

Faculty of English

**The Art of Arts:  
Theorising Pastoral Power  
in the English Middle Ages**

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*The Art of Arts: Theorising Pastoral Power in the English Middle Ages*

Gregory the Great described the government of souls as ‘the art of arts,’ a sentiment that the Fourth Lateran Council would echo in 1215. This thesis takes as its fundamental proposition that this ‘art’ can be understood as a ‘craft’, one that is responsible for producing and maintaining a Christian subjectivity marked by introspection, inwardness, and a strong distrust of externalities. Using a theoretical framework influenced by Michel Foucault I suggest a tradition of administering and producing these subjects through ‘pastoral power.’ Charting the trajectory of these ideas from the ascetics of the early church through to fifteenth-century Middle English texts, I explore the dynamics produced by texts invested in producing this specific form of subjectivity as they expand their reach from a specialised audience of monks to an increasingly laicised vernacular sphere.

This investigation is broken into two halves. The thesis begins with a re-reading of Michel Foucault’s theories of power and subjection. Here I suggest that there are important conceptual connections between Foucault’s concept of ‘discipline’ and medieval approaches to the care of the soul. The first half of the thesis stresses the *longue durée* development of pastoral power, focussing on two particular historical moments. The first of these chapters engages with the pastoral and monastic thinkers of the early church, who developed two overlapping regimes – that of body and spirit. The second turns to the *Ancrene Wisse*, arguing that it responds to the developments of twelfth-century spirituality by suggesting a form of spiritual engagement that is increasingly imbricated in the mundane world. The second half of the thesis focuses on a number of texts produced in Middle English during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Two chapters focus on a collection of pastoral texts produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first focuses on the hermeneutic dynamics of these texts whilst second chapter assesses the use of documentary imagery and theories of legal accountability in the same texts. The final chapter suggests that certain proto-autobiographical

texts, represented by the work of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, are conditioned by the concerns and dynamics of pastoral power, which also affects the practices modern readers bring to bear on them.

## *Declaration*

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is not the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the English Degree Committee. Including all footnotes but excluding the bibliography, it runs to 80,000 words.

## *List of Abbreviations*

EETS OS	<i>Early English Text Society</i>
SEP	<i>Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>

## NOTE

All biblical references are to *The Holy Bible: Douay version, translated from the Latin Vulgate*, trans. Richard Challoner (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1956).

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It seems appropriate in the context of such a work to use this opportunity to suggest a brief genealogy of my own. Thanks, then, are due to James Durran; Jon Phelan; Anna Baldwin; Laura Varnam; Vincent Gillespie; Kantik Ghosh; and Annie Sutherland, all of whose influences on this current work are substantial, if not always immediately obvious. More recently and specifically, I would like to thank Alexandra da Costa for her incisive readings and comments at key moments during my progress; Mary Carruthers, for sharing with me characteristically erudite insights on medieval monasticism; and, of course, my supervisor, Nicolette Zeeman, without whose unfailing critical and creative attention – to say nothing of the warmth and constancy of her friendship – this thesis would be indescribably lesser.

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Finally, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all those radicals and activists I have met – often briefly, sometimes anonymously – over the past four years, who have taught me time and time again the importance of living out to the fullest the conclusions of our intellectual labour.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Ars artium* and the technologies of pastoral power

The opening to Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* assertively analogises medical and spiritual care, declaring in the process that 'the government of souls is the art of arts ['ars est artium']'.<sup>1</sup> This refrain would be repeated nearly a millennium later, in the twenty-seventh Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, held in November 1215: 'To guide souls is a supreme art [ars artium regimen animarum]'.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the phrase is used to mobilise support for a programme of teaching designed to create priests capable of tending effectively and carefully to the spiritual welfare of their flocks. In the case of Gregory, the *Pastoral Care* is designed to be exactly this programme, and to teach those in positions of responsibility how best to execute their pastoral powers. In the case of Lateran IV, Canon 27 is outshone by its famous sibling, Canon 21, which standardised annual auricular confession as a necessity across the medieval church. Both are grand gestures – and both are heavily invested in a sense of the pastoral role of the church as the *ars artium*. It is this role that produced throughout the middle ages a plethora of texts intended to structure and guide experts and laypeople alike in the disciplines of examination, communication, and absolution that make up the pastoral experience, commonly referred to as *pastoralia*.<sup>3</sup>

The use of the term *ars* – variously, 'professional, artistic or technical skill', 'skilled work, craftsmanship', 'stratagem [...] a tactical device', 'behaviour', 'a

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), Preface, p.21. The Latin of the *Pastoral Care* is taken from Grégoire le Grand, *Règle pastorale*, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Charles Morel, 2 vols, Sources Chrétiennes 381 (Paris: Editions du cerf, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> 'The Fourth Lateran Council – 1215', in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), pp.226-271 (27, p.248).

<sup>3</sup> For a breakdown and genealogy of the different forms of texts produced and disseminated from the late twelfth century onwards, see Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, TN.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp.30-43. Particularly helpful is his well-known tree diagram, originally part of his thesis, and reproduced in this article on p.30.



profession, art, craft, trade, occupation’, and ‘a systematic body of knowledge and practical techniques, an art or science’<sup>4</sup> – immediately opens the discursive field to a whole range of uses and applications. Practice implies the possibility of *malpractice*; both of these concepts require an institutional framework within which the limits of acceptable practice are established. Further, the term *ars* – elevating, as it does, the care of souls (‘regimen animarum’) to the level of a craft or what twenty-first century English speakers might tellingly call a *profession* – suggests an entire framework of significance, a constellation of practices, epistemic and ontological assumptions, knowledge-relations and, frequently, morals. Another term we might use for *ars* is the Greek *technê*, that is, a set of techniques or a craft grounded in a particular worldview, a particular way of prioritising and organising the existence of ourselves and our surroundings at large. This term is distinct (to various extents according to various thinkers) from *episteme*, a term closer to ‘purely theoretical’ knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Understood in this manner, the term *ars* implies that pastoral work was always understand *as* work, as embodied in the material, historically-contingent practices that took place in day-to-day encounters with Christian subjects.

That these subjects might themselves be conditioned not only by *ideas* of the self but *practices* – or an *ars* – of the self is a small leap indeed:

[I]t is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices – historically analysable practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> OLD, ‘ars’ (n.), senses 1a, 3, 5 and 7a.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Parry, ‘Technê and Episteme’, *SEP*.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress’, in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.340-372 (p.369).

There is something specific to the programme designed by Christian thinkers which demands that they conceptualise it as an *ars*. It is more than an ideological deployment because it entrenches itself through groups of repeated practices. As Michel Foucault writes, ‘these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances [...] but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and “reason”.’<sup>7</sup> It is the specific dynamics and patterns of the *ars artium*, understood in its broadest subject-forming sense as a set of repeated practices performed by (as well as on) the subject themselves, that form the central matter of this thesis. This piece is not, therefore, a traditional history of medieval pastoral or penitential thought, but a series of reflections on the evolving structures of, and issues raised by, the subject learning to speak itself anew.

Foucault is not mentioned here merely incidentally or in passing – his original account of the operations of power is the subject of the first chapter and a foundational premise of this thesis. Foucault’s account of power as *productive* (capable of generating, rather than merely denying or suppressing, truths and beliefs) and *diffuse* (not inhering in or contained by any given institution or historical person) opens the field for a very particular approach to the materials I explore in the following pages. In order for the *ars artium* to be effective, it must constitute its terms as the essential conditions of expression. It cannot be merely conceived of as a means of social control, externally imposed from on high by an institution.<sup>8</sup> Instead, it is a continuous and embedded practice that must be

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Questions of method’, in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.73-86 (p.75).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Social control’ is a term famously used by Thomas Tentler to describe the aims of confessors’ manuals and *summae*; see his ‘The *Summa* for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control’, in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion: Papers from the University of Michigan conference*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp.103-126, and the resulting monograph, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1977). The presentation of the former paper occasioned a spirited response by Leonard

understood by the subjects it constitutes as enabling and essential, rather than simply as a requirement foisted upon them by external powers. In taking the phrase *ars artium* for the title of this thesis, then, I am not just using it in the common medieval manner, as a reference to the pastoral work of priestly and clerical practitioners; rather I am using it more capaciously, to refer to a whole set of skills and practices that shaped medieval subjects, both producing and problematising the effects of interiority, enabling them to speak the forms of their own subjecthood under the conditions of a particular deployment of power. The efficacy of the *ars artium* is proportional to the degree to which it achieves this process. As Foucault writes, ‘power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.’<sup>9</sup> The *ars* of subjection – the creation of the Christian pastoral subject through a series of proliferating techniques – accrues power through exactly this dynamic. As one of the most influential and lasting of such deployments of power, the production of the pastoral individual is worthily described as the *ars artium* not only because of its immense moral weight, but because it represents an exceptional example of the self-effacing operations of power. Everywhere its assumptions are assumed as natural, buried in the centre of the self, and lauded as triumphs of the individual will and soul. Viewed as a historical legacy, the pastoral deployments of the Middle Ages deserve this double-description as the *ars artium*. A lesson in power.

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E. Boyle, printed in the same volume under the title ‘The Summa for Confessors as a Genre, and its Religious Intent’ (pp.126-130), responded to by Tentler and also printed in the same volume under the title ‘Response and *Retractio*.’ Boyle’s (largely unsatisfactory) argument stresses the role of the Dominicans in the birth of the genre of *summae*, and describes Tentler’s ideology critique – which explicitly draws on sociological theories of social control and power – as ‘all too negative and sweeping’ (p.130). It seems to me that Foucault’s account of power allows us to nuance this kind of impasse by suggesting that pastoralia may engage in acts of social control whilst remaining highly plastic and above all ‘positive’ – in the sense of *productive* – phenomena. Indeed, the flourish which concludes Tentler’s original article may suggest something of this: ‘Anti-clericalism and anti-papalism may have roots in clerical incompetence and Roman corruption. It may, on the contrary, *have roots in clerical and Roman efficiency*’ (p.125, emphasis mine).

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.86.

This perspective on the *ars artium* governs both the approach I will take and the materials I will employ in the coming chapters. For the central part of the thesis I will focus on the techniques made available to these Christian subjects themselves through texts designed to structure and guide their own interior examinations of conscience, and will look at a series of Middle English texts that illustrate different aspects of the *techne* of self examination that they make available. I will not be looking at the extensive and evolving traditions of advice to confessors or the accompanying theologies of confession that developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The theological and scholastic tradition of confessional theory has been extensively researched in recent years.<sup>10</sup> For scholastic theologians questions concerning contrition, satisfaction, and the proper execution of the duties of the *cura animarum* were an important and continual source of disputation and elaboration, whilst the compilers of the great penitential *summae* – texts designed to aid in the hearing of confession and the assignment of satisfaction – drew increasingly on theological as well as canonical authorities to justify their claims. However, it is an assumption of this thesis that this body of theory is designed to resolve problems inhering in an already-established articulation of power. Rather than examine the elaborations of scholastic pastoralia, therefore, I will first explore the roots of a medieval *ars* of subjection in the monastic cultures of the early Christian church; I will

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<sup>10</sup> A great deal of scholarship exists on the developments in theology and priestly training in these centuries – a helpful overview of the history of the field is Andrew Reeves’ “‘The Cure of Souls is the Art of Arts:’ Preaching, Confession, and Catechesis in the Middle Ages”, *Religion Compass* 7:9 (2013), 372-384. For an extended study of the relationship between theology, scholasticism, and the developing evangelical and mendicant movements, see M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968). For an introduction to the genre of *pastoralia*, see Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran Council’ and Peter Biller, ‘Confession in the Middle Ages’, in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), pp.1-34. Boyle has also written extensively on the relationship between scholastic theology and *pastoralia* – see his ‘The Quodlibets of St. Thomas and Pastoral Care’ and ‘The *Summa Confessorum* of John of Freiburg and the Popularisation of the Moral Teaching of St. Thomas and Some of his Contemporaries’, both in *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), pp.232-256 and pp.245-268. See also Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c. 1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For the continuing relationship between scholastic theology and *pastoralia* in the fourteenth century, see W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

then go on to trace recurring elements of this *ars* in the developing anchoritic literature of early Middle English and in its elaboration and dissemination in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sermon cycles and handbooks for penitents, concluding with its appearance in the complexly negotiated tensions of the work of late medieval writers Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. The aim throughout is to develop a *longue durée* analysis of a particular form of spirituality, recognisable as a *technê* of interiority, as it develops and spreads from the cloister to the laity of fifteenth-century England. It is my intention to balance the specific historical and textual circumstances of the witnesses analysed with an awareness of the resilience of this form of pastoral subjectivity which, whilst developing and changing in response to contingent historical phenomena and situations, remains a recognisable strand and a recurring theme over the millennium covered in my account. It is thus the aim of each individual chapter to analyse a different aspect of the general conceptual structure of this *ars*, either by suggesting the importance of a particular text or set of texts to the history of the technique, as in Chapters Two and Three, or by examining how a series of contemporaneous texts develop fundamental aspects of pastoral identity, as in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. By attending to texts of different periods and of several different genres, in other words, each chapter proposes to illuminate different dimensions of the tradition, all the while producing an accumulating sense of its characteristic structures, recurrent preoccupations and internal tensions.

Chapter One acts as something of a conceptual introduction to the thesis. It develops a concept and definition of ‘pastoral power’, the central theoretical concept applied throughout the work. The term is taken from Michel Foucault’s final interviews, and I take the opportunity to engage creatively with Foucault’s later work, beginning chronologically with ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ (1971) and focussing mainly on *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Pastoral power is

conceived by Foucault as a particular set of techniques by which individuals come to understand themselves as moral subjects, capable of monitoring their own internal states and regulating their own behaviours, thoughts, and desires. The genealogical method articulated by Foucault in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', is a procedure with a particular ability to challenge apparently natural ontologies and suggest an alternative method of ontological *bricolage*, making it an excellent tool to analyse the discursive and contingent elements of subject-formation. My re-reading of Foucault will necessarily engage with recent responses to Foucault from medievalists as an opening into a wider discussion of his models of power, liberation, and the relationship between discourses and institutions. There are important conceptual similarities between Foucault's concept of 'discipline', his discussion of post-Tridentine confession in *The Will to Knowledge*, and medieval approaches to the care of the soul; central to my argument, then, is the claim that fully to see these similarities we need to look beyond those of his writings explicitly addressed to the Middle Ages. Engaging so thoroughly with Foucault reminds us that a craft of souls is as likely to *produce* the souls to which it administers as it is to care for them.

Chapter Two begins the literary analysis in earnest. Like all the chapters that follow, it concerns itself with the structures that define and determine the epistemologies of spiritual and pastoral care. It focuses on a selection of pastoral and monastic thinkers from the early church, with specific attention paid to Gregory the Great, John Cassian, and Evagrius of Pontus, exploring the geography of an *ars* of interior subjectivity that will, many centuries later, develop into a widespread lay phenomenon in the Middle Ages. These thinkers commonly defined their project in opposition to the platonic and neoplatonic traditions with which they nevertheless shared a sizeable intellectual heritage, stressing hidden intention over outward appearance or bodily orientation. Such a position

led quite naturally to the construction of two different regimes, those of body and spirit, which were held in troubled tension and supposed hierarchy in the monastic spiritualities that flourished from the sixth century onwards. These tensions found analogies too in an increasing re-orientation of interpretative efforts away from (to use Rita Copeland's terms) 'rhetoric' and towards 'hermeneutics'. This chapter stresses that such a shift is paralleled by an increasing stress on human interiority and the problems of knowing true intentions. What results is a vertical, 'depth' model of the subject, a specific kind of epistemology that leaves sinners 'fighting in the night' and waiting for the day of judgement for epistemological clarity. This is reflected in the work of Augustine of Hippo who, although not engaged in a systemic pastoral project, is nonetheless influenced by (and dramatically influences) the direction of early Christianity.

Chapter Three focuses on the *Ancrene Wisse*, one of the first post-conquest devotional and pastoral works in the vernacular. The previous chapter will have drawn some parallels between general pastoral projects (such as that of Gregory the Great) and the more specialised aims and techniques of some monastic writers (such as Cassian and Evagrius). Developing these themes, this chapter interrogates the *Ancrene Wisse*, with its self-aware, specialised forms of spirituality. Whilst it is not the only vernacular devotional and pastoral text to circulate in thirteenth-century England – existing alongside, for instance, the Anglo-Norman *Manuel des péchés* and the French *Somme le Roi*<sup>11</sup> –, its immensely varied afterlife in a broad textual tradition that became increasingly accessible to lay people suggests that it may be pivotal in the development of a specifically Middle English pastoral subjectivity that is nevertheless originally monastic in its flavour. I focus in particular on spatial structures in the text, arguing that the *Ancrene Wisse* creates a

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<sup>11</sup> For a helpful overview of many of the 'religious and moral treatises in the vernacular' available in England, see Pantin, *The English Church*, pp.223-235. Note that Pantin does not include texts like the *Ancrene Wisse* in his discussion as they fall outside of his (rather limited) framework.

disciplinary self, but one that is in constant conversation with her environment. Unlike earlier readers, who have mainly focused on space in this text as enclosure, I am interested in the capacity of the ‘desert’ of the anchoritic cell here to open itself up to the many imaginative scenarios of pastoral care and exemplarity. *Ancrene Wisse*’s own focus on the place or location of disciplinary labour marks it apart from the earlier monastic texts (whose actual or conceptual setting was usually the desert) and points towards a more complex sense of a spiritual life that no longer understands itself – or its desert – as completely separated from the world. This understanding is one that appealed to an increasingly laicised vernacular readership and enabled the prodigious afterlife that the *Ancrene Wisse* enjoyed.

Shifting into the second half of the thesis, Chapter Four introduces the main subjects of study for the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries – a number of texts belonging to a relatively stable tradition of Middle English confessional manuals and handbooks for the laity, that is, the *Ayenbite of Inwyrt*, *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, *Handlyng Synne* and *Jacob’s Well*. As vernacular representatives of the highly developed post-Lateran vernacular pastoral project,<sup>12</sup> these texts help further to support the arguments for a continuity between the forms of identity delineated in the *Ancrene Wisse* and later material. Here I focus on the epistemological demands made by a mature pastoral identity, concentrating especially on the particular relationship constituted by a double gesture which violently overturns everyday experience with an exemplary and revelatory insight on the one hand, whilst integrating the lessons of such upheavals into that everyday experience through a system of metaphors that supercharge the mundane with salvific potential. In the process, this chapter discusses the techniques through which

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<sup>12</sup> These texts are largely the inheritors of Leonard Boyle’s ‘second wave’ of pastoralia, a broad tradition ‘more directly concerned with the penitent as such’ than their predecessors, and increasingly available in the vernacular from the second half of the thirteenth century. See Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran Council’, pp.34-35.



the confessional mode upholds a particular relationship between the self, materiality, the quotidian, and eventual revelation – a relationship that is often articulated in spatial terms –, contributing to the formation of the ‘depth’ model of the self.

The same core texts are the focus of the next chapter. Confessional and pastoral materials rely time and time again on a range of metaphors and instances of sorting, recording and quantification, and this chapter analyses the conceptual role and force these images hold within the pastoral regime in a period when, as recent scholarship has shown, English documentary culture was developing rapidly. Here I use recent scholarship in the field of legal history to argue that developing theories of officialdom, structured by large-scale social and cultural shifts in conceptualising accountability, inform important elements of the mature, codified confessional discourse of the later Middle Ages. Whilst most of the discussion focusses on the texts introduced by the previous chapter, here they will be set alongside a range of literature from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries inspired by legal formulae and developments, including the *Charters of Christ*. Pastoral materials apply mechanisms of accountability both to entrench the self as an ‘objective’ fact of study, measurement, arrangement and quantification, and to represent the mechanisms of enforcement and correction as objective and dispersed to the point of immanence.

Finally, Chapter Six reflects a shift in analytical approach. Where the previous five chapters have largely been concerned with texts that set out to produce pastoral identities, here I examine two late-medieval texts, the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich and the *Book of Margery Kempe*, as witnesses to specific pastoral identities. In so doing, I set out to describe the rhetorical methods by which both of these texts produce a sense of a pastoral identity, becoming in the process proto-autobiographical. By aligning the pastoral sense of self with the discursive demands of autobiography, this chapter embarks

on an analysis of both these seminal prose texts and their modern reception, arguing in the process that essential elements of the pastoral regime – such as the medical gaze, particular forms of hermeneutics, and documentation and reflection – remain operative long after the end of the medieval period is marked, and long after we readers have closed our books. Indeed, paradoxically, texts and readings sometimes understood as being critical of, or in tension with, the tradition of pastoral care may in fact themselves be mobilised by that discipline and its techniques of self.

The size of this undertaking and the theoretical lens employed mean that this analysis is, in two senses of the word, *partial*. It is not intended to be a complete account or exhaustive survey of penitential and pastoral thinking in the vernacular in the period, but rather an attempt to sketch a particular historical trajectory across a *longue durée*. In so doing, it is also my goal to prompt reflection on the nature of the ‘modern’ twenty-first-century subject in relation to its venerable predecessors, and test once more the boundaries of ‘the individual’ – a task loaded with ideological and political resonances. I thus set out to situate some of the great Middle English texts – many of which have received extensive critical attention – in a new arrangement which will, I hope, be more than the sum of its parts, and contribute to the interminable work of thinking our own pasts. It should at the very least remind us that, as Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls* famously reminds us,

...out of olde felde, as men seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere;  
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Parliament of Fowls’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., gen. ed. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 22-25, p.385.

## 1: SHEPHERD AND FLOCK

Genealogy, discipline, and the pastoral subject

*The meaning of life always comes down to a method of life.*<sup>1</sup>

Michel Foucault remains almost inescapable in academic work on medieval confession. Indeed, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge*, is continuously cited as scholars discuss sin and confessional regimes in medieval writings of the High and Late Middle Ages. These engagements, however, tend to be somewhat cautious and ambivalent, weighed with heavy caveats and partial dissociations.<sup>2</sup> With a tendency to misrepresent the key dynamics of his later thought, such ambiguous treatments threaten to reduce to a simplified straw-man a thinker whose radical intellectual work offers fruitful paradigms for an interrogation of medieval models of selfhood. Much of this criticism springs out of a refusal to read Foucault's treatment of confession within the larger contexts of *The History of Sexuality* and other important late publications including *Discipline and Punish* and the interviews of his final decade, effectively denying the methodological basis upon his analysis of medieval Christian truth-method relies.<sup>3</sup> This chapter offers a re-reading of Foucault, proposing a critical model of coercive identity formation which can provide a serious, politically-charged vantage point from which to read medieval literature.

In order to read *The History of Sexuality*, we must begin with Foucault's 1971 methodological essay, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'. Here, he articulates the logic of

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Greif, 'The Concept of Experience', in *Against Everything: On Dishonest Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), pp.77-95 (p.78).

<sup>2</sup> For overviews of - and limited engagement with - Foucauldian medievalism, see Pierre J. Payer, 'Foucault on Penance and the Shaping of Sexuality', *Studies in Religion*, 14.3 (1985), 313-20, and Anne Clark Bartlett, 'Foucault's "Medievalism,"' *Mystics Quarterly*, 20.1 (1994), 1-18.

<sup>3</sup> Conversely, certain readers of Foucault interpret contradictions between statements made decades apart as serious methodological breaches – for a partial example of this, see Karma Lochrie, both in 'Desiring Foucault', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27.1 (1997), 3-16, and *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999). Many of Lochrie's other critiques are more convincing, and I will return to them later.

his own shift from an ‘archaeological’ method to a ‘genealogical’ one, where the latter is derived from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals*. What genealogy allows one to do, according to Foucault, is to hold the historical fragility of contingent moments in balance with a sense of partial identity between them:<sup>4</sup>

genealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.<sup>5</sup>

The aim is to reinscribe into history that which has traditionally been understood as beyond its reach: ‘sentiments, love, conscience, instincts’ need to be understood as socially-constituted historicities rather than supposedly human universals.<sup>6</sup> Genealogy does not aim to write histories *of* these impulses, but rather to recover the history that lies *in* these impulses as a necessary condition for their existence. Moreover, this project does not aim to uncover a simple ‘evolution’ (thus avoiding charges of causal or teleological reductionism), but rather to stress historical singularity and ‘the exteriority of accidents’ that enables and underwrites this singularity.<sup>7</sup> Thus the genealogical method draws attention to the process of cultural *bricolage* by which apparently self-evident, inviolate (material and/or conceptual) ‘things’ are produced:

if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The baseline-definition for ‘history’ I am using is ‘both the persistent presence of the past and the pressure of social realities’. This definition is found in Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.76–100 (p.76).

<sup>6</sup> Lee Patterson describes this ‘recognition’ as ‘the great, liberating insight of postmodernism’. See his ‘On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies’, *Speculum* 61.1 (1990), 87–108.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p.81.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p.78.

The genealogical method is motivated by a rejection of readymade ontologies, of ‘things’ to which history merely happens. In contrast, things are constituted in history, ‘fabricated in piecemeal fashion’ from cultural materials. Under the genealogical eye, ‘the details and accidents that accompany every beginning’ are ‘unmasked as the face of the other’; every point of origin is revealed as an uncritical myth, which suppresses the process of composition and re-composition the object whose genesis it claims to be has undergone.<sup>9</sup> We are on the brink of an entirely different ontological perspective.<sup>10</sup> Instead of a single ontology, we are confronted by the possibility of a plurality of relational ontologies. Complex historical networks *create* things by governing the distribution of ‘alien forms’ across the conceptual terrain in such a manner as to allow them to (be) recombine(d) into ‘new’ things; the ontological structure of any given object/event is determined and enabled by these local, contingent forces. Under such a model, ‘things’ themselves begin to lose something of their solidity, become markers for local, historically-specific organisations or networks which remain forever tied to the coordinates in which they are found and which give them their particular articulation. Thus the genealogical mode is also a critique of metaphysics; it heralds the death of God, the *logos*, the tale of pure beginnings: ‘[t]he origin lies at a place of inevitable loss [...] the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost’.<sup>11</sup> Without such a metaphysical challenge, the histories we write will only serve to support an uncritical status quo: ‘We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities’.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, genealogy cannot bend to this demand. The

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<sup>9</sup> Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Here I differ from the perspectives of critics such as Hayden White, who argues that Foucault’s account of power ‘endow[s] it with all the mystery, all the metaphysicality with which he claims power endows sex’. But in my view, any metaphysical project is precluded by a commitment to a genealogical method, which insists on a difference produced within and through the sequence (but never trajectory) of historical events. See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp.129–130.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p.79.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, p.89.

fundamental force of this new mode ‘deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature [...] It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because *knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting*’. Knowledge is not neutral, and it is certainly not the result of ‘discovery’. Rather, it is ‘made for cutting’, a vivisectional tool for shifting and re-shifting the terms under which reality is constituted as a strategy of power. Apparent oppositions, differences, and accidents become caught up in an expansive web of object/event relations, within which even alterity and difference are held as elements of a vast, unstable network.

This network is regulated by the logic of what Foucault will later come to call an ‘apparatus’ (*dispositif*), a concept which functions as a sort of historically-contingent grammar. In an interview given six years after ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ was published, Foucault offers an account of the apparatus as an organising principle:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is *the system of relations* that can be established between these elements.<sup>13</sup>

The apparatus is the name for a ‘system of relations’ between ‘elements’ which include, alongside ‘institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions’, ‘*discourses*’ themselves. Foucault uses this statement to clarify his analysis of an ‘apparatus of sexuality’; we can perhaps use it to clarify the concept of an ‘apparatus of identity’. We can conceive of a kind of map populated by a range of historically-specific variables, including ‘discourses’ (confession, courtly culture), ‘institutions’ (the church, the

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Confessions of the Flesh’, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. & trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp.194–228 (p.194). Emphasis added.

monastic community, the state), ‘architectural forms’ (the monastery, the confessional, the anchoritic/penal cell, the panopticon), ‘laws’ (*Omnis utriusque*, prison reform legislation), ‘administrative measures’ (satisfaction, guild membership, documentary culture), ‘scientific statements’ (psychology, medicine, other forms of authorised ‘treatment’) and ‘philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions’ (asceticism, degrees of contrition, the role of grace). The apparatus is the organisational quality that arranges diffuse social and cultural instances into patterns and determines their relative proximity and overlap. Much like the divergent elements that it organises, such an apparatus is of course historically contingent; furthermore, the specific articulations of this apparatus which account for different subject-responses are various and variable.

Understanding identity in this way leads naturally to an account of power. The organisation of any given apparatus will make certain responses seem more favourable or relevant than others – most importantly, it will also render a substantial range of possible responses completely invisible. This is why the term *strategy* comes in useful – it does not designate the specific intentions behind an effect of the apparatus (those of a cabal of priests against an unsuspecting laity, for instance), but rather marks out the particular shape that the apparatus gives to history. This is why Foucault can describe the apparatus as consisting in ‘strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge’.<sup>14</sup> Since the apparatus is nothing more than the relation established between instances of cultural production, it becomes an incredibly hardy force. For Foucault, its longevity is underwritten by ‘a double process’. This double process consists of ‘*functional overdetermination*’, the resolution of contradictory elements of the apparatus through a re-adjustment or re-working of certain elements, and ‘*strategic*

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<sup>14</sup> Foucault, ‘The Confessions of the Flesh’, p.196.

*elaboration*', the re-utilisation of unintended consequences by the mechanics of power.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of this chapter, one could consider the re-use of monastic or devotional disciplinary structures in the industrial revolution as an example of functional overdetermination, and the ease with which Wycliffite, Protestant or even modern critiques of the medieval church rely on a form of confessional truth-telling as an example of strategic elaboration.<sup>16</sup> The concept of the apparatus allows for a succinct mapping of the object-relations and discourses that make up a model of identity we have come to accept, uncritically and perhaps dangerously, as natural, apolitical, and inevitable.

This genealogical approach gives life to *The Will to Knowledge*. Here, Foucault sets out to problematise what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis', a conventional historical narrative concerning the treatment of sex and sexuality in the Victorian era. According to this received analysis, the era was dominated by the suppression of sex, by institutionalised censorship:

Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation – whether in acts or words.<sup>17</sup>

Sex vanished from authorised discourses, the repressive hypothesis argues; it became a silence, an embarrassment to be hidden away in the core of the human self. *The Will to Knowledge*, however, suggests that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw in fact the development of specialised languages which sought to express and quantify, rather than suppress, sex, a 'steady proliferation of discourses' including psychology, medicine,

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, 'The Confessions of the Flesh', pp.195–96.

<sup>16</sup> These instances will be discussed in more detail below, and will be returned to in Chapter Six and my conclusion.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.4.



education and, finally, psychoanalysis.<sup>18</sup> Here, ‘sexuality was defined as being “by nature”: a domain susceptible to pathological processes [...] a field of meanings to decipher’, becoming what Foucault calls a *scientia sexualis*.<sup>19</sup> The ‘truth’ about sex does not disappear; it is redeployed through a number of new, sometimes competing, discourses. This is fatal to the received historical narrative of repression and censorship, and the project of *The Will to Knowledge* – and, indeed, *The History of Sexuality* – is to explore the historical, philosophical and political fallout of such a breach.

The serious challenge of the genealogical mode is to reject the category of ‘natural’, of the ‘untouched-by-history’, and the opening provided by the failure of the repressive hypothesis to account for historical fact – the proliferation of institutionalised discourses on sex – allows for the very category of ‘sex’ to fall under suspicion. If sex is the result of cultural *bricolage* rather than a pre-given natural datum, then one must ask what effect such a position would have on the deployment of power. Indeed, the question becomes one of seeking out the ‘procedures for producing the truth about sex’, the very apparatus which, by organising a network of objects/events in a particular manner, placed sex at the core of ‘human nature’, and acts as the condition of possibility for the repressive hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> This allows Foucault to problematize a dynamic that Judith Butler would later brilliantly map out in a related field:

Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal ‘before’, is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy. [...] The performative invocation of a nonhistorical ‘before’ becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.18.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.68. The function and force of pathologizing will be discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.57.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p.4.

It is the conjuring of the ‘before’, in which a ‘presocial ontology’ of sex and sexuality could be experienced, which enables and justifies the historical narrative of censorship. The ‘nonhistorical “before”’ of the repressive hypothesis is the pre-Victorian age of sexual freedom, satirised in the opening of *The Will to Knowledge*:

It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies ‘made a display of themselves’. But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie.<sup>22</sup>

It is this narrative which enables the repressive hypothesis to exist, which gives it its ‘fictive foundation’ of a prelapsarian, clear sexuality upon which to lay the bricks and mortar of our repressed Victorians. In Butler’s terms, the repressive hypothesis understands sexuality and sex as ‘prediscursive’ facts, existing before and outside history. It is the aim of *The Will to Knowledge* to challenge this. The analysis shifts radically, then, from a question of *why* and the attendant assumptions – ‘Why was our sexuality so ruthlessly suppressed by the Victorians?’ – to a much more urgent *how* – ‘How did it come to be that sex became the essence of ourselves, something so deep down and natural that we assumed it to be pre-discursive? Why did we ever ask *why*?’

