng, the same hath he yett and shalle in to
the tyme that the last soule shalle be savyd is come uppe to hys
blysse.⁵⁵⁴

Phrased delicately as Julian's personal conclusion, a rare instance in the *Showings* which generally lacks such qualifications like "as to my syght," this clarification of Christ's thirst underpins Julian's efforts to reconcile Christ's promise that "*alle maner a thyng shalle be wele*" with the Church's teaching that not all will be saved.⁵⁵⁵ It is particularly significant that Christ's thirst is not simply a consequence of his suffering to atone for humanity's sin. Christ experienced this thirst for the lacking members of his body "from without begynnyng."⁵⁵⁶ This desire-thirst, then, is both a facet of Christ's nature and the means of salvation, without which "no soule comyth to hevyn."⁵⁵⁷ It is through this desire-thirst that Christ draws his children into himself. "And so gettyng his lyvely membris," as Julian puts it, "evyr he drawyth and dryngkyth and yett hym thurstyth and longyth."⁵⁵⁸ This thirst is "a lack that is simultaneously an excess of desire," and it is not so much for an other as for the members of his own body, like the "love longyng" a mother might feel for the gestating child who is both self and other, enclosed within her

⁵⁵⁴ *LT* 13.31.44.

⁵⁵⁵ *LT* 13.31.44-45.

⁵⁵⁶ *LT* 13.60.94.

⁵⁵⁷ *LT* 13.31.44.

⁵⁵⁸ *LT* 16.75.113.

body but a separate being.⁵⁵⁹ Neither prayer, penance, nor sacrifice pave the path to union with Christ, but rather his own longing for that union to which the flesh of his flesh responds almost instinctively. His children, in other words, are drawn to salvation by way of being drawn back into maternal flesh, which is, in a sense, their own communal body.

Thirst was recognized as a symptom of the loss of fluids during childbirth in the Middle Ages, and images of birth scenes frequently depicted the offering of wine or water to the mother.⁵⁶⁰ These meditations on Christ's thirst anticipate Julian's full account of his motherhood by associating both thirsts with features of his maternal body. The loss of blood and water that produces his "bodely" thirst occurs in conjunction with the "grevous paynes" he suffered before his death when he "borne us to blysse."⁵⁶¹ Christ hemorrhages blood and water through his wounds; they are, therefore, points of seepage, outflow, and birth. The bleeding and drying of Christ's body underscore its permeability, but his "gostly" thirst transforms these points of egress into entranceways. It is this function of Christ's wounds that Julian emphasizes in her meditations on his maternal body.

⁵⁵⁹ Bauerschmidt (1999), 105.

⁵⁶⁰ McAvoy (2004), 81.

⁵⁶¹ *LT* 14.60.94.

Part Four: Christ's Maternal Body: Wounds, Breast, Womb

Julian was among a number of thirteenth and fourteenth-century female mystics to whom Christ privately revealed his wounds. For holy women such as St. Liutgard, Ida of Louvain, and Catherine of Siena, Christ's wounds were, in the words of Miri Rubin, "literally an entry into Christ."⁵⁶² In her book on the eucharist in late-medieval culture, Rubin identifies the early fourteenth century as a time when "interest in the wounds developed into a special devotion."⁵⁶³ It is during this period that the first masses dedicated to Christ's wounds appear. Indulgences were granted to those who contemplated the measure of the wound in Christ's side (*mensura vulneris*). As Sarah Beckwith has noted, in a society where the limens of the sacred and the profane were under contestation, "the arena of Christ's body, the very touchstone of sacerdotal authority, makes itself both closed and open through its wounds."⁵⁶⁴

Showings translates into words Julian's desire for and experience of wounds. The textual result of this experience, which is itself a reading of Christ's wounded body, articulates the relationship between humanity's wounds and God's wounds. Although Julian prayed for the experience of wounds and received a personal vision of Christ's wounds, she insists that the wounds of contrition, compassion, and longing for God are not reducible to her own desires, illness, and visionary episode. They are precisely "thre menys [means] ... wher by alle soules com to hevyn."⁵⁶⁵ Thus, salvation is bound up with

⁵⁶² Rubin (1991), 303.

⁵⁶³ Rubin (1991), 304. See also Bynum (1987), 271-272.

⁵⁶⁴ Beckwith (1993), 56.

⁵⁶⁵ *LT* 13.39.54.

the experience of the wounded body shared by Christ and humanity. Moreover, Christ's flesh proves to be the point of communion between humanity and God by way of its woundedness. Although the splits and tears in his flesh are the consequences of sin, they are also "medycins."⁵⁶⁶ These wounds are medicinal precisely because they refuse to be healed: "the blessed woundes of oure Saviour be opyn and enjoye to hele us."⁵⁶⁷ Julian reads in these corporeal marks the proof of Christ's humanity, the consequences of human sin, and the hope of salvation. In several senses, then, *Showings* offers to its readers a semiotics of wounds, and Christ's maternity is inextricable from his woundedness. Ruptured by thorns, scourge, and spear, Christ's body takes on the points of egress and entry, the sites of birth and gestation.

Maternal images of Christ were not rare in the Middle Ages, but Julian's long text represents the most complex elaboration of the motif.⁵⁶⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, who often compared the nurturing qualities of Christ to a breast-feeding mother, employed the motherhood motif more than any one in the twelfth century.⁵⁶⁹ He also condensed the relationship between abbots, like himself, and the religious men whom they guided, into

⁵⁶⁶ *LT* 13.39.54.

⁵⁶⁷ *LT* 14.61.97.

⁵⁶⁸ Images of God as mother appear in Christian writings beginning in the patristic period. Some writers who employed these images are Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine. In *Jesus as Mother*, Bynum provides the following list of medieval authors who described the divine in maternal language: "Anselm, Peter Lombard, the biographer of Stephen of Muret, Bernard, William of St. Thierry, Aelred, Gueric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, Adam of Perseigne, Helinard of Froidmont, Gilbert of Hoyland, Guigno II the Carthusian, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Gertrude the Great, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Marguerite of Oingt, the monk of Farne, Richard Rolle, William Flete, Dante, Ludolph of Saxony, Catherine of Sienna, Bridget of Sweden, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, the *Ancrene Riwe*, the *Stimulus Amoris*, the *Chastising of God's Children* (Bynum [1982], 126, 140).

⁵⁶⁹ Bynum (1982), 115.

the image of a tender mother suckling her children.⁵⁷⁰ In a sermon on the *Song of Songs*, he exhorts those who provide others with spiritual guidance by expanding on the verse, “For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments” (*Song* 1:1-2). “Be gentle,” he urges, “avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk, not swell with poison.”⁵⁷¹ The resonances of tenderness, mercy, and unconditional love in such imaginations of Christ’s maternity tempered the vengeful, fearful characteristics of God the Father.⁵⁷² The emphasis on “creation and incarnation” over “atonement and judgment” that characterized the affective piety of the later Middle Ages likewise encouraged religious writers to turn to maternal language to speak about God.⁵⁷³ The fourteenth century, in particular, saw a rise in male writers who envisioned the crucifixion as a birthing scene.⁵⁷⁴

Medieval views about mothers and medieval Christology intersected in several ways that facilitated the image of the motherhood of Christ. Bynum identifies three primary points of identification, each of which appear to some extent in the *Showings*. First, Christ’s sacrificial death was compared to the labor pains of a mother giving birth. The suffering of both Christ and mother generate new life. Second, Christ’s love for humanity was compared to the unconditional and tender love a mother feels for her children. Third, Christ’s nourishment of the soul with his body and blood was compared

⁵⁷⁰ Bynum (1982), 116.

⁵⁷¹ Bynum (1982), 117-118. Sermon 23, par. 2, *Sancti Bernardi opera* 1:139-140; trans. Walsh (1971), *Song* 2:27.

⁵⁷² For a full account of maternal images of God in the High Middle Ages, see Bynum (1982), 110-169.

⁵⁷³ Bynum (1982), 128-129. On the increasing devotion to the humanity of Christ in the later Middle Ages, see Beckwith (1993), Bynum (1982), 16-19, 129-146, 151-154, and Rubin (1991).

⁵⁷⁴ Bynum (1992), 163.

to the nourishment a mother provides her children, both within the womb (in the form of menstrual fluid) and after birth (in the form of breast milk).⁵⁷⁵ Analogies between Christ's side wound and the female breast appear in both academic and mystical texts in the later Middle Ages. Such comparisons appear explicitly in religious writers as early as the second century. Meditating on the eucharistic valences of Christ's wound, Clement of Alexandria drew on comparisons between breast milk, the blood that nourishes the gestating fetus, and the blood that poured from Christ's spear-pierced side.⁵⁷⁶ In the fourteenth century, the monk of Farne wrote of Christ nursing his children with the blood of his wound rather than mother's milk. He urges men to run toward Christ as little children run to the arms of their mothers: "He stretches out his hands to embrace us, bows down his head to kiss us, and opens his side to give us suck."⁵⁷⁷

Judging from the number of male authors who wrote of Christ as mother from the patristic period through the late Middle Ages, Bynum cautions against inclinations to associate the motif with female religious writing.⁵⁷⁸ Indeed, she finds the motherhood of Christ to be a "more articulated, self-conscious notion" in men's writing than in women's, but also notes that male and female writers tended to employ the metaphor differently.⁵⁷⁹ Men, such as Bernard and the monk of Farne, tended to see their own nurturing responsibilities reflected in the image of Christ as Mother. They also valued the tenderness of the maternal role as a supplement to the authority of the paternal role in

⁵⁷⁵ Bynum (1992), 158. See also Bynum (1992), 157-165.

⁵⁷⁶ Cited in Bynum (1982), 132. Clement *Paedagogus* bk. 1, ch. 6, *Clemens Alexandrinus* 1: 104-21.

⁵⁷⁷ Cited in Bynum (1992), 159. *The Monk of Farne*, trans. a Benedictine nun of Stanbrook (1961), 64.

⁵⁷⁸ Bynum (1982), 140.

⁵⁷⁹ Bynum (1992), 156.

which they acted as the spiritual directors of other men.⁵⁸⁰ Women, Bynum observes, did not generally use the image of Christ as mother in a way that associated maternal qualities with their own responsibilities, but “simply projected themselves into the role of child vis-à-vis mother Jesus.”⁵⁸¹ When female writers drew contrasts between men and women in reference to the maternal Christ, these contrasts were biological rather than social—“between begetting and conceiving, perhaps, but not one between authority and love.” In general, Bynum concludes, “women seem to move from images of lactation or giving birth directly to theological matters, such as eucharist and redemption.”⁵⁸² The thirteenth and fourteenth-century female mystics, Angela Foligno, Lutgard of Aywières, and Catherine of Sienna report visions of nursing from the wound in Christ’s side.⁵⁸³

Julian sees herself as one of the children of “Moder Jhesu,” but she speaks of herself as the child of Christ only as one of many, using the words “us” and “we,” rather than referring to herself as a singular child. Exemplifying Bynum’s paradigm, Julian underscores the biological rather than the social or familial functions of Christ’s maternity, and locates these functions—birthing, feeding, conceiving, and gestating—in the fissures of his flesh⁵⁸⁴ As these fissures in Christ’s flesh condense nourishment and gestation, breast, womb, and wound, his body is simultaneously a site of fragmentation, seepage, and enclosure. Julian does not, however, report visions of nursing from Christ’s wounds. In *Showings*, the fissure in Christ’s side is an entryway into Christ’s body rather

⁵⁸⁰ Bynum (1992), 158.

⁵⁸¹ Bynum (1992), 161.

⁵⁸² Bynum (1992), 162.

⁵⁸³ Bynum (1992), 161-163.

⁵⁸⁴ See McInerney (1996), 169-170.

than a site that nourishes. Julian's vision of Christ's crucified body intimated the relationship between Christ's wounds and his maternity, but the vision of Christ that follows designates the wound in Christ's side to be the threshold where his children will enter his body. Still riddled with wounds, but now "wyth a good chere," Christ appears and looks toward the wound in his side "with joy."⁵⁸⁵ Julian's gaze is led "by the same wound in to hys syd with in" where Christ shows her a "feyer and delectable place and large inow for alle mankynde that shalle be savyd and rest in pees and love."⁵⁸⁶ This sight brings to Julian's mind "hys dere worthy blode and hys precious water whych he lett poure out for love," a reference to the outflow of blood and water from Christ's crucified body when Longinus pierced his side with a spear.⁵⁸⁷ The sight of Christ's open wound and its association with blood and water evoke the birthing of the Church and its sacraments represented in many late-medieval devotional texts and images to have emerged through the opening in Christ's side.⁵⁸⁸

Julian's maternal Christ performs the physiological functions of mortal mothers, but exceeds them in specific ways. Whereas mortal mothers bear their children "to payne and to dyeng," Mother Christ bears his children "to joye and to endlesse levying [living]." In this labor, Christ suffered "the the sharpyst thornes and grevous paynes that evyr were or evyr shalle be," birthing pains that led to the death of his mortal body, but ensure that his children will never die.⁵⁸⁹ Referencing but them moving beyond images

⁵⁸⁵ *LT* 10.24.37.

⁵⁸⁶ *LT* 10.24.37.

⁵⁸⁷ *LT* 10.24.37.

⁵⁸⁸ For examples, see Bynum (2007), 158-159, 165, 170-171, 181-182.

⁵⁸⁹ *LT* 14.60.94.

of nursing from Christ's wound, Julian compares it to the site where a mother may "geve her chylde sucke hyr mylke," but Mother Christ may "lede us in to his blessyd brest by his swet opyn syde and shewe us there in perty of the Godhed."⁵⁹⁰ Within Christ's wound, Julian glimpses a further "sweet sight": "hys blessyd hart clovyn on two." Christ speaks to Julian as she gazes, "*Lo, how I love thee.*"⁵⁹¹ Within the center of Christ's body, then, there is an emblem of brokenness; "[t]he core of Julian's vision is of a division."⁵⁹²

Christ's cloven heart can be read in several overlapping ways. Christ himself glosses this fragmentation within his body as love. This serene Christ who introduces Julian to this "feyer and delectable place" is markedly changed from the suffering and bleeding Christ of Julian's vision of the passion. This split within him can also then be read as the mark of Christ's many divisions: man and God; mortal and immortal; suffering and serene; "all blode" and space "large inow for alle mankynde;" a hemorrhaging body and a body that welcomes in. Christ's cloven heart also materializes the clefts of the maternal body. His labor and separation from his children have left a fissure within him, a longing for an *other* who is and is not part of his own body. Thus, Christ's maternal body takes shape in the amniotic flow of blood and water from the wound in his side, the womb-like space ready to enclose his children, and the internal divisions that occur in childbirth.