Foucault places the medieval period at the fulcrum of his answer. ‘The Middle Ages’, we are told, ‘had organised around the theme of the flesh and the practice of penance a discourse that was markedly unitary. In the course of recent centuries, this relative uniformity was broken apart [...] in an explosion of distinct discursivities’, which to some extent disguised their coercive role.<sup>23</sup> It is through the medieval gesture of

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.33.

*confession*, Foucault argues, that the subject is first required to tell the truth about themselves:

For a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualisation by power.<sup>24</sup>

Confession, and the demand for annual auricular confession articulated by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, conditioned a new image of the subject in relation in power, one that would finally supersede the ‘ties to the commonweal’ common to feudalism.<sup>25</sup> This new subjectivity is understood as a private, secret, essential value to be whispered to those close to us or confessed to those with power over us: ‘[o]ne confesses [...] things it would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about’.<sup>26</sup> Post-Lateran auricular confession constructed a ‘unitary discourse’ around *the subject as true*. No longer is the primary mode of identity tied to the mutable social world, to action in the political arena; the fundamental relation of the subject to themselves becomes that of an essential internal truth.<sup>27</sup> This new confessional mode was dominated by

the nearly infinite task of telling – telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts which, through the body and the soul, had some affinity with sex.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, pp.58–59.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Brown notes a widely-recognised development in the early Middle Ages which may have some analogous weight: the decline of the ordeal in favour of institutionalised legal proceedings redeployed the supernatural, previously ‘the main source of the objectified values of the group’ to the ‘preserve of intensely personal feeling’. See Peter Brown, ‘Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change’, in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp.302–32 (p.325). For an alternative, but adamantly Foucauldian, perspective, see Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), who argues that the consolidation of primogeniture under feudal relations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries contributed to a new-found interest in the examination and regulation of sex. Thus rather than being antagonistic, Barker suggests that feudal relations and the institutions of the church found common ground.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.59.

<sup>27</sup> On pre-Christian sexual ethics and behaviour, see Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), and Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.20.

According to Foucault, we have since become a culture dominated by the confession of the secret of our sex, the kernel of our selves. Medieval confessional practice inaugurated a mechanics of identity which, redeploying and mutating throughout the following centuries, would give rise to the modern sense of ‘sexuality’ in the eighteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Thus a transition Foucault notes in literature: ‘we have passed from a pleasure [...] centering on the heroic or marvellous narration of “trials” of bravery or sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself [...] a truth’.<sup>30</sup> In the process, the confessional linking of truth, identity, and speech sets the blueprint for a wide range of ‘procedures of individualisation by power’.<sup>31</sup> The multiple discursivities of the Victorian era constitute a ‘dissemination [...] of procedures of confession, a multiple localisation of their restraint’; the types and spaces of this power proliferate, whilst their ‘restraint’, and the objectified identity they generate, remains similar. It is these very mechanics, Foucault points out, that have buried sex and the truth of ourselves as the deepest secrets to be coaxed out by those with power over us; ‘[w]estern man has become a confessing animal’.<sup>32</sup>

At the opening of *Sin and Fear*, Jean Delumeau writes that

[i]n European history, the ‘siege mentality’, [...] was accompanied by an oppressive feeling of guilt, an unprecedented movement toward introspection, and the development of a new moral conscience. [...] A global anxiety, broken up into ‘labelled’ fears, discovered a new foe in each of the inhabitants of the besieged city, and a new fear – the fear of one’s self.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault, ‘The Confessions of the Flesh’, p.210.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.59.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, pp.58–59.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.59. In ‘Desiring Foucault’, Lochrie argues that *this* insight, ‘[a]s an argument for the indispensability of medieval subjectivity to what it means to be modern, [...] is often overlooked in favour of Foucault’s other argument for radical epistemic discontinuity between modernity and premodernity’ (p.7). It is one of the aims of this thesis to take seriously the implications of this statement.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), p.1.

Far from running in accidental parallel, Delumeau's twin concepts of 'siege mentality' and medieval guilt culture actually turn out to be complementary strategies. The constituent elements of such a besieged attitude – endless watchfulness, carefully demarcated boundaries, the possibility of contamination/penetration/rupture, etc. – also serve as the building blocks of a theoretical perspective which increasingly imagined the human soul as embattled, militarised, as a threatened castle. Such a structure has been helpfully described by Carolyn Dinshaw as the 'depth model'; the confessional/besieged model of identity posits an essential, truthful inside and an inessential, problematic outside.<sup>34</sup> The confessional regime had set itself a mighty task indeed, one whose extensive net of discursive deployments struggled, and continues to struggle, against the pressures and paradoxes inherent in the depth model:

From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is 'inner space' figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified? *How does a body figure on its very surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?*<sup>35</sup>

The paradoxes of this demand remain difficult to map out precisely because of the profoundly naturalising force of what Butler calls the 'nonhistorical "before"'. '[T]he law must appear to be a necessity of things, and power must act while concealing itself beneath the gentle force of nature'.<sup>36</sup> Thus Foucault, writing a year before *The Will to Knowledge*.

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<sup>34</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Getting Medieval: Pulp Fiction, Gawain, Foucault', in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp.116–64 (p.154).

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.183. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.106.

In fact, Foucault's 1975 *Discipline and Punish* proves to be an excellent companion piece to *The History of Sexuality*. It is here that the analytical principle under which the confessional apparatus will soon be discussed is first brought to our attention:

We should admit [...] that power produces knowledge [...]; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.<sup>37</sup>

No articulated truth exists outside the play of 'alien' objects from which it is constituted; no articulated truth operates free from a system of power relations. A logical corollary of this argument is to suggest that no analytical position is free from the coercive effects of truth-through-power. Thus Foucault writes that 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth'.<sup>38</sup> By the very act of holding a relation to certain 'objects' and truths, every debate is embedded within and determined by an apparatus suffused with power relations. This apparatus also sets the limits of intelligibility for the debate through the systematic organisation and prioritisation of certain experiences, thoughts, and object-relations. Without such an analysis, we risk remaining entangled in the grammar of domination. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Foucault situates the valorisation of truth as an inherently anti-tyrannical gesture within the confessional apparatus itself:

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points [...] that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; [...] [o]ne has to be completely taken in by this internal ruse of confession in order to attribute a fundamental role to censorship.<sup>39</sup>

The repressive regime rears its head again, as a function of the 'internal ruse' of confession. Old models of power – which restrict its deployments to a 'juridical' mode

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.27.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.194.

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.60.

which can only mute, suppress, and silence, ‘that has only the force of negative on its side’ – themselves reinforce the repressive hypothesis by refusing power the ability to generate and naturalise forms of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Power, Foucault tells us, is *productive*: if a subject ‘can be induced to speak, when his ultimate recourse could have been to hold his tongue, preferring death, then he has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power’.<sup>41</sup> Power and force are not identical. It is precisely when the very coordinates through which power operates have become encoded into the structures of identity that the shift from coercive force to power is made – ‘power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of itself’.<sup>42</sup> The *inducement to speak* – above and beyond the *order* to do so – plays a fundamental role in the disciplines of sexuality born in the eighteenth century, and in their venerable ancestor. Indeed, historians of inquisition have observed this ‘productive’ effect in play. Writing on the investigation of Cathars in Languedoc, John Arnold argues that ‘[t]he [inquisitorial] depositions record the *creation* of that [confessional] speech, the language impelled by the demand to confess. [...] There is no language available to us prior to the inquisitorial event; the language prompted by the event is intimately connected with its discursive context, and is not a mirror of speech occurring “elsewhere”’.<sup>43</sup> Productive power is not a ‘modern’ phenomenon; to assume such would contribute to the exceptionalism of modernity. Thus Foucault’s comments in *Discipline and Punish* hold resonance for the Middle Ages, too: ‘We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’,

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<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.85.

<sup>41</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Critique of Political Reason’, in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 2002), III, 298–325 (p.324).

<sup>42</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.86.

<sup>43</sup> Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p.7. See also his ‘Inquisition, Texts and Discourse’, in *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*, ed. Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller (York: The Boydell Press, 2003), pp.63-80. See also Talal Asad, ‘Notes on body pain and truth in medieval Christian ritual’, *Economy and Society* 12.3 (1983), 287-327, which links the development of judicial torture in medieval Europe to a practice of linking pain and truth developed by early Christian asceticism.

it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’;<sup>44</sup> it is a critical and political imperative to do so. To do so is to become *more* historical, not *less*; to do so is to reject the logic that states: control exists purely in the manipulation of falsehood, freedom in the access to undiluted truth. To do so is to clash unavoidably with certain medievalists’ responses to Foucault.

In her *Confession and Resistance*, Katherine Little writes that ‘Foucault’s monolithic view of confession obscures the differences between the discourses available to both priest and penitent as well as the possibilities for resistance inherent in choosing another story’.<sup>45</sup> She argues that a ‘monolithic’ view of confessional structure affords no possibility for escape, no possibility for ‘choosing another story’; it challenges the historical relevance of, for example, the Wycliffite stress on institutional rather than personal sin.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Little continues, the Foucauldian model leaves no place for a heresy whose ‘interiority resists exploration [... and] is described as hiddenness’; his ‘preference for the conflict between self and other, individual and society, runs the risk of inscribing the limitations of our own ideology of selfhood upon the medieval texts that we read without recognising that we might one day see differently’.<sup>47</sup> On these grounds, Little chooses to reject the Foucauldian ‘subject-formation’, choosing instead ‘self-definition’, distinguished by virtue of the fact that ‘*self-definition* recovers, as *subject formation* does not, that being a self is a constant negotiation between historical forces that shape the self and the choices that one makes’.<sup>48</sup> Little is not the only medievalist to take up such a position; Jeremy Root sees an almost infantilising tendency in Foucault’s relentless extension of the confessional reach:

he seems to imply that medieval penitents [...] blindly perceived their new subjectivity and right to speak as a liberation, that they went after this new

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<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.194.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p.11.

<sup>46</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.42.

<sup>47</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.43; p.14.

<sup>48</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.12. Emphasis original.



chance for salvation without recognising the price they were paying. [...] Foucault's image of a confessing animal manipulated by a discourse that he or she pronounces assumes both a hegemonic institution and an uncritical acceptance of this institution on the part of medieval penitents.<sup>49</sup>

Such responses to Foucault are all the more problematic for their self-effacing nature; they are proposed as modifications to a theory declared by Root to be so wide-ranging that 'new chapters need to be written in our histories of autobiography and the modern subject'.<sup>50</sup> In truth, however, their rendering of a version of Foucault's thesis compatible with their own dramatically reduces its analytical potential. These allegations are problematic precisely because they deny *The History of Sexuality* its role within the wider theoretical context Foucault offers. The arguments push in two complementary directions, suggesting both that Foucault denies any possibility of constructive response in the battle over identity, and that in order to operate effectively, the confessional demand must be foisted from on high by an organised, monolithic, inflexible medieval church. Each assumption will be dealt with in turn, for to answer them in critical detail is to insist on reading a different, subtler, Foucault.

To Little, the Foucauldian model is unable to come to terms with rebellions like that of the Wycliffites. Indeed, the heterodox movement becomes in her analysis the champion of interiority: 'Wycliffite interiority resists exploration; it is described as hiddenness [...] [it] can be read as a rejection of the certainty of the established church, whose categorisation reflects both knowledge of and the ability to control sin'.<sup>51</sup> The 'crisis of the speaking subject' identified in Wycliffite texts is therefore a challenge to an institution that demands a one-to-one relation between speech and truth: it suggests that 'the distinction between inner and outer is perhaps unbridgeable – that showing and

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<sup>49</sup> Jerry Root, 'Space to Speke': *The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), pp.87–88.

<sup>50</sup> Root, 'Space to Speke', p.10.

<sup>51</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, pp.43–44.

opening the heart [...] in language may well be impossible'.<sup>52</sup> The problem is that a 'preference for the conflict between self and other', apparently symptomatic of Foucault's work, actually characterises the operations typical of *Confession and Resistance* rather well.<sup>53</sup> In a logocentric turn, the Other has become language itself, and the fear over what amounts to *differance* ends up reinscribing the pre-discursive interiority that enabled the repressive hypothesis in the first place.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it seems that Little actually *expands* the repressive hypothesis to encapsulate the orthodox medieval church in addition to the cold Victorians.<sup>55</sup> Were one to challenge the Wycliffite claim to heterodoxy more thoroughly, one would quickly find the confessional mode simply redeployed in order to critique a heavily-entrenched institution. Thus a certain complicity – and a certain continuity – can be detected between the Medieval Church, its Wycliffite detractors, and even the Protestant challenge. This should not come as a surprise to the genealogical historian: we are still living and thinking within the confessional enclosure.

Root's critique demands two separate, but related, responses. The previous paragraph has already hinted at the first of these: a discourse is not an institution; the confessional apparatus is not the medieval church. Indeed, the very possibility for both Wycliffite movements and Ricardian poets to take hold of confessional paradigms and

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<sup>52</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, pp.64, 69.

<sup>53</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.15.

<sup>54</sup> 'Logocentric' and '*differance*' are, of course, not Foucauldian terms – and one wonders what he would make of employing them in the course of a discussion of his work – but they remain useful tools in this context. For parallels and differences between a Foucauldian analysis of pastoral power and deconstructive critical methodology, see Chapter Six, pp.206-209.

<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Tambling has made similar observations on Protestantism's criticism of the sacrament on confession, writing that '[f]ormal confession is of limited value to Luther precisely because the subject can never say enough. [...] But the Protestant outlook certainly does not involve *less confession* that before: simply the mode alters in which the discourse takes place, especially as what specifically religious confession there is must now be voluntary'. See his *Confession: Sexuality, sin, the subject* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.45. It should be added that, in order to authenticate itself as true, confession has always needed to seem voluntary and heartfelt. As Arnold writes in *Inquisition and Power*, 'the idea of autonomous confession lies at the heart of the Inquisition's claim to be an authoritative producer of "truth"' (p.76); subjects could not be convicted on the basis of confessions made under torture, although they could be made to reproduce these in court – where failure to confirm previous statements could result in more torture (Asad, 'Body pain and truth', p.297).

redeploy them to different ends – as Root shows – proves that we cannot speak of discourse and institution as identical. Instead, we must think of them as related cultural productions which, whilst occasionally overlapping or intersecting, ultimately exist on different axes. Thus, for instance, the confessional apparatus could, on the one hand, intersect with the institution of the medieval church in canon law and confessional *summae* whilst intersecting on the other with the positions held by the Lollards and later by Protestants, for whom the truth of the self must be directed straight to God. The confessional discourse should not be confused with any of these institutions. Rather, it should be understood as a term representing a series of events with their own unique history which take place within a variety of different institutions, arranged both diachronically and synchronously. Each of these events is moulded and affected by the institution within which it takes place, as well as by other discourses and objects/events with which it appears. In the process it too affects and reshapes the historical variables it interacts with. Together these variables constitute the reactants, as it were, for a chemical reaction which produces the specific historical moment.<sup>56</sup>

The explosion of any simple identification of apparatus with institution also complicates the concept of discursive appropriation and warns us against celebrating any shift in usage as liberatory, as Root appears to do: ‘the carnival will come to Church, investing the confessional word with the least expected intentions. The power and authority of the “confessional” word are constantly put into question, manipulated, and

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<sup>56</sup> Arnold has made similar points concerning the inquisition. Whilst recent scholarship has shed doubt on the extent to which individual inquisitors and their quarries understood the inquisition itself as an institution, Arnold adds there is a different sense in ‘that one might speak of the Inquisition with a capitalised letter: [...] as a mechanism for producing “truth,” using a particular kind of authority and language, that lays claim to continuity in its textual repetition’ (*Inquisition and Power*, p.90). It is similarly possible to conceive of confession as a specific mode of truth production.

adapted to local, social contexts'.<sup>57</sup> The apparently newfound celebration of the ability to *speak the truth of oneself* – this is not a liberatory impulse. It appears so only under the juridical power-model that licenses the repressive hypothesis by expressing power as a pure, institutional 'no'. This model cannot account for *productive* power, power which constructs the framework for intelligibility in speech. This power licenses a space to speak and in the same gesture attempts to render impossible alternative types of identity. Without a recognition of productive power, liberation remains a coercive fiction, the triumph of a discourse that has come to define the very coordinates within which 'resistance' can occur. Monique Wittig's blurring of the lines between psychoanalyst and inquisitor brings this problem into stark relief:

In the analytical experience there is an oppressed person, the psychoanalysed, whose need for communication is exploited and who (in the same way as the witches could, under torture, only repeat the language that the inquisitors wanted to hear) has no other choice (if s/he does not want to destroy the implicit contract which allows her/him to communicate and which s/he needs), than to attempt to say what s/he is supposed to say.<sup>58</sup>

Resistance is precluded if the voice in which it is articulated continues to subscribe to the central pillars of exploitation. Reappropriation along these lines cannot take place without reinscribing the depth model instituted by the confessional apparatus, without defusing those oppressed, marginalised forces whose voices could threaten the discursive core of the system. According to Wittig, what is needed instead is a radical break:

All their testimonies emphasise the political significance of the impossibility that lesbians, feminists, and gay men face in the attempt to communicate in heterosexual society, other than with a psychoanalyst. When the general state

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<sup>57</sup> Root, p.90. Root also appears to associate textual flexibility and appropriation with 'carnavalesque', liberatory tendencies without much specific contextual justification. In contrast, I agree with Larry Scanlon's cautionary warning that '[t]he dispersions of the textual are generally taken to be a force which, by its very nature, inevitably resists all established forms of cultural authority'; he adds that 'we need to recognise that narrative complexity is a structural feature whose ideological value is variable', and is as likely to reflect an association with authority as an ironic attack on it. See Scanlon's *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.23-26. This analytical thread will be taken up again in Chapter Four.

<sup>58</sup> Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind', in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp.21–32 (p.23).

of things is understood (one is not sick or to be cured, one has an enemy) the result is that the oppressed person breaks the psychological contract.<sup>59</sup>

Resistance consists in re-orienting oneself to the ‘general state of things’, in recognising an apparently neutral, natural demand (the urge ‘to be cured’ or ‘speak the truth’) as a strategy of power and an act of violence; in short, in recognising that ‘one has an enemy’. The re-formulations and re-uses of the confessional apparatus charted by medievalists such as Root do not amount to a challenge to the essential dynamics of power, as he himself points out; rather, they represent the continuing redeployment of a power-knowledge relation that will outlive its church. None of these redeployments constitute a substantial challenge to the confessional regime, however. Root’s challenge to Foucault finally falls under the reign of ‘that austere monarchy of sex’, oriented towards ‘the endless task [...] of extracting the truest of confessions from a shadow’. ‘The irony of this deployment’, the last line of *The Will to Knowledge* reads, ‘is in having us believe that our ‘liberation’ is in the balance’.<sup>60</sup>

How should we orient ourselves to the concept of liberation? Is there any space in Foucault at all for such a concept? Only very occasionally. Foucault does, for instance, make some overtures towards a praxis of sexual liberation from within the enclosure of sexuality: there ‘are movements which take off [...] from the apparatus of sexuality within which we’re trapped, which make it function to the limit; but at the same time, these movements are displaced in relation to sexuality, disengaging themselves from it and going beyond it’.<sup>61</sup> There is no denial that these movements have their beginning within current deployments of knowledge/power. In a double-move, however, they manage to ‘displace’ themselves from the demands of sexuality, to take up a new relationship to it

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<sup>59</sup> Witting, ‘The Straight Mind’, p.24.

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.159.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The End of the Monarchy of Sex’, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Dudley M. Marchi (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), pp.214–25 (p.218).

without ever leaving it behind. These movements begin with an ‘apparatus’ which, rather than being denied, is placed under pressure in specific, local, tactical gestures which ultimately entail a fundamental re-orientation. Foucault takes twentieth-century feminism as an example, briefly sketching the dynamics of the liberatory impulse:

Are we sex by nature? Well then, let it be but in its singularity, in its irreducible specificity. Let us draw the consequences from it and reinvent our own type of political, cultural and economic existence... Always the same movement: take off from this sexuality in which movements can be colonised, go beyond them in order to reach other affirmations.<sup>62</sup>

The first gesture, then, entails an affirmation of the position one is currently assigned within a given network; this in turn provides an organisational and conceptual launch-pad from which to practise the radical disengagement or re-orientation towards, for example, gender, as the basis for a new ‘political, cultural and economic’ movement. An interview with *The Advocate* offers some specific examples of what this kind of tactic might look like up close. There, Foucault explains that ‘[s]exuality is something that we ourselves create. It is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality; it’s a possibility for creative life’.<sup>63</sup> Foucault is not interested here in denying the importance of sex to gay communities – indeed, he is suggesting that it is more important than ‘a secret side of our desire’, that, indeed, it coincides with and energises a demand to re-think ‘relationships, [...] love, [...] creation’. This position clearly ‘take[s] off’ from within ‘the monarchy of sex’, but it sees sex as a sort of catalyst for a liberatory practice that will occasion challenges to the confessional and sexual apparatus on a macrocosmic scale. In doing so, it leaves the king in the dust.

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault, ‘The End of the Monarchy of Sex’, p.218.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.315.

Perhaps there are places where we medievalists should too leave king – or saint – Foucault in the dust. Many of the most energetic and creative applications of Foucauldian theory to the Middle Ages over the past decades have shared a common criticism of Foucault’s work: namely, that many of his comments on medieval power range from the contradictory to the deeply concerning. Karma Lochrie writes that much of Foucault’s work’s on the Middle Ages is ‘unfoucauldian’; Carolyn Dinshaw describes his use of the medieval as ‘contradictory, nostalgic’, and Lee Patterson notes – without entering into further detail – that Foucault counts among those who, whilst working against the teleological historical *grand récit* narrative nonetheless ‘end up operating within its terms’.<sup>64</sup> Of the three related critiques, Lochrie’s receives the most development. In *Covert Operations*, she finds ‘three disturbing aspects of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*’: the ‘nostalgic representation of the Middle Ages as the modern’s “other,”’ Foucault’s ‘complex and paradoxical relationship to confession’, and ‘his reduction of confessional discourse to the subject of sex’.<sup>65</sup>

I will only examine the first and third arguments here, as they bear directly on the nature of this project. Lochrie correctly challenges Foucault’s somewhat throw-away declarations that confession forms a ‘remarkably unitary’ discourse arranged entirely around confessing the secret of sex.<sup>66</sup> There is nothing in medieval confessional material to suggest a focus on sex; the vast majority of texts range widely and do not devote disproportionate space to matters of sexual conduct. As Pierre Payer writes, ‘the confessional tradition focussed on the open acknowledgement of sins – *all* sins: theft, homicide, simony, lying, perjury, usury, and sexual offences. The confession was

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<sup>64</sup> Lochrie, ‘Desiring Foucault’, 5; Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘Getting Medieval’, p.137; Patterson, ‘On the Margin’, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p.14.

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.33.

certainly designed to produce truth, if you will, but the truth about the whole range of sinful behaviour'.<sup>67</sup> Nor was confession 'unitary' in terms of the processes or discourses it leveraged in order to produce truthful statements about the subject – as this thesis sets out to show.

Foucault's sense of a 'unitary' subject of confession is combined by Lochrie with an earlier statement, from the opening of 'A Preface to Transgression', which argues that 'never did sexuality enjoy a more immediately nature understanding and never did it know a greater "felicity of expression" than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin'.<sup>68</sup> This statement does empathically make the medieval, as Lochrie points out, 'that pre-discursive – and hence, by definition, pre-modern – origin of sexuality' against which we can define modernity.<sup>69</sup> In this reading, Foucault falls foul of his own charge unerringly to fragmentise and challenge the apparently 'natural', finding in the Middle Ages the location of a legible sexuality against which later centuries balk. It seems somewhat uncharitable, however, to employ 'A Preface' to challenge the suggestions made in *The Will to Knowledge*, given that thirteen years separate their publications.<sup>70</sup> Further, Foucault in fact *repeats* the assertions of 'A Preface to Transgression' in his later work, only now they are the ventriloquized words of the repressive hypothesis aimed at the seventeenth century with which *The Will to Knowledge* opens: 'It was a time of direct

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<sup>67</sup> Payer, 'Foucault on Penance', 315. Payer is right to offer this corrective, but the majority of this article engages in a limited and reductionist reading of Foucault. See also John Bossy, who has noted a shift in confessional practice from examinations structured around the Seven Deadly Sins to ones informed by the Ten Commandments. The former, he argues, direct the confessant towards confessing sins against society, whilst the latter – increasingly in vogue from the sixteenth century onwards – stress sins against God, and thus 'interior' sins. See his *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and 'Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments', in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.214-235.

<sup>68</sup> Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', trans. and ed. Donald F. Bouchard and Simon Sherry, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp.29-52 (p.29).

<sup>69</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p.16.

<sup>70</sup> 'A Preface to Transgression' first appeared in *Critique* in 1963 as part of 'Hommage à des Georges Bataille' (and the influences of Bataille's *Eroticism* are plain to see here); *The Will to Knowledge* was published in French as *La volonté de savoir* in 1976.



gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies “made a display of themselves.”<sup>71</sup> Whilst Foucault has left us with nothing as helpful as a retraction, the similarities between these two declarations suggest we can read the conclusions of *The Will to Knowledge* back on the ‘Preface to Transgression’: that the delimitation of a nonhistorical before is part of the gesture that creates and sustains historical difference. This may not exonerate Foucault exactly, but it does suggest that we can use his own methods to question the conclusions he reached, and to build a better understanding of the discourses of confession in the Middle Ages. There are further signs that the late Foucault who nearly brought us *Les aveux de la chair*, the projected medieval volume of *The History of Sexuality*, would have challenged many of these critiques himself.<sup>72</sup> In a much-quoted 1979 interview, Foucault declares ‘I must confess that I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex... sex is boring’.<sup>73</sup> It is with this late warning in mind that the rest of this chapter will outline the contours of this project beyond the justly-critiqued first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, drawing primarily on *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and a paper entitled ‘Omnes et Singulatim’, given in 1979.

*Discipline and Punish* may seem at first like an odd choice. The overriding narrative of the text – a transition from punishment as the excessive performance of monarchic power on the body of the condemned to a disciplinary, specifying, self-effacing network of institutions – is not of immediately obvious relevance to an analysis of the dynamics of *The Will to Knowledge*. This chapter has already stressed, after all, that the confessional

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<sup>71</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.1.

<sup>72</sup> As I edit this in January 2018, *Les aveux de la chair* is slated for final publication within the month – some three decades after Foucault’s death. Time will tell how his approach differs from the one presented here.

<sup>73</sup> Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’, p.340. This is also quoted by Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, although she puts less faith in these principles affecting the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*.

paradigm operates in contradiction to the ties of vassalage and family that determine feudal identity. Indeed, this new paradigm seems to have far more in common with the ‘discipline’ of the eighteenth century, which

‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. These are humble modalities, minor procedures, as compared with the majestic rituals of sovereignty or the great apparatuses of the state.<sup>74</sup>

In *Discipline and Punish* we are dealing with a system of truth. A system which observes, specifies, and breaks down individuals into their smallest constituent parts, controls and polices them. With the advent of the police, disciplinary power had found its paradigm ‘in the indefinite world of a supervision that seeks ideally to reach the most elementary participle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body’.<sup>75</sup> But this individualised, carefully controlled subject, bears a remarkable similarity to the confessional identity, whose every stirring of the will must be identified, regurgitated, and dissected.

Crucially, Foucault notes that many of these later disciplinary techniques stem from monastic or inquisitorial sources, stating that eighteenth century penal justice ‘is still, in principle, inquisitorial’.<sup>76</sup> Confession also ‘makes’ individuals; our besieged depth-model implies an attention, a ‘basic intimacy’, to the contingent product of power called the individual and the minutiae that compose it.<sup>77</sup> Accepting the centuries-old sources for much of the disciplinary system, Foucault goes on to declare that

[t]aken one by one, most of these techniques have a long history behind them. But what was new, in the eighteenth century, was that, by being combined

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<sup>74</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.170.

<sup>75</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.213–14.

<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.227. It would seem that that work being done by scholars such as Asad and Arnold (cited above) confirm that, at the very least, the analytical principles of *Discipline and Punish* bear fruit when applied to the operations of inquisitors in Languedoc.

<sup>77</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.62.

and generalised, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process.<sup>78</sup>

*Discipline and Punish* bears witness to the tactical re-elaboration and re-articulation of discourses of power-knowledge. The genealogy is clear: the rule of the convent is transposed onto the penal workhouse, a trajectory of which even eighteenth-century reformers were clearly aware:

On a throne, above which is a crucifix, a sister is sitting; before her, arranged in two rows, the prisoners are carrying out the task imposed on them [...] the strictest silence is constantly maintained... It seems that in these halls, the very air breathes penitence and expiation. One is carried back [...] to the time of the venerable habits of this ancient place, one remembers those voluntary penitents who shut themselves up here in order to say farewell to the world.<sup>79</sup>

This disciplinary power is new. But there can be no origin, only reconstruction and reincorporation, a process of cultural *bricolage* which is unable to hide the other beneath it, the alien objects which serve as the very material of its construction. The disciplinary modes of the monastery were re-integrated into a new disciplinary regime in much the same way as the confessional modes of the priesthood were re-integrated into a new discursive array. The inquisitor and the priest may have disappeared, but the methods and discourses they designed, appropriated, and elaborated have remained.

The crowning expression of the disciplinary sentiment is, for Foucault, Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon'. Never more than a plan, it was designed as the surveillance structure *par excellence*, equally applicable – with modifications – to prisons, hospitals, workhouses, and schools. It was to be a 'new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example'.<sup>80</sup> A large circle of cells were to be watched

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<sup>78</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.224.

<sup>79</sup> L. Faucher, *De la réforme des prisons*, quoted in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.233–34.

<sup>80</sup> Jeremy Bentham, 'Panopticon Letters', in *The Panopticon Writings*, ed. Milan Božovič (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp.29–95 (p.31).

from a central tower; light would flow through the cells from external windows, illuminating the prisoners perpetually. From the central tower, an inspector would watch, crucially disguised in an elaborate maze. In Bentham's scheme, it was the mere possibility of surveillance, rather than the actual fact of surveillance, that made the panopticon so efficient:

Ideal perfection, if that were the object, would require that each person should actually be in that predicament [of surveillance], during every instant of time. This being impossible, the next thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, he should *conceive* himself to be so.<sup>81</sup>

The panopticon is a prison of the mind, sustained through an illusion. The very multiplicity of uses to which it can be put makes it the paradigm of an age in which disciplinary power came to regulate (and in the process define, identify) large swathes of Western European culture. It is 'the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning [...] must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact of a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use'.<sup>82</sup> Power has become a pure mechanism through the conscience of the subject; the panopticon's 'major effect' is 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'.<sup>83</sup> It is a pure disciplinary machine. It is also, as Milan Božovič points out in his introduction to the panopticon letters, a God-machine.<sup>84</sup> God is omniscient; God generates the same necessary self-surveillance as the panopticon. Even Bentham seems to be aware that he might be infringing on divine right, employing the term 'omnipresence' only 'if divines will allow me the expression', and noting firmly that the panopticon, in 'confining its attention to *overt* acts, leaves thoughts and fancies to their proper *ordinary*, the court

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<sup>81</sup> Bentham, 'Panopticon Letters', p.34. Emphasis original.

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.205.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.201.

<sup>84</sup> Milan Božovič, 'Introduction', in *The Panopticon Writings*, pp.9–20.

above'.<sup>85</sup> The panopticon is, of course, a self-aware fiction where God is not, but the epistemological, coercive logic is the same: Watch over yourself, for He watches over you.