⁵⁹⁰ *LT* 14.60.94.

⁵⁹¹ *LT* 10.24.37. Italics are Baker's.

⁵⁹² Sprung (1996), 186.

As this vision of Christ's wound as a threshold demonstrates, Julian principally sees the wound in Christ's side not as breast-like site of nourishment, but as a fissure through which children may pass, even though analogies between Christ's wound and the breast became increasingly common in the late-fourteenth century.⁵⁹³ Between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, "[d]eath on the cross as birthpangs, and feedings with the blood from Christ's wound tended to replace images of conception, gestation and lactation when Christ's motherhood was elaborated in prayer, sermon and vision."⁵⁹⁴ That Julian passes over possible analogies between breast and wound corroborates her silence about the eucharist and the role of Christ's body as food. Within the metaphors available for meditations on the motherhood of Christ, Julian does not pursue the maternal function of nourishment. Instead, Julian's meditations on this corporeal threshold draw from textual and iconographic traditions of the crucifixion as a birthing.⁵⁹⁵ Julian alludes to this tradition when she compares the pains of the crucifixion to labor pains, but extends Christ's maternity from this image of birth on the cross to an image of salvific reverse-birth.⁵⁹⁶ The promise of salvation resides in the openness of Christ's birthing wound, and his thirsty desire for children to come up into him again and "be enclosyd in rest and pees."⁵⁹⁷ Julian's own affective encounter with the wound in Christ's side includes her desire to penetrate Christ's body at this site where bodies exit

⁵⁹³ Bynum (1992), 158.

⁵⁹⁴ Bynum (1992), 158.

⁵⁹⁵ See Bynum (1992), 97, 99; McCracken (2003), 106-107.

⁵⁹⁶ *LT* 14.60.94.

⁵⁹⁷ *LT* 13.31.43.

in childbirth and enter a place of gestation. With the acknowledgment that Julian does not say so herself, Christ's side wound is analogous to the female genitals.

This particular reading of Christ's wound has been somewhat polarizing in analyses of female mysticism. Regarding the intersections between the female body, physical suffering, and eroticism in mystical discourse, Nancy Partner has argued that readers would do well to extend their interpretive strategies beyond the "frame of reference and symbolic code offered ... at the manifest level of human self-explanation."⁵⁹⁸ For Julian's *Showings*, this means acknowledging "the allegory of sexual fears and frightening desires spoken through Julian's strong images of Christ's body punctured, torn, gouged, multiply penetrated" despite Julian's emphasis on the Christ's body as site of gestation and birth.⁵⁹⁹ We might add that, if these frightening images of Christ's body accommodate erotic intimations, likewise does the vision in which Christ lovingly spreads his wound and allows Julian to gaze upon his empty womb and broken heart. The maternal site of gestation in Christ's body is also the site of desire for corporeal union, a site that Christ translates for Julian into the language of love.

While Bynum acknowledges the existence of textual and iconographic comparisons between wound and vulva, she asserts that they "have less to do with sexuality than with fertility and decay."⁶⁰⁰ In the spirit of her project to problematize tendencies in medieval scholarship to read flesh as temptation, especially of a sexual sort, Bynum urges modern readers to consider a broader range of meanings signified by the

⁵⁹⁸ Partner (1996), 305.

⁵⁹⁹ Partner (1996), 304. Italics are Partner's.

⁶⁰⁰ Bynum (1992), 182.

female body and even the female genitals. Karma Lochrie criticizes Bynum's readings of Christ's wound as a fertile (i.e. maternal) site because such readings "cancel out" the signification of Christ's wound as a sexual (i.e. female) site, and she has argued for more expansive readings of "the sacred wound's polysemy."⁶⁰¹ Lochrie questions Bynum's foreclosure of sexual valences in medieval desires to suck, taste, press against, and penetrate Christ's body, or more specifically, his wounds. She cites texts such as the *Stimulus Amoris*, by James of Milan, in which the mystical soul expresses desire to "copulate wound to wound" with Christ in language that exploits the pun between *vulnus* and *vulva*.⁶⁰² Lochrie also finds the "transitivity of wound to vulva/vagina, of masculine to feminine bodies, and of sexualities" vividly expressed in certain devotional images of Christ's side wound. These images, which show Christ's wound disembodied and enlarged to life-size proportions, provide, says Lochrie, "a visual conjunction of wound and vagina."⁶⁰³ Openness to the polysemy of Christ's wound, therefore, requires openness to its sexual valences, and the interconnectedness of erotic desire, violence, and death under the sign of this fissure in Christ's flesh.

Taking Julian's meditations on the body of Christ as an instance of the analogy between *vulnus* and *vulva*, we might consider whether Lochrie's claim that the maternal body and the (female) sexual body are mutually exclusive favors certain aspects of the sacred wound's polysemy while neglecting others. If we shift both Bynum's emphasis on the maternal functions of Christ's flesh and Lochrie's emphasis on the female erotic

⁶⁰¹ Bynum (1992), 182; Lochrie (1997), 189.

⁶⁰² Riehle (1981), 46; Lochrie (1997), 189. See also Beckwith (1993), 58-59.

⁶⁰³ Lochrie (1997), 190. See also Hughes (2003), 150-151.

possibilities such an emphasis overlooks, and instead attend to the intersections of love and pain in the fissures in Christ's body, we may find that this body occupies the boundary zone between eroticism and fertility. Julian's readings of Christ's side wound may admit erotic valences, but it specifically articulates maternal valences. Need we forge divisions between the two when Julian does not foreclose this polysemy? Christ's permeable boundaries mark his body as pervious and fertile, qualities that confirm Bynum's characterization of a medieval religiosity concerned with the generations, transformations, and dissolutions fundamental to human flesh and exemplified by the maternal body. Yet Christ's permeability, materialized by his split heart and thirst, also marks his body as desiring and desirable, one that he offers to his children "now in this lyfe by many prevy touchynges of swete, gostly syghtes and felynges mesuryd to us as oure sympylhed [simpleness] may bere it ... so long tyll we shall dye in longyng for love."⁶⁰⁴ Through this death will come the sensual consummation of a life of longing:

And than shall we alle come in to oure Lorde, oure selfe clerely knowyng and God fylsomly felyng, and hym gostely heryng, and hym delectably smellyng, and hym swetly swelwyng [tasting]. And ther shall we se God face to face, homely and fulsomly.⁶⁰⁵

Here, communion with the divine is experienced through the physical senses, as one desiring body sensually experiences another. As we have seen, Julian also expresses such communion through images of entangled body boundaries and multiple, overlapping enclosures. Julian longs for God as a child longs for its mother's body; this longing, rather than a lover's desire, infuses her language, even in her occasional employment of

⁶⁰⁴ *LT* 14.43.61.

⁶⁰⁵ *LT* 14.43.61.

the spousal imagery favored by many late-medieval female mystics.⁶⁰⁶ Evoking conception and gestation, Julian describes the creation of humanity as the moment when God “knytt us all and onyd us to hym selfe.” She does not, however, allow this language to efface the significance of desire and sensual pleasure when bodies join together:

And in the knyttyng and in the onyng he is oure very tru Spouse
and we, his lovyd wyfe and his feyer meydyn, with whych wyfe
he was nevyr displeyd. For he seyeth, *I love the and thou lovyst
me, and oure love shall nevyr parte in two.*⁶⁰⁷

Showings may imagine salvation as enclosure within the womb-like space in Christ’s breast, but the relationship between humanity and divinity is not reducible to eternal enclosure or union. Julian expresses this relationship as a “series of reflections and inversions, of bodies engendered and gestating within other bodies.”⁶⁰⁸ Christ’s body is envisioned as a dwelling place for his children, but Christ is simultaneously enclosed in these children: “The place that Jhesu takyth in oure soule he shall nevyr remove withouten ende as to my sight. For in us is his homeliest home and his endlesse dwellyng.”⁶⁰⁹ Thus, the maternal body expands beyond Christ’s own flesh; it serves as the paradigm for the relationship between divinity and humanity. Drawing from her close readings of Christ’s maternal body, Julian employs this semiotics of pervious body boundaries to develop a theology modeled on breaches and enclosures. By way of their boundary violations, the relationships among the persons of the Trinity and between the Trinity and humanity are both maternal and monstrous.

⁶⁰⁶ For examples of eroticism in female mysticism, see Lochrie (1997), 187-196.

⁶⁰⁷ *LT* 14.58.90-91. Italics are Baker’s.

⁶⁰⁸ McInerney (1996), 176.

⁶⁰⁹ *LT* 16.68.104.

Part Five: A Theology of Breaches and Enclosures

Julian's meditations on the fissures of Christ's flesh that beget, nourish, and welcome children back into his body provide the most explicit instances of permeable body boundaries in *Showings*. We have seen how the breaches in this body and the blood they seep to the point of painful desiccation prove to be the means by which Christ welcomes and encloses humanity within his corporeal boundaries. We have also seen how the perforation and fragmentation of Julian's own body operate in her text: in her desire to experience wounds, in the numbing divisions of her ill body, and the limiting divisions of her visual field. In the final revelations of her long text, Julian delves into the broader theological implications of the visions of Christ's body she has received. Here, too, we find that her meditations on the Trinity, Mary's role in creation and salvation, human psychology, and the problem of sin and redemption depend on the possibility of bodies overlapping, filling, and enclosing other bodies.

Unlike many theologically minded writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Julian does not clearly demarcate the persons of the Trinity, nor the divine and human aspects of Christ.⁶¹⁰ As Nicholas Watson has noted, "Julian goes out of her way to elide these distinctions" when she states that "the Trinitie is God, God is the Trinitie. The Trinitie is our maker. The Trinitie is our keper. The Trinitie is our everlausting lover ... for wher Jhesu appireth the blessed Trinitie is understand as to my sight."⁶¹¹ Julian generally speaks specifically of Christ in her visions of the passion, and situates

⁶¹⁰ Watson (2003), 213.

⁶¹¹ Watson (2003), 213; *LT* 1.4.8.

the origins of his maternity at the moment of his incarnation in Mary's womb; yet, she understands God the father communicated in the flesh of the son: "We praie to God for his holie flesh and for his previous bloud, his holie passion, his dere worthy death and worshipfull woundes."⁶¹²

This impulse in Julian's theology to loosen the boundaries between the persons of the Godhead is repeated in her efforts to come to terms with the problem of evil and the promise of salvation. Julian concludes from her "bodily sight" of Christ crowned, scourged, and crucified that blood and wounds—the tokens of sin—are simultaneously the points where union with the divine occurs. This promise of Christ's permeable body nevertheless leaves Julian questioning why, by the foresight and wisdom of God, "the begynnyng of synne was nott lettyd," for then, "alle shulde have be wele."⁶¹³ Why must Christ's corporeal boundaries have been breached at all? Why must Christ suffer the pain of his desiccated body? It is at this moment that Christ offers Julian the comforting but enigmatic promise: "*Synne is behovely, but alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thyng shalle be wele.*"⁶¹⁴ But, haunted by the vision of Christ's empty womb, Julian presses on. A certain "poynt of oure feyth," as she puts it, namely that "many creatures shall be dampnyd," prevents her from blithely accepting Christ's words.⁶¹⁵ Among these children of Christ to be eternally excluded from his body, Julian lists the demons who fell from heaven, those who "dyeth out of feyth of holy chyrch,"

⁶¹² *LT* 1.6.11.

⁶¹³ *LT* 13.27.39.

⁶¹⁴ *LT* 13.27.39. Italics are Baker's.

⁶¹⁵ *LT* 13.32.45.

and Christians who have lived an “uncristen lyfe.”⁶¹⁶ As Frederick Bauerschmidt has noted, the theological quandary Julian faces “is a question of how the boundaries of salvation are delimited.”⁶¹⁷ It is also a question about the boundaries of Christ’s body. How can all be well while some of Christ’s children remain eternally banished from his body, distant from the threshold of his wounds?

Torn between the teaching that God holds humans accountable for sin, and her sense that God does not blame humans for sin, Julian begins to fear that her visions will end before she can begin to reconcile this contradiction.⁶¹⁸ God answers her prayer for insight by “shewing full mystely [very obscurely and figuratively]” an allegorical vision of the Fall which features a lord and a servant. The lord who “lokyth uppon his servaunt full lovely and swetly and mekely” bids him to complete a certain task. The servant, who runs in eagerness to do his lord’s will, falls into a ditch.⁶¹⁹ Understanding that “oonly hys good wyll and his grett desyer wass cause of his fallying,” the lord does not blame his servant, but wants only to rescue him from his discomfort, for the servant “culde nott turne his face to loke uppe on his lovyng lorde, whych was to hym full nere, in whom is full comfort.”⁶²⁰ His greatest pain of all was “that he leye aloone,” separated from his lord.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁶ *LT* 13.32.45.

⁶¹⁷ Bauerschmidt (1999), 79.

⁶¹⁸ *LT* 14.50.69.

⁶¹⁹ *LT* 14.51.70-71.

⁶²⁰ *LT* 14.51.70; 14.51.71. For a comparative analysis of Julian’s and Augustine’s meditations on the fall, see McEntire (1998).

⁶²¹ *LT* 14.51.70.

The full meaning of this ostensibly simple vision of a man tripping and falling into a ditch eludes Julian, who, by her own count, contemplated its “pryvytes [secrets]” for nearly twenty years after the time of her revelations.⁶²² The problem of the redemption of sin had arisen earlier in Julian’s text, but had been quelled when Christ “seyde fulle swetely thys word, *If I myght suffer more, I wolde suffer more.*”⁶²³ “He seyde nott,” Julian observes, “Yf it were nedfulle to suffer more, but if I myght suffer more. For though it were nott nedfulle and he myght suffer more, he wolde.” Christ’s desire to suffer further out of love for humanity leads Julian to conclude that his “fulle blysse” would not be fulfilled “yf it myght any better have ben done than it was done.”⁶²⁴ This meditative episode breaks into Julian’s descriptive accounts of her visions of Christ’s body, and has been called “the first fissure in Julian’s narrative.”⁶²⁵ Maud McInerney sees the return of the question of sin in the theological meditations of the denser thirteenth and fourteenth revelations as the fruit of Julian’s own labor, “a labor that overlaps Christ’s, his to bring forth Christianity, hers to bring forth understanding of one of its essential paradoxes.”⁶²⁶

Julian’s full exegesis of the vision of the servant and the lord identifies the meaning behind the clothing worn by both servant and lord, the shape of their bodies, their gestures, facial expressions, and affects. Through this exegetical method, Julian identifies the lord as God and the servant as Adam, and, therefore, “all men,” for “in the

⁶²² *LT* 14.51.72.