The disciplinary subject is enabled and perfected by such a refrain. As Bentham notes, the omniscient gaze changes the dynamic of the entire prison population:

In the condition of *our* prisoners [...] you may see the student's paradox, *nunquam minus solus quam cum solus*, realised in a new way: to the keeper, a *multitude*, though not a *crowd*; to themselves, they are *solitary* and *sequestered* individuals.<sup>86</sup>

A '*multitude*, though not a *crowd*'; even to the observer, the mass of people remain analytically separate, constituting single subjects. Individuality is a function of this disciplinary mode, a mode which quantifies even the smallest of functions into a mark of difference, endlessly recording the minute variations of its subjects. The disciplinary subject experiences this process as extreme 'individualisation'; that is, a '*solitary* and *sequestered*' experience. This subject – and the gaze that constitutes it – is not an invention, however, of the eighteenth century. The thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* opens with a justification for a flexible, 'external' rule to regulate the lives of the religious recluses it is aimed at:

Ah alle ne mahe nawt halden a riwle, ne ne purue nawt ne ne ahe nawt halden on a wise þe uttre riwle, *quantum scilicet ad obseruantias corporales*: þet is, onont licomliche locunges efter þe uttre riwle, þet Ich þuften cleopede, ant is monnes fundles, for na þing elles istald bute to serui þe inre, þe makeð feasten, wakien, calde ant hearde werien, swucche oþre heardschipes, þet fles mei polien, moni ne mei nawt. Forþi mot þeos changin hire misliche efter euchanes manere ant efter hire euene. For sum is strong, sum unstrong ant mei ful wel beo cwite ant paie Godd mid leasse. Sum is clergesse, sum nawt ant mot [t]e mare wurchen ant on oðer wise seggen hire bonen. Sum is ald ant eðelich ant is þe leasse dred of, sum is ȝung ant luuelich ant is neod betere warde. For-þi schal each ancre habben þe uttre riwle efter hire schriftes read, ant hwet-se he bit ant hat hire in obedience þe cnaweð hire manere ant wat

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<sup>85</sup> Bentham, 'Panopticon Letters', pp.45, 94. Emphasis original.

<sup>86</sup> Bentham, 'Panopticon Letters', p.50.

hire strengðe. He mei þe uttre riwle changin efter wisdom, as he sið þet te inre  
mahe beo best ihalden.<sup>87</sup>

The *Ancrene Wisse* presents us with a watchful gaze, carefully determining the different ‘licomliche’ states of various devotees, offering a flexible, modulated system to fit their needs. This apparently liberal programme, however, may be reformulated by the aid of the Foucauldian analysis; it is in fact as liberating as the eighteenth-century reformists wished their prisons to become. It is an almost unadulterated expression of the disciplinary impulse. The *Ancrene Wisse* refuses to homogenise its subjects, instead carefully categorising them, listing and measuring their physical and psychological dispositions, generating an extensive grid into which the specific coordinates of each anchorite can be entered. Indeed, the ‘schrifte’ becomes a spiritual advisor, physician, and overseer, responsible for the flawless incorporation of every breath of enclosed life into the devotional framework. This lengthy assessment is therefore coextensive with the more obviously disciplinarian moments of the *Ancrene Wisse*, such as the order that ‘[a]ncre ne ah to habben na þing þet utward drahe hire heorte’,<sup>88</sup> or the demand that ‘3e ahen of Godd þenchen in euch time’.<sup>89</sup> These are, of course, stock components of anchoritic discourse. Read through a disciplinary lens, however, the apparently sympathetic angle a flexible outer rule suggests should be understood as *reinforcing*, rather than *weakening*, the coercive reach of this power. Concessionary care is revealed as an element of disciplinary oversight.<sup>90</sup> Thus Thomas N. Tentler somewhat misses the point when he declares that confessors ‘thought themselves as doctors of souls. It makes

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<sup>87</sup> *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett, EETS OS, 325, 2005, preface, p.2. Sarah Stanbury has also employed Foucauldian techniques to *Ancrene Wisse* with great results – see her ‘Passionate Regulation: Enclosure, Ascesis, and the Feminist Imaginary’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93.4 (Autumn 1994), 803-825, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>88</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt. 8, p.158.

<sup>89</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.1, p.19.

<sup>90</sup> Here we can see how Lochrie’s suggestion in *Covert Operations* that the medieval pastoral eye’s interest in ‘discretion and care’ and stress on ‘the healing of the sinner’s soul’ invalidates or challenges Foucault’s conclusions (p.26) misses the point. Disciplinary structures achieve their full power as functions of *care* and *improvement* rather than punishment.

sense to ask whether they were good doctors’; in fact, it makes sense to ask what kind of power-knowledge grid enabled, and was served by, such an identification.<sup>91</sup> The confessional mode is one of the key enablers of both the physician-patient power relationship and the wider the disciplinary regime:

Hwa-se heleð eawiht, he naueð iseid nawiht for-hwon he beo þe skerre, [ah]  
is ilich þe mon þe haueð on him monie deadliche wunden, ant schaweð þe  
leche alle ant let healen buten an, þet he deieð upon as he schulde on alle  
clane.<sup>92</sup>

The demand to tell all is also a demand to know all. It is a demand that constitutes the subject as their own overseer, as the subject of their own disciplinary gaze. It individualises in the act of telling the total truth, repeating the total truth, over and over again. It is ‘the nearly infinite task of telling – telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts’, marked clearly with the disciplinary stamp.<sup>93</sup>

Disciplinary power structures, then, appear to have a certain amount in common with the confessional regime and wider pastoral ramifications. Not only do they ‘objectify’ a certain kind of subject – which could be held as the function of *any* knowledge-power deployment – but they generate a subject marked by *specificity*, by a drive to discover and regulate the truth of the individual self, whether through the organisation and prioritisation of certain ‘interior’ structures (confession) or ‘external’ actions and behaviours (discipline). They are more than complementary – they are to a large degree coextensive. In his 1979 lecture *Omnes et singulatim*, Foucault gives a name to this overlapping field, and in doing so offers an analytical grid through which to understand the changing deployments of this power-structure. He calls it ‘pastoral

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p.222.

<sup>92</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt. 5, p.119. For a more thorough discussion of disciplinary power in the *Ancrene Wisse* and the historical role it plays in the development of the lay pastoral subject, see Chapter Three.

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.20.

power'. This movement, coagulating in the position of 'pastorship', is defined rather straightforwardly as 'the development of power techniques oriented towards individuals and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way'.<sup>94</sup> Embodied in the figure of the shepherd, this series of power techniques was almost entirely absent from Greek and Hellenic culture, articulated instead by 'oriental' societies – 'Egypt, Assyria, Judaea', and intensified to an extremity in Hebrew culture.<sup>95</sup> The intensity and functional importance of the relationship of the shepherd to the flock is what distinguishes the pastoral model from classical norms: 'what the shepherd gathers together is dispersed individuals [...] In other words, the shepherd's immediate presence and direct action cause the flock to exist'.<sup>96</sup> Note, however, that the flock also *remains* 'dispersed individuals', a dynamic that is elaborated as the Christian tradition develops from the Jewish:

Christian pastorship implies a peculiar type of knowledge between the pastor and each of his sheep. This knowledge is particular. It individualises. It isn't enough to know the state of the flock. That of each sheep must be known. [...] He must know what each of them does – his public sins. Last but not least, he must know what goes on in the soul of each one, that is, his secret sins, his progress on the road to sanctity.<sup>97</sup>

In Bentham's terms, the flock remains a multitude rather than a crowd. Pastorship requires both confessional and disciplinarian structures; indeed, it is shorthand for their systematic alliance and deployment towards the same end.

The final trick that the development of pastoral power gives us is its integration, in the modern period, into the *state*.

We can say that Christian pastorship has introduced a game that neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews imagined. It is a strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, self-identity – a game that seems to

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<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault, '*Omnes et Singulatim*', p.300.

<sup>95</sup> Foucault, '*Omnes et Singulatim*', p.301.

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, '*Omnes et Singulatim*', p.302.

<sup>97</sup> Foucault, '*Omnes et Singulatim*', pp.310–11.



have nothing to do with the game of the city surviving through the sacrifice of the citizens. Our societies proved to be really demonic since they happened to combine those two games – the city-citizen game and the shepherd-flock game – in what we call the modern states.<sup>98</sup>

In the Middle Ages, pastoral power remained a shaky, partially realised dream. In fact, the image of pastorship remained, throughout the medieval period, ‘a yearning’ to be satisfied only with the birth of the modern nation-state.<sup>99</sup> We return to the argument of *Discipline and Punish*, to the sense that the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ refashioning of ancient late-classical or medieval disciplinary models may signify nothing more (or less) than a redeployment or rearticulation of pastoral power. Similarly, the ‘discursive explosion’ described in *The Will to Knowledge* did not put an end to the pressures and subjectivities generated by the confessional structure – rather, they fragmented a single institutional language into a multiplicity of (sometimes competing) identitarian discourses which sought to entrench the depth-model in new and subtle ways.

It is this *apparatus of pastoral identity*, an extension and development of the generalised (and limited) analysis of medieval confession made by Foucault three years prior to ‘*Omnes et Singulatim*’ in *The Will to Knowledge*, which determines the analytical frame of this thesis. I will argue that pastoral power, as a mode of power-knowledge relation geared towards the production of a unique individual in all its specificity, is visible throughout the Middle Ages as a powerful tool of subjectivisation. It produces, from its first limited deployments in the monasticism of the Church Fathers all the way to the fifteenth-century writings of Margery Kempe, a new subject, compelled to interpret, think, and speak its self is a continuous and unending cycle. The enclosure this apparatus of pastoral identity generates is subtle, expansive, but also productive. It offers itself as the raw materials for the generation of a new form of identity, a ‘pastoral’ identity,

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<sup>98</sup> Foucault, ‘*Omnes et Singulatim*’, p.311.

<sup>99</sup> Foucault, ‘*Omnes et Singulatim*’, p.313.

determined by the endlessly circulating demands of introspection and self-formation. This productive capacity enables at the same time as it appropriates, rendering many challenges to the pastoral apparatus deeply complicit. It also ensures a deeply robust network of discourses and practices – one that, I argue, survives beyond our Middle Ages.

This apparatus remains one of, perhaps *the*, defining model of the modern age. As we settle into the twenty-first century, it may be tempting to suggest that the commonplaces derived from twentieth-century poststructural thought might subject such an apparatus to unprecedented levels of stress and provide an analytical opening. So far, however, it seems only possible to conclude that the radically liberating perspectives of those conclusions are anomalous and available only to a small portion of the liberal-academic elite. Indeed, studies of the marginalised and oppressed in developed countries imply that a tightly individualistic model of identity may be increasingly deployed in support of neoliberal economic doctrine and social values – the sociologist Jennifer M. Silva finds that American working-class coming of age rituals are increasingly defined ‘in terms of wilful self-change at the level of the psyche’, as ‘deeply *personal* coming of age stories, grounding their adult identities in recovering from their painful pasts [...] and forging an emancipated, transformed, and adult self’.<sup>100</sup> We should perhaps place the self-help book in the same category as the sexologist’s handbook.<sup>101</sup> Atomising subjective experience into journeys of discovery and self-transformation (common confessional themes) alienates workers from each other and their labour: ‘without a broad, shared vision of economic justice, race, class, and gender have become sites of resentment and division rather than a coalition’, working to preclude the analytical situations that are ‘the prerequisite for effective political engagement’.<sup>102</sup> But it was not always so. Despite the ‘unitary discourse’ of truth-production, the elaboration of a codified confessional model,

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<sup>100</sup> Jennifer M. Silva, *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.11–12. Emphasis is original.

<sup>101</sup> Silva, *Coming Up Short*, p.111; Foucault, ‘The End of the Monarchy of Sex’, p.217.

<sup>102</sup> Silva, *Coming Up Short*, p.17; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p.3.

Foucault's middle ages are finally a contested zone, typified by breaks and challenges to a juvenile *scientia sexualis* rather than by the all-pervasive demands of *Omnis utriusque*. It is not a golden age, but rather a transitional one; 'the Western legacy and all the problems of the Western world' that Umberto Eco argues 'emerged in the Middle Ages' may perhaps be understood as magmatic, as the not-as-yet-cooled earth on which we now ground ourselves.<sup>103</sup> The modern subject of the depth model, no doubt already traceable long before the Middle Ages, is found here as one of those concepts, far more labile and far more visible than in the coming centuries. The chinks in its armour may be more discernible for this. As students and readers of the Middle Ages, we cannot hope for a greater mandate than this – as Carolyn Dinshaw reminds us,

keeping in mind the past's difference even as we chart its continuities in the present, we can suggest that the future offers possibilities of still other, profoundly different, narratives and lives.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Umberto Eco, 'The Return of the Middle Ages', in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.59–86 (p.64).

<sup>104</sup> Dinshaw, 'Getting Medieval', p.117.

## 2: SECRET SELVES

### Governing the self in the early church

*Some souls one will never uncover, unless one first of all invents them.*<sup>1</sup>

The genealogical method suggests that nothing appears *ex nihilo*, that everything is composed of parts alien to and preceding it chronologically. Indeed, the medieval delimitation of a specifically Christian identity – the topic of the majority of this thesis – had been the subject of strenuous thought and debate for nearly a millennium before its widespread articulation in vernacular English. Many of the structures that would come to form its key components were put into a Christian context by the thinkers of the early church, including John Cassian, Gregory the Great, and Evagrius of Pontus.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, these thinkers will be used to sketch the outline of a conception of self marked by a prioritisation of the interior over the exterior and an insistence on drawing the truth out from within. The effects of this particular hierarchy are widespread and difficult to overstate. It gives the human body a profoundly ambiguous significance and drives a fear of duplicity to the centre of an entire semiotics. This semiotics, resting on a play between external lie and internal truth, supports the elaboration of a parallel hermeneutical discourse directed at texts, which re-purposes classical rhetorical models for its own end. Here, a demand for the constant excavation of a hidden truth to be found within the Christian subject and speaker mobilises a whole array of techniques which become formative for the *longue durée* of Christian exegesis.<sup>3</sup> These same techniques, it turns out,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), I.8, p.37.

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive study of the spirituality of the period to which much is owed, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989); for the effects of such thinkers on medieval pastoral theology, see Carole Straw, 'Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices', in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005), pp.35–58.

<sup>3</sup> Much of this language theory naturally draws on Hellenistic thought. For an overview of these theories, see James Allen, 'The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology', in *Language and Learning: Philosophy of Language in the Hellenistic Age*, ed. Dorothea Frede and Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.14–35; for comparisons between Hellenistic and medieval thought on the subject, see Sten Ebbesen, 'Theories of Language in the Hellenistic Age and in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *Language and Learning*, ed. Frede and Inwood, pp.299–319; Rita Copeland, 'Ancient Sophistic and Medieval Rhetoric', in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, ed. Carol Dana Lanham (London and New York: Continuum,

are developed and deployed in the analysis of sin: reading scripture, this tradition suggests, turns out to be analogous to reading the Christian subject. The aim of this chapter is to treat some of the intellectual projects of the early Church, with their explicitly disciplinary dynamics, as a suggestive background for the development of Christian techniques of subjectivisation and Christianity's many methods of 'speaking the self'. As such, it will privilege the early developers of specifically pastoral forms of teaching – including Gregory the Great, John Cassian, and Evagrius of Pontus – over figures like Saint Augustine who, despite (or perhaps because of) their subtlety, shy away from developing a structured programme for combatting sin.<sup>4</sup> What these writings, spanning some four centuries, conjure is the collective manifesto of the government of the soul. Settled at the centre of a Christian cultural campaign in the early centuries of its ascendancy, it will become the formative model of identity formation for Western European civilisation for centuries to come.

Cassian's *Conferences* are clearly troubled by the apparent similarities between the accomplishments of Christian ascetics and those of Gentiles who, undeserving of God's grace, nevertheless 'shine with the virtues not only of temperance but even [...] with that of chastity'.<sup>5</sup> The anchorite Chaeremon is on hand to provide a response, however, and takes the ever-paradigmatic Socrates as a case study:

one time a certain expert in physiognomy saw him and said: [...] These are the eyes of a corruptor of boys. When his disciples rushed upon the man,

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2002), pp.258–83; 'The Ciceronian Rhetorical Tradition and Medieval Literary Theory', in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), pp.239–66; 'Pathos and Pastoralism: Aristotle's Rhetoric in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 89 (2014), 96–127; and Paul F. Gehl, 'Latin Orthopraxes', in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. Lanham, pp.1–21.

<sup>4</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Evagrius of Pontus was read in the medieval Christian West, and I am not making an argument for any direct influence of Evagrius on European medieval modes of subjection. He is examined instead to illustrate the widespread nature of such dynamics in the key figures of early monastic literature – amongst whom he, as theorist, practitioner, and teacher of Cassian, should certainly be counted.

<sup>5</sup> John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 2.13.IV, p.469.

wanting to avenge the insult to their teacher, it is said that he restrained their anger with these words: [...] Calm yourselves, my friends. For I am such, but I contain myself. It is very clear, then, not only from our assertion but even from their own say-so that they only repressed actual immoral behaviour – that is, wicked intercourse – by main force, but that desire for and delight in this passion had not been cut out from their hearts.<sup>6</sup>

The difference is between external manifestation and internal, sacred truth. The fundamental distinction, according to *Conferences*, is between the mere modification of external action and the cleansing of the internal state. The truth of Socrates – his deep internal corruption – is as apparent to the enlightened anchorite as it is to the physiognomist. The pagan treats the symptoms, the Christian the cause; the former restrains anomalous elements of the self where the latter purges them. Foucault's account of the fundamental difference between Hellenic and Christian techniques of self-examination echoes Chaeremon's sentiments perfectly; the distinction lies in the monk's concern for 'the nature of the origin of the thought itself', in the 'decipherment of interiority, the subject's exegesis of himself'.<sup>7</sup> Expanding on the failures of classical philosophers, Chaeremon condemns Diogenes' words to a man put to death for adultery: '[y]ou should not purchase with your death what is freely sold'.<sup>8</sup> To Diogenes, the adulterer's failure is essentially a tactical one – he was not able to get away with it. From the Christian perspective, however, the failure is a more essential one; adultery is a sin, famously declared internal in Matthew 5:28: 'But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart'. Chaeremon utilises exactly this difference in response to condemn pagan thinkers: '[i]t is

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<sup>6</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 2.13.V.3, p.470.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.301. Richard Sorabji has noted something similar: 'the very sharp [Stoic] distinction between first movements and emotions is now [in Origen] blurred, but blurred in a way that thoroughly suits the very different Christian agenda. Instead of the very sharp distinction between first movements, which are not your fault at all, and emotions for which you are totally responsible, the Christian talk of bad thoughts allows for many intermediate degrees of sin'. See his *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 2.13.V.4, p.470.

obvious [...] that they did not know the virtue of true chastity to which we aspire'.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, the pagan position is caricatured as transactional, flexible and action-based, incapable of perceiving the essentially inward truths emphasised by Christianity. Socrates and Diogenes fall flat at the first hurdle of monastic spirituality. Their approach is neatly summarised in the maxim 'I am such, but I contain myself'; in contrast, the ascetic regime demands that internal 'desire' and 'delight' in sin be entirely 'cut out' from the self in a sacrificial gesture.<sup>10</sup> As Julia Kristeva has noted, this is one of the primary developments of Christianity: 'What is happening is that a new arrangement of differences is being set up [...] An essential trait of those evangelic attitudes or narratives is that abjection is no longer exterior. It is permanent and comes from within'. In this analysis, the New Testament 'inverted the pure/impure dichotomy [of the Old Testament] into an outside/inside one'.<sup>11</sup> Thus the fourth-century Evagrius of Pontus can declare in his 'Treatise on the Practical Life' that '[a]bstinence cuts away the passions of the body; spiritual love cuts away those of the soul'.<sup>12</sup>

This concept of ritualised operation on the self proves to be a hardy metaphor, as Chaeremon declares that 'it is quite certain that our circumcision, which is in the spirit, can only be possessed by the gift of God'; the mark of the covenant between worshippers and God, a permanent act of bodily modification, is turned inward, spiritualised.<sup>13</sup> This passage's most strident demand is that external manifestation – whether it be pagan or Jewish – be transformed into the internal rule of the heart. The stress is dramatically

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<sup>9</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 2.13.V.4, p.470.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault maintains that 'there can only be a conversion inasmuch as a break takes place in the subject. A fundamental element of a Christian conversion is a renunciation of oneself, dying to oneself, and being reborn in a different and a new form'; see Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.211.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.113, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, 'The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life', in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.91–114, 37 (p.104).

<sup>13</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 2.13.V.4, p.470.

shifted from acts of body to acts of spirit, from measurable gestures to immaterial processes. A sketch of the eunuch fits perfectly into this process: in a passage on 'lukewarm' spirituality, abba Daniel notes that

this lukewarmness exists very frequently in those who are eunuchs in body because they are, as it were, freed from this fleshly constraint and consider themselves to stand in no need of either the effort of bodily abstinence nor a contrite heart. Weakened by this sense of security, they never really struggle to seek for and possess perfection of heart or even purification from spiritual sins. This condition, which comes from their fleshly state, becomes animal, which is certainly a worse condition.<sup>14</sup>

The fundamental error of the eunuch is to misinterpret the type of 'circumcision' which they have undergone. Understanding their physical state as the ultimate condition of their purity, they become '[w]eakened' by presumptuous thoughts, and 'never really struggle to seek for and possess perfection of heart'. Their apparent bodily freedom hides their spiritual sluggishness, their continuing fleshly servitude; they are eunuchs in body but not in soul. The systematic prioritisation of interiority generates an analytical hierarchy within which the exterior and physical are treated as secondary. The lukewarm eunuch is a victim of this structure, condemned to become animal for his failure successfully to navigate this dynamic.

The establishment of this hierarchy has telling effects on the role and position of the body within early Christian thought. In his voluminous *Morals on Job*, Gregory the Great sets out the relationship between the interior self and the body:

We may express outwardly the things which we are inwardly sensible of, deliver these through the organ of the throat, by the sounds of the voice, since to the eyes of others we stand as it were behind the partition of the body, within the secret dwelling place of the mind; but when we desire to make ourselves manifest, we go forth as though through the door of the tongue, that we may shew what kind of persons we are within.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.5.XVII, p.166.

<sup>15</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, by S. Gregory the Great, the First Pope of That Name, trans. John Henry Parker, 3 vols (Oxford: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, London, 1844), II.8, vol. 1, p.73. Henceforth *Morals on Job*.



The pressure of the Christian dynamic transforms the body into an oddly unmarked territory onto which our expression maps a sense, on which we can ‘make ourselves manifest’. But it appears as a ‘partition’, noticeable only for its obfuscatory capacities. The self is disguised behind it, hidden away ‘within the secret dwelling place of the mind’, and it is only through communication that any sense of ‘what kind of persons we are within’ is allowed to escape.<sup>16</sup> Where is the body in this schema? Its role is minimized, flattened. To adopt a popular medieval metaphor, the body is the handmaid of the soul.<sup>17</sup> It is a secondary, often dangerous variable in the struggle for salvation – especially when it becomes a disloyal servant.

In *Morals on Job*, it is precisely the body’s status as a necessary tool of the mind that makes it a threatening object, a potential space for disruption and distortion:

what is the office of the body saving to be the organ of the mind; and though the musician be ever so skilled in playing, he cannot put his art in practice unless outward aids accord with himself for that purpose, for we know that the melody which the hand of the proficient bids, is not rightly given back by instruments that are out of order; nor does the wind express his art, if the pipe, gaping with crevices, gives a grating sound.<sup>18</sup>

The soul within is constantly concerned about the potential for the body to fail its demands. In the best-case scenario, the body is rendered unproblematic by effective communication. Gregory stresses that the body is the necessary ‘organ’ of communication, the tool which allows speakers to ‘put [their] art in practice’; it is all we have. At the same time, however, it remains fundamentally distinct from the self, an ‘outward aid’, ‘organ’, or ‘instrument’ to which the internalised self gives a function. This dissonance allows the body to become dangerous when damaged; ‘gaping with crevices,

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<sup>16</sup> Here Gregory also imagines the body as a secret cell or home – it is a ‘dwelling place’ and has a ‘door’. For more on the effect and use of conceptual space(s) in later disciplinary texts, see Chapter Three.

<sup>17</sup> For more on this theme, see p.103, below.

<sup>18</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, Preface, V, vol. 1, p.10.

[it] gives a grating sound', introduces dissonance and discordance into play. There is a strong sense, then, in which *Morals on Job* structures the body as fundamentally other to, and outside of, the self. The relationship is not necessarily always antagonistic, but the positions body and self take up, and the space generated between them, turn the body into an ambiguous and sometimes volatile variable. It remains external, an unintegrated 'outward aid', whose role can be as fatal as it is always necessary.

The concern over this disjunction between body and mind naturally makes the hypocrite into one of the prime antagonists in the drama of salvation. In Gregory's *Morals*, for instance, censure of hypocrisy is clearly mobilised through the tensions implicit in the pastoral hierarchy. The life of the hypocrite is denoted

by the name of 'a rush' or 'a flag' [...] which has an appearance of greenness, but has no fruit of usefulness for the services of man, which continuing dry in barrenness of practice, is green with only the colour of sanctity alone. But neither does a rush grow without moisture, nor a flag without water, in that the life of hypocrites receives indeed the infused grace of the heavenly gift for doing good works, but in whatsoever it does seeking praises without, it proves void of fruit of the infused grace vouchsafed it.<sup>19</sup>

The rush is duplicitous; it holds only the 'colour of sanctity', hiding sin beneath its green partition. Notably it appears to perform good actions – the body itself, existing in social space, may appear or even act as if virtuous, but the intentions of the soul 'seeking praises without' condemns it. Again the body becomes a type of neutral zone, to whose actions no moral values (whether good or evil) can be attributed until the partition is drawn to one side and hidden intentions dissected. It is grey, amorphous, without value.

The accidental hypocrisy of the soul is perhaps Cassian's greatest fear. In *Conferences*, abba Moses expounds on the devil's duplicity, his ability to change 'the precious words of scripture by his clever use of them and [give] them a contrary and

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<sup>19</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, XVIII.66, vol. 1, p.469.

harmful meaning'.<sup>20</sup> Under false pretences, the devil tempts monks with 'acts of meditation', 'pious visitations', and even concerns for 'nuns and destitute women', all designed to finally entangle 'the entrapped monk with baleful preoccupations' and lead him from the strict ascetic rule.<sup>21</sup> Thus even the inhabitant of the monastery can become a ruse, the colour of good deeds hiding dalliance on, or diversion from, the path of the righteous. In order to combat such a threat, virtuous Christians must 'become, in keeping with the precept of the Lord, approved money-changers'.<sup>22</sup> Cassian tells us that all of these devilish designs are like false coins, which

imitate the coins of the true king because they appear very pious at first sight, but they have not been stamped by lawful minters [...] nor do they come from the central and public workshop of their conferences, but they are clandestinely fabricated by the fraud of demons and, to their detriment, are offered to the unskilled and the ignorant.<sup>23</sup>

The language of law and order, of unauthorised piety, dominates. But this narrative is itself justified in the second half of the excerpt by a play between public and private spheres, where the 'central and public workshop' of the 'lawful minters' (authorities on biblical teachings and the monastic life) are displaced by the agents of the devil, working 'clandestinely' to undermine the uninformed. Chaeremon's Socrates would have placed these coins into circulation without a second thought, thereby betraying his error; the ascetic monk must be taught that it is the origin of the thought that determines its value, rather than its application. The unavoidable demand for the depth-model, for a hierarchy of internal over external, generates a whole new array of enemies whose specific threat comes from the destabilising potential of subterfuge.

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<sup>20</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XX.4, p.60.

<sup>21</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XX.4, p.60.

<sup>22</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XX.1, p.59.

<sup>23</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XX.6, pp.60-61.

Indeed, in Gregory it is exactly this potential which furnishes the vices with their favourite trick – disguising themselves as virtues: ‘assuredly, every evil spirit, after the example of its chief, even Satan, begotten in the erring principle of pride, presents itself as a snare to deceive’.<sup>24</sup> Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, acts as the Book of Job’s figurative demon:

And it is likewise well said concerning him; *weeping all along as he went*; forasmuch as in order that he may cut off devout souls by smiting them, he hides himself under the guise of virtue, and whereas he feigns to agree with those that really mourn, being thus with greater security admitted to the interior of the heart, he destroys whatsoever of virtue is there hidden within’.<sup>25</sup>

Cassian’s counterfeiting has become generalised, has become integral to the very state of the vice. The ‘partition’ of the body, that divides intention from public awareness, is the model through which the vices are empowered and act. Where Ishmael deceived with crocodile tears, they deceive with virtuous thoughts and holy desires. This subtlety is mobilised precisely by the depth model, which produces the tension between surface and depth as its central paranoia. Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* confirms the connection:

The ruler should also understand that vices commonly masquerade as virtues. Often, for instance, a niggard passes himself off as frugal, while one who is prodigal conceals his character when he calls himself open-handed. Often inordinate laxity is believed to be kindness, and unbridled anger passes as the virtue of spiritual zeal. Precipitancy is frequently taken as promptitude, and dilatoriness as grave deliberation.<sup>26</sup>

This passage develops from an account of sinners – ‘a niggard’, ‘one who is prodigal’ – to sins – ‘laxity’, ‘unbridled anger’ -, the two linked together by the merciless logic of the depth-model. This hierarchy mobilises hypocrisy as its most dangerous foe, choosing to gather all vices under the charge of duplicity.

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<sup>24</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, I.52, vol. 1, p.62.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, I.52, vol. 1, p.62.

<sup>26</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, 2.9, p.78.

The immense weight such a structure places on duplicity allows the relationship between internal truth and external signification to take centre-stage. This particular arrangement prompts Christian writers to look to the field of medicine, with its fully-fledged epistemology of diagnosis, to inform processes made necessary by the depth-model. Thus, Gregory's ideal priest should draw inferences from external observations, much like a physician: 'He goes in, as it were, to see the abominations, and by examining certain external symptoms, he sees into the hearts of his subjects, so that all the evil thoughts therein are disclosed to him'.<sup>27</sup> It is the body's partition which makes such a process necessary, which turns sinful actions or tendencies into proof of ill intention. In the *Morals on Job*, the medical motif reappears as a fully-fledged anagogical reading:

Ver.8. *And he took him a potsherd to scrape the humour withal.* 58. For what do we understand by the 'potsherd', saving the forcibleness of severity, and what by the 'humour', save laxity of unlawful imaginations? And thus we are smitten, and 'scrape off the humour with a potsherd', when after the defilements of unlawful thoughts, we cleanse ourselves by a sharp judgement.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst there is no lack of Scriptural evidence to support such deployments,<sup>29</sup> they add an additional charge to the dynamics of the depth model. *Morals on Job* is by no means alone in developing this medical metaphor; examples are scattered throughout the pastoral work of the early church. Evagrius too meditates on the discomfort of medical procedures, declaring: 'The scalpel and cautery cause a great deal of pain, but they restrict the spreading of the wound; on the one hand, dishonour pains the one being treated, but on the other, it puts a stop to the grievous passions, namely vainglory and pride'.<sup>30</sup> The same metaphor allows the *Conferences*' abba Daniel to clarify his distinction between overt and 'hypocritical' sins: 'The former are at once rebuked and healed like diseases that have been openly exposed and made manifest, but the latter, hidden under the guise of virtue,

<sup>27</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, 2.10, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, XXX.58, vol. 1, pp.168-169.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Psalm 103:0, Jeremiah 30:17, Deuteronomy 7:15.

<sup>30</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, 'On the Eight Thoughts', in *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp.66-90 (8.31, p.87).

remain incurable and make more desperately sick those whom they have so dangerously deceived'.<sup>31</sup> Here the medical metaphor directly supports the hierarchies of the depth-model, valorising interiority as the site of the most dangerous – because hidden – contamination and illness. The irony (and, indeed, the tension) stems from the fact that, whilst medical examples prove rich parallels in support of the depth model, they undeniably foreground the very body the depth model has relegated to a subordinate position.

*Conferences* bears clear witness to the difficulties of such seductive metaphors. Cassian introduces us to the tale of abba Serenus who, blessed with the purification of bodily desires, yearns ever harder for the state of complete chastity. The holy man argues that the grace of God alone can alter that which 'human skill is unable to draw out either by potions or medicines or surgical instruments'.<sup>32</sup> In the face of divine power, mortal enterprise is necessarily revealed as partial and rife with failure. Strikingly, Serenus' tricolon ('potions [...] medicines [...] surgical instruments') dismisses not so much the entirety of human endeavour as the specific powers of the physician. *Conferences*' dismissal of 'human skill' actually turns out to be a dismissal of human doctors. The following lines justify this angle flawlessly:

As he was untiringly devoting himself with constant supplication and tears to the request he had made, there came to him an angel in a vision of the night. He seemed to open his belly, pull out a kind of fiery tumour from his bowels, cast it away, and restore all his entrails to their original place. 'Behold', he said, 'the impulses of your flesh have been cut out, and you should know that today you have obtained that perpetual purity of the body which you have faithfully sought'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.4.XX.4, p.170.