⁶²³ *LT* 9.22.35.

⁶²⁴ *LT* 9.22.35.

⁶²⁵ McInerney (1996), 174.

⁶²⁶ McInerney (1996), 174.

syghte of God alle man is oone man, and oone man is alle man,” a formulation that recalls her boundary-free description of the Trinity.⁶²⁷ The fall into the ditch thus represents the fall of man. Julian also recognizes Christ in the figure of the servant. Emphasizing the vulnerability of the incarnate Christ, Julian reads in the servant’s torn clothing the marks of “the roddys and scorgys, the thornes and the naylys, the drawyng and the draggyng, his tender flessch rentyng.”⁶²⁸ As Christ, the servant’s fall into the dell represents Christ’s incarnation. This double nature of the servant allows Julian to identify Christ as a second Adam whose incarnation restores communion between the divine and human.⁶²⁹

As Bauerschmidt has observed, this allegory, when the servant is read as Christ, is quite orthodox:

It is Christ who responds with good will in obeying the lord’s command ...; it is Christ who suffers through his ‘fall’ into human flesh; it is Christ to whom the lord assigns no blame; and it is Christ whom the lord will reward for the pains he has suffered.⁶³⁰

But Julian’s search for the meaning of sin and redemption is not satisfied by Christ’s redemption of humanity’s fall. She sees Adam’s fall and Christ’s incarnation as a single event encapsulated in a single moment, figured by the physical fall of the servant. At the moment Adam fell from life to death, “Goddys Son fell with Adam in to the slade [ditch] of the meyden’s wombe.”⁶³¹ Julian insists that Christ’s identity is inextricable from “all

⁶²⁷ *LT* 14.51.71, 72, 75-76.

⁶²⁸ *LT* 14.51.78.

⁶²⁹ See Baker (1994), 94-98.

⁶³⁰ Bauerschmidt (1999), 142.

⁶³¹ *LT* 14.51.76.

men,” that one flesh is shared by Christ and humanity, a flesh that clothed them both at the moment of incarnation within Mary’s womb, and—most significantly—that this flesh is indistinguishable because it houses a common will. For, as there is in Christ, there is in “all men” a “godly wylle that never assentyd to synne ne nevyr shall.”⁶³² The problem of evil, then, withdraws. The fall, both Adam’s and Christ’s, is an act of obedience rather than disobedience, and “the judgment of weakness, deception, subjection, subordination, servitude is not only lacking but also completely dismissed.”⁶³³ This is a view of the fall in which Adam, Christ, the servant, the lord, and God are together enclosed together rather than divided, and the space of that enclosure is simultaneously Christ’s flesh and Mary’s womb. That these enclosing spheres of flesh are inextricable underpins Julian’s vision of Christ’s maternal body.

If Christ is Adam, the incarnation mends humanity’s separation from God, and this is precisely the conclusion to which Julian comes by way of her meditations on human psychology.⁶³⁴ In Christ’s body is sealed the breach between humanity and divinity, and likewise the internal division within the human soul that preserves the servant’s inability to look upon the loving face of his lord. Julian holds the human soul to be comprised of two aspects, a “hyer party” which is inclined towards God, and a “lower party” which is inclined towards the mutable and material world. The “hyer party,” which Julian calls “oure substaunce,” is “knytte to God in the making,” that is, by way of God’s creation of human kind in his image; the “lower party,” which Julian calls “oure

⁶³² *LT* 14.53.82.

⁶³³ McEntire (1998), 171 in Baker (2005).

⁶³⁴ See Bynum (2007), 204-208.

sensualite,” is “knytte to God in oure flessch takyng,” that is, by way of God’s becoming human.⁶³⁵ In the incarnation of Christ, Julian understands, the “two kyndys be onyd [joined].”⁶³⁶ Thus, Christ’s “fall” into Mary’s body performs a double conception—of God within a human womb and humanity within God. The knitting together of the human soul by way of Christ’s fall into Mary’s womb is the touchstone of Christ’s maternity: “Jhesu [is] oure very Moder in kynd of oure furst makyng, and he is oure very furst Moder in grace by takyng of oure kynde made.”⁶³⁷ The incarnation is therefore a re-creation, a knitting and birthing parallel to God’s creation of humankind in his image. Overlapping images of gestation, Julian identifies this joining and enclosing of Christ’s body within Mary’s womb as the condition of Christ’s own maternity:

And in the takyng of oure kynd he quyckyd us, and in his blessyd dyeng uppon the crosse he bare us to endlesse lyfe. And fro that tyme and now and evyr shall in to doomyssday, he fedyth us and fodreth [supports] us, ryght as the hye, sovereyne kyndnesse of moderhed wylle and as the kyndly nede of chylldhed askyth.⁶³⁸

Christ’s power to give birth to his children, feed and support them, issues specifically from his incarnation, that is, his enclosure within human flesh.⁶³⁹ The theological

⁶³⁵ For the resonances between Julian’s division of the soul with Augustine’s, see Nuth (1991), 176-190 in Baker (2005); for the resonances with Walter Hilton’s psychology, see Bauerschmidt (1999), 146-147.

⁶³⁶ *LT* 14.57.89. According to Joan Nuth, the use of this pair of words to indicate two parts of the soul is “unique to Julian” (182).

⁶³⁷ *LT* 14.59.93.

⁶³⁸ *LT* 14.63.99. According to McInerney (1996), “the word *knytt* was used as early as 1400 to describe the formation of fruits on a tree, and by the early seventeenth century it is used for the formation of the fetus.” Though without direct evidence of such a use in the fourteenth century, McInerney “understand[s] the term here in the same sense, since Julian is describing a process within the Virgin’s womb” (175).

⁶³⁹ Krantz (1997) and Bauerschmidt (1999) have commented upon the frequent appearance of the word “kynd” in Julian’s meditations on the motherhood of Christ. Krantz notes that in Middle English “kindness” can mean both “nature” and the reproductive organs of the female body (99-109).

centrality of these interpenetrating images of birth and enclosure within generative bodies testifies that Julian's affective encounter with the porous limens of Christ's maternal body is not reducible to "a dominant commonplace of late medieval devotion" to be distinguished from the "reasoning inquiry" of the theological portions of her text.⁶⁴⁰

The processes of continuous birth and enclosure permeate all of Julian's theology. Mary, Christ, and humanity participate in this process which has been called "an imagistic system which plays upon the related images of anchorhold and womb, developing a discursive strategy that links the apophatic and the maternal":⁶⁴¹

Oure lady is oure moder, in whom we be all beclosyd and of hyr borne in Crist, for she that is moder of oure savyoure is mother of all that ben savyd in our savyour; and oure savyoure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlessly borne and nevyr shall come out of hym.⁶⁴²

Moreover, Julian does not restrict her theology of enclosure to the maternal bodies of Christ and Mary, but communicates the relationships among the persons of the Trinity and between divinity and humanity through a mesmerizing system of enclosure in order to express how "God dwellyth in oure soule" while "oure soule dwellyth in God." Julian's account of the Trinity draws on familial relationships, but instead of featuring the interpersonal dynamics between father, mother, and son, she features the processes of enclosure, which, throughout *Showings*, are identified with the maternal function of gestation:

For the almyghty truth of the trynnyte is oure Fader, for he made us and kepyth us in hym. And the depe wysdome of the Trynnyte

⁶⁴⁰ Aers (1996), 83-84.

⁶⁴¹ McInerey, "In the Meyden's Womb" (158)

⁶⁴² *LT* 15.57.90.

is our Moder, in whom we be closyd. And the hye goodnesse of the Trynyte is our Lord, and in hym we be closyd and he in us. We be closyd in the Holy Gost. And the Fader is beclosyd in us, the Son is beclosyd in us, and the Holy Gost is beclosyd in us, all myghty, all wysdom, and alle goodnesse, one God, one Lorde.⁶⁴³

Through her allegorical exegesis of the servant, then, Julian finds insight into Christ's promise, "all shalle be welle." She also finds further confirmation of the maternity of God, for Christ's claim "works its way through the body," a body that participates in concentric circles of gestation and birth.⁶⁴⁴

Julian's exegesis, with its attention to multiple levels of allegorical signification and its learned explication of human psychology, demonstrates her accomplishments in the readings of mystical experience; yet, she concludes that the full meaning of Christ's words is not to be found through rational inquiry, but by fully accepting the position of a child who trusts in the goodness and mercy of her mother. In this position, Julian affirms that, "The blessed woundes of oure Saviour be opyn and enjoye to hele us."⁶⁴⁵ Through these breaches in Christ's body pours the "flode of mercy that is his deerworthy blode and precious water ... plenteous to make us feyer and clene."⁶⁴⁶ Continuously bathed in these fluids, Christ's children are never entirely severed from the boundaries of the maternal body. "Thus," writes Julian, "I understode that all his blessyd chyldren whych be come out of hym by kynd shulde be brought agayne in to hym by grace."⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴³ *LT* 14.54.84-85.

⁶⁴⁴ Bauerschmidt (1999), 119.

⁶⁴⁵ *LT* 16.61.97.

⁶⁴⁶ *LT* 14.61.97.

⁶⁴⁷ *LT* 14.63.99.

Part Six:
Boundaries of the anchorhold

There is no scholarly consensus as to whether Julian composed her long text after she became an anchoress. A reference to “Julian anakorite” in the will of Roger Reed provides evidence that she had been enclosed by the year 1394, twenty years after she experienced her sickness and revelations.⁶⁴⁸ Barbara Newman speculates that Julian was a mother and a widow not only by the time she was enclosed in her cell, but before her visionary episode.⁶⁴⁹ In his careful study on the composition of the *Showings*, Nicholas Watson concludes that the short text was likely written later than had been previously assumed, that is, in the mid to late 1380’s rather than in the years immediately following Julian’s visionary episode. He believes that Julian worked on the long text from the late 1380’s to the time of her death, sometime after 1416.⁶⁵⁰ As McInerney notes, Watson’s dating suggests that Julian composed the short text “in a domestic, albeit devout setting” – a setting that she sees reflected in Julian’s use of “images drawn from being a woman in the world, allusions to childbirth, motherhood, sexuality, and domesticity.”⁶⁵¹ Watson’s dating also suggests that the long text, with its rich vocabulary of enclosure would have been “a product of perhaps almost a quarter of a century of writing within the anchorhold.”⁶⁵² That Julian had gained local renown as an anchoress, expert in matters of spiritual guidance by the year 1413, is attested by Margery Kempe’s report of a visit to

⁶⁴⁸ McInerney (1996), 159.

⁶⁴⁹ Newman (2003), 223-224. See also Ward (1989), 11-35.

⁶⁵⁰ Watson (1993), 663.

⁶⁵¹ McInerney (1996), 69-70.

⁶⁵² McInerney (1996), 70.

Julian's anchorhold in that year. A visionary herself, Margery recounted to "Dame Julian" the "many wonderful revelations" God had showed her "to learn if there were any deceit in them, for the anchoress was expert in such things and good counsel could give."⁶⁵³ Julian's name is taken from the church to which her cell was attached, the church of St. Julian in Norwich. Although the extent to which Julian's long text may have been shaped by her personal experience as an anchoress remains an open question, her vocabulary and images of enclosure resonate with the anchoritic life.

According to Maud McInerney, the words *closen*, *beclosen*, and their cognates, favored by Julian, included within their late-medieval range of meanings to bury or entomb.⁶⁵⁴ The anchorhold was "in principle as well as practice, not so much a house as a tomb."⁶⁵⁵ Comparisons between the anchorhold and tomb would not have been unfamiliar to the anchoress as the Office for the Dead and the Office of Extreme Unction were traditionally performed during her enclosure ceremony.⁶⁵⁶ The sprinkling of dust over her body and the blocking up of the door through which she entered her cell would have further underscored the junction of death and birth within the walls of the anchorhold.⁶⁵⁷ The anchoress was to become dead to the outside world, but born anew to the reclusive life. The cell, moreover, would be the place of her final death and rebirth into the afterlife; it was womb and tomb twice over. Thus, Julian's assertion that "we be all in hym [Christ] beclosyd, and he is beclosyd in us," does not simply describe the

⁶⁵³ Staley (2001), 33.

⁶⁵⁴ The term *closid* was used in 1498 to describe a recluse (McInerney [1996], 157).

⁶⁵⁵ Cannon (2003), 109. On the enclosure ritual, see Warren (1985), 76-77, 97-100, and Robertson (1989), 109-134.

⁶⁵⁶ Warren (1985), 97-98.

⁶⁵⁷ Warren (1985), 98.

relationship between container and contained; it also evokes the tradition of anchoritism.”⁶⁵⁸ And, we might add, the physiology of maternity. The “paradox of expansiveness within enclosure” that permeates *Showings*, “like so many concentric circles”—sickroom, body, womb, soul—are “depicted as leading both inwards and outwards to the very seat of an immanent divinity.”⁶⁵⁹ This divinity, enfleshed within Mary’s womb, becomes *Moder Jhesu* in whose conceiving, gestating, and birthing body life and death converge.

One anonymous collection of texts believed to have been written for a group of anchoresses in the early thirteenth century has much to say about the borders of the female body. Julian may have been familiar with this “much-copied” collection that includes *Hali Meidhad*, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the *Katherine Group*, given that it was “intended for just such an audience as she.”⁶⁶⁰ Julian makes no reference to the anchoritic life in her text, yet, as McInerney has observed, *Showings* shares with these texts, particularly with the anonymous *Ancrene Wisse* (*Rule for Anchoresses*), “the same emphasis on reversible or permeable boundaries, along with similar movements of one body into or through another.”⁶⁶¹ *Ancrene Wisse* repeatedly draws comparisons between the anchorite body and the anchorhold as sites with precarious boundaries. Both enclosed and enclosing, “the recluse’s body-boundaries are as intensely regulated as those of the

⁶⁵⁸ *LT* 14.57.90. McInerney, 157.

⁶⁵⁹ McAvoy (2002), 132.