<sup>32</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.7.II.1, p.247.

<sup>33</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.7.II.2., pp.247-248.

What use is a human surgeon, compared to an angelic one? Rather than supersede the physician, this passage elevates him to the state of divinity. We are back in the zone of circumcision, of a form of bodily modification that finally finds a powerful ally in the medical metaphor. Unwanted ‘impulses’ – undesirable elements of the self – are transformed from spiritual or psychic forces into a ‘fiery tumour’ which can be ‘cut out’ by divine surgery. The hierarchy of interior over exterior turns back on itself beneath the surgeon’s mask, planting in the body it found so troublesome a new conceptual potential. The body remains a troubling variable in the struggle for salvation, but the conceptual charge the medical metaphor provides gives it a new significance.

Many of these instances can be safely recuperated into the hierarchy of spirit over body. Abba Serenus’ experience on the divine operating table merely suggests that spiritual intervention may at times be necessary to save a pure soul from the temptations of the flesh. Whilst the use of the medical metaphor – arguably the analogy that most foregrounds the necessary presence of the body – does go some way to complicating the picture, it does not finally undermine it. Similarly, when Evagrius notes that ‘[p]ride is a tumour of the soul filled with pus; when it has ripened, it will rupture and create a disgusting mess’, the link remains associative, exploiting rhetorical effect without collapsing the essential distinction (and implicit hierarchy) between spirit and flesh.<sup>34</sup>

Other cases are less easily resolved. Often, it is when these texts broach the subject of demonic interference with bodily selves that the hierarchy becomes especially strained. This is perhaps not surprising, because here, in the *minutiae* of an attack by an unclean spirit on enclosed human self, the distance that the metaphor upholds is collapsed. This

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<sup>34</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, ‘On the Eight Thoughts’, 8.1, p.87. On the development of these dynamics and the uses of metaphor in Middle English manuals see Chapters Four and Six.

is especially true of possession – the inhabitation of the body by a foreign spirit – which, in *Conferences*, marks a point of extreme tension:

It is very clearly understood that this takes place not through some kind of diminution of the soul but through a weakening of the body, when an unclean spirit makes its way into those organs in which the soul's vigour is contained, imposes an unbearable and immeasurable weight on them, and overwhelms the intellectual faculties and deeply darkens their understanding.<sup>35</sup>

The unclean spirit has less in common with the gadarene demon (Mathew 8:28-34) than with a common cold; it is virus-like, infiltrating through the biological 'weakening of the body' and seeking out 'those organs in which the soul's vigour is contained'. Possession can even be enabled 'through the fault of wine or fever or excessive cold'.<sup>36</sup> It attacks and weakens the *organs* rather than the soul itself; its remit remains strictly biological. Even the soul itself is empowered and tied to its body, strengthened (if not generated) by the physiological operation of its host.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, it is the demand for separation of body and soul (for possession cannot be allowed to take place 'through some kind of diminution of the soul') which demands a systematic link between body and soul be made.

Evagrius, who dwells for some time on the specifics of demonic influence, echoes the sentiments (and instabilities) of Cassian's *Conferences*. Deeply embedded in the experiences of monastic communities, Evagrius' 'On Thoughts' describes the particular technique of 'certain impure demons' who persistently target 'those engaged in reading' in overwhelmingly somatic terms:

I for my part have learned this by frequent observation: they touch the eyelids and the entire head, cooling it with their own body, for the bodies of demons are very cold and like ice; and the head feels as if it is being sucked by a cupping glass with a rasping sound. They do this in order to draw to

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<sup>35</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.7.XII.1, p.256.

<sup>36</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.7.XII.2, p.256.

<sup>37</sup> On the continuity of these dynamics of possession in the medieval period, see Nancy Caciola, 'Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42.2 (2000), 268–306.



themselves the heat that lives within the cranium, and then the eyelids, relaxed by the moisture and the cold, slip over the pupils of the eyes.<sup>38</sup>

Of immediate note is the familiarity most twenty-first century readers will have with sense of ‘being sucked by a cupping glass’ when, despite their own tiredness, they continue to read and apply themselves to hard intellectual work. Much of what was implicit in Cassian’s account of possession is drawn out at length here, with the specifically physiological elements of the attack – the demon’s desire for ‘the heat that lives within the cranium’, its own body ‘cold and like ice’, even the drooping of the monk’s eyelids, ‘relaxed by the moisture and the cold’ – making up the bulk of the analysis. In fact, there is no mention here at all of sin, or temptation; even the demon’s intentions are reduced to a pseudo-animalistic hunger for heat, its opposite element. In fact, the demon appears to operate on sound Galenic principles. Galenic theory – a modified and Romanised version of Hippocratic medicine, which would remain the dominant account until after the Renaissance – relied on an account of four basic substances, or humours, from which the body was composed. These four – black bile, yellow bile, mucus, and blood – were responsible for the regulation of the body; as an excess of any could kill, a constant and careful balancing act was required.<sup>39</sup> The same basic dynamic informs Evagrius’ account; the cold demon seeks the heat of the brain and, once successful, cools the human body, producing unwelcome results. Here, the sense of balance implied by Hellenistic medicine becomes a central component of the struggle against the devil and his minions. Meditating on the spirit of fornication, Evagrius notes that

When someone has attained impassibility of the concupiscible part and shameful thoughts have cooled off a little, this spirit at once introduces men and women fooling around with each other [...] Sometimes it touches even the flesh, inducing within it an irrational burning. [...] Against such thoughts,

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<sup>38</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, ‘On the Eight Thoughts’, 33, p.176.

<sup>39</sup> On the properties and relations of the four humours, see R. J. Hankinson, ‘Philosophy of nature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, ed. R. J. Hankinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.210-241, esp. pp.217-223. On later medieval psychosomaticism more generally, see below, note 42.

the boiling head of the irascible part directed against this demon is extremely useful.<sup>40</sup>

Again, we can note the same essentially physiological dynamics at play. Once an original victory has been won, and parts of the body ‘have cooled off a little’, the spirit returns with a vengeance, sometimes reaching out to the flesh and ‘inducing within it an irrational burning’. Hot and cold are set against each other as the fundamental principles of this struggle. Further, in this case some of the implications of this somaticism are explicitly worked through – in order to restore a balance, oppositional elements can be used to counteract each other. Here, the ‘irascible part’ can be directed against the demon targeting the ‘concupiscible part’ in a manner reminiscent of adjusting humoural balance – as Evagrius refers to it elsewhere, ‘to knock one out one nail with another’.<sup>41</sup> Such instances, and the techniques they suggest either implicitly or explicitly, point to a complication of the straightforward hierarchy that texts like *Morals on Job* might, in the first instance, seem to be suggesting. Indeed, these texts seem incapable of deciding exactly what should be done with the body, what position in relation to the soul it should take up, and, most tellingly, what the practical considerations of such a position could and should be. This tension is amplified and brought out by the medical metaphor, whose sheer richness will make it a continuous favourite throughout the early Church and medieval period. Indeed, by the late Middle Ages, it will be expressed in pervasive psychosomaticism, a characteristic feature of both later medieval and early modern thought that makes explicit the tensions and challenges that these texts suggest a millennium earlier.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, ‘On the Eight Thoughts’, 16, p.163.

<sup>41</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, ‘The Monk’, 58, p.108.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Katherine Park, ‘The Organic Soul’, in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.464–84; David Hillman, ‘Visceral Parts’, in *The Body in Parts: Phantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp.81–106; Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990).

Strikingly, then, the medical metaphor allows the muted body to re-enter the field of significance. As thinkers concerned in various ways with the articulation of a Christian subjectivity and subject-hermeneutics, Gregory, Cassian, and Evagrius' texts all point towards this fundamental distinction. Unable to dismiss the spirit/flesh premise that structures much of Christian thought, their work also points to the body's refusal to be cancelled, an insistent relevance which their constant use of metaphors of treatment and illness highlights again and again. Bringing a medical array of concepts to bear on the depth-model fundamentally changes its dynamics, re-organising the relationship of physical and non-physical elements. Organising spiritual wellbeing along such a model transforms the self from a binary mode into a set of overlapping zones which, whilst arranged in a hierarchy, do not categorically condemn each other. If a body can be sick, it can be healed; if Serenus' lustful tumour can be removed, then his body can be purged of its disease. It is not inherently sinful. Indeed, Augustine briefly edges towards a similar statement in *On Christian Teaching*. The Bishop of Hippo argues that 'it should be our concern in this life that the tendency of the flesh is reformed and not allowed to resist the spirit with its unruly impulses. But until this happens, the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh'.<sup>43</sup>

Medical language corroborates this idea: by inserting it into the array of pastoral knowledges, the authors of the Early Church introduce a restorative, normalising slant to both practice and theory. Foucault notes that 'we are close to a medical type of practice' once 'one of the major functions of the practice of the self is to correct, restore, and reestablish a condition that may never have actually existed, but whose nature is indicated

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<sup>43</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.52, p.19. Augustine is explicitly referring to Paul here – see Galatians 5:17.

by the principle'.<sup>44</sup> The medical model relies on the normative power of the healthy body, unafflicted by ravages of disease and (in the case of Galenic models), blessed with a regulated, balanced measure of the four humours. The extent to which this might be considered mythological – who is entirely healthy? What does a perfectly healthy human look like? – are beyond the remit of this investigation. What is not, however, are its effects on the arrangement of the field of knowledges called 'the self'. What the medical metaphor suggests is that the disease of sin, and the state of fallenness/illness in which humanity finds itself, are in the final analysis transitory effects of our place in history. This is also the foundation upon which the signifying machine of Christian history rests, as *Morals on Job* makes clear when the Elected human is compared to

'a lamp' because he is bright within, 'despised' because he is not luminous without. Inwardly he glows with the flame of charity, without he shines with no gloriousness of lustre. Therefore he shines and is despised who, while he glows with virtue, is accounted vile. [...] [T]he 'appointed time' for 'the despised lamp' is the predestined Day of final Judgment, wherein it is shewn how each one of the righteous, who is now condemned, shines bright in greatness of power. [...] Then their Light shines over so much the wider space, the more cruelly the persecutor's hand confines and fetters them now. Then it will be made clear to the eyes of the wicked, that they were supported by heavenly power, who forsook all earthly things of their free will.<sup>45</sup>

The Elect is the inverse-hypocrite, the inwardly shining, outwardly-besmirched soldier of Christ. Historical contingency makes them the enemy of the powerful, looked down upon by their peers and hated for the fundamental alterity of their ethics. This logic of estrangement relies on the desire to 'reestablish a condition that may never have actually existed' to justify and position itself in relation to (perceived) dominant culture.<sup>46</sup> The prelapsarian human is also the human without illness; the pure human is the one from whom no tumour must ever be removed. As Augustine notes, 'it will be the case after the

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<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.97.

<sup>45</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, XX.51-52, vol. 1, pp.617-618.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.97.

resurrection that the body will live for ever in a state of utmost tranquillity;’ freed from the disturbance and agitation of the flesh.<sup>47</sup> At the end of time the slate will be wiped clean, and the worthy will be returned to the prelapsarian state which justifies their current suffering a thousandfold.

If the Elect are advised to look forward to the Day of Judgement, it will be the end of the hypocritical ‘rush’:

Thus this rush is full of moisture in the night but on the coming of the sun it is dried up, in that the hypocrite is accounted holy by all men in the darkness of the present life, but when the searching Judge cometh, he will appear as wicked as he is.<sup>48</sup>

The Day of Judgement, the point at which history ends, becomes the ultimate epistemological fantasy, where the itching temptations caused by original sin can finally be placed to one side and all known as it should be.<sup>49</sup> Hypocrites will be revealed as such, and the Elect will finally garner the praise and recognition they have always deserved. This apocalyptic scheme carries implications for a Christian hermeneutics, too. The layered self that frustrates interpretation is a product of historically-specific variables (Original Sin, humankind’s fallen state, the redemptive possibilities offered by the crucifixion) which, *Morals on Job* promises, will fall away in time. Conditioned as it is by its larger place in biblical history, then, the depth-model of interiority demands that a certain theory of hermeneutics accompany it.

The connection between the depth-model and its accompanying system of knowledge can be traced in a passage from *Conferences*. Developing the moneychanger

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<sup>47</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 1,XXIV, p.29.

<sup>48</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, VIII.76, vol. 1, p.478.

<sup>49</sup> For an excellent account of resurrection beliefs in the early church, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp.19-114.

metaphor discussed above, abba Moses slips seamlessly from an essentially psychological argument to a treatment of scriptural interpretation:

in the first place, so that the material itself, whether real gold or false, may not be concealed from us; secondly, so that we may reject thoughts that lie about works of piety as being adulterated and counterfeit coins since they are not lawfully minted and have a false image of the king; then, so that with similar discernment we may be able to turn those which, because of an evil and heretical interpretation, portray in the precious gold of scripture the face not of the true king but of a usurper; and finally, so that we may refuse as too light and condemnable and insufficiently heavy those coins whose weight and value have been eaten away by the rust of vanity, which does not let them balance out in the scale of the elders.<sup>50</sup>

Noting that a ‘similar discernment’ underlies both processes, abba Moses here explicitly links a hermeneutics of the mind – an approach which enables one to ‘reject thoughts that lie’ – and a hermeneutics of the text – an approach which enables one to uncover ‘evil and heretical interpretation[s]’. A paranoia over the secret origins and qualities of things, whether they be mental concepts or interpretative positions, is structurally central to both of these interrogative stances: in Augustinian theology, the same fall that rendered interpretation a struggle darkened human skin, making the process and intentions previously literally transparent into riddles.<sup>51</sup> Books and bodies become newly opaque, require new tools (whether interpretative or medical) to be effectively interpreted. The play between depth and surface, between an ever-fleeting presence and the marks of its passing, are as applicable to skin marked by a self as skin marked by a pen.

This association is taken a step further in *Morals on Job*, where scripture seems, for a moment, to become a human being:

For as we see the face of strange persons, and know nothing of their hearts, but if we are joined to them in familiar communication, by frequency of conversation we even trace their very thoughts; so when in Holy Writ the

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<sup>50</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XXII.1, p.62.

<sup>51</sup> This position is described in Virginia Langum, ‘Discerning Skin: Complexion, Surgery, and Language in Medieval Confession’, in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, ed. Katie Louise Walter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.141-160 (pp.141-145).

historical narration alone is regarded, nothing more than the face is seen. But if we unite ourselves to it with frequent assiduity, then indeed we penetrate its meaning, as if by the effect of a familiar intercourse.<sup>52</sup>

Here, the tiered model of biblical exegesis is justified through recourse to a psycholinguistic model of social interaction. The body is both a barrier to knowledge and an essential means of expression. Its opacity and difficulty is overcome by ‘frequency of conversation’, until people can trace the ‘very thoughts’ of those they know well. The historical sense of scripture, oftentimes alienating and apparently irrelevant to organised Christianity, is figured as a stranger whose intentions and meanings, hidden behind the barrier of a ‘literal sense’, will become clear as time breeds familiarity.

The transformation of scripture into an embodied human being has, of course, an important history, and is licensed by the bible itself. John 1:14 unambiguously situates Christ and the incarnation at the absolute intersection of these parallel discourses: ‘And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth’. The Word of God is many things in theology; it is the Logos, it is Christ’s revelation, it is the written text of scripture, and it will become the word of the concept in the mind for Augustine and, much later, Aquinas.<sup>53</sup> It is also Christ himself, a subject medieval religious culture will embrace with remarkable creativity.<sup>54</sup> Far earlier, however, this association will already have had a profound effect on early Christian hermeneutics. Christian truth had already taken on the

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<sup>52</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on Job*, IV, Prologue, vol. 1, pp.177-178.

<sup>53</sup> Much has been written on Augustine of Hippo’s hermeneutics. See David Tracy, ‘Charity, Obscurity, Clarity: Augustine’s Search for Rhetoric and Hermeneutics’, and Donald G. Marshall, ‘Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Interpretation of Scripture: Augustine to Robert of Basevorn’, both in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader*, ed. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp.254–74 and pp.275–89 respectively, and Elaine Fantham, ‘Varietas and Satietas: “De Oratore” 3.96-103 and the Limits of Ornatus’, *Rhetorica*, 6.3 (1988), 275–90.

<sup>54</sup> An example of this creativity is the Middle English ‘Charters of Christ’ tradition, in which Christ’s crucified body becomes the site for a literal inscription of newly liberated Christians’ rights. See Mary Caroline Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Bryn Mawr College, 1914). See Chapter Five, in which the documentary elements of this tradition are examined in more detail.

role of the stranger whom we get to know over the course of repeated conversations, interactions, and clarifications. The historical-mythological fact of the literal embodiment and fulfilment (Mathew 5:17) of scripture in human form allows Christian thinkers like Augustine to re-inscribe intentionality at the heart of hermeneutics.<sup>55</sup> This is because embodiment, as a particular formation of the problem of self, entails certain ontological and epistemological assumptions; it is assumed that the articulations and expressions of a human being are organised by an internally cohesive force, an intention which determines the range of meanings available to a listener/interpreter. Troubled, maybe, struggling, sometimes, a human self is a fundamentally closed unit, a single entity with a discernible unity. Under these rules, the human form that scripture assumes in Christ almost inevitably allows for the text to take on an intention. The Word made flesh allows, in essence, scripture to claim the same unifying force. This same move, of course, also means that it may have a sometimes opaque ‘body’.

The renewed attention to a divinely-inspired intentionality that such an approach mobilises and justifies has a recognisable impact on the performance of hermeneutics. The centrality of divine intention (and the implicit model of speaker/listener) to the Christian hermeneutic project necessarily places intense pressure on the point of reception and the interpretative capacities of the reader. Thus it is not surprising that Rita Copeland marks the distinction between classical and early Christian rhetorical modes precisely in a shift from composer (point of origin) to interpreter (point of reception). Writing on *On Christian Teaching*, a crucial moment in the development of biblical hermeneutics, she notes that

[c]lassical rhetoric deals with ambiguities of meaning from the perspective of the orator, of the producer of the utterance. The facts of the case, the *res*, are

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<sup>55</sup> Eric Jager writes that Augustine ‘inaugurated a specifically *textual* consciousness’ for the Middle Ages (p.27). For an investigation of Augustine’s associations between body, interior, and text, see his *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.27-43.



ambiguous, and meaning is contingent upon the orator's effective use of language, of *signa*. [...] Augustine's sacred rhetoric takes up ambiguities of meaning from the perspective of the reader. The 'facts' of the 'case', that is, the *res* or doctrine, are determinate and unitary, and what is ambiguous are the words, the signa. It is the responsibility of the reader to interpret these signs and to produce an account of their meaning.<sup>56</sup>

This shift chimes perfectly with a newly forceful elaboration of a depth-model of signification. For Augustine, this redeployment is sanctioned by a call for renewed focus on the aim – that is, the intention – of scripture: to produce (the correct form of) love. Misreadings can, and do, occur, according to Augustine, and those which misread the literal sense are amongst the most dangerous: '[n]o "death of the soul" is more aptly given that name than the situation in which the intelligence, which is what raises the soul above the level of animals, is subjected to the flesh by following the letter'.<sup>57</sup> Against such threats, Augustine offers the criteria of love as a litmus test for accurate reading: 'scripture enjoins nothing but love',<sup>58</sup> and any reading which fails to reflect this is guilty of failure. Such failure is caused precisely by not recognising the force invested in scripture by the singular intention of God; it is a failure to, in Gregory's terms, get to know the stranger before judging his more opaque statements. Only as scripture ceases to be a stranger, as one becomes comfortable with its idiosyncrasies and mannerisms, will a certain sense of coherence be achieved. Over time, one learns to accept that its single lesson, its single intention, is to communicate love. Familiarity with scripture will resolve the obscurities that are part of its material and verbal form into the singular significance of divine intention.

Divine signification is, of course, in a league of its own, and its relevant permutations remain essentially limitless. Gilbert Dahan, writing on the Middle Ages,

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<sup>56</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.158.

<sup>57</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 3.IV, p.72.

<sup>58</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 3.X., p.76.

notes that such ‘pluralité des sens dans l’optique médiévale [...] implique un travail encore plus actif de la part du lecteur, sommé de retrouver des interprétations qui ne sont pas donnés – mais qu’il faut rechercher’.<sup>59</sup> Renewed attention to the relationship between physical text and authorial intention demands a greater role for the reader than ever before. If a singular truth is enshrined not so much *in* the words as somehow *behind* them – that is to say, if the words are a record *of* God’s intention rather than God’s intention itself – then a powerful sense of textual paranoia is unavoidable.<sup>60</sup> Thus Dahan’s point that such a position – that ‘l’Ecriture [...] est une transcription de la Parole divine’ – engenders ‘difficultés sans nombre’ is not deeply problematic for the Christian tradition.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the strenuous textual gymnastics that form the hallmarks of this hermeneutic tradition are fundamental in maintaining the integrity of the project. It is an immensely productive tension, capable of generating millennia of debate whilst sustaining unchallenged the foundational premise of divine authorial intention.<sup>62</sup> It builds a framework in which it is only possible to ask *what* the bible means, not *how* it does.

It is on these grounds that Copeland’s shift from Hellenistic rhetoric to Christian hermeneutics is based. Where classical rhetoric was concerned with the manipulation of signs to generate meaning, developing Christian modes of reading and thinking will concern themselves far more with the attempt to resolve signifiers into their signifieds. Copeland writes: ‘[m]edieval *enarratio* or hermeneutics has assumed the power of rhetoric to grasp discourse as action, as totality, and to reunite the signifier with the newly

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<sup>59</sup> Gilbert Dahan, *Lire La Bible Au Moyen âge: Essais D’herméneutique Médiévale* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2009), p.13. The ‘plurality of meanings in the medieval account [...] calls for a far more active role on the part of the reader, namely that of retrieving interpretations that are not given but must be sought out’.

<sup>60</sup> This tension will be returned to in the context of autobiography in Chapter Six.

<sup>61</sup> Dahan, *Lire La Bible*, p.10. ‘Scripture [...] is a transcription of divine speech [...] it engenders innumerable difficulties’.

<sup>62</sup> Larry Scanlon has suggested something similar in his *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, p.50: ‘[T]he biblical text never ceases to be signifier. This may well be the secret of its historical success. Its essential textuality ensures that it always knows itself not simply as a set of collective beliefs, but also as a textual practice, that is, as a way of producing and maintaining such beliefs’.

signified'.<sup>63</sup> The ur-text, and therefore ur-discourse, of Christianity is of course scripture, the textual object whose totality was both strongly policed and held up as paradigmatic. Classical rhetoric has no essential text, no signifier pointing to a perfect signified, to perform this function and, therefore, there is no need for such an insistently paranoid theory of rhetoric. The demand for discursive unity places newly forceful demands on rhetorical modes that must, in turn, be re-articulated to accommodate new models of knowledge-production. Understood by the Romans as engagement with 'changeable conditions', rhetoric's relationship to truth is reconfigured; now part of exegesis, it is transformed into a bloodhound.<sup>64</sup>

The necessity of seeking out information, of dredging it up from the depths within which it lies, cements the parallel discourses of Scriptural interpretation and reflexive subjectivity with striking force. Whilst divinely-inspired scripture is not strictly equivalent to the fallen human person, the approaches to both are structured in terms of an excavation of surface in order to reach hidden depths. Essentially, the Early Church demands that we become bloodhounds, both as readers and as sinning subjects. In *Conferences*, Cassian has abba Moses explain that

all the secret places of our heart [...] must be constantly scrutinised and the prints of whatever enters them must be investigated in the most careful way, lest perchance some spiritual beast, a lion or a dragon, pass through and secretly leaves its dangerous traces; then, once our thoughts were neglected, access to the sanctuary of our heart would be offered to still others.<sup>65</sup>

Here the monk becomes a type of spiritual tracker, tasked with discovering the traces of past sins, hunting them down and removing them before more damage can be dealt. There is a strong sense, however, that these processes are ultimately reactive and reparative;

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<sup>63</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, pp.82–83.

<sup>64</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p.19.

<sup>65</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, 1.1.XXII.2, p.63.

they arrive on the crime scene *ex post facto*, condemned to chase after ‘traces’ and ‘prints’. The origins of surface thoughts are never revealed in their entirety; the ‘prints’ uncovered in the mind point the way to the deferred presence of sin that has passed, and toward future danger. The hermeneutics of this position are made explicit in *On Christian Teaching*, when Augustine takes a moment to develop his own tracking metaphor, arguing that signs are to things as tracks are to animals – ‘when we see a footprint we think that the animal whose footprint it is has passed by’.<sup>66</sup> A semiotics that seeks to distinguish between full, present ‘things’ and ‘signs’ as markers of their absence allies itself perfectly with a mode of subjectivity that demands we understand ourselves as constantly in search of the former but in thrall to the latter, held in check against our will by partitions of both flesh and mind.

These mutually-reinforcing strands of the Christian disciplinary regime blend seamlessly, structuring a new subject of knowledge. The strategic elaboration of the so-called ‘circumstances’ is a telling example of the method by which old techniques were co-opted in the Christian enterprise. In ancient texts, most famously in Cicero, the *circumstantiae* are the components of argumentation, defining the remit and specific attributes of the topic and formulated as a sequence of variables: *quis, quid, locus, tempus, occasio, modus, and facultas*.<sup>67</sup> By the medieval period, however, the *circumstantiae* have found their way into a wide variety of *accessūs*, commentator’s introductory prologues which set out the circumstances of the text’s production (and therefore participate in the project of shaping and delimiting meaning). As Copeland points out, ‘[t]he exegete can take possession of the text as a discursive totality in the way that the *rhetor* or (orator) can grasp the case as a circumstantial totality [...]’.<sup>68</sup> The *accessus* employs the

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<sup>66</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 2.II, p.30.

<sup>67</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p.67.

<sup>68</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p.71.

*circumstantiae* in order to impose a conceptual unity on the text, in order to make a *res* out of the endless *signa* that make up writing. In so doing the role of the circumstances has changed dramatically – they are now variables employed in the discovering of a truth insistently constructed as previously-hidden, oriented towards uncovering the *correct* interpretation. Even more strikingly, however, a tradition of circumstances became a functional component of the art of the soul itself; by the Middle Ages, a list of circumstances had become a common sight in handbooks addressed to those in pastoral cares and laypeople alike.<sup>69</sup> Whilst by no means *exact* reproductions of a rhetorical technique, the force of applying such analogous grids is substantial.<sup>70</sup> Thus the medieval subject, and its position in the pastoral-disciplinary nexus, are reified into a ‘circumstantial totality’ through an inspired, *textual* gesture. As Augustine himself notes, ‘the function of eloquence in teaching is not to make people like what was once offensive, or to make them do what they were loth to do, but to make clear what was hidden from them’.<sup>71</sup> The techniques of rhetoric find a life in the non-textual sphere, where they provide the fundamental criteria by which the subject can pronounce the truth of themselves. This entire shift of methods, a recalibration of operational areas, is brought about by a reformed care of the self and the new hierarchy at its centre.

Writing on the departure from classical tradition represented by Cassian, Foucault has noted that the latter’s spirituality:

has nothing to do with [...] merely substituting the prohibition of the intention for the act itself. [...] This has nothing to do with a code of permitted actions,

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p.118; Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, ‘Classroom and Confession’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.376–406 (pp.386–387).

<sup>70</sup> The Council of Treves listed a version of the confessional circumstances in 1227: *quis, quid, ubi, per quos, quotiens, cur, quomodo, quando* (who, what, where, from whom, how often, why, how, when). For a various versions of the circumstances and an account of their prehistory in classical rhetoric, see D. W. Robertson, Jr., ‘A Note on the Classical Origin of “Circumstances” in the Medieval Confessional’, *Studies in Philology* 43:1 (1946), 6-14, and Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*.

<sup>71</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.XI, p.117.

but is a whole technique for analysing and diagnosing thought, its origins, its thoughts, its dangers, its potential for temptation and all the dark forces that can lurk behind the mask it may assume.<sup>72</sup>

There is more at work in the pastoral self than the mere internalisation of a set of prohibitions; central figures of the early church, represented here by Augustine, Gregory, Cassian, and Evagrius, are hard at work to form an entire conception of self oriented towards cultivating and assessing the inner life. The self becomes a complicated hierarchy of obfuscating, contradictory layers, on whose surfaces the battle for truth must be waged incessantly. The call to turn inwards is accompanied by an ever-increasing set of conceptual tools, which rally semiotics, medicine, and rhetoric to aid the project. Behind all of these is the play between surface and depth, between appearance and revelation, where a highly attentive search for signs of hidden sin plays out across body and mind. The self becomes a complicated hierarchy of obfuscating, contradictory layers, on whose surfaces the battle for truth must be waged incessantly. As the centuries progress, Christianity – by no means a heterogeneous phenomenon – will finish establishing itself as an essential element of dominant culture. Its conception of the self-as-secret, as a puzzle hidden behind partitions which must be analysed, prized apart, pierced, will remain a central functional principle.

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<sup>72</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Battle for Chastity', in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin, trans. Anthony Forster (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.14–25 (p.14).

### 3 DISCIPLINARY PLACES

Transforming structures in the *Ancrene Wisse*

*[A]n immense cosmic house is a potential of every dream of houses. Winds radiate from its centre and gulls fly from its windows. A house that is as dynamic as this allows the poet to inhabit the universe. Or, to put it differently, the universe comes to inhabit the house.<sup>1</sup>*

As one of the earliest examples of literature in post-Conquest English, the *Ancrene Wisse* takes up the tradition of pastoral power in the vernacular. It is notable both for its proximity to the outpouring of pastoral literature that accompanied Lateran IV and for its immense textual longevity. Much has been written on different aspects of the developments of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries from the perspective of the subject or individual, including Georges Duby's account of monastic ideals of contemplative separation and Susan Kramer's interrogation of the role of agency in scholastic theology. Others have queried the terms under which such investigations operate, including Caroline Walker Bynum's study of medieval corporate identity and the discussions of 'self' and conceptions of 'inner and outer' found in Richard D. Logan and Stephen Medcalf.<sup>2</sup> Many of these interventions are insightful and helpful; very few of them engage with and explicitly theorise a model of subject-formation that takes satisfactory account of the complex operations of power and the techniques by which medieval selves are

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.51.

<sup>2</sup> The period around Lateran IV's consolidation of church power and the sacrament of oral confession is often considered pivotal in discussions of the medieval self and penance. For a summary of this history, see Susan R. Kramer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood in the Twelfth-Century West* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2015), pp.22-25. See also Georges Duby, 'Solitude: Eleventh to Thirteenth Century', in *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.509-534 and Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001). For complications of this narrative, see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?' in *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press: 1982), pp.82-100, which stresses the power of corporate identity in the Middle Ages and cautions against the use of the term 'individual', preferring 'self'; Richard D. Logan, 'A conception of self in the later middle ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 12:3 (1986), 253-268, who argues that in the twelfth century '[t]he "I" is essentially there, but not the "me" (I's awareness of itself' in any whole, direct way', (p.261) and Stephen Medcalf, who describes somewhat less convincingly a 'medieval style of innocent presentedness' in 'Inner and Outer', in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (London: Methuen & Co., 1981), pp.108-171 (p.133).

constituted at specific moments under specific circumstances. This is what a close textual analysis of *Ancrene Wisse*, informed by explicit theorisations of power, allows us to do.

Copied from the early thirteenth century until the seventeenth, the *Ancrene Wisse* crosses bounds of historical period and appeal, engaging ‘a range of audiences far more diverse than that for which it was originally intended’.<sup>3</sup> Adapted to diverse uses throughout these centuries of tradition, we are left with a text that, beginning as a thirteenth-century guide to specialised spirituality, would become a pastoral model for mendicant (Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 234/, 120), monastic (London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xviii), lay (London, British Library, MS Royal 8 C. i), and even less-than-orthodox (Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498) audiences in Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin.<sup>4</sup> As such *Ancrene Wisse* is almost perfectly balanced on the religious-lay divide. As a text directed to a spiritual elite, it retraces some of the dynamics of eremitic subjectivity and hermeneutics discussed in the previous chapter. As a text that invited engagement from a wide variety of (often non-specialist) audiences, it asks us to consider what becomes of a disciplinary perspective seemingly so bound to early monasticism. Its treatment of the architectural and spatial dynamics of the anchorhold allows us to see a new way of structuring the interplay of surface and interior, body and soul, outside and inside, in the formation of the subject.