⁶⁶⁰ McInerney (1996), 162. E.J. Dobson has concluded that *Ancrene Wisse* was written around 1215 for the instruction of three anchoresses in Deerford near Wignore Abbey in Herefordshire (Dobson, 1976, cited in Hellwarth (2002), 27. For a comprehensive discussion of medieval literature directed at anchorites, see Warren (1985), 92-124. For individual analyses of some of these texts specifically directed at anchoresses, see Bella Millet (1996); Millet and Wogan-Browne (1990); Salih (1999); Cannon (2003); Hellwarth (2002), 25-42.

⁶⁶¹ McInerney, 163.

cell itself, and form a frontier across which significant egresses and entrances may occur.”⁶⁶² The author is particularly concerned with breaches in the boundaries of body and anchorhold, corporealized in the form of wounds and body orifices, or reified in the form of windows or doors in the cell walls. These thresholds are significant not for the generative potential they embody in *Showings*, but for their vulnerability to transgression understood in its narrow sense: sin.

The permeability of female corporeality in *Ancrene Wisse* appears in the form of bodily orifices imagined as thresholds of temptation, openings in the flesh that render the soul vulnerable to evil. The anchoress’ body must be constantly monitored to prevent sin—often sexual in nature—from entering and contaminating it. She must also guard against foulness exiting from her own body and corrupting others. The author of this text illustrates the dangers of each of the bodily senses by tracing them to their corresponding orifices in the anchoress’ body, and then urging her to keep these orifices tightly closed:

[K]eep your listening, your speech, and your sight within, and close fast their gates, mouth and eye and ear. She is locked in for nothing, inside fence or wall, if she opens these gates, except to God’s messenger and the soul’s nourishment.⁶⁶³

The anchorhold is here seen as a materialization of the anchoress’ own body. But, as such, it recreates the instabilities of this body. The walls of the anchorhold provide a secondary boundary “to shore up those bodily limits which are themselves so hard to specify,” but onto these walls is also projected the slipperiness between inside and

⁶⁶² Wogan-Browne (1994), 27.

⁶⁶³ Savage and Watson (1991), 86.

outside that renders the anchoritic body so vulnerable to temptation.⁶⁶⁴ Incitements to corporeal closure such as, “Stop you ears against all evil speech, my dear sisters, and be disgusted by the mouth which spews out poison,” echo similar admonishments regarding openings in the anchorhold: “Love your windows as little as you possibly can. Let them all be little, the parlor’s smallest and narrowest.”⁶⁶⁵ The anchoritic body and the anchoritic cell, “like a castle or fortress, must equally be shut, sealed, closed, covered, guarded, fastened, bolted up, locked, blind-folded, intact”—just some of the terminology employed in *Ancrene Wisse*.⁶⁶⁶

Ancrene Wisse is divided into an “inner rule” (books 2-7) that “rules the heart” and an “outer rule” (books 1 and 8) that “rules the body and bodily actions.”⁶⁶⁷ This model which is acutely conscious of the vulnerability of anchoritic boundaries aims to guard against internal and external threats to the boundaries of both the anchoritic body and the anchorhold. But, as Christopher Cannon has remarked, inside and outside are co-products—“no inside exists without an outside to surround it”—and so a certain fragility threatens delineations between inside and outside, despite the fact that the delineation between inner and outer modes of surveillance are meant to harden these borders. In *Ancrene Wisse*, moreover, it becomes difficult to distinguish between what is internal and external so that the two rules manage to highlight the permeable boundaries of the

⁶⁶⁴ Cannon (2003), 113.

⁶⁶⁵ Savage and Watson (1991), 66 and 78. For similar injunctions in Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* (1160-1162), and the thirteenth-century *Hali Meidenhad*, see Lochrie (1991), 23-27.

⁶⁶⁶ McAvoy (2002), 136.

⁶⁶⁷ Savage and Watson (1991), 47 and 48. Anchoritic rules were commonly divided into inner (soul-focused) and outer (body-focused) parts. Christopher Cannon (2003, 113) notes that *Ancrene Wisse* follows this “‘body model’ so closely that its ‘inner rule’ (Books 2-7) is also physically surrounded by its ‘outer rule’ (Books 1 and 8).”

anchoress' body as well as her cell.⁶⁶⁸ Operating under the conceit that external surroundings such as the wall of the anchorhold, physical practices such as the closure of lips or eyes, and ritual performances such as genuflection affect the soul, shape it, as it were, into something more pleasing to the eyes of God, *Ancrene Wisse* is a testament of the inextricability of soul and body in late medieval religious literature.⁶⁶⁹ Its author is keen to point out, for example, that the female body, though fortified within the walls of the anchorhold, is not immune to sexual corruption. Imagining female flesh as a “brittle vessel” containing virginity, “a valuable liquid like balm,” the *Ancrene Wisse* author warns that, once this frail vessel is broken “it may never be mended to its former wholeness any more than glass can.”⁶⁷⁰ Away from the worldly jostling crowd the anchoress is more likely to keep this liquid enclosed; but, he warns, virginity can be lost by a “stinking desire, if it go far enough and last long enough.”⁶⁷¹ The anchoress herself, then, threatens her own integrity when her desires corrupt from within despite the carefully policed surfaces of her body and the secondary fortification of her cell.

The image of virginity as a fluid enclosed within the boundaries of the female body gives expression to religious, philosophical, medical constructions of female corporeality as an unstable economy of fluids, ill-managed by body boundaries and riddled with vulnerable or wily orifices. The anchoress' body is a container of fluids. Virginity may be represented as a precious liquid to be preserved from corruption, but *Ancrene Wisse* also makes assertions about the filthiness of what lurks within and

⁶⁶⁸ See Cannon (2003), 112-113, and Beckwith (1994), 808.

⁶⁶⁹ See Bynum (1995), 10-11, 259-263, 318-319.

⁶⁷⁰ Savage and Watson (1991), 109.

⁶⁷¹ Savage and Watson (1991), 109.

threatens to escape the boundaries of the anchoritic body. “Does not there not come out of a vessel whatever is in it,” the author asks his anchoress readers:

From your flesh’s vessel does there come the smell of aromas or sweetbalm? See dry branches bear wine-berries, thorns rose blossoms. Your flesh – what fruit does it bear in all its orifices? Amid the nobility of your face, which is the fairest part, between the taste of your mouth, and the smell of your nose, do you not carry as it were two privy-holes? Are you not come from foul slime? Are you not a vessel of filth? Are you not worm’s food? *Philosophus: Sperma es fluidam, vas stercorum, esca vermium.*⁶⁷²

Liquid seed, a sack of filth, food for worms, the anchoress’ body is a precarious container of abject material. Indeed, her body is a vessel already breached by her orifices, mouth and nostrils. Imagined as “privy-holes,” openings through which feces and urine pass, even those orifices in this “fairest” part of the female body harbor foulness. The anchoress is encouraged to meditate on the composition of her body in order to quell pride, one of the grave “chest-wounds” of spiritual sins. This is not a body that unites the anchoress with the humanity of Christ, but one that reminds the anchoress of her worldliness.

In both *Ancrene Wisse* and *Showings* wounds mark the human sinner as well as the body of Christ. Julian identifies the wounds of humanity—contrition, compassion, longing for God—as the “thre menys [means] ... wher by that alle soules com to hevyn, ” “medycins” that heal sinful creatures through their openness.⁶⁷³ *Ancrene Wisse*, by contrast, imagines wounds as the marks of the seven deadly sins in need to be knit back together by the remedies of confession and penitence. Bodily sins—lechery, gluttony,

⁶⁷² Savage and Watson (1991), 149.