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<sup>3</sup> A. S. G. Edwards, ‘The Middle English Manuscripts and Early Readers of *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp.103–12: p.103. The structure of the text itself, with the ‘Outer Rule’ of ascetic observance contrasted with the essential ‘Inner Rule’ of the heart, lends itself naturally to lay application. As Nicholas Watson writes, the anchoritic life is presented ‘as a version of the life of all who desire salvation must live. This stance is compatible with the work’s elevation of anchoresses to a position of special attainment. But paradoxically it still acknowledges that, in some respects, they have as much in common with lay-people as they do either with monks and nuns or with the clerics the work regularly satirises’; see his ‘*Ancrene Wisse*, Religious Reform and the Late Middle Ages’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, pp.197–226 (p.203). See also the discussion in Bella Millett, ‘*Ancrene Wisse* and the Conditions of Confession’, *English Studies* 80 (1999), 193–215.

<sup>4</sup> Bella Millett, ‘Textual Introduction’, in *Ancrene Wisse*, pp.xi–xxvii.



Like these earlier interplays, the ‘outsides’ and ‘insides’ of anchoritic life are ultimately flexible and resist binary classification.

As a number of readers have already noted, architecture is the most obvious measure of anchoritic specialism.<sup>5</sup> Buildings dominate the *Ancrene Wisse*, insistently calling attention to the unusual practices of enclosed men and women. The anchorite’s cell is ever-present in the *Ancrene Wisse* as a boundary whose entrances are carefully closed and policed, whose walls represent the limits of the anchorite’s life, and whose ground they can expect to be buried in. The text also draws attention to its own highly structured nature (with two parts on the ‘external rule’ essentially book-ending the six parts on the ‘internal rule’), with chapter headings, sub-conclusions and introductions, and a general overview in the preface: ‘Nv, mine leoue sustren, þis boc Ich todeale on eahte “destinctiuns”, þet 3e cleopieð dalen; ant euch wiðute monglunge spekeð al bi him seolf of sunderliche þinges, ant þah euchan riht falleð efter oðer, ant is þe leatere eauer iteiet to þe earre’.<sup>6</sup> Its structure strives to be visible, to remind the reader again and again that its very processes are enmeshed with a very particular order. That *structures* – cells, houses, castles; chapters, parts, headings – should feature so strongly in a collection of texts designed for and read by the enclosed religious should come as no surprise. The longevity of a text so clearly structured around a specialised experience of space is, however, somewhat more surprising. Whilst the anchorite’s cell, as a synecdoche for her withdrawal from the world, has become a byword for her specialised vocation, it is the aim of this chapter to find precisely within the structures of the *Ancrene Wisse* the key to

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<sup>5</sup> See especially Part 2 of *Ancrene Wisse*. Previous scholarship has explored these dynamics in some detail – see Mari Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideological and Spiritual Practices* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012); Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), Christopher Cannon, ‘The Place of the Self: *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group’, in *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.139-171, and ‘The form of the self: *Ancrene Wisse* and romance’, *Medium Aevum* 70:1 (2001), 47-65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, preface, p.5; Beckwith, ‘Passionate Regulation’.

their chimeric and wide-ranging legacy. The anchoritic cell is not just, as others have claimed, a blueprint for the ‘enclosed self’. Along with the spiritual ‘desert’, the anchoritic cell is a blueprint for a set of structures whereby a widespread later medieval disciplinary pastoral subjectivity is developed and distributed.

As a blueprint, the cell is more than just a physical area. It is a highly charged space which organises a conceptual grid for existence. It responds, therefore, to what Gaston Bachelard calls ‘topoanalysis’; that is, ‘the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’. Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* is a study of an intimacy that is mapped, that accumulates in corners of houses, in their cellars and attics. The house, Bachelard argues, ‘thrusts aside contingencies:’ ‘its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of heavens and through those of life’. (p. 7) For Bachelard the house is the conceptual principle by which we gain purchase through intimacy and safety; it provides the spaces and rulings which allow interiority to develop and take form: ‘[a] house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability’ (p. 17). Whilst *The Poetics of Space* argues strenuously for the formative impact of the first house of our lives, Bachelard offers us a compelling argument for thinking of *all* inhabited space as capable of conditioning subjectivity. We always carry with us, or are carried by, the architectures of our lives.<sup>7</sup>

To apply Bachelard’s methods to the *Ancrene Wisse*, we must leave behind a purely geometrical analysis. The images under inspection in *The Poetics of Space* are not geometrical in the specific sense of relating to an organisation of objects, people, buildings or other elements in a given circumscribed area. They cannot be mapped by

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<sup>7</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp.8–17.

Ordinance Survey. Bachelard describes ‘the obvious geometry’ of ‘[o]utside and inside’ which ‘blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains’ (p. 211). Geometrics is ill-equipped to handle such analyses because of its ‘sharpness’, (p. 211) because ‘in a reinforced geometrism [...] limits are barriers’ (p. 215). It disguises the fact that, as Bachelard argues, ‘there exists a play of values, which makes everything in the category of simple determinations fall into second place. The opposition of outside and inside ceases to have as coefficient its geometrical evidence’ (p. 230). Rejecting geometric thought opens the way for shimmering, perforated boundary zones, permeable webs within which subjectivity is at constant play.

What Bachelard teases out of twentieth-century poetry finds echoes in the assumptions of the medieval spatial imagination. Alain Gurreau suggests that unlike the strict ‘étendue et [les] limites’ that characterises later space, the medieval parish ‘était un élément de la structure ecclésiale, indissolublement matériel, rituel et social’.<sup>8</sup> ‘Dans l’Europe féodale’, he continues, ‘l’espace n’était pas conçu comme continu et homogène, mais comme *discontinue* et *hétérogène*, en ce sens qu’il était à chaque endroit *polarisé*’.<sup>9</sup> The symbolic or metaphorical weight of spatial distributions has not yet ceded the ground that it will in the coming centuries; medieval space is more fraught, tied to oppositional poles whose insistent struggle creates varying zones of intensity and importance. In the Parish, Gurreau adds, ‘l’opposition entre un intérieur valorisé, réglé et ordonné, perçu comme l’espace de déploiement d’une parenté spirituelle fondée sur la *caritas*, et un

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Gurreau, ‘Quelques Caractères Spécifiques de L’espace Féodal Européen’, in *L’État Ou Le Roi: Les Fondations de La Modernité Monarchique en France*, ed. Neithard Bulst, Robert Descimon, and Alain Gurreau (Paris: Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1996), pp.84–101 (p.91). Rather than the simple ‘area and its limits’ characteristic of later societies, the medieval parish ‘was an element of the ecclesiastical structure, indissolubly material, ritual, and social’.

<sup>9</sup> Gurreau, ‘Quelques Caractères’, p.87. ‘In feudal Europe, space was not conceived of as continuous and homogenous, but as *discontinuous* and *heterogeneous*, in the sense that it was at every juncture *polarised*’. Emphasis original.

extérieur indéterminé, hostile, auquel il valait mieux se frotter le moins possible'.<sup>10</sup> Between the poles of purity and filth, hope and despair, the entire vista of fallen human experience spreads itself out.

Numerous historical studies of medieval spatial culture confirm these theoretical suggestions. Medieval cartographical practice, for instance, is often typified by '[d]istortions [...] because the conceptual overrides the practical'.<sup>11</sup> Medieval *mappae mundi* like the famous Hereford map were designed, Naomi Kline argues, as 'conceptual enclosures for stored information', frameworks for interpretation rather than geometrical representations of space.<sup>12</sup> On a smaller scale, medieval urban space was 'shared and challenged by [...] corporate bodies' of various kinds.<sup>13</sup> The tensions over urban space to which medieval legal documents testify point to 'complex social relations' and 'the interpenetration of geographical space and legal dominion'.<sup>14</sup> These spaces that operate as sites of extreme tension within medieval communities whilst refusing to be assimilated to post-Cartesian geometrical notions. Domestic space too was a varied and complex zone, divided and refracted through numerous levels of social significance and legal-historical strata. Medieval homes 'were honeycombed with a multiplicity of private spaces' and overlapping jurisdictions, with properties often divided between various owners.<sup>15</sup> These spaces accumulated their own debts – 'perhaps to repay an obligation, raise capital, or endow a pious or charitable objective' – that were shouldered by property owners.<sup>16</sup> Thus the history of the medieval urban home is written into its bills, where

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<sup>10</sup> Guerreau 'Quelques Caractères', p.95: '... an opposition between a valorised, regulated and disciplined interior, understood as the field of deployment for a spiritual relationship founded on *caritas*, and an indeterminate, hostile exterior which it was best to avoid as much as possible'.

<sup>11</sup> Naomi Reed Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), pp.2–3.

<sup>12</sup> Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Lorraine Atterd, 'Urban Identity in Medieval English Towns', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34.2 (2002), 571–92 (p.572).

<sup>14</sup> Atterd, 'Urban Identity', p.591.

<sup>15</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'Space, Property, and Propriety in Urban England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34.4 (2002), 549–69 (p.549).

<sup>16</sup> Harding, 'Space', pp. 554–555.

memories and duties to the living and the dead could accumulate through the decades. Under such circumstances we should not be surprised to find that medieval writings far exceed the geographical limits of the spaces to which they respond.

Bachelard's account of topoanalysis is immensely useful. It stops short, however, of developing an analysis of power. *The Poetics of Space* is not interested in what accounts for variations in the subjectivities created by spaces, nor how these spaces themselves might play roles in larger narratives of subjection. Thus when Bachelard describes the house as 'body and soul', these highly charged terms remain hovering above the analytical material, unintegrated into the theory.<sup>17</sup> 'Body' and 'soul', however, respond well to theoretical integration. For Foucault, they are motifs around which disciplinary technologies accumulate; as *Discipline and Punish* notes, '[t]he soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body'.<sup>18</sup> Whenever we think of souls, whenever we think of intimacy, power is also at work: the very conditions of possibility for entertaining such concepts lie in a web of knowledge-apparatuses arranged in specific ways according to specific and contingent distributions of power. Whilst Foucault does not develop the spatial dynamics of his famous soul-prison argument, pairing him with Bachelard allows us to extend the analysis. If our experiences of space condition our innermost selves (our souls), then we must also treat space as a conduit of power, capable of programming the identities of those that experience and reflect on it.

This has not gone unnoticed by other readers. Sarah Beckwith has noted in an excellent essay that '[t]he play with borders and boundaries in the *Ancrene Wisse* [...]

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<sup>17</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.30.

establishes the psychic construction of a subject, its social formation, and it does through the regulatory practices that orient the subject in space and time'.<sup>19</sup> For Beckwith, the mechanics of the *Ancrene Wisse*'s ascetic programme produce 'the spectacle of [...] historically marked transience' in a human body fully contingent on the 'regulatory practices that orient the subject in space and time', marking the irony that rejection of the world is performed within and through the world.<sup>20</sup> What Beckwith's comments also suggest is that regulatory practices may themselves be presented *as* space. If the soul, the stable ontological centre of the self, actually exists as the *prison* of the body, then it exists *around* it, spreading horizontally and laterally as the background for subjection – or, in Beckwith's terms, a 'ritual social topography'.<sup>21</sup> The 'play with borders and boundaries' that Beckwith notes in the *Ancrene Wisse* can ultimately show us that the spaces and houses within which the pastoral-disciplinary project work are themselves dynamic parts of the larger apparatus. However, Beckwith's focus on the body, and the practices that structure it, marks a point of difference from this chapter. My analysis of the way that architectures and spatial zones might form large scale parallels to the dynamics identified by Beckwith with respect to the body will allow for an assessment of how power contours the topographies upon which these selves develop and are constituted.

A famous passage of *Discipline and Punish* demands our close attention in this regard. The analysis of the panopticon – Jeremy Bentham's surveillance system – lies at the centre of Foucault's argument here. Crucially, however, the panopticon remains the subject of inquiry as an *idea*; it is 'the architectural figure of this composition' of power, a 'generalisable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations', and 'a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form [...] a figure of political technology'.

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<sup>19</sup> Beckwith, 'Passionate Regulation', p.809. Beckwith also hints at potential applications of Foucault and Bachelard, amongst others, to the *Ancrene Wisse*.

<sup>20</sup> Beckwith, 'Passionate Regulation', pp.819, 809.

<sup>21</sup> Beckwith, 'Passionate Regulation', p.811.

The panopticon remains spectral or immanent in this whole process – it functions not so much in its physicality but in its pure potential; it is a map of an ideal, just like place of the cell in the *Ancrene Wisse*. It is a diagram or technique that ‘programmes’ a set of relations that together generate a disciplinary subjectivity. The panopticon is a kind of organisational metaphor or analogy for a whole apparatus of pastoral subjectivisation which is condensed into its operation.

Bentham imagined almost limitless applications for his model – prisons, schools, and hospitals. The fact that the panopticon remains ‘an elementary and easily transferable mechanism’, ‘a generalizable model of functioning’, means that it can in its immanence become the structural rule for ‘a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms’.<sup>22</sup> The panopticon’s power finally rests in its perfect generalisability, in the very fact that its planned deployment to all sectors of society does not conflict either with its stated aims nor with the systems by which it will achieve these aims. It encodes within an architectural formula the infinitely generalizable performances of power. Bentham imagined this architectural model dissolving into a thoroughly disciplined society in which its techniques would be constituted as part of the subject itself. The subject would carry the techniques that typify the panopticon within its own psychic structures, dissolving the disciplinary drive into the very conditions of the self. The same drive towards immanence, it will become clear, is true of the anchoritic cell.

The ideal cell of the *Ancrene Wisse* is a far cry from the panopticon’s large-scale social model. Where the latter disciplines crowds, the former places its subject in a position of concentrated isolation. Thus the anchorite’s cell always becomes a ‘wilderness’:

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.200–209.

‘Wildernesse’ is anlich lif of ancre wununge. For alswa as i wilderness beoð alle wilde beastes ant nulleð nawt þolien monne nahunge, ah fleoð hwen ha heom ihereð, alswa schulen ancres, ouer alle oþre wummen, beo wilde o þisse wise.<sup>23</sup>

The anchorite walks the path of the desert fathers. Her role is to turn away from the complex interactions of the mundane world and turn instead to the spiritual. The experiences of early eastern Christianity formed the basis of the successive monastic reformations that patterned the middle ages. These movements were regularly constituted by re-assertions of the eremitic ideal forged in the deserts of the Middle East and Northern Africa by men such as St. Anthony, John Cassian, and Evagrius of Pontus. As Jean Leclercq writes of later centuries, ‘at every period, the monks feel the attractions of the “light which comes from the East.”’<sup>24</sup> The *Ancrene Wisse* suggests that the anchorite should strenuously assert this genealogy in the face of detractors and confused visitors:

Ȝif ei unweote easked ow of hwet ordre ȝe beon [...] ondswerieð: of Sein Iames, þe wes Godes apostel ant for his muchele halinesse icleopet Godes broðer. Ȝef him þuncheð wunder ant sullich of swuch ondswere, easkið him hwet beo ordre, ant hwer he funde in Hali [W]rit religiun openluke[r] descriue[t] ant isutelet þen is i Sein Iames canonical epistel. He seið hwet is religiun, hwuch is riht ordre.<sup>25</sup>

The response here is incisive – it sidesteps a direct reference to an established ‘ordre’, instead querying the very terms of the question, asking instead ‘hewt beo ordre’ and where ‘in Hali Writ’ its justifications can better be found than in the Epistle of James. Finally, the response ends with a pun – it turns out that the best ‘order’ is in fact ‘riht ordre’, the disciplined and correct life, rather than any specific monastic code. Gesturing back at the founders of the monastic life, the text asks: ‘Pawel þe Earste Ancre, Antonie ant Arsenie, Makarie ant to oþre, neren ha religiuse ant of Sein Iames ordre?’ In harkening back to the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.4, p.74.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York and London: Fordham University Press, 1978), p.113.

<sup>25</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface, p.3.



lived experience of a disciplined life, the *Ancrene Wisse* demonstrates the kind of relationship to tradition that Leclercq describes as the fulcrum of the monastic path: ‘It is often affirmed that monasticism maintained tradition by copying, reading and explaining the works of the Fathers, and that is correct; but it did so also through *living* by what the books contained. This might be called an experiential mode of transmission’.<sup>26</sup> The contemplative life exists in an ‘experiential mode’, where ‘ordre’ and history lie not in external signals but in a disciplinary model of behaviour, organising and re-forming significances, ‘makeð efne ant smeðe cnoſt ant dolc of woh inwit’.<sup>27</sup>

The desert is an enduring element of this transformation; a site, in Bachelard’s terms, of intimate life.<sup>28</sup> Athanasius’ *Life* of St. Antony has his subject struggle time and time again to secure a truly solitary life – after attracting disciples to the deserted fortress in which he has sojourned, Antony speaks to God: ‘Since the crowds will not allow me to be alone, I want to go into the upper Thebiad because of the many annoyances of those who beset me here’.<sup>29</sup> Only amidst the harshness of the wilderness can the life of the spiritual athlete attain to the kind of *ordre* of which the *Ancrene Wisse* speaks. The *Life of Saint Anthony* describes the growth of these ascetic communities as an inversion of the fallen world they have left behind: ‘there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by the monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for the citizenship in the heavens’.<sup>30</sup> The impossibly inhospitable desert is transformed

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<sup>26</sup> Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p.135. Emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the Desert Fathers and early monasticism, see Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: an Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (London: Mowbrays, 1977) and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, discussed further below. On the relationship between hermeneutics and the desert, see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Athanasius, ‘The Life and Affairs of Our Holy Father Antony’, in *Athanasius: The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, ed. Robert C. Gregg (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), pp.29–99 (sec.14, pp.42–43).

<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, ‘Life and Affairs’, sec.14, p.42.

into ‘a city’ in which all labour is directed to God and the afterlife, with monks purposefully giving up links to ‘their own people’ to subscribe to the forthcoming ‘citizenship in the heavens’. Such a model makes the withdrawal of the self from its multifaceted and muddled environment a precondition for effective spiritual discipline. Once this has been accomplished, new forms of association can take place:

It was as if one truly looked on a land all its own – a land of devotion and righteousness. For neither perpetrator nor victim of injustice was there, nor complaint of a tax collector. And there was a multitude of ascetics, but among them all there was one mind, and it was set on virtue.<sup>31</sup>

Purged from the complexities and unequal relationships generated by ‘injustice’ and the distracting ‘complaint[s] of [the] tax collector’, these ascetics can purge themselves more effectively of sin. In this purged state, the self undergoes a further kind of withdrawal, a sort of retreat from subjectivity itself: the ‘multitude of ascetics’ had only ‘one mind, and it was set on virtue’. Subjectivity is filed into a single point, the desire for God; the singularity of the wasteland mirrors the singularity of ascetic labour. No doubt heaven seemed a step closer in the wilderness.

The life of St. Anthony suggests a model within which three different spaces exist in dynamic relation to each other: the world, the cell, and the desert. As part of the triumvirate of evils, the world sits next to the devil and the flesh as one of the prime causes of temptation. It represents the space tainted by the Original Sin and twisted from its original divine purpose. By contrast, the cell is the location of seclusion, purity, and hard spiritual work. Here the monk or recluse labours against their sinful body and the temptations of devil and world. For monks like Anthony, the desert acts as a sort of interface between cell and world. It is an endlessly threatening place, within which ‘a multitude of demons’ viciously assail holy men. It also, however, holds a specific

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<sup>31</sup> Athanasius, ‘Life and Affairs’, sec.44, p.64.

potential which, Athanasius tells us, the devil fears Anthony will unlock.<sup>32</sup> It can become a simple, black-and-white arena in which people of God can flex their spiritual muscles in constant war against the agents of the devil. It offers a peculiar sense of clarity. Peter Brown has noted that ascetic settlements in Egypt were usually no more than a day and a half away from Alexandria. Despite this, ‘the monks of Egypt towered in the imagination of contemporaries because they stood against an ocean of sand that was thought to stretch from Nitria to the furthest edges of the known world’.<sup>33</sup> The geographical, *geometrical* distance between secular life and the trials of the desert did not need to be substantial; the immense difference in priorities it represented generated ‘a sense of measureless imaginative distance’.<sup>34</sup> Above all, as Brown notes, the ‘myth of the desert’ was

a myth of liberating precision. It delimited the towering presence of ‘the world’, from which the Christian must be set free, by emphasising a clear ecological frontier. [...] The ‘world’, the ‘present age’ of previous Christian radicals had been almost too big to be seen. Its measureless demonic structures had engulfed the very stars. [...] Seen from the slight eminence of the desert of Egypt, however, the ‘world’ was no more and no less than the green valley below.<sup>35</sup>

It is the desert that gives monks like Anthony the tools with which to come to grips with the world. It teaches with ‘liberating precision’ and ferocious clarity that the world is an unforgivably dangerous place from which the ascetic self must turn. In this purificatory, reflexive turn the desert comes to stand for bounded spaces of isolation within which the self can be re-examined and re-made – to stand for, in short, both the cell and the ‘internal forum’ of the soul.<sup>36</sup> The wilderness is a space within which the indistinguishable threat

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<sup>32</sup> Athanasius, ‘Life and Affairs’, sec.8, p.37.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp.215–216.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.215.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.216.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Goering explores the developing images of two ‘*fora*’ in the twelfth century: the external forum of the ecclesiastical courts and the internal forum of conscience. Goering argues that canon law was understood to apply to both, meaning that even laity would be expected to have ‘at least a modicum of familiarity with the doctrines and practices of the Church’s canon law’. See Joseph Goering, ‘The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession’, *Traditio* 59 (2004), 175-227 (p.189).

of the world can be localised and set to one side as a quantified space so that the work of transforming temptation into salvation can begin in earnest.

The desert is able to fulfil this essential function because it is what *The Poetics of Space* calls a 'simplified cosmos'. The example Bachelard gives, of a snow-covered landscape, resonates in helpful ways with Brown's account of the Egyptian desert:

The dialectics of the house and the universe are too simple, and snow, especially, reduces the exterior world to nothing rather too easily. It gives a single colour to the entire universe which, with one word, snow, is both expressed and nullified for those who have found shelter. [...] Outside the occupied house, the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is a non-house in the same way that metaphysicians speak of a non-I, and between the house and the non-house it is easy to establish all sorts of contradictions. [...] As a result of this universal whiteness, we feel a form of cosmic negation in action.<sup>37</sup>

The desert would, no doubt, appear 'simple' to Bachelard. The desert sands are not that unlike snow, giving 'a single colour to the entire universe', simplifying the relationship between world and cell into a 'simplified cosmos' in which spiritual contraries are set in simple opposition. It gives the struggle of the desert monks a 'single colour[ed]', monochromatic world within which differences are clearly divided and kept apart. The desert is the non-world, the non-I, to which the Egyptian monks purposefully turn their backs in order to become one with God. It is the analytical basis for a contemplative life which seeks an escape from the ephemeral tactics, twists and turns of the world.

To the desert monk there is no symbolic difference between the cell and the desert. The association is complete and the desert's position as interface remains invisible. Isolation and its spiritual coefficients, however, remained central to every movement of monastic reform, despite vastly different circumstances; the desert remained a touchstone for *ordre* in a fallen world and a way of structuring the cell or monastic space as opposed

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<sup>37</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.40.

to the world at large. Marry Carruthers observes that the ‘the privilege afforded to “the desert” [... survived] long after it ceased to be plausible as an actual ecological zone’.<sup>38</sup> She argues that, ‘as a place separated from the world, one of solitude and silence, [...] this role is given in the twelfth century to the cell’.<sup>39</sup> According to this argument the desert becomes a sort of synecdoche for a life lived at a safe, critical distance from the world: ‘[s]olitude, silence, literary study, small room, bed, the middle of the night – there is the twelfth century “desert.”’<sup>40</sup> The clarity and ontological simplicity that the desert stands for are once again mapped onto the space of the cell; once again, the wilderness allows the secluded servants of God to draw a strict dividing line between the places they inhabit and the sinful, muddy outside.

In the *Ancrene Wisse*, too, the life of the soul demands a withdrawal from the world that is as much physical as spiritual:

Ant to þis wop, lokið nu, he bit anlich stude (*Quis michi dabit diuersorium uiatorum in solitudine, ut, et cetera*), þe hali prophete, forte schawi witerliche þet hwa-se wule biwepen hire ahne ant opres sunnen, as ancre ah to donne, ant hwa-se wule ifinden ed te nearewe Domesmon mearci ant are, a þing þet let him meast is beowiste (þet is, wununge) bimong men, ant þet swiðest furdreð hit, þet is anlich stude mon oþer wummon eiðer to beon ane.<sup>41</sup>

Brown has described Anthony’s primary struggle in early life as an attempt to ‘sever the umbilical cord that linked him to his village’.<sup>42</sup> The *Ancrene Wisse* drives in the same direction here – following the words of Jeremiah, the text asserts that the ‘þing þet let him

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Carruthers, “‘The Desert’”, Rhetorical Invention, and Prayer in the Augustinian Renewal of the Twelfth Century: The Case of Pierre de Celle’, in *The Early Christian Mystagogy of Prayer*, ed. Paul van Geest, Late Antique History and Religion (Leuven: Peeters, Forthcoming), p.2. On the continuing imaginative weight of the wilderness in medieval thought, see also the general account offered in Jacques Le Goff, ‘The Wilderness in the Medieval West’, in *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.47-59, and the discussion of religious mysticism in Bernard McGinn, ‘Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition’, *The Journal of Religion* 74:2 (1994), 155-181.

<sup>39</sup> Carruthers, “‘The Desert’”, p.5.

<sup>40</sup> Carruthers, “‘The Desert’”, p.6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.3, pp.60-61. The Latin reads: ‘Who will give me a shelter for travellers in the wilderness, so that, etc’. and is paraphrased from Jeremiah 9:2.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.214.

meast is beowiste (þet is, wununge) bimong men'. As it was a millennium before, the village itself comes to represent the world once set in opposition to the cell and the desert (and thus also the soul). Like the desert monk, the anchorite must seek to live a spiritual life removed from this obfuscating influence. The 'wilderness' of the fathers and of Jeremiah settles over the coordinates of the cell, investing it with the intellectual and mystical potential of true solitude.

A text so insistently involved in articulating itself as spatial and architectural has invited many observations on the relationship of life within the cell to an 'outside'. Mari Hughes-Edwards notes that early Middle English anchoritic materials including *Ancrene Wisse* admire enclosure 'as an end in itself' to an extent that later guides do not, adding that '[e]nclosed space functions [...] as a creative canvas open to metaphorical manipulation'.<sup>43</sup> In one of the few book-length studies of the text, Linda Georgianna explores the relationships the anchoritic self is asked to build with the external world, arguing it eschews strict regulation for a 'personal, self-conscious response to the gospel's message of love' and a flexible, individualised approach to the self.<sup>44</sup> Central to this demand is that the tomb-like environs of the cell be transformed into the conditions of the anchorite's salvation: the work is 'to transform what could be her doom into her joy'.<sup>45</sup> Approaching from a different angle, Christopher Cannon and Liz Herbert McAvoy read the *Ancrene Wisse* through the geo-political ramifications of enclosure in the Welsh marches, whose dialect it reflects.<sup>46</sup> Cannon's work places the *Ancrene Wisse* in the context of the embattled marches, arguing that much of its imagery – warfare, sieges, boiling water poured on assailants – derives from daily life along the border. McAvoy builds upon Cannon's work by developing a gendered analysis of enclosure and

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<sup>43</sup> Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*.

<sup>44</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p.23.

<sup>45</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p.78.

<sup>46</sup> See Christopher Cannon, 'The Place of the Self', pp.139-171 and McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*.

‘grounding’ in the thirteenth-century marches, suggesting that the limits of the anchorhold reflect an ideological programme of rigid national, cultural, and gendered assertiveness against Welsh heathenism. Both Cannon and McAvoy develop the idea of enclosure through the term ‘grounding’ – a helpful conceptual shift that allows for a more expansive and variegated approach to space. These two scholars dwell at length on the parallels between the self (variously imagined as national, gendered, besieged) and its physical grounding (the anchorhold, the Welsh marches); especially productively, McAvoy reads the land and the body alongside one another, arguing that both are ‘always already inscribed and encoded, able to be read in multiple ways for a myriad of cultural and ideological purposes’.<sup>47</sup>

Despite all their differences, these approaches all have in common a stress on the flexible and powerful associations that *Ancrene Wisse* produces between the self and the world around it. My work diverges from these arguments by examining the historical and technical developments of space understood as a disciplinary category, one that will eventually break down the anchorhold itself. This is why the desert features heavily in my analysis – and why I treat ‘desert’ and ‘wilderness’ as conceptual parallels rather than as a pair of ecological realities, where the temperate forests and fields of the Europe replace the desert of early monasticism. I take the idea of the desert as both emblematic of the category of space and as structuring the particular space of the anchorhold. For both Georgianna (for whom the desert is ‘imaginary’ and ‘larger-than-life’)<sup>48</sup> and McAvoy (for whom the anchoritic wilderness is ‘not the ascetic desert of the first, coenobitic anchorites’)<sup>49</sup> the desert is a superseded reality and an exhausted motif whose only analytical relevance lies in its difference from the realities faced by medieval English

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<sup>47</sup> McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, p.154.

<sup>48</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p.65.

<sup>49</sup> McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, p.103.

anchorites. My emphasis on the anchoritic ‘wilderness’ as a still valent contingent *form* of the desert allows me to develop the analysis further, by instantiating it within a historical genealogy of pastoral power in which it continues to have a structuring significance.

In Part Four of the *Ancrene Wisse*, the notion of a spiritual and practical ‘wilderness’ is clearly and explicitly formulated. Here the abstracted desert works to draw lines of association between spiritual disciplines divided by almost a millennium: encoded in the ‘wununge’ of the anchorite, the wilderness signifies the specialism and difference of both the desert fathers and the anchorite herself.

‘Wilderness’ is anlich lif of ancre wununge. For alswa as i wilderness beoð alle wilde beastes ant nulleð nawt þolien monne nahunge, ah fleoð hwen ha heom ihereð, alswa schulen ancras, ouer alle oþre wummen, beo wolde o þisse wise, ant þenne beoð ha ouer oþre leoue to ure Lauerd, ant sweetest him þuncheð ham – for of all flesches is wilde deores flesch leouest ant swetest.<sup>50</sup>

Again, the cell has been marked by the sparse strength of the desert image. This time, however, it stresses the combative edge of the anchorite’s calling. Leaving behind the comforts of the domesticated, spiritually slothful life, the anchorites are like ‘wilde beastes’ who, forced to rely on survival instincts and their own wits, ‘nulleð nawt þolien monne nahunge, ah fleoð hwen ha heom ihereð’. I would like to suggest that the desert’s afterlife in the cell consists in more than its potential as a synecdoche for meditative solitude, as Carruthers suggests. Instead, as the *Ancrene Wisse* points out, it continues to foreground the anchorite’s own position and role within the struggle for salvation. Its relocation within the cell places her in the same position as the Israelites who, having escaped Egypt with God’s aid, are made to feel ‘wah inoh – hunger, þurst, ant muche swinc, ant weorren muchele ant monie’. Finally, of course, the trials of the Israelites will

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<sup>50</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.4, p.74.



come to an end: ‘On ende he ȝef ham reste, ant alle weole ant wunne, al hare heorte wil, ant flesches eise ant este, *terram fluentem lacte et melle*’.<sup>51</sup> Like the wanderers of Exodus, the anchorite’s wilderness conditions her relationship to God and the work still before her. Her allotted task is one of active spiritual athleticism and constant watchfulness, and the wilderness of the cell will act as a suitable spiritual gymnasium – or panopticon. As well as representing an escape from civilisation, then, the ‘wildernesse’ of the *Ancrene Wisse* paints the cell or ‘wununge’ itself as part of a ‘simplified cosmos’ of endless struggle and spiritual refinement. Thus it would seem that *Ancrene Wisse* offers us a straightforward conclusion. It has brought the desert with it, mapped its coordinates and its trials onto the lives of the anchorites in order to integrate the disciplinary form of the desert monk into their thirteenth-century existences.

Delving a little deeper into the trials which might await an anchorite, however, allows us to fragment this coherent, simplified geography into something more complex. In Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*, a twelfth-century text of advice directed to the author’s sister and one of *Ancrene Wisse*’s sources, the author asserts the kind of genealogy with which we are now familiar: ‘[t]he monks of old [...] chose to live as solitaires for several reasons: to avoid ruin, to escape injury, to enjoy greater freedom in expressing their ardent longing for Christ’s embrace’. Then, however, the text makes an interesting move – it refracts the ‘light that shines from the east’ into two distinct shades. Thus we learn that ‘[s]ome lived alone in the desert’, whilst others, ‘whose confidence was undermined by the very freedom inherent in the solitary life and the opportunity it affords for aimless wandering [...] were] completely enclosed in a cell with the entrance walled up’.<sup>52</sup> Aelred is complicating a story which should not require it. The

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<sup>51</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.4, p.84. The Latin reads: ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’.

<sup>52</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, ‘A Rule of Life for a Recluse’, in *Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, trans. Mary Paul MacPherson, Cistercian Fathers Series, 2 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982), pp.45–102 (pt.1, sec.1, p.45).

ontologically simple desert does not provide opportunities for ‘aimless wandering’ because it constitutes a great trial by fire. Wandering in the desert is never aimless; it is always a trial, part of a process of spiritual refinement. The fact that Aelred can describe the cell as a *supplement* to the desert suggests that, by the time his sister found herself enclosed in an anchoritic cell, the desert’s simplicity was somehow lacking in disciplinary efficacy.<sup>53</sup> Much of this is no doubt due to the straightforward geographic *absence* of the physical desert; to Aelred and his contemporaries, separated by many thousands of miles from the Eastern wilderness, ‘the desert-goal [...] is ideal but self-consciously imaginary’.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as Aelred extrapolates from the Egyptian desert to a critique of his enclosed contemporaries, the desert disappears entirely:

They think it enough to confine the body behind walls; while the mind roams at random, grows dissolute and distracted by cares, disquieted by impure desires. The tongue too runs about all day through towns and villages, market-place and square, prying into other people’s lives and behaviour.<sup>55</sup>

A very different outside world has invaded the imaginative fabric of the anchorite’s cell. It, like the distracted anchorite herself, is ‘dissolute’ compared to the ontological simplicity of the wilderness. Here different coordinates jostle for her attention – ‘towns’, ‘villages’, markets, and squares all provide points along a confused route. The source of the anchorite’s distraction is precisely the possibilities generated by ‘other people’s lives and behaviour’, whose mysteries and secrets lure her attention away from proper religious observation.

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<sup>53</sup> Jacques Derrida has outlined this function of the supplement: ‘[a]s substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy’. Aelred’s own additions to the traditional references to the desert fathers imply the fundamental instability of the desert ideal, whose relative lack of ‘fullness’ as a disciplinary environment in the twelfth century is made clear by the supplementary gesture of enclosure. See *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p.145.

<sup>54</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p.53.

<sup>55</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, ‘A Rule of Life for a Recluse’, pt.1, sec.2, p.46.

Writing in the twelfth century, Aelred's thoughts were formed by the specific developments of medieval monasticism. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the founding of a number of new orders, many of whom criticised, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, perceived defects, including laxness, worldliness and expansionism, in the Benedictines.<sup>56</sup> Many of the reformers drew distinctions between the size and economic power of the eleventh-century orders and the situations characteristic of the early monks of the fourth and fifth centuries – Giles Constable suggests that '[t]he *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius, together with the works of Cassian and the *Lives of the Fathers*, were second only to the bible and the rule of Benedict in their influence on monasticism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries'.<sup>57</sup> Many of the new orders, such as the Cistercians, carried the desert ideal of Anthony and Cassian with them, setting out to found houses in a wilderness and solitude. Moreover, Ineke van't Spijker's *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self* stresses that new Benedictine thinkers also reasserted the values of the solitary life and eremitic ideal. The reformist Peter Damian's 'portrait of the hermit's cell', for instance, 'encapsulates traditions of eremitism and a new emphasis on inwardness' through the associative links it produces between the subject and the cell.<sup>58</sup> Despite this drive, there are few records of Cistercians displacing laypeople in order to generate artificial wilderness;<sup>59</sup> the new institutions, much like those of their spiritual ancestors, 'were usually much closer than the sources suggest to settled areas'.<sup>60</sup> A continuous tension, then, between the conceptual potential of the wilderness

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<sup>56</sup> Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.28 and John F. Benton, 'Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol Dana Lanham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 263-295. For a study of solitary religiosity in the period, see Henriette Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150* (London: MacMillan Press, 1984).

<sup>57</sup> Constable, *Reformation*, p.161.

<sup>58</sup> Ineke van't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), p.49.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Fergusson, *Architecture of Solitude: Cistercian Abbeys in Twelfth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.9.

<sup>60</sup> Constable, *Reformation*, p.120.

and the reality of institutions increasingly embedded in the wider world on which they relied, formed an essential part of eleventh and twelfth century monastic thinking.<sup>61</sup> There is more than just a poetic irony to the fact that, by the end of the twelfth century, many of the new foundations had come to accept income and economic support in a similar manner their predecessors.<sup>62</sup> It suggests that these monks too finally discovered that, in the world of institutionalised Christianity that had developed by the Middle Ages, the topos of wilderness could no longer keep the world at large from creeping in. This does not mean that the metaphor of wilderness was ever abandoned by medieval monasticism – far from it – but rather that embedded within its uneasy relationship to a material reality was a core point of contention for Christianity, a version of what Jessica Brantley calls ‘the paradox of eremitic community’: the relationship of the individual to society and the world at large.<sup>63</sup>

The same was true of the anchorhold. Indeed, according to the *Ancrene Wisse*, anchorites’ reputation for gossip goes so far ‘þet me seið I bisahe, “From mulne ant from chepinge, from smiððe ant from ancre-hus me tiding bringeð.” Wat Crist, þis is a sari sahe, þet ancre-hus, þet schulde beon alukest stude of alle, schal beon ifeiet to þe ilke preo studen þet meast is in of chaffe’.<sup>64</sup> Far from emulating the blasted desert monasteries of

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<sup>61</sup> At the same time, however, the medieval church moved to consolidate its power and extend its influence further into traditionally lay spheres to create ‘the Gregorian “mountain” intended to fill the universe’. See Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000-1150)*, trans. Graham Robert Edwards (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.261. For discussions of the Gregorian Reform, see also Suzanne Verderber, *The Medieval Fold: Power, Repression, and the Emergence of the Individual* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), esp. pp.25-60.

<sup>62</sup> Constable, *Reformation*, p.226.

<sup>63</sup> Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.110. For a discussion of the re-articulation of solitude as an *internal* and *imaginative* practice, see Giles Constable, ‘The Idea of Inner Solitude in the Twelfth Century’, in *Horizons marins, itinéraires spirituels (V<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. Henri Dubois, Jean-Claude Hocquet, André Vauchez, 2 vols (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1987), vol. 1, pp.27-34. For an account of the specific tensions and problems encountered by English Carthusians in their balance of isolation and pastoral practicalities, see Vincent Gillespie, ‘*Cura Pastoralis in Deserto*’, in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), pp.161-182.

<sup>64</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.2, p.36.

the superhuman desert monks, the anchorhold is potentially imbricated in a web of rumour and a logic of transmission that binds it geographically to the network of the ‘mulne’, the ‘chepinge’, and the ‘smiððe’. What such warnings suggest is that to texts like the *Ancrene Wisse* the wilderness was not the watertight disciplinary motif that it may once have been – thirteenth-century medieval life kept breaking through. The wilderness which these texts work hard to impress upon their readers is under constant threat of fragmentation and collapse.

The reality of the anchorite’s existence, lived without many of the institutional safeguards and supports of traditional enclosed orders, further limits the functional relevance of the wilderness to the disciplinary situation of the *Ancrene Wisse*. Here again the text clearly departs from the example of St. Anthony who, whilst living alone in the centre of the mountain, took to growing his own grain and making his bread rather than receiving supplies from passing Saracens and monks.<sup>65</sup> Anthony’s *vita* describes these continuous acts of self-isolation as the saint pushes himself further and further from distraction. Unlike *Life* the *Ancrene Wisse*’s nature as a handbook means it is unable to disguise the realities and difficulties involved in the secluded life. These generic differences – Elizabeth Robertson has described it as functionally similar to a cookbook – mean that the *Ancrene Wisse* incorporates practical advice and a methodology of day-to-day spirituality into its fabric.<sup>66</sup> As a result it is forced to confront situations that are far more complex than Anthony’s one-man bakery. Thus anchorites are warned against keeping cattle, ‘for þenne mot ha þenchen of þe kues fodder, of heorde-monne hure, olhin þe heiward, wearien hwen he punt hire, ant ȝelden þah þe hearmes. [...] [3]ef eani mot nedlunge habben hit, loki þet hit na mon ne eili ne ne hearmi, ne þet hire þoht ne beo

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<sup>65</sup> Athanasius, ‘Life and Affairs’, sec.50, p.59.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, ‘Savouring “Scientia”: The Medieval anchoress Reads *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, pp.113–44 (p.114).

nawiht þron ifestnet'.<sup>67</sup> The rather humorous histories that no doubt underpin such suggestions again function as a reminder that the world outside the anchorhold simply refuses to be reduced to a simplified ontological structure. Instead characters – a costly 'heorde-mon' and a meddling 'heiward' – and the 'hearmes' of legal responsibility in a secular society appear insistently. Part Eight of the *Ancrene Wisse* goes on to warn against storing 'oðer monne þinges' in the anchorhold, again reflecting the kinds of complexity that disciplinary geography might rather forget: 'ne ahte ne claðes, ne boistes ne chartres, scoren ne cyrograffes, ne þe church-uestemenz ne þe calices'.<sup>68</sup> As Linda Georgianna writes in her book *The Solitary Self*, 'the anchoress' battle is waged, not on the imaginary, larger-than-life field of the desert, but on the minute level of the everyday'.<sup>69</sup> Whilst this statement illustrates the analytical priorities of her book, which aims to stress the multiplicity and flexibility of anchoritic experience, the opposition of the 'larger-than-life field of the desert' to 'the minute level of the everyday', this appears to be premised on the assumption that the desert is 'imaginary', a projection, whereas the 'everyday' is somehow 'real', immediately and uncomplicatedly accessible. If we approach an account of *Ancrene Wisse*'s environmental imaginary through the model of phenomenology or Bachelard's 'topoanalysis', we can avoid such distinctions.<sup>70</sup> Instead the desert can become a method of negotiating between self and the cell, creating and maintaining a historically- and conceptually-variable architectural-disciplinary structure. The desert remains for the anchorite, therefore, a compelling element of the pastoral texture. Similarly, the cell cannot usefully be described as any less 'imaginary', charged as it is with a whole different set of disciplinary relations between self and environment. What we have here should rather be understood as an ontological shift between two types of space – from the ontological simplicity of the desert to the complexities and shifting

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<sup>67</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.8, p.158.

<sup>68</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.8, p.158.

<sup>69</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*, p.65.

<sup>70</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.8.

terrain of the thirteenth century English countryside. Such a shift points towards the changing realities of religious existence in the Middle Ages and paves the way for the elaboration and re-articulation of pastoral power away from its roots in early monastic eremitism and into new fields and directions that may nevertheless still be understood through the lens of that eremiticism and its spiritual desert. It also produces an emphatic and immediate demand to reshape the boundaries and distinctions – between self and other, inner and outer – that pattern the depth model the *Ancrene Wisse* has inherited from early monastic spirituality. Without a readily available ecological and imaginative zone of difference, the work of the self must be re-articulated.

*Sawles Warde*, one of the *Ancrene Wisse*'s companion texts, illustrates the loss of the literal desert. The expanse that exists outside of the cabin in *Sawles Warde* is simply an absence against which to organise the 'hus' of 'seolf þe mon', itself a constellation of household tropes at the centre of which sits 'monnes wit' as the lord of the home and 'te fulitohe wif [...] Wil' (p. 247). It is a version of the figure of the hut, described by Bachelard as 'the tap-root of the function of inhabiting'. 'It is the simplest of human plants', he writes, 'the one that needs no ramifications in order to exist [...] When we are lost in darkness and see a distant glimmer of light, who does not dream of a thatched cottage or, to go more deeply still into legend, of a hermit's hut?'<sup>71</sup> The space around the hut of the 'seolf' represents the archetypal night; it remains opaque, black as ink, and nearly undescribed. Outside the house of the self, everything is indeterminate and potentially lethal: the thieves seek the 'tresor þet Godd bohte mid his deað ant lette lif o rode', the soul of humankind (p. 248). This is not the night of the desert, which brings with it a specific kind of clarity. Rather, it is the night of the world, an indeterminate shroud under which murderers lie in wait for the human soul. This is a soul which is more

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<sup>71</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.31.

embattled by its surroundings than liberated by them; the outside world looms as pure existential threat, something to exist despite of. Indeed, when a figure does appear ‘of feorren icumen’, it constitutes a terrifying vision of punishment ‘forte offearen þeo þe beoð ouerhardi’ (p. 249). This is, of course, ‘Fearlac’, who offers the terrified virtues a description of hell, ‘wiðute met ant deop wiðute grunde; ful of brune uneuenlich, for ne mei nan eorðlich fur euenin þertowart’ (p. 250). The outside’s entry through Fearlac into the ‘hus’ results, at the very least, in dire reminders of the punishments meted out to the unworthy and lax, and at worst in the theft of ‘monnes sawle’.<sup>72</sup> It is a zone of danger and fear, less of a spatial reality than the archetypal fallen space.

In contrast, the *Ancrene Wisse*’s allegorical treatment of temptations, which are separated into animal groups and described in terms of family trees, maps a determinate and specific wilderness through which the path to Jerusalem lies; ‘[g]að þah ful warliche’, the text warns, ‘for I þis wildernesse beoð uuele beastes monie’.<sup>73</sup> Both of these texts condition watchfulness around the cell, but with a key difference: the desert is absent from *Sawles Warde*. In the *Ancrene Wisse* the temptations of the ‘wildernesse’ exist within as well as without, and occupy the cell as much as they do the outside. The desert remains operative, structuring cell and soul. *Sawles Warde*, on the other hand, refuses to use the wilderness to interface between the world and the cell. Instead, the outside becomes pure world: an indeterminate, obfuscating, dark place.

By the end of *Sawles Warde*, however, the world is given a brief reprieve. A second visitor arrives from the gloom and danger of the outside, but this time he does so in order to ‘gleadien’ the daughters of God, who have been rendered ‘offruhte ant sumdel

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<sup>72</sup> *Sawles Warde*, pp.247–250.

<sup>73</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.4, p.74.



drupnin' by Fearlac's vision of hell (p. 255). This visitor is 'Murðes sone, ant mungegunge of eche lif, ant [called] Liues Luue' (p. 255). Whilst the story that Liues Luue tells the assembled household is of heaven rather than earth, the blessed visions it constitutes remind that actions on earth provide rewards in the afterlife. Thus we are reminded that Christ 'bohte us o rode' and now continuously shows the 'studen of his wunden' to the Father as proof of his love (p. 256). Similarly, 'te patriarches ant to prophetes' now find themselves in 'þet ilke lont of blisse þet ha hefden of feor igret ear on eorðe, ant seoð nu al þet isoðet þet ha hefden longe ear icwiddet of ure Lauerd, as he hefde ischawed hom I gastelich sihðe', and the martyrs whose 'pinen ant deoð for ure Lauerd' are transformed into 'murhðe' (p. 256). Thus the blessed in heaven are recalled in histories that appear continuous with this life rather than separated from it.<sup>74</sup> *Sawles Warde* suggests that the world can prove capable of providing an antidote to the fear and horror it threatens without the intervention of the desert. Bereft of a wilderness within which to struggle, the self of *Sawles Warde* finally cannot afford to completely seal itself off from the outside world, from which dreadful and hopeful reminders issue regularly. Instead the self must be properly conditioned and function without fault so that it may *engage* with the threatening reality of the outside. The apparent simplicity of *Sawles Warde* in fact points the path to a disciplinary method without the desert.

As it shifts symbolic weight from the desert *qua* ecological zone to the desert *qua* imaginative disciplinary structure, the *Ancrene Wisse* works to create distinctions between different forms of the spiritual life. 'Þreo manere men of Godes icorene liuieð on eorðe', it states at the opening of its chapter on penance. These three groups are 'to gode pilegrimes iuenet, þe opre to deade, þe þridde to ihongede wið hare god wil o Ieusus rode'. The self that travels the world, beset and resisting the trifold evils of the flesh,

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<sup>74</sup> *Sawles Warde*, pp.255–257.

world and spirit to the best of its ability, is compared to the pilgrim. No matter how hard it tries, it remains embedded in a world which threatens to destroy or waylay it at any point, so that ‘sum kimeð leate ham, sum neauer mare’. It remains in contact with the evils of the world, travelling through a space filled with ‘idele gomenes ant wundres bi þe weie’ towards the distant heavenly city.<sup>75</sup> This is a self conditioned by the unavoidable fact of temptation, for whom disciplinary labour exists in accurately diagnosing and correctly responding to challenges set along the way to salvation. The second order is composed of those who are dead to the world, who are immune to the itches of a world to which they are dead: ‘For pilgrim eileð monihwet; þe deade nis noht of þah he ligge unburiæt ant rotie buuen eorðe’. This stage typifies what we might call the desert ethos, a state in which the turn from the world is so complete that the subject’s eyes can be turned entirely to God: ‘þus riht is euch religious dead to þe worlde, ant cwic þah to Criste’. Cocooned in the earth, the self has passed the absolute limits of living experience and is rendered safe from the world. The anchorite can certainly claim to occupy the space of death, which is simultaneously the desert and the tomb: she is advised to ‘schrapien euche dai þe eorðe up of hare put þet ha schulen rotien in’ as a *memento mori*.

‘Þis’, the *Ancrene Wisse* adds, ‘is an heh steire; a 3et is þah an here’. Paraphrasing Bernard, the text continues, describing the ‘ancre staire’ in the affirmative declaration that ‘i na þing ne blissi Ich me bute i Godes rode, þet Ich þolie nu wa ant am itald unwurð, as Godd wes o rode’. This final step in the disciplinary ladder constitutes a shift in focus. There is no literal desert here, no pure negation of the world in favour of the life of the mind that exists in and with Christ. Instead, associations and disciplinary implications begin to accumulate around the concept of ‘þolie[n]’, of an active and empathic

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<sup>75</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.6, p.132.

experiential mode. This becomes clear once the *Ancrene Wisse* turns to summarise the three steps of the religious life:

Ʒe pilegrim i Ʒe wor[l]des wei, Ʒah he ga forðward toward te ham of souene,  
he sið and hereð unnet, ant spekeð umbe hwile; wreaðeð him for wohes, ant  
moni Ʒeing me letten him of his iurnee. Ʒe deade nis na mare of scheome Ʒen  
of menske, of heard Ʒen of nesche, for he feleð nowðer; ant for-Ʒi ne ofearneð  
he nowðer wa ne wunne. Ah Ʒe Ʒe is o rode ant haueð blisse Ʒrof, he wendeð  
scheome to menske ant wa into wunne, ant ofearneð for-Ʒi hure ouer hure.<sup>76</sup>

The limitations of the pilgrim lie in his inability to truly resist and remain untouched by the world around him – corruption is everywhere, unavoidable and unending. By contrast, the limitations of the dead lie precisely in their inert nature, unable to feel ‘wa ne wunne’. The anchorite, ‘ihongede wið hare god’, approaches on a different axis. The world around the anchorite is not a space of pure negation – instead, it becomes infused with disciplinary potential through the suffering of God. Through Christ, ‘schome’ and ‘wa’ can be transformed into ‘menske’ and ‘wunne’ in a process of recalibration and pastoral-imaginative labour. Crucially, Millett notes that the *Ancrene Wisse*’s source material (Bernard’s *Sermones in Quadragesima*) stresses the mystical elements of this affective gesture. In contrast, the *Ancrene Wisse*’s free translation introduces a meditation on the nature and methods of penance, setting a tone that is pastoral rather than affective: ‘Al is penitence, ant strong penitence, Ʒet Ʒe eauer dreheð, mine leoue sustren. Al Ʒet Ʒe eauer doð of god, al Ʒet Ʒe Ʒolieð, is ow martirdom I se derf ordre, for Ʒe beoð niht and dei upo Godes rode’. The entire world, everything in it, is ‘martirdom’, the penitential process by which the sinful self can cleanse itself for Christ’s embrace. Such an assertion allows the *Ancrene Wisse* to redeploy from the wilderness into the wider world, to elaborate the desert ethos into an immanent disciplinary demand for constant heartfelt struggle. Dissociating from the world, turning from the village and the smithy and the market, is

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<sup>76</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.6, p.134.

not enough. Instead these places become opportunities for creative engagements with, and reconfigurations of, the relationship between the subject and her environment.<sup>77</sup>

This essential distinction clears a space within which the *Ancrene Wisse* can once again assert its callings as a specifically devotional and pastoral handbook. It also puts a spin on the association of Christ and anchorite. Meditations on Christ's suffering transform his body and his suffering into an object of scrutiny and intense affective emotion. Suffering alongside Christ, however, involves the subject of the penitent far more insistently – our starting point becomes the experience of the subject herself rather than the object of Christ. It foregrounds feeling, life, and the vigorous struggle that transforms the hateful world into the promise of salvation. Here crucifixion is not about death, but rather about the expanse of existence as a lived and living terrain. Thus the *Ancrene Wisse* pauses over and elaborates on exactly those elements of the Passion which stress the liveliness of the son of God. He is *supervivacious*:

A lutel hurt i þe ehe derueð mare þen deð a muchel i þe hele, for þe flesch is deaddre. Euch monnes flesch is dead flesch aȝein þet wes Godes flesch, as þet te wes inumen of þe tendre meiden, ant na þing neuer nes þin þet hit adeadede, ah euer wes iliche cwic of þet cwike Godhead þe wunede þrinne. For-þi in his flesch wes þe pine sarre þen eauer eani mon in his flesch poledre.<sup>78</sup>

This drive towards life and feeling is encapsulated in the term 'cwike', piling up in abundance around Christ ('cwic of þet cwike Godhead'), whose uses vary from 'living, live, animate' to 'vigorous, active, eager, willing [...] earnest, urgent, fervent of faith'.<sup>79</sup> To be alive is to be capable of a fervour, a force of feeling that is not available to those that conceive of the religious life merely as a form of spiritual burial. Following the

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<sup>77</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.6, p.132. On the roles of temptation and tribulation in medieval spiritual lives, see Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially Chapter One.

<sup>78</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.2, p.45.

<sup>79</sup> *MED*, 'Quik' (adj.), senses 1a and 2.

example of the crucified Christ, then, the anchorite's task is to become *as alive as possible*. Surpassing the limits of the sinful body is no longer neatly summarised in the struggle against gluttony, as it was for the early desert monks<sup>80</sup> – the *Ancrene Wisse* adds to 'negative' demands (fasting, avoiding contact, etc.) the 'positive' charge to live a life that is attuned to the possibilities inherent in the world. The most 'mystical' moments of the *Ancrene Wisse* should be seen in this light – at the elevation of the host, the anchorite is urged to declare

*[s]et quis est locus in me quo ueniat in me Deus meus, quo Deus ueniat aut maneat in me, Deus qui fecit celum et terram? [...] Quis michi dabit ut uenias in cor meum et inebries illud, et unum bonum meum amplectar, te? [...] Angusta est tibi domus anime mee, quo uenias ad eam; dilatetur abs te. Ruinosa est; refice eam.*<sup>81</sup>

Whilst this passage does share a hint of the rapturous somaticism of that characterises the literature of the twelfth-century reform movement, its relative sparseness allows the fundamentally disciplinary drive at work to become obvious. The anchorite's demands – for God to transform the '*locus*' of the self into a fitting home for Him who '*fecit celum et terram*' – resolve into a request for the grace to live a holy life, to claim a kind of divine panopticism for the self. The sinful soul is '*angusta*', a cramped and limited zone within which the spiritual life cannot develop. Only with God's help can the *locus* of the self undergo the reformation it must in order to reach salvation: '*ruinosa est; refice eam*'.

The type of work that grace enables the anchorite to perform is figured time and time again as a transformation of this *locus* within which she experiences life. Part Seven begins with the declaration, attributed to Saint Paul, 'þet alle utter heardschipes, alle

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.224.

<sup>81</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.1, p.13. 'But what place [*locus*] is there in me where my God can enter, where God may enter and remain in me, God who made heaven and earth? [...] Who will grant it to me that you may enter into my heart and intoxicate it, and that I may embrace you, my only good? [...] The house of my soul is narrow for you to enter; may it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins; rebuild it'. Translations of Latin quotes from the *Ancrene Wisse* are from Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses. A translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), p.13.

flesches pinsunges ant licomliche swinkes, al is ase nawt azeins luue, þe schireð ant brihteð þe heorte'. This marks the subject and thrust of the chapter, which will function as a kind of central cell for the entire text: 'Þis luue is þe riwle þe riwleð þe heorte. [...] Þis is þe leafdi riwle. Alle þe oþre seruið hire, ant ane for hire sake me [ah] ham to luuien'. The 'leafdi riwle' naturally trends towards centrality, towards images of a focal point of the household around which servants are organised. It also evokes a very specific and famous medieval analogy – that of the body (external, secondary) as the handmaid to the soul (internal, primary).<sup>82</sup> Within a few paragraphs, a new version of the labour of the self-in-the-world, engaged by living necessity in its *locus*, reasserts itself. Part Seven demands that the anchorites engage in an ongoing search for the two pieces of kindling (signifying the vertical and horizontal elements of the cross) which will kindle their love of God. Should God 'ifint [them] þeose twa treon bisliche gederein, he wule gestnin wið ow, ant monifalden in ow his deorewurðe grace'. Love of God is an active search which takes the anchorite into the world to pick through the undergrowth to find fuel for her passion. This process unhesitatingly brings the handmaiden-body back into focus, brings the mundane existence of the fallen human into relation with the most divine of labour. God will reward with threefold grace not those found wrestling demons in the stark desert, but those gathering kindling on their knees in the forests of the cell – and soul. The *Ancrene Wisse* pushes further, demanding the anchorite kindle 'Grickish fur', which 'ne mei na þing bute migge ant sond ant eisil, as me seið, acwenchen'. The anchorites are urged to become holy alchemists, to 'makien' this Greek Fire out of the blood of Jesus Christ. Even in this fantastical scenario, the active work of the anchorite is that of an experimental labour which, under the right conditions, can manufacture love of God out of diverse gathered materials. The anchorite's ardent prayers to Christ allow her *locus* to

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<sup>82</sup> For examples of this analogy see 'Dialogus Inter Corpus et Animam', in *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: J. B. Nichols and son, 1841), pp.99, 336.

become the zone this work requires. The wilderness has been transformed into a complex symbolic field, in which both the anchorite's 'treon' and 'blode' (for the fire of love) and the 'migge ant sond ant eisil' (the only materials that can quench it) can be found. It is to this multifaceted, uncertain world – ontologically so very different from the desert, but yet still linked to it – that the *Ancrene Wisse* introduces its charges.<sup>83</sup>

The anchorite's *locus*, then, is a profoundly varied space within which good and evil can be discovered in equal measure. It is also a place in which the anchorite herself can transform, can be turned from the path of God into something else entirely. Anger, the *Ancrene Wisse* tells us,

*Maga quedam est, transformans naturam humanam.* Wreaððe is a forschuppilt, as me teleð i spellles, for ha reaued mon his wit ant changed al his chere, ant forschuppeð him from mon into beastes cunde. Wummon wrað is wuluene; mon, wulf oðer liun oðer unicorne. Hwil þet eauer wreaððe is I wummone heorte, versaili, segge hire Vres, Auez, Pater Nostres, ne deð ha bute peoted.<sup>84</sup>

The idea that sin transforms humans from reasoning persons to unthinking animals is well-attested in the middle ages,<sup>85</sup> but here the *Ancrene Wisse* dwells on the idea of the 'forschuppilt' itself, drawing from contemporary tales of werewolves to develop a structural principle. Anger is a 'forschuppilt' – or, maybe, the anchorite is a 'forschuppilt'. Under the effects of wrath she certainly appears to become one, contorted and twisted out of shape, unable to wrap her fangs around the sanctified syllables of her Hours, which issue from her as frustrated howls. Over the next few lines the struggling anchorite slips from one form of sinful animal to another as she fails to control her rage: 'Ȝef þu berkest

<sup>83</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.7, pp.144, 154, 151.

<sup>84</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.3, pp.48-9. The Latin reads: 'It is a kind of witch, transforming human nature'.

<sup>85</sup> For examples of the bestialising effects of sin, see *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1983), p.91 and *Jacob's Well, An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS OS, 115 (London: Oxford University Press 1900), p.262.

aȝein, þu art hundes cunnes; ȝef þu stingiest aȝein, þu art neddre cundel'. Similarly, an earlier passage of the *Ancrene Wisse* describes the anchorite as 'henne kunde'.<sup>86</sup> These kaleidoscopic transformations stress not only the debilitating effects of sin but the sheer plasticity of the self, which can fall from human to dog to snake in the blink of an eye.<sup>87</sup> These metamorphoses can only be halted, and human form regained, through the disciplinary work of shedding rage like the thick coat of the werewolf: 'Nis þer bute sone forwarpe þet ruhe fel abute þe heorte, ant wið softe sahtnesse makien hire smeðe ant softe as is cundeliche wummone hude'.<sup>88</sup> Should the anchorite be successful in avoiding the traps of sin, she can aspire to be what is 'cundeliche', what is proper and natural to her position as a holy woman. The roughness and multiplicity of sin can be left behind.

Far from remaining the 'smeðe ant softe' figure of feminine spirituality, however, the *Ancrene Wisse* suggests its readers undergo a series of transformations through the vivid use of *exempla*. Examining the textual traditions underlying the *Ancrene Wisse*, Cate Gunn has noted that, unlike its predecessors, it employs 'short stories about ordinary life to which its readers could relate [...] in order to stress the reality of moral danger'.<sup>89</sup> Here, these stories offer the anchorite multiple roles, both positive and negative, to identify with. The transformations that the text offers cannot finally be strictly divided into representatives of unholy mutability and blessed stability; rather, a distinction exists between two types of mutability. The *Ancrene Wisse* itself sketches this distinction during an extensive meditation on Matthew 8:20:

*Vulpes foueas habent, et uolucres celi nidos*; þet is, 'Foxes habbeð hare holen, ant briddes of heuene habbeð hare nestes'. Þe foxes beoð false ancres, ase fox

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<sup>86</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.2, p.27.

<sup>87</sup> On transformation and transformative imagery in pastoral power, see Chapter Four.

<sup>88</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.3, p.49.

<sup>89</sup> Cate Gunn, *Ancrene Wisse: From Pastoral Literature to Vernacular Spirituality* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.152. The current chapter focuses on the *Ancrene Wisse*'s use of *exempla* as part of its imaginative manipulation of space, but for more on *exempla* in the tradition of pastoral power, see the following chapter.



is beast falsest. Peose habbeð, he seið, hollen þe holieð inward eorðe wið eorðliche unþeawes, ant draheð into hare hole al þet ha mahen repen ant rinnen. [...] Ha is of þe briddes þet ure Lauerd spekeð of efter þe uoxes, þe wið hare lustes ne holieð nawt duneward ase doð þe uoxes, þet beoð false ances, ah habbeð on heh ase brid of heouene iset hare nestes, þet is, hare reste.<sup>90</sup>

Stable humanity is not an imaginative option for the anchorite here. Instead she must choose between two bestial identities, between ‘foxes’ and ‘briddes’. Her behaviour will transform her into one of the other – either into the fox, who ‘holien þe holieð inward eorðe wið eorðliche unþeawes’, or the ‘bridde’ who ‘ne holieð nawt duneward’ but ‘habbeð on heh [...] hare nestes’. Both the bird and the fox, of course, are behaving ‘cundeliche’, as natural order dictates they do – one burrows in the earth, the other nests near the heavens. The anchorite associates with these animals as they exist in their natural environments, settings which evoke the abundance of life in the world rather than the grim lifelessness of the desert. Further, this passage clarifies the *Ancrene Wisse*’s intense stress on a parallelism, even identification, between *locus* and self. Foxes and birds, we are told, differ precisely in the ways in which they use their *locus*. In this way, the predicament of the anchorite – stuck between an earthly den and a heavenly nest – reflects the age-old biblical division between David and Saul.

Ba ha wenden into hole, Saul ant Dauid, as hit teleð i *Regum*, ah Saul wende þider in forte don his fulðe þrin [...]. Ah Dauid wende þider in ane forte huden him from Saul, þet him heated ant sohte to sleanne. Swa deð þe gode ancre þe Saul, þet is, þe feond, heateð ant hunteð efter. [...] ha hude hire in hire hole ba from worltliche men ant wortliche sunnen, ant for-þi ha is gasteliche Dauid, þet is, ‘strong’ tozein þe feond ant hire leor ‘lufusm’ to ure Lauerd ehnene – for swa muchel seið þis word ‘Dauid’ on Ebreische ledene. Þe false ancre is Saul, efter þet his nome seið: *Saul: abutens siue abusio*. For ‘Saul’ on Ebreisch is ‘misnotunge’ on English.<sup>91</sup>

The opposition of Saul and David is based on the fact that they respond differently to the same *locus*. Saul can literally mean ‘misnotunge’ because that is exactly what he does with the cave that is offered to him; overtaken by natural urges, he ‘don his fulðe þrin’,

<sup>90</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.3, pp.51-52.