⁶⁷³ *LT* 14.39.54.

and sloth—are “foot-wounds;” spiritual sins—pride, envy, anger, covetousness—are “chest-wounds,” and, according to the metaphor of spiritual health and illness, much more dangerous on account of their proximity to the vital organs.⁶⁷⁴ Wogan-Browne reads in these metaphors the possibility of identification between the negatively permeable female body, inherently volatile and vulnerable to temptation, and the redemptive body of Christ. Female flesh may be a “problematic border zone,” but in this instance, “the sinning body itself is permeable and wounded as the redemptive body of Christ.”⁶⁷⁵ The author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, however, does not present the wounds of sin, when they mark the human soul, as fecund sites for encountering Christ. Rather, these wounds sicken the soul and estrange it from God. In *Ancrene Wisse*, then, *imitatio Christi* “is incongruously identified with the unbroken flesh and the sealed female body.” Its readers are to read in Christ’s wounds “the need to dam up their own vulnerable bodies.”⁶⁷⁶

The redemptive power of permeable corporeality in the *Ancrene Wisse* is virtually exclusive to Christ’s wounded flesh which is seen as a place of refuge for the tempted anchoress. Drawing on Canticles 2:14, *Columba mea in foraminibus petre, in cavernis macerie*, the *Ancrene Wisse* author urges his readers:

Flee into his wounds. He loved us much who allowed such holes to be made in him for us to hide in. Creep into them with your thought—are they not entirely open?—and bloody your heart with his precious blood.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ Savage and Watson (1991), 119. See Wogan-Browne (1994), 30.

⁶⁷⁵ Wogan-Browne (1994), 30.

⁶⁷⁶ Lochrie (1991), 26.

⁶⁷⁷ Savage and Watson (1991), 155.

The rock and wall of the biblical verse become the surface of Christ's body, the clefts and hollow places become the wounds into which Christ summons the anchoress. "My dove," he says, "come hide yourself in the openings in my limbs, in the hole in my side."⁶⁷⁸ Christ's wounds remain open, but the anchoress' wounds—symptoms of her spiritual sickness—must be healed through doctrinal sacraments before their consequences become mortal.

Julian's account of communion with God as the ever penetration and indwelling of one body with another counters the *Ancrene Wisse*'s emphasis on enclosure as the prophylactic stricture of body orifices. Christ's wounded body is not simply a refuge site, as in *Ancrene Wisse*, but an overflowing and enveloping site whose creative and redemptive functions are materialized in the physiological functions of the maternal body. Julian does not shrink from describing the processes of opening and closure to which human bodies are obligated. A man encloses food within his body, she writes, and "whan it is tyme of his nescessery, it is openyde and sparyde [closed] fulle honestly [properly]." There is no reference to the proverbial vessel of filth; rather, God oversees this physiological process of the lowest corporeal stratum. He "comyth downe to us to the lowest parte of oure nede," Julian explains, for "he hath no disdeyne to serve us at the symplyest office that to oure body longyth in kynde [that belongs to our body by nature.]"⁶⁷⁹ Even more remarkably, the stuff within the various layers of body boundaries serves as a model for the relationship between mankind and God:

⁶⁷⁸ Savage and Watson (1991), 155.

⁶⁷⁹ *LT* 1.6.11.

For as the body is cladd in the cloth, and the flessch in the skynne,
and the bonys in the flessch, and the harte in the bowke [trunk of
the body], so are we, soule and body, cladde and enclosydde in
the goodness of God.⁶⁸⁰

The different treatment of permeable corporeality in these texts is especially significant in their respective representations of the womb. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the womb is explicitly associated with the intact anchorhold, and in *Showings* with the perforated body of Christ. The *Wisse* author urges anchoresses to make the mortal body and the anchorhold the dwelling places of Christ who experienced the anchoritic enclosures of Mary's womb and the tomb in which he lay dead for three days.⁶⁸¹ The *Wisse* author imagines the anchoress-reader objecting to his comparison of Mary's womb, Christ's tomb, and her own cell: "But he [i.e. Christ] went out of both." He assures her she too will "go out of both your anchorhouses as he did, without a break, and leave them both whole. That will be when the spirit goes out in the end, "without a break or blemish, from its two houses": the body and the anchorhold.⁶⁸² Whereas Julian imagines the womb as a space of overlapping enclosures and births, the very interpenetrations of which embody the relationship between humanity and God, *Ancrene Wisse* underscores either the womb's brittle frailty to penetrating sexual temptations or the eternal integrity of holy wombs like the Virgin Mary's. The recluse may enjoy the refuge of Christ's open wounds, but her challenge is to preserve the closure of Christ's own dwelling places – spaces delimited by the boundaries of her own womb and womb-like containers, both anchorhold and female body. The birth of Christ did not "break or blemish" Mary's

⁶⁸⁰ *LT* 1.6.11.

⁶⁸¹ McInerney (1996), 162.

⁶⁸² Savage and Watson (1991), 186-7.

womb, and the birth of the anchoress at death, should she have properly policed the boundaries of her body and her anchorhold during life, will likewise remain intact. The recluse's cell, then, is not only a sealed tomb, but a sealed womb. As befits holy wombs in the corporeal economy of *Ancrene Wisse*, this space, precisely because it has remained impervious, gives birth to eternal life.

Ancrene Wisse does not specifically address the effects of motherhood on the female body and spirit, meant as it is for a group of women who had already entered the anchorhold. The author of *Hali Meidenhad*, however, uses graphic descriptions of the pregnant and birthing body to argue that the virgin life is preferable over the married life. This author crafts a grotesque account of the maternal body to dissuade his female readers from taking lightly the Lord's edict to be fruitful and multiply:

Let us now go further, and see what happiness comes to you afterwards during your pregnancy ... Your rosy face will grow thin, and turn green as grass; your eyes will grow dull, and shadowed underneath, and because of your dizziness your head will ache cruelly. Inside, in your belly, a swelling of your womb which bulges you out like a water-skin, discomfort in bowels and stitches in your side, and often painful backache; heaviness in every limb; the dragging weight of your two breasts, and the streams of milk that run from them. There is a bitter taste in your mouth, and everything that you eat makes you feel sick; and whatever food your stomach disdainfully receives—that is, with distaste—it throws it up again.⁶⁸³

Maternity here transforms the female body into something monstrous: discolored, distended, uncontrollably porous. There is an uneasiness with the procreative female body, which the author of *Hali Meidenhad* hopes to transfer to his readers. Motherhood is painful and disfiguring. It makes you sick, as the creature gestating within leaches

⁶⁸³ Millet and Wogan-Browne, trans. (1990), 30-32.

vitality from the maternal body so that it begins to resemble a corpse—green, dull-eyed, swollen, heavy, and leaky. This is a far cry from joining with Christ’s suffering, bleeding body; pregnancy is not here *imitatio Christi*, or corporeal compassion, but the embodiment of the curse laid against Eve and her daughters: “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband ...”⁶⁸⁴ The *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidenhad* underscore the instability of female body boundaries that must be strictly monitored in the virgin body and painfully suffered in the procreative body. These are models to which Julian of Norwich surely had recourse, and for which she found no place in her *Showings*.

⁶⁸⁴ Genesis 3:16.

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