<sup>91</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.3, pp.51-52.

metaphorically staining it with sin. He is defined by his abuse of the *locus*. By contrast, David embraces the possibilities of the *locus* as a redoubt or hiding place against Saul (and, allegorically speaking, ‘þe feond’). The transformation of the self, the *Ancrene Wisse* suggests, is inextricably linked with the transformation of the *locus*. Neither body nor *locus* hold the stable, static identities reminiscent of the ‘simple ontologies’ of the desert. Instead, their very capacity for mutability and transformation suggest a new direction for the pastoral project.

This is why the anchorite can be so many things. In addition to the transformations already mentioned (fox, bird, snake, dog, wolf, child, bride, hen), she can become a besieged soldier, a market vendor, a miller or a pair of millstones, a raven, a rower on treacherous waters, the earth itself, a lion’s mate, a trader in animals, an invitee to a distant feast, a wrestler in combat with the devil, the nurse to lions and vipers, a tower, a traveller, a prisoner, the crew of seafaring vessel, a poor widow cleaning her house, a guilty person in a courtroom, and many other things.<sup>92</sup> Thus, for instance, the *Ancrene Wisse* dwells on the particulars of milling as it develops an image of the anchorite’s self as a complex agricultural machine: ‘Muche fol were þe mahte to his bihoue hweðer-se he walde grinden greot oþer hweate, 3ef he gronde þe greot ant lette þe hweate. [...] Þe twa cheken beoð þe twa grindelstanes, þe tunge is þe clappe. Lokið, leoue sustren, þet ower cheken ne grinden neauer bute sawle fode’.<sup>93</sup> The text as a whole proves itself capable of handling such examples in tandem with more exotic images without any sort of tension; chickens, millers, widows, devils, wolves, snakes, foxes, owls and more all rub shoulders without overwhelming the pastoral logic of the text. This is because these moments, creatures and places are finally disciplinary in nature – it points sternly back to the anchorite’s own self

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<sup>92</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.2, pp.21-44; pt.3, p.49; pt.4, pp.70- 95; pt.5, pp.117-119.

<sup>93</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.2, p.29.

and the habits that constitute it. Thus it should be no surprise that these transformations are enabled by, and owe a great deal to, the dynamic relationship between anchorite and the *locus* that has replaced the blasted simplicity of the desert. Bob Hasenfratz has correctly identified the anchorhold as an ‘intensely symbolic space’ which reflects the anchorite’s needs and undergoes a whole series of changes.<sup>94</sup> But it is clear that we can push the argument much further to uncover the specific, powerful dynamics of the *Ancrene Wisse*. It is not simply the case that the anchorhold becomes a mutable field for the imagination. As Beckwith writes, ‘[i]nteriority [...] is not so much the opposite of exteriority as its complex product:’ instead of reconstituting her surroundings, the anchorite must enter into sustained and creative dialogue with her *locus*: she must understand, for instance, how to defend herself when besieged, how to wrestle with the devil, and how to stop the leaks that threaten to sink her ship.<sup>95</sup> The *locus* in turn must speak back to her, and form the kind of surroundings which enable the anchorite’s disciplinary apparatus to tear down the very walls within which it is still physically situated. This entire trend is made possible by the very prayer by which I introduced the concept of *locus* in the *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>96</sup>

The mystical-disciplinary desire stresses place even as it elides differences between the *locus* of the self and the *locus* of the cell. Never mentioned specifically, the cell remains a kind of objective correlative hovering just over the text; the ‘*domus anime*’ of the anchorite, *angusta* as it is, cannot help but draw lines of association between the self-as-cell and the cell-as-self. Such a process is also pertinent to the Foucauldian proposition that architecture (and, more generally, space) can reflect and perform the gestures of individuation by power; the exchange between self and cell solidifies the understanding

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<sup>94</sup> Bob Hasenfratz, ‘The Anchorhold as Symbolic Space in *Ancrene Wisse*’, *Philological Quarterly*, 84.1 (2005), 1–26 (p.1).

<sup>95</sup> Beckwith, ‘Passionate Regulation’, p.808.

<sup>96</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.1, p.13. See also pp.101-104, above.

of the self. The potential overlap between external figure and internal identity is implicit from the very beginning of the confessional depth-model; as the previous chapter demonstrated, ensouling a subject necessarily renders the body as a kind of externality itself, a necessary but troublesome tool. A natural extension to this line of reasoning figures the body as a kind of house or cell, much as *Sawles Warde* does; writing on the *Ancrene Wisse*, Christopher Cannon has pointed out that '[w]here the view is held that a body contains something [...] every person lives in an enclosure'.<sup>97</sup>

Further, as Cannon has made clear elsewhere, this gesture is fundamentally egalitarian and refers to every Christian in general, rather than being merely relevant to specialised spirituals.<sup>98</sup> Twenty-first-century intellectuals are by no means the first, of course, to note such a trend. Written in the second half of the fourteenth century, the version of the *Ancrene Wisse* recorded in Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498 (henceforth the Pepys text), pauses after the pelican imagery of Part III:

Now vnderstoneþ þat a mannes body is cleped in holy wrytt sumtyme an hous.  
[...] Þan riȝth as ȝee see þat an Ancre is beschett in an hous and may nouȝth  
out. Riȝth so is vche mannes soule biscjett in his body as an Ancre. And  
þerfore vche man lered and lewed ȝif he wil queme god and be his deciple  
helde hym in his house. Schete his dores and his wyndowes fast þat ben his  
fyue wyttes. Pat he take no liking to synne ne to werldelich þynges. And þan  
he ais an Ancre and wel better quemeþ god þan hiij þat byschetten hem and  
taken hem to heiȝe lyf. and ben werldelich.<sup>99</sup>

By the fourteenth century, as we can see, the generalising seed sown by the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Sawles Warde* as part of the larger pastoral culture of the Middle Ages has germinated. If 'mannes body' can be a 'hous' and the anchorite is determined as one 'bischett in an hous' then 'vche man lered and lewed' holds the potential to become an

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<sup>97</sup> Christopher Cannon, 'Enclosure', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.109–23 (p.109).

<sup>98</sup> Cannon, 'The Form of the Self', p.53.

<sup>99</sup> *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Edited from Magdalene College, Cambridge MS. Pepys 2498*, ed. A. Zettersten, EETS OS, 274 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pt.3, p.44.

‘Ancre’. As a cipher of the entire self, the anchorite’s cell – a metonym of her en-soulment – belongs to the same category as the visions of Bachelard’s cosmic house; house and universe, universe and house, come to inhabit one another, folding over each other and becoming a space of ‘alternate security and adventure. It is both cell and world’.<sup>100</sup> Indeed the Pepys text even repeats some of the concerns Aelred had voiced some centuries earlier, criticising those who confuse the spirit and the letter and ‘byschetten hem and taken hem to heze lyf and ben werldelich’. The Pepys text transforms the anchoritic calling into the ‘onelich lyf’, a vocation strikingly reminiscent of the ‘one mind’ of Egyptian ascetic communities, available to lay and religious alike. Even the wilderness, ‘anlich lif of ancre wununge’ in earlier manuscripts,<sup>101</sup> has become the coefficient of a generalised disciplinary spirituality: ‘By wilderness is bitokneð onelich lyf. For also as in þe wilderness ben wilde bestes [and] willen nouȝth þolen mannes anoping ac flen whan þat hij hem here. Riȝt so schulden onelich Men [and] wymmen ben wilde on þis wise’.<sup>102</sup> The wilderness now signifies a ‘onelich lyf’; a form of living available to ‘Men and wymmen’ of any stripe should they aspire to it. This ‘lyf’ is, of course, formed by the stylised repetition of acts and habits that form and re-form the human sinner into a fitting vessel for God – it is the disciplinary monastic project writ large.

The Pepys text is admittedly something of an outlier amongst surviving manuscripts of the *Ancrene Wisse*, teetering in the grey zone between orthodox and heterodox statements.<sup>103</sup> It is clear from surviving manuscript evidence, however, that the *Ancrene Wisse*’s influence was felt in every corner of late Middle English pastoral writing to such an extent that Nicholas Watson has called it ‘a textual synecdoche for the life of

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<sup>100</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.51.

<sup>101</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, pt.4, p.74.

<sup>102</sup> *Ancrene Riwe, Pepys 2498*, pt.4, p.88.

<sup>103</sup> For a detailed discussion of the contents of the Pepys text, see Christina Van Nolcken, ‘The Recluse and Its Readers: Some Observations on a Lollard Interpolated Version of *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, pp.175–96.

holiness’, especially ‘as it might be practiced by women and other notionally uneducated Christian people’.<sup>104</sup> Watson locates amongst the heirs to the *Ancrene Wisse*’s pastoral tradition a double move, on the one hand to generalise advice to include all Christian people, and on the other hand to perform an act of ‘puritisation’ by appealing to a select audience of specialised subjects. Instead of anchorites, then, the specialising impulse of the *Ancrene Wisse* is now directed to an ‘imagined community of serious-minded lay-people’, theoretically accessible to any Christian.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, this dynamic points for Watson towards the great controversies of the period still excluded from many of these analyses by the term ‘Early Modern’ – ‘the protestant declaration of “the priesthood of all believers.”’<sup>106</sup> Many suggestions have been given for the immense legacy of the *Ancrene Wisse* in pastoral literature: a shift of anxieties from female spirituality to lay spirituality;<sup>107</sup> the text’s own use of the burgeoning thirteenth-century techniques of Latin *pastoralia*;<sup>108</sup> or its typically thirteenth-century interest in the internal workings of the subject.<sup>109</sup> There much truth to each of these claims.

It has been the aim of this chapter, however, to suggest the ways in which the *Ancrene Wisse*’s specific awareness of the disciplinary structures of *place* plays an essential role in its position as an inaugural vernacular pastoral and spiritual text. It makes clear the continual play of becoming that exists between subject and environment, and marks a forceful shift away from the simple ontology of the desert that typified the monastic outlook and towards a tempestuous, shifting attitude to a much wider, and more complex, terrain. In so doing, it opens the way for, and creates an imaginative space for the exemplary mechanics of, a generalised pastoral programme whose reach will extend

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<sup>104</sup> Nicholas Watson, ‘Religious Reform’, p.199.

<sup>105</sup> Watson, ‘Ancrene Wisse’, p.209.

<sup>106</sup> Watson, ‘Ancrene Wisse’, p.222.

<sup>107</sup> Watson, ‘Ancrene Wisse’, p.203.

<sup>108</sup> Gunn, *Ancrene Wisse*.

<sup>109</sup> Georgianna, *The Solitary Self*.

far beyond the cell and the desert. It tears down the walls of the anchoritic cell and paints them with all the birds and animals and peoples of the world, mapping one to the other in a superficially liberating gesture. In truth, of course, the power of the anchoritic cell dissolves into what I have called the ‘immanence’ of Bentham’s panopticon, and energises the ultimate drive to transform architectural and spatial specificity into the general condition of society.<sup>110</sup> Rather than being liberatory, it is instead a function of pastoral power, the system of interrelated discourses that produces an individualised and reflective subject – one, as this chapter has set out to explore, is constant dialogue with an environment that is no more stable than it is. And yet this immanence repeats and re-applies the gestures of the depth model developed in early monastic and eremitic Christianity.

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<sup>110</sup> See above, pp. 79-80.

#### 4: BEING-IN-SIN

##### Epistemological trauma and the sins of everyday life

*The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. [...] These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognised poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility.*<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the *Ancrene Wisse* has painted an environment newly open and available to the lay pastoral subject. In this brave new world, this subject’s own responsibilities increase substantially: required to interface with an ever-growing set of variables and equipped with more and more complex tools to enable such work, the developing pastoral trend places more and more power in the hands of lay individuals. Claire Waters has described a similar trend in her 2016 study of the changing relationships between instructor and penitent in thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman pastoralia. She argues that a textual emphasis on the penitent’s own interpretative processes and responsibilities, which became increasingly common from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, goes hand in hand with a developing sense of responsibilities on the part of their confessor as both sides of the pastoral relationship develop a new sense of accountability.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the penitent increasingly becomes a central and above all *responsible* participant in their own Christian narrative. Many of the texts Waters discusses were translated over the course of the next century, and the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English pastoral world in which they circulated is the subject of this chapter and the next. This world is to a substantial degree the product of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council, whose call for an educated laity and consolidation of ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), p.93.

<sup>2</sup> Claire M. Waters, *Translating ‘Clergie’: Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).



power underwrote new genres of text designed first to educate the preacher, and then the flock.<sup>3</sup>

The following two chapters take up this world as it is represented in a series of Middle English texts, each invested in structuring and re-producing pastoral power. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and *The Ayenbite of Inwit* are both translations of the wildly popular *Somme le Roi*, written by the Dominican Lorens d'Orléans in the thirteenth century. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* exists in three manuscripts: British Library MS. Add. 17013 (mid-fifteenth century), and MS. Add. 22283 (late fourteenth century) – also known as the Simeon Manuscript – and Huntington Library MS. HM 147 (mid-fifteenth century). Three manuscript versions suggest that this version of the *Somme*, copied in an East Midlands dialect, was amongst the most popular translations.<sup>4</sup> The *Ayenbite*, notable for its strong Kentish dialect, is extant in only a single, considerably earlier manuscript – MS. Arundel 57, datable by internal evidence to 1340.<sup>5</sup> It is used here in conjunction with *The Book of Vices and Virtues* as an important witness to mid-fourteenth century pastoral traditions. Representing a different strand of the tradition, the fifteenth-century *Jacob's Well*, a sermon collection on vices and virtues largely derived from the *Speculum Vitae* (a metrical version of the *Somme le Roi*), distinguishes itself from its source material by presenting its material in a vigorously allegorised dissection of the *Fons Jacob*, taken from John 4:6. *Jacob's Well* survives in a single manuscript, MS. Salisbury Cathedral

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<sup>3</sup> Much has been written on this development. For an overview of the field, see Joseph Goering, 'Leonard E. Boyle and the Invention of Pastoralia', *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp.7-20. Famous and central to the field are Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council'; Tentler, 'The Summa for Confessors' and *Sin and Confession*. On late medieval developments, see discussions by John Bossy, 'Moral Arithmetic', pp.214-235, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Fifth Series)*, 25 (1975), 21-38, and Pantin, *The English Church*. On preaching, see G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to the Sermon Manuscripts of the Period, 1350-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), and H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also the caveats supplied by Mary C. Mansfield in *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), who argues that public penance was practiced well into the thirteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see the Introduction to *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS OS 188 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp.ix-lxxxii.

<sup>5</sup> See the extensive discussion in Pamela Gradon, *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt: Volume II: Introduction, Notes and Glossary*, EETS OS, 278 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp.1-107.

103, datable by watermark and handwriting to the period 1445-1455.<sup>6</sup> The final text is Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*, another important fourteenth century witness: a translation of the Anglo-French *Manuel des Pechiez* produced – on evidence presented in the text itself – in 1303. It is extant, partially or wholly, in nine manuscripts datable from late fourteenth century onwards, of which the principal witnesses (all datable to the beginning of the fifteenth century) are Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bodley MS. 415, Folger Library, Washington DC, Folger MS. V.b 236 [formerly 420312] and British Library, MS. Harley 1701. An excerpt from *Handlyng Synne* also rubs shoulders with *The Book of Vices and Virtues* in the Simeon Manuscript, BL MS. Add. 2283.<sup>7</sup> This chapter and the following will attempt to map how these materials – texts intended to disseminate the essential dynamics of pastoral subjectivity to the laity – structured a specific way of being, both in relation to the wider world and to themselves.

*Jacob's Well* suggests just how fallen humankind relates to the rest of the world and to God: poorly. In fact, humans come at the very back of the class, utterly unable to appreciate the divine mysteries:

[W]han crist kom in-to þis world, heuen knewe hym, & worschepyd hym, for heuen sente doun aungelys & a sterre, in worschipp of his comynge / þe see & þe wynde knewyn him, and worschepedyn hym, for in oo. word of his mowth þe see & þe wynde were stylye. [...] Þe see also obeyid vn-to god, & ʒaf hym wye to gon vp-on hym wyth his feet. þe erthe knewe god, & worschepyd hym, for all erthe in his deth styrred and schakyd. þe sunne knewe god in his deth, for he wyth-drowe his lyzt. helle knewe god, & ʒalde to hym, whan he kome, þe sowlys which he bouʒte. But man, hardest þan grauel-stonys in herte, tunge, & dede, þat hath resoun & vnder-stondyng, wyll noʒt knowe god ne dewly worschepyn him, neyþer in herte, ne tunge, ne dede.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Jacob's Well, an Englisht Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS OS 115 (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co., 1900), pp.v-xiii. See also Leo Carruthers, 'Where did *Jacob's Well* come from? The provenance and dialect of MS Salisbury Cathedral 103', *English Studies* 71:4 (1990), 335-340.

<sup>7</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, pp.xii-xlvi.

<sup>8</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.282.

This passage introduces a litany of revelatory moments, in which creation demonstrates its own recognition of the creator who has revealed himself. Knowing and praising are the two constituent elements of this demonstration. The rhythmic repetition of the phrase ‘knewe hym & worschepyd hym’ binds together ‘heuen’, ‘þe see & þe wynde’ and ‘þe erthe’ in a unity of celebration as the elements of the natural world prostrate themselves before their creator. The harmony is broken, however, by ‘man’ whose heart and deeds are harder than stone. Here the text shifts into the present tense: humankind ‘wyll noȝt knowe god;’ the betrayal is a continuous action that stains humanity from the incarnation into the present moment. The ‘resoun & ynder-stondyng’ gifted to humans alone is thrown back at them as an ironic curse which places them at odds with both the natural world and God.

Humankind is set apart from the natural world by its fundamental failure to know and worship God ‘in herte, tunge, & dede’. Whilst knowledge does not guarantee salvation, the handbooks’ position in the vanguard of a pastoral programme foregrounds the problem of epistemology in particular. The dynamics of vice and virtue presented in these texts consistently circulate around the metaphor of light or images of seeing, passing from ignorance to knowledge, from blindness to perception. The *Book of Vices and Virtues* dwells explicitly on this theme, describing the gift of understanding as

cleped liȝt, for it purgeþ þe vnderstondyng of a man or a womman of þe derknesses of vnknowe þinges & of þe tecches of synne. For riȝt as þe bodiliche liȝt doþ away þe derknesses and makeþ clerliche y-see alle þinges bodiliche, riȝt so doþ þis liȝt gostliche purgeþe þe vnderstondyng of a man or a womman so þat þei mowe knowe clerliche, and sikerliche as men mowe knowe in þis dedliche lif, God here makere and þe þinges and creatures þat ben gostliche.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, pp.221–222.

Bodily realities run alongside immaterial metaphor as ‘bodiliche’ light is carefully and extensively allegorised as spiritual revelation.<sup>10</sup> It is a necessary moment that purges and crystalizes the realities of the world and allows humans to recognise ‘þe þinges and creatures þat ben gostliche’. In a similar vein, *Jacob’s Well* declares that ‘3yf þou, in equyte, haue þis 3yfte of knowynge, þanne seest þi-self wel wrecchyd & synfull, þanne moornyst þou, & wepyst sore’.<sup>11</sup> Repentance is enabled first and foremost by regaining spiritual sight and recognising one’s own fallen, ‘wrecchyd’ state; that is, by learning how to *see oneself*. This point is especially valuable in texts designed to be read by laypeople; aware of their status as educational materials, these manuals take the truth of God as the case-in-point for their total pedagogical function.

Spiritual and epistemological blindness, then, are what *Jacob’s Well* and the handbooks discussed below attempt to remedy as best they can. They set out a programme by which God can become known in the heart, and be acknowledged in mouth and in deed: a kind of epistemology which brings the physicality of the subject’s being-in-the-world into sharp relief. They provide an embedded interpretative structure which might enable the Christian to soften and open up to God, and re-orient themselves sufficiently to reach salvation; a programme which reflects, in the words of Mark Miller, ‘a concern with teaching a way of life and with disseminating a conceptual apparatus deemed necessary to that teaching’.<sup>12</sup> This programme attempts to engage with the living world around the subject in order to discover within it the truths of the super-real world of the divine behind and beyond worldly existence. In order to accomplish this epistemological shift, these texts provide moral analysis and instruction. But above all they perform two

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<sup>10</sup> On the medieval trope of holy light and revelation, see Timothy Noone, ‘Divine Illumination’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), vol.1, pp.369-383.

<sup>11</sup> *Jacob’s Well*, p.275.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Miller, ‘Displaced Souls, Idle Talk, Spectacular Scenes: *Handlyng Synne* and the Perspectives of Agency’, *Speculum* 71:3 (1996), 606-632 (p.606).

mutually-enforcing moves. On the one hand, they employ *exempla*, self-contained short narratives intended to support or illustrate an argument, often shocking or startling, to reveal the true struggle being waged beneath the appearances of the world.<sup>13</sup> On the other, they attempt to reintegrate the interpretative trauma created by these exemplary breaks into a general theory of day to day existence which refuses to abandon the social, mundane and physical world for the promise of the immaterial spirit. This system embraces and moulds the material world without ever rejecting it, stressing that the process of sin and redemption is an embedded and tactile experience that is enacted in and through the body.

This material dimension interacts productively with one of the governing metaphors of pastoral work, that of medical care. Far more than marking confessors as ‘doctors of souls’, pastoral power figures the whole enterprise as a holistic system of treatment enacted within the world.<sup>14</sup> The epistemologies of pastoral power can be understood as structured by the same concepts that determine medieval Galenic medicine – interpenetration, balance, and regimen. Towards the end of its reflections on virtue, for example, *Handlyng Synne* pauses to deliver a short passage on the effects of sin on the soul:

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<sup>13</sup> Medieval *exempla* have received some somewhat sporadic attention from the scholarly community. For an overview, see Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Joan Krakover Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.1-27; for a historical account somewhat undermined by teleological assumptions, see Frederic C. Tubic, ‘Exempla in the Decline’, *Traditio* 18 (1962), 407-414; there is also a brief general discussion in J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Gawain Poet* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1971), pp.82-83. For more developed discussion, see the helpful, if cautious, conclusions of Fritz Kemmler’s, ‘Exempla’ in *Context: a Historical and Critical Study of Brunne’s ‘Handlyng Synne’* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984), and Scanlon’s *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, which makes a convincing case for the role of *exempla* in maintaining an authority that is not given, but rather ‘an ideological structure that must be produced and maintained’ (p.26). For a source study of the *exempla* in *Jacob’s Well*, see Joan Young Gregg, ‘The Exempla of “Jacob’s Well”: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Sermon Stories’, *Traditio* 33 (1997), 359-380; for an analysis of the relationship between ‘idle tales’ and *exempla* in *Jacob’s Well* and *Handlyng Synne*, see Susan E. Phillips, “‘Janglynge in cherche’: Gossip and the Exemplum”, in *The Hands of the Tongue: Essays on Deviant Speech*, ed. Edwin D. Craun (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp.61-94.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of medical discourse in the early fathers, see Chapter Two, pp.54-59; for the legacy of such discourses, see Chapter Six.

[W]han men haue synned dedly,  
Here soule ys mornyng & heuy  
And cumbred ful of þoght & drede,  
Ne he haþ no wyl to do gode dede.<sup>15</sup>

Far from being a transcendental substance detached from the vicissitudes of the flesh and the world, this soul carries with it a distinctly material aspect.<sup>16</sup> The effects of mortal sin are to weigh the soul down, to make it ‘mornyng & heuy’ and render it a ‘cumbred’ entity. In one word, mortal sin is *exhausting*, and this is the psychological state *Handlyng Synne* reflects upon here. This is a soul whose edges can fray, which can be stretched so thinly that any ‘wyl to do gode dede’ is lost to gloom and dread. The intimacy and subtlety of this portrait works to muddy the soul and render parts of it intimately physical, made sick, heavy, and weak by the assault of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Seen from this perspective, the insistent use of medical discourse and this language of sickness – a tradition that reaches back to the bible itself and was explicitly deployed in Lateran IV – comes as no surprise.<sup>17</sup> The *Ayenbite of Inwyte* refers to the sin of scorn (a subdivision of pride) as ‘a perilous ziknesse þet ne may naȝt þoyle’, and later adds that all ‘zenne is wel grat ziknesse: and þe ssrifte is þe medecine’.<sup>18</sup> The complexities and difficulties of such corporeal ways of thinking about the soul are not new in the fourteenth century – indeed, they have already been discussed with reference to Evagrius and other members of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.297.

<sup>16</sup> This is not unusual for the period, where elements of the soul were often conceived of as contributing to the physiological operations of the body. For a helpful overview of such concepts at the end of the period, see Park, ‘The organic soul’. For analysis of the theological relationship between the soul and the body see Susan Kramer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood*; for the nexus of soul, body, and identity, Caroline Walker Bynum’s excellent *The Resurrection of the Body*. Virginia Langum’s insightful ‘Discerning Skin’ draws compelling connections between medieval theories of sin, surgery, and confession in the period. Much of what she suggests confirms the Foucauldian model of medicine I propose here.

<sup>17</sup> The famous Canon 21 advises priests in their capacity as spiritual physicians: ‘The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one. Let him carefully inquire about the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person’. ‘Fourth Lateran Council’, ed. Tanner, p. 245.

<sup>18</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyte, Or, Remorse of Conscience*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 23 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1866), pp.22, 173.

early church.<sup>19</sup> In the context of developing theories of medieval medicine and religious practice for more widespread lay use, however, the physicality of the pastoral soul is arguably of especial importance.

The souls of sinners are sick souls, spiritual entities whose diseased state insistently materialises them. If souls can be sick, then confessors can be doctors, as a long tradition of confessional and pastoral thought had established. Recent scholarship has suggested that the modern sense that medicine and religion are discrete entities must be treated as an anachronism ill-fitted for conceptualising medieval practice. Joseph Ziegler has suggested that we should instead think of the relationship between theology and medicine as characterised by ‘overlap, sometimes even ambiguity’, rather than tension.<sup>20</sup> If the soul holds a material value and resonance, the medical metaphor must be more than a mere rhetorical flourish. In his extensive survey of late-medieval confessors, Thomas Tentler suggests that ‘[t]hey thought of themselves as doctors of souls. It makes sense to ask if they were good doctors’.<sup>21</sup> This is, I believe, a mistake, a misstep by which analysis becomes limited by the very field (in this case, pastoralia) it is trying to assess. Tentler here accepts the discursive implications of the medical metaphor without querying the structural effects of the metaphor itself. Medicine has its own inescapable discursive dimension: it sets out to articulate and entrench a certain organisation of observational and inferential apparatuses which inscribe the ‘body’ as a cultural construct. Rather than taking the assumptions of the medieval pastoral field for granted, then, it is

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Two, above. Despite some similarities in deployment, however, there are some notable differences between the periods. Perhaps most clearly, the medical in Cassian is, as we have seen, explicitly interventionist and surgical. The same is not true of later medieval medicine, which increasingly stressed the diagnostic and carefully therapeutic aspects of medicine. See Susan Kramer, who contrasts the ‘invasion etiology’ of the New Testament with the ‘balance etiology’ of the medieval period: Kramer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood*, pp.121-128. For an overview of the developments in medieval medicine from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, see Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion, c. 1300: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.1-21.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ziegler, ‘Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages’, in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp.3-14 (p.4).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p.222.

more productive to ask what the effect of such a medical configuration would have on the forms and structures available to the sinning – and therefore sickly – subject.

Understood medically, the medieval body was a deeply unstable entity. Academic commentaries on Pūr Sina (whose texts, translated and attributed to the Latinised ‘Avicenna’, were highly influential throughout the period) struggle over separating the causes of health and sickness into ‘intrinsic’ (including the humours, complexion, and composition) and ‘extrinsic’ forces (including food and drink, over-exertion, the heat of the sun, and emotions), effectively rendering the boundaries of the human body mobile and flexible.<sup>22</sup> Originally, ‘intrinsic’ causes, ‘were the things permanently constituting the body, the things intrinsic to it. The extrinsic causes of health and disease were things which the body could do, the operations, and the things which changed or conserved the body’s state’.<sup>23</sup> This careful distinction, however, became less stable as the commentary tradition expanded. Causes had the potential to be considered either ‘intrinsic’ and stabilising or ‘extrinsic’ and possibly dangerous, based not on the *nature* of the cause, but on its current effect: ‘the central features upon which this decision were based were agency, change and the direction of the change. Whenever something acted as an agent, and changed the state of the body, especially if it changed the bodily state for the worse, medieval physicians easily perceived it as extrinsic’.<sup>24</sup> Medicine slowly came to define as harmful the external and extrinsic, and as safe the internal and intrinsic.

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<sup>22</sup> Karine van ’t Land, ‘Internal, Yet Extrinsic: Conceptions of Bodily Space and Their Relation to Causality in Late Medieval University Medicine’, in *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Patricia A. Baker, Han Nijdam, and Karine van ’t Land (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp.85–116 (p.106).

<sup>23</sup> Land, ‘Internal, Yet Extrinsic’, p.104.

<sup>24</sup> Land, ‘Internal, Yet Extrinsic’, p.113.



A deep suspicion of the polyvalency of the body is here combined with an exorcistic demand to expel and mark as outside anything harmful.<sup>25</sup> The result is a fraught system which, by the very virtue of its far-reaching interrogations and systematics, collapses secure boundaries between the world and the self, inviting the fear of the world into the body itself: '[m]edieval medicine knew a fundamental distrust not just of the world surrounding man, but also of the very things composing the body'.<sup>26</sup> Medical manuals further noted that human skin, commonly understood by modern medicine as the essential boundary between the internal and the external, is even more permeable than that of other animals:

Compared to the skin of most other creatures, the skin of a human being has a few peculiarities: it is thin, hairless and porous. Being thin, humours easily evaporate from it, together with the body's spirits. [...] [T]he body does not only have a porous skin, it is of itself wholly porous, *spongiosus*. Veins permeate the body and reach into its remotest and smallest corners. There they end in tiny openings that are not visible to the human eye. Even the body's bones are porous and therefore permeable.<sup>27</sup>

As Fabiola van Dam notes, '[i]t is difficult to imagine how deep the body could be penetrated'.<sup>28</sup> Medieval medical practice painted an image of the body as punctured all over, not only by pores as we now understand them, but by a labyrinthine system of tunnels that exposed every part of the human being, right down to our very skeletons, to the effects of the outside world.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The conclusions reached in the study of this material stand as an important caveat to arguments such as those made by Stephen Medcalf in 'Inner and Outer' that 'the division between inner and outer does not run deep'. (p.109) Whilst an important corrective to analyses that seek to collapse historical difference entirely, such positions nevertheless run the risk of supporting themselves with patronising accounts of 'the medieval style of innocent presentedness' (p.133). A more analytically precise and convincing account of the differences between medieval and modern subjectivities is given in Logan, 'A conception of the self'.

<sup>26</sup> Land, 'Internal, Yet Extrinsic', p.116.

<sup>27</sup> Fabiola I.W.M. Van Dam, 'Permeable Boundaries: Bodies, Bathing and Fluxes: 1135-1333', in *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Patricia A. Baker, Han Nijdam, and Karine van 't Land (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp.117-45 (pp.131-132); On the specifically gendered aspects of this physiology, see Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Van Dam, 'Permeable Boundaries', p.133.

<sup>29</sup> Medcalf comments on this dynamic, seeing in medieval humoral theory evidence that medieval thinkers 'assume meaning to be inherent in the world, are less bothered than later philosophers by any gap

Van Dam goes on to suggest convincingly that this medical account of the permeable body held a relevance for twelfth-century Cistercian devotional writing from Bernard of Clairvaux onwards.<sup>30</sup> ‘The digestion of spiritual food is similar to that in the natural body’, she writes, ‘[t]herefore, the same steps have to be followed. The spiritual body will otherwise have to cope with unhealthy tumours, just like the body’.<sup>31</sup> Jean Leclercq’s classic *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* also develops this theme, noting how the monastic reading tradition of *rumination* ‘means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication with releases its full flavour’.<sup>32</sup> The religious experience of the cloister is dietetic, and involves both mind and molars, both soul and stomach. The thirteenth-century progressions sketched through the *Ancrene Wisse* in the previous chapter brought these medical-salvific associations out of specialised spirituality and into the lay domain. In a tradition heavily influenced by Bernard and Aelred of Rievaulx, pastoral selves are porous organic nodes whose entrances and exits remain heavily policed sites of instability. In a passage on lechery that echoes the famous gated sentiments of the *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Ayenbite of Inwit* notes that

pench þet non ne wes strengre þanne samson fortin. ne wiser þanne salomon.  
ne more milder þanne dauid. and alneway uillen be wyfmen. Ac uorzoþe yef  
hy hidden wel yemd þe gates: þe uyend ne hedde naȝt ynome zuo greate  
casteles.<sup>33</sup>

The wisest and greatest figures of the Old Testament are revealed as penetrable, unsafe structures whose ‘gates’ can easily be taken. Later, speaking on chastity, the *Ayenbite*

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between subjectivity and the external world, and are concerned rather with the relation of the transcendent to the immediate’ (‘Inner and Outer’, p.109). Medcalf appears to present such theories as monolithic and untroubled in the period, a position the scholarship cited above contests and renders unsustainable.

<sup>30</sup> Van Dam, ‘Permeable Boundaries’, pp.136–144.

<sup>31</sup> Van Dam, ‘Permeable Boundaries’, p.137.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p.90.

<sup>33</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwit*, p.204. This also suggests an overlap between medicalised thought and the ‘siege mentality’ view of the Middle Ages – for a famous exploration of the latter, see Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*.

adds that ‘[b]e gates of þe kastele huer maydenhod is: byeþ þe gates of þe herte’.<sup>34</sup> The variable ingresses of the towers and castles of the self echo the medieval medical body, itself a warren of tunnels through which the self can be swayed and conquered by misleading externalities. The *spongiosus* body is a powerful image, one capable of being mobilised for a variety of discourses whose ideological and structural demands centre around the care (and generation) of the self.

Caring for the *spongiosus* self requires a particular approach and a whole array of techniques. The constantly permeable body demands treatments organised around a regimen, around repeated habitual acts which regulate the incomings and outgoings of a complex, balanced internal economy. Medieval models of care did not operate under the same principles as modern medicine: Peregrine Horden points out that ‘partly [...] because of our own inescapable awareness of how modern biomedicine proceeds, we tend to privilege diagnosis and active treatment over prognosis and regimen’, a practice the Middle Ages does not seem to have shared.<sup>35</sup> In the process, modern ‘[m]edicalisation becomes [...] the leitmotif of an implicit teleological narrative – of a victory of cure over care, of doctors over nurses, and (again) of treatment over regimen’.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to such a narrative, Horden paints a picture of the medieval hospital ‘less in terms of the presence or absence of doctors and more as a “total therapeutic environment.”’<sup>37</sup> Galenic humoral theory and the extreme permeability of the human body demanded an approach that was

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<sup>34</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, p.231.

<sup>35</sup> Peregrine Horden, ‘Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals’, in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp.135–53 (p.137); See also Michael R. McVaugh, ‘Moments of Inflection: The Careers of Arnau de Vilanova’, in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, pp.47–68; Daniel McCann, ‘Heaven and Health: Middle English Devotion to Christ in Its Therapeutic Contexts’, in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life*, ed. Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp.335–62; and Jessalynn Bird, ‘Medicine for Body and Soul: Jacques de Vitry’s Sermons to Hospitallers and Their Charges’, in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Biller and Ziegler, pp.91–108, and Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion*, as well as below.

<sup>36</sup> Horden, ‘Religion as Medicine’, p.138.

<sup>37</sup> Horden, ‘Religion as Medicine’, p.139.

disinclined towards direct intervention (e.g. surgery), favouring instead the development of a healthy and balanced regimen designed to level the body's inputs and outputs.<sup>38</sup>

Horden's account of a typical hospital deserves quoting at length:

Patients [...] lay within sight of the sacrament on the altar. [...] [T]heir daily life was punctuated far more deeply by the monastic 'hours' than by the 'ward round'. Exposure to the host, even without reception; regular confession (without which the hospital would be contaminated by sin); the proximity of relics, their power absorbed either in a single dramatic moment or more slowly and osmotically; contemplation of devotional pictures with their appropriate symbolism of the sure avenue to health; the prayers and Christian magic of nurses; the pleasing ambience of gardens and (sometimes) water courses...<sup>39</sup>

The religious/medical distinction seems almost anachronistic here. 'Religious' and 'medical' effects intermingle freely in the form of a therapeutic regimen, where the threat of sin is as threatening as the threat of infection, and holy relics can cure the ailments of patients.<sup>40</sup> All of these practices gesture towards a form of care for the self which involves the construction and generation of a 'total therapeutic environment', a particular organisation of the space around the self which manages and balances the never-ending flow of forces affecting the human body. Such a relationship of the self to the world suggests different configurations of knowledge, and a very specific role for the pastoral subject who seeks to care for their soul. It may also help us to understand the sheer interminability of sin, which has become a topos in these handbooks. If, as the books claim, there are too many sins to list, if the work is endless, then the subject seems almost impotent, bound to unending defeat. If, however, we challenge what Horden calls the 'implicit teleological narrative' that stresses 'cure over care' and 'treatment over

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<sup>38</sup> See the discussion of the medieval 'balance etiology' in Karmer, *Sin, Interiority, and Selfhood*, pp.121-128.

<sup>39</sup> Horden, 'Religion as Medicine', pp.138-139.

<sup>40</sup> Consider too the myriad miracles recorded in hagiographies, where contact with a saintly relic cures disease and removes ailments. Whilst still *miraculous* (and therefore, almost by definition, uncommon) they should be understood as the extremes of a therapeutic continuum rather than complete breaks with mundane experience.

regimen', then we can understand the work of the care of the self in a new light.<sup>41</sup> It is not a case of 'rooting out sin', for sin will always return, worm its way back into the mind and the will and the soul. Rather, it is a case of generating a therapeutic epistemological environment, of teaching interpretative habits to combat the ever-present threat of damnation.

Advice to confessors certainly understood the importance of environment. Confessors' manuals advocated generating safe environments in which sinners could comfortably express their sins without fear of unnecessary judgement or a breach of privacy.<sup>42</sup> Texts designed for the consumption of penitents themselves are also concerned with the subject's environment. Here, however, I propose that one fundamental thrust of these texts is epistemological: these texts aim to re-organise this environment, to prompt a new and continual re-assessment of one's surroundings. One technique such a programme utilises is to transform the world into a grotesque space of fear and disgust that can, with the right tools and habits, in turn become the key to salvation. To this end, they employ often extreme forms of exempla to structure and suggest a new interpretative response to the world around the subject. They propose a far-reaching programme of pastoral hermeneutics that ultimately offers the pastoral self the possibility of participating in its own process of reform.

Many such exempla function as moments in which the everyday order of things is suspended, where normal human perception folds back and the divine foundations of existence are laid bare. *Handlyng Synne*, for instance, cites the experience of a priest who,

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<sup>41</sup> Whilst his conclusions are somewhat different to mine, Miller's 'Displaced Souls' similarly situates the mechanics he finds in *Handlyng Synne* against the backdrop of unavoidable sin.

<sup>42</sup> Dallas G. Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.54–55.

when distributing the Eucharist to church-goers, has a momentary vision of the true state of his congregation:

And some here vysseges al blakke  
Pat no þyng myghte hem blakkere make.  
And some were as rede as blode,  
Staryng right as þey had be wode.  
And some were swollen þe vysege stout  
As þogh here yen shuld burble uot.  
And some gnapped here fete & hands  
As dogges doun þat gnawe here bandes.<sup>43</sup>

The mass of Christian people assembled to taste the sacrament – composed of farmers, bakers, merchants, and all the variety of medieval life – is transformed into a boiling carnivalesque frenzy of sinful types, where humans smeared ‘al blakke’ by their sins mix with the swollen bodies of the gluttonous, whose very eyes threaten to ‘burble out’, and the empty, raging gazes of the red-faced wrathful. In this kind of exemplum, the quotidian experience of church-going is overturned, challenged by a revelatory vision that renders the congregation into a grotesque satanic procession.<sup>44</sup> The veil of mundane perception is momentarily torn, the laws of nature suspended, to allow the reality of damnation to work itself out, twisting the familiar bodies of parishioners into hideous mockeries of their former selves. The scales fall for a moment from the epistemological gaze, and the effects of sin are made clear. In another exemplum, a dragon that ravages the land and ‘slogh so merueylouse, / So moche folke’ is tracked back to its lair, the tomb of a lecherous woman.<sup>45</sup> In a twist on a romance trope, the dragon sleeps curled between the two halves of the corpse’s split-apart body, a materialised warning to all women ‘[þ]at haf here flesh haue partyd or brokun’ by sin.<sup>46</sup> This second exemplum works backwards, opening with a fantastical tale that ends by rooting itself in the undetectable sins of everyday life; the

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<sup>43</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, pp.254–255.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Camille draws insightful comparisons between this passage and the marginal babewyns of the Luttrell Psalter; see *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), pp.159–160.

<sup>45</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, pp.46–49.

<sup>46</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.49.

adulterous woman is ‘partyd’ and ‘broken’ in both soul and body, rent in flesh as her soul is in hell. Despite their differing narrative structures, however, both exempla demonstrate another way of seeing, of momentarily suspending everyday experience in order to understand the divine depth behind it. In so doing they demand that the meta-physical retain its physicality, and that the reader understand the effects of damnation in terms of the physical body and its properties.

Such exempla induce a traumatic break in the surface of day to day existence, deploying the shock value of a depth epistemology to permanently re-model the pastoral consciousness of their surroundings. By a ‘depth-epistemology’ I mean a structure of thought that feeds off a tension between a surface imagined as a fiction and an underlying truth. Chapter Two has already touched on this sense of a depth-epistemology of the subject in the writings of the early church; here, the very stress of a momentary suspension of everyday experience suggests unhesitatingly again that there is a reality *beneath* the surface of things that is the privileged site of truth. The exemplum is capable of providing a revelation because it shows the deep-down truth of the world: the depth model which underpins it is a version of the depth model that underpins the subject. The traumatic moment of revelation upsets the status quo, upsetting the quotidian epistemology. The phenomenology of the everyday that must be subverted is the direct hermeneutic fallout of Original Sin, which rendered humankind’s inner eye blind and unable to detect the soteriological gears grinding away beneath the surface. Indeed, the very grotesqueness of the revelation shores up the depth model: precisely by suggesting that an experience of the real is, or could be, so essentially shocking, it reinforces the essential difference between the world of appearances and the divine truth beneath it. The energies of this structure reverberate between two poles, quotidian/revelatory, surface/depth, or natural/supernatural.

Even many of those exempla that lack explicitly supernatural elements conform to a similar structure: *Handlyng Synne* tells of a Cambridgeshire man who, dying, refused to speak to the friars who came to hear his confession. Instead, his gaze remained fixed on a locked chest filled with gold. At the sight of his hoard, the sick man exploded into action, and

Toke and fylde ful hys fyste  
And yn to hys mouth þe pens kyste  
As what he wlde hem haue ete,  
Ȝyf he myghte hem alle haue ete.

The man is restrained and dies soon later, and *Handlyng Synne* adds '[s]eeþ how now hys ouyngge / Broughte hym to euyl endyngge'.<sup>47</sup> As the upside-down logic of the sinful world becomes clear, the tale takes on distinctly nightmarish overtones. The man acts in a frightful orgy of gluttony-turned-mad, reflecting the logic of a perverse world where the body itself hungers for gold rather than food. This liminal Gothic figure holds a kind of haunting, grotesque fascination, where sin and evil fester behind the closed shutters of a private abode and few witnesses exist. Whether the driving force of the exemplum is supernatural (demons, a vision) or quasi-natural (sin-driven madness), these moments of disturbance represent the same type of traumatic break, where mundane reality is stretched beyond its breaking point and something deeper is revealed. Such exempla inject a moment of inspired otherness into medieval England, serving as a stark reminder of invisible vices. At the height of their potential they are performative moments, whose didactic power is achieved through the rhetorical force of the narrative structure. The sheer terror of sin, they suggest, refuses to be hidden forever and will finally burst forth onto the surface of everyday life.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.155.

<sup>48</sup> Not every exemplum is intended to terrify, however. Whilst the focus of this study is on those exempla which are structured to unnerve, terrify, or cause unease, they coexist with other forms and deployments of the exemplary; although Joan Young Gregg notes in 'Exempla' that *Jacob's Well* tends



The dynamics of these exempla have not gone unnoticed by previous scholars. In his study of the ‘Dancers of Colbek’ exemplum in *Handlyng Synne*, Mark Miller argues the rhetorical techniques of the tale operate through

a double-facedness by which they simultaneously insert themselves within what appear to be natural norms of response and problematise those norms, as if to catch us up on then, or call our attention to the ways we catch ourselves up.<sup>49</sup>

Reading the seemingly ‘natural’ responses characters have to the dramatic events of the Colbek story, Miller argues that Mannyng explores the process by which ‘sin becomes naturalised for us, or at least we treat it as natural, even as it represents for us the depth of our denaturedness’. Thus the exemplum prompts the subject to reflect on their own responses to sin, and to recognise the methods and habits by which sin slips under the phenomenological radar – as ‘a generalised condition’ rather than as an ‘atomically discrete act whose motivations can be rooted or purged’ – and becomes an uncontested part of the self. This reading resonates with my approach, which attempts to situate a similar play of shock and revelation within larger trajectories of care and therapeutic engagement with the self. Despite this, Miller’s stated goals of ‘exploring the agent’s point of view’ also circumscribe the limits of his investigation. He argues that this reflexive function of the exemplum is unique to *Handlyng Synne* and to the artistry of Robert Mannyng, to whom he attributes a desire to construct a system of understanding that circumvents ‘blunt’ and ‘authoritative redescriptions’ in favour of engaging with

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overwhelmingly towards the category of exempla she describes as ‘tales of caution’, she attributes such selectivity to the compiler’s ‘unwillingness to compromise his homiletic material which was not wholly typical of his age’. (pp.374, 378). Gregg is right to point out the trend, but is somewhat unfair on other preachers, many of whom introduced other forms of exempla without substantially ‘compromis[ing]’ their work – although the topic of entertaining exempla was much debated. On entertainment and the pulpit, see Siegfried Wenzel, ‘The Joyous Art of Preaching’, *Anglia* 97 (1979), 304-325, and Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp.78-133.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, ‘Displaced Souls’, p.625.

‘[e]thical problems [... that] are ultimately problems about who we are’.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between phenomenologies and selves that Miller charts is suggestive, but he stops short of exploring what exactly the agency he describes *is* and under what historical pressures it is constituted.

On an implicit level, a certain kind of agency is clearly assumed: one that favours open-ended approaches to ethical problems over the ‘blunt [...] authoritative redescriptions’ found in other exemplum collections. This implicit subject, a self-aware and highly competent analyst, is pitted *against* the procedures of authority, which are in turn assumed to be brutally simplistic and straightforward in their every gesture.<sup>51</sup> There is no room in Miller’s work for a discussion of power – of how the subject, engaged in ‘self-formation’, manoeuvres through or is manoeuvred by the historically-particularised forces of the medieval church. Indeed, there seems to be little sense of how power *could* manoeuvre the subject – how it could be more than a ‘blunt’ monolith against which to explore the procedures of Mannyng, represented as an exceptional author.<sup>52</sup> Miller’s focus on agency simplifies the operations of power – which appear in his essay only as a foil, never as productive – and, in the process, exceptionalises a process that could better be generalised.

Larry Scanlon has offered similar challenges to a straightforward reading of power in exempla, albeit from a non-Foucauldian perspective. Exploring the distinction between authority and narrative, he writes that in much scholarship ‘[a]uthority is treated

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, ‘Displaced Souls’, pp.631, 615, 607, 616, 630.

<sup>51</sup> This subject could arguably be described as ‘liberal’, owing as much to the academy’s own projected desires about the past as to the medieval subject as a historical phenomenon. On the production of such readings and the implicit biases they reflect, see Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, discussed below, and Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, especially pp.3-46.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter Six suggests the potential for overlap between pastoral power and modern concepts of authorship.

as simple, closed, and unchanging. It is a pure given, an inherited ideal which exercises absolute constraint over unquestioning present. Narrative, by contrast, is treated as complex, dynamic, liberating'. This received narrative, Scanlon suggests, makes the exemplum 'unreadable', a superfluous structure added to sermons to labour an already belaboured point. Only through re-thinking authority, 'not as some pure given, but an ideological structure that must be produced and maintained' can we understand the role that exempla play in sustaining and re-producing the processes of power.<sup>53</sup> This re-engagement with the terms of authority allows us to reach beyond the juridical model of power reflected in Miller's work, and to recognise in *all* exempla the dynamic redeployment of power that Miller ascribes to Mannyng. Scanlon's account of the function of exempla describes an

elasticity [which] enables the discourse of church doctrine to be at once fully outside the exemplum, as the immutable truth toward which it tends, and completely within the exemplum as the motor of its plot. Narrative becomes the discourse of the secular world, but a discourse continually amenable to incursions from the doctrinal.<sup>54</sup>

Miller's 'open-endedness' is a version of what Scanlon calls 'elasticity', a kind of drive, an 'infinitely repeatable process' of 'appropriation, or redemption of the material by the spiritual' that Scanlon convincingly argues is the central pillar of the exemplum.<sup>55</sup> The sense of *embeddedness* or cross-contamination between the material and the spiritual is of central importance in understanding the structure and function of the exemplum in a pastoral context. It is its ability to supercharge material reality with a meaning whose trace lingers long after the event that makes it so useful for the type of epistemological cleansing the sinner must undertake – and so useful as a repeated re-elaboration of subjectivisation through power. Thinking on one's sins entails a re-framing of one's entire

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<sup>53</sup> Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, p.26.

<sup>54</sup> Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, pp.62-63.

<sup>55</sup> Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, p.76.

life which must necessarily be performed through the terms of lived experience. The dynamics of this work suggest an epistemology of depth, where the momentary glimpses of divine reality have a precedence which marks normal material existence as quotidian and fundamentally lesser. At the same time, however, the contamination that functions as an essential part of the exemplum reintroduces, again and again, the reality and relevance of the material world itself.<sup>56</sup>

In many cases, the unforgettable materiality of everyday life proves to be fruitful material for pastoral power. *Jacob's Well*, for instance, opens with the description of a task: the work of digging and fortifying that will transform a 'schelde pytt' into the titular 'depe welle' – drawn from the image of Jacob's Well in John 4. The analogy is immediately clear; penitence is figured as a continuous labour of improvement. The 'pytt' which must be improved, however, quickly transforms from an external threat into the very substance of the self.<sup>57</sup>

þis pytt is þi body, þat is clepyd be doctourys þe pytt of lust. þis pytt is so  
schelde of kynde þat it hath no kyndely spryng to receyve þe watyr of grace.  
But þis pytt, þi body, haþ v. entrees, þat arn þi v. bodyly wyttes [...] Þe v.  
entrees þe stremys of watyr, þat is, þe artycles of þe gret curse, entryn ofte  
tymes in-to þi pytt.

The disturbing otherness of sin and failure, so often externalised in exempla, has been brought *inside* by *Jacob's Well*. The grotesque experience of sin has been buried literally under the skin. The pit, filled with 'sande' and 'grauel' and, most disturbingly, 'wose', is revealed to be the very *spongiosus* body of the subject. There is no grace in this revelation:

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<sup>56</sup> On medieval figurative language and its relationship to other forms of representation, see James Simpson, 'Spirituality and Economics in Passus 1-7 of the B Text', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 1 (1987), 83–103; Larry Scanlon, 'Personification and Penance', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 21 (2007), 1–29; and Nicolette Zeeman, 'Medieval Religious Allegory: French and English', in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.148–61.

<sup>57</sup> This shift is typical of the internalisation that differentiates the New Testament from the Old. See Chapter Two, pp.46–48.

the body is a leaking, overcome thing, unto which the ‘stremys’ of sin ‘entryn ofte tymes’, pouring in apparently unopposed.<sup>58</sup> *Jacob’s Well* thus opens by re-framing the body itself, stressing to its listeners that their own self is a stinking pit into which sin trickles, again and again. Contact with this pit places the soul in constant moral danger as the muck of the well threatens to ‘diffoule 3oure soule’. Sin coagulates in the nooks and ‘cornerys’ of the human body and soul, which ‘gaderyth euer more wose of synne’ as it goes about its daily business.

*Jacob’s Well* is not an outlier in working so hard to frame the body as a site of disgust: *The Book of Vices and Virtues* notes that humankind is ‘wel foul and uncelne sed in his begetyng, a sakful of dunge in his lyuyng, and wormes mete is his dienge’.<sup>59</sup> Under a medicinal-regimental eye such contamination is an essential evil. As Mary Douglas points out in *Purity and Danger*, ‘[d]irt is essentially disorder [... d]irt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment. [... R]ituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience’.<sup>60</sup> Understanding that one’s self is an essentially contaminated, dirty object is the first step in the ‘positive effort’ of cleansing the soul. Pastoral material demands such an appraisal of the subject – that is, the composite of body and soul that is a ‘human’ – as a precondition for salvation. This understanding rests by necessity, however, on an epistemology of the material world, in which the everyday materials of life can be charged with a new salvific energy. Here we are taught that selfhood is finally indivisible from the world within which it exists, warts and all. Being is always a form of being-in-the-world, as the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* makes clear in its use of the angel’s words from Genesis

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<sup>58</sup> *Jacob’s Well*, pp.1–2.

<sup>59</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.239.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.2. We do not have to embrace all of Douglas’ structuralist assumptions to see the relevance of such observations here.

16:7-8: ‘Agar he zayde “huannes comst þou, Huyder gest þou. Huet des þou?” Þise þri acsinges makeþ þe holy gost to þe zenezere huanne he awakeþ and arareþ him and openeþ þe eȝen of þe herte’.<sup>61</sup> Here the *Ayenbite* transforms the ‘þri acsinges’ of Hagar the wayward slave into the conditions of effective self-examination. Whilst a condensed version of the popular conditions of sin discussed in Chapter Two,<sup>62</sup> they drive to the heart of the matter: accurate penitence is enabled by the penitent’s ability accurately to locate themselves on the epistemological grid of past, future, and present being.

The purged eyes of the sinner recognise that this being is in constant danger. The reformed ‘eȝen of þe herte’ reveal a new and frightening landscape:

Afterward huanne he þengþ huer he ys and y-ziȝþ þise worlde þet he is bote an exil and a dezert uol of lyons and of lipas. a forest uol of an of calketreppen and of grines. ane ze uol of storm and of peril. a fornays anhet mid uer of zenne and of zorȝe. a ueld of uiȝt huerinne him be-houeþ eure to libbe in were and wyȝte mid dyeulen þet zuo moche byeþ wyse and sotil and strang.<sup>63</sup>

The purified gaze of those who ‘know themselves’ – the phrase has a long and distinguished pedigree – reveals the absolute state of danger that the entire environment poses.<sup>64</sup> The quotidian experiences of medieval English life are stripped away, and the stark bones of the salvific structure are conjured for all to see. The world beneath the veil of perception seems at first similar to that with which the *Ancrene Wisse* had engaged with so productively and energetically, before morphing into a series of extremities: it is a ‘dezert’ populated by ferocious animals, a ‘forest’ brimming with snares, a ‘ze’ in the grip of a terrible storm, and even a ‘fornays’ whose flames are sin and pain embodied. The world around the sinner is constantly threatening to metamorphose into apocalypse,

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<sup>61</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyȝt*, p.129.

<sup>62</sup> See pp.69-70.

<sup>63</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyȝt*, p.131.

<sup>64</sup> On the history of the term in medieval thought, see J. A. W. Bennett, ‘*Nosce Te Ipsum*: Some Medieval Interpretations’, in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, ed. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp.138–58.

whether sunk below the waves or burnt in fires that echo hell's infernal promise. In *Jacob's Well*, the water of sin that trickles into the 'pytt' is in constant danger of breaking a dam and rising into a final reckoning, a second 'noes flood' that 'flowyth hyȝe in-to þe hylles of powre & ryche folk [...] þe swelwe of watrys of cursynges flowyth in-to the hylles of proude & ryche men. þise watyr of curs ouerflowyth þanne þe valelys of poore folk'.<sup>65</sup> The modern sense of 'apocalypse' as a cataclysmic event is anachronistic here; following the biblical tradition derived from the Greek *apokalyptein* ('to reveal, disclose'), Middle English *apocalypse* meant 'insight, vision' or 'a vision or hallucination'.<sup>66</sup> Here, however, anachronism allows us to understand how evoking the savagery of the cataclysm generates an epistemological shift or revelation. The systematic manner in which such moments employ and redistribute the value of the material world reminds that pastoral texts must also construe and engage with the non-self, the non-I through which the I is constituted and maintained. Forever teetering on the brink of destruction, forever locked in a dynamic struggle with its surroundings, this self is tied to an environment that threatens its existence at every turn.<sup>67</sup> Such shifts are designed to send a shock through the subject's interpretative apparatus, replacing the certainty of a limited perspective with an awareness of the self's fragility in the cosmic order. The effect is the total transformation of the environment, with spiritual-therapeutic aims: the epistemological environment has been shifted forever. Such a gesture is firmly set within a conceptual framework that writes a process of repeated rupture – through exempla and apocalypse – into the heart of pastoral subjectivity and epistemology.

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<sup>65</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.90.

<sup>66</sup> *MED*, 'apocalypse' (n.).

<sup>67</sup> In her unpublished PhD thesis, Katie Walter has suggested something similar, writing that '[e]veryday bodies and discourses of the care of the self might more properly characterise formulations of the medieval lifecycle, being-in-the-world, the "mixed life," the audience of vernacular theology'. Katie Louise Walter, 'Discourses of the Human: Mouths in Late Medieval Religious Literature' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006), p.7. Whilst Walter posits a stricter distinction between specialised spiritual advice and 'general' pastoralia than I do, she is right to insist on the centrality of the care of the self for understanding quotidian experience per se.

These handbooks, then, operate through a sustained, systematic deployment of revelations whose net effect is to demand the constant reappraisal of the quotidian. Thus these regular revelations become regimen-like, even dietetic; the ordered repetition and re-articulation of the revelatory moment underscores the necessity of constant watchfulness. Thus *Jacob's Well* demands the wrathful be 'be fled as a raveynous dogge, & as a wood hound, as an egre and a rampaund leoun', and describes the 'coueytous man' as similar to 'an yrchon' and a backbiter as 'a bocherys dogge'.<sup>68</sup> Other manuals follow a similar structure, insistently making the wilful irrationality of the sinner material; *Handlyng Synne's* backbiter is compared to a 'neddre', whilst the heart of a prideful self is 'þe deueles feþere bed' in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*.<sup>69</sup> These texts thus function as reverse bestiaries, gladly reading through the human surfaces of sinners to their true, bestial natures. Where much of the force of the bestiary derives from a process of allegory that ferrets precepts and warnings for human behaviour out of the behaviour and physiology of the natural world, the pastoral model instead dives under the skin of human behaviour to reveal the rampant bestiality beneath. The bestiary moves from particular to type, from signifier to signified – the manuals, meanwhile, invert this trajectory. From the undifferentiated mass of mankind, new species and types of sinners are discovered lurking in every corner, brought together and neatly categorised as the devil's menagerie. Such metaphors insistently make sin material, embody it in visceral images of frothing dogs and starving lions. Pastoral power refuses to transform the material world into a mere mirage of a rarefied, divine discourse – the 'dezert', 'forest' and 'ze' of the *Ayenbite*, populated with fierce beasts and natural disasters, will not be assimilated into a purely metaphysical hierarchy. The world surrounding the penitent, from the most foreign of

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<sup>68</sup> *Jacob's Well*, pp.100, 117, 262.

<sup>69</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.106; *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.26.



externalities to the individual organs of the body, is transformed, time and time again, into images that signify clearly the great evils within – without succumbing to abstraction.

Despite the exotic potential of such images, many exempla work hard to retain a sense of mundanity. The forms of materiality that sin takes are pulled into quotidian experience rather than held at arms' length. Whilst some of the animals of this reverse bestiary are rather exotic (the 'leoun' is an obvious example), the majority of them would have been rather common sights in medieval England ('yrchon', 'neddre', the ever-popular 'dogge' or 'hound').<sup>70</sup> These are certainly dangerous animals, but they are indigenous to Britain and likely not unheard-of in day-to-day medieval life. Such images, then, work towards the same epistemological shift as the otherworldly exempla but simultaneously refuse to exoticise sin in the process. It may be disgusting, it may be other, but sin is as common as the village dogs or the hedgehog encountered after dark. The manuals' preference for domestic or indigenous animals implies that sin must be understood as familiar as well as apocalyptic. The inanimate resources martialled to figure sin also support such observations. Whilst the 'feþere bed' of the prideful heart was likely a target of considerable desire rather than social reality for many, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* goes on to describe the contaminating potential of sinful company in an explosive manner. It is dangerous because, as would have been common knowledge, 'a cole þat is brennyng brenneþ soone a-feer a grete heepe of ded cooles, 3if he ligge amonges hem'.<sup>71</sup> Metaphor transforms company itself into a state fraught with danger, where human association can light the fires of hell in an instant. *Handlyng Synne* employs similar imagery to warn men of the dangers of fraternising with women: 'of wymmen hyt is gret wunder: / Hyt fareþ wyþ hem as fyr & tunder'.<sup>72</sup> Under the normative heterosexuality of

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<sup>70</sup> More than merely 'snake', 'neddre' designates the common adder found throughout Europe. See *MED*, 'neddre' (n.).

<sup>71</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.227.

<sup>72</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.199.

patriarchy, the never-ending potential of flame, of explosion, of hell, lies between women and men. At the same time as stressing the inherent danger of interactions with sinners and women, however, such imagery remains a material metaphor, images of hearth and home which would have been extremely familiar to the vast majority of medieval readers. Fire especially carried frightening material overtones in a period where the majority of buildings were wooden and streets tended to be narrower than they are in the twenty-first century.<sup>73</sup> The effect of rendering such sin in *common* terms should not be understated; deep in the heart of the revelatory, destabilising moment, the handbooks reintroduce the quotidian. Rather than remaining only illustrations, then, these metaphors serve as intentionally everyday gestures that stylise normal experience as part of the divine struggle for salvation.

The confessional manuals themselves remind us that this enterprise is endless, for the temptation against which the subject struggles has no end. These texts appear to struggle with this fact, setting out to enumerate the various genealogies and family trees of vice before giving an almost unanimous gesture of resignation – as *The Book of Vices and Virtues* states, sin ‘is deuised and y-sprad in so many maneres and so fele parties þat ynneþe may any man noumbre hem’.<sup>74</sup> Rather than an actual failure of the pastoral structure, though, this unending, undefinable, and uncountable parade of sins and temptations is part of the fundamental core of the entire apparatus. It is one of its greatest strengths, demanding and licensing a flexible system whose task is never done and whose particular instances can be challenged or even dismissed without engaging with the system *qua* system. The task also becomes one of constant analysis, interpretation, and purgation – an endless disciplinary demand in the face of an unending threat. Traumatic

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<sup>73</sup> Despite the growing prevalence of stone walls in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many homes were still composed mostly of wood. See Mark Gardiner, ‘An Archaeological Approach to the Development of the Late Medieval Peasant House’, *Vernacular Architecture*, 45 (2014), 16–28.

<sup>74</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.12.

episodes and a systematically quotidian system of imagery work to generate to generate an epistemological regimen that is both general and specific, capable of honing the finest points of psychological detail whilst setting the entirety in its cosmic context. In order to achieve such a system, the manuals set out to structure their message as *evidential* or *experiential* in nature – the exemplum’s power rests on it being a faithfully-related example of deviance punished, whilst the carefully reiterated metaphorical twist reframes everyday experience in terms of heaven and hell. It is finally up to the pastoral subject to take from this the need for a new epistemological paradigm. Whatever the final shape of this paradigm, however, it cannot eschew the world – pastoral power denies attempts to rarefy or abstract sin, performing in the process its own material form of metaphysics.

The abiding metaphor of *Jacob’s Well* encapsulates these metaphysics perfectly – the ‘wose’ of sin, gathering in the leaking pit of the body, is an eminently *spatial* phenomenon. In its own take on the taxonomy of sins, the *Well*’s different species of sin separate into different corners, each of which are further divided into *feet*. Thus Envy ‘hath iij. cornerys of wose. þe ferste is in þe herte, þe secunde in þe mowth, þe thridde is in dede’.<sup>75</sup> These ‘cornerys of wose’ fill and drown the three coordinates through which knowing and worshipping take place, and through which mankind is marked as fundamentally defective and fallen from grace: heart, mouth, and deed. Envy literally spreads itself through the body and its actions, sticking in the mouth and staining every deed of the subject. Such sins refuse to be abstracted and, much like the cooling physiological work of Evagrius’ demons discussed in Chapter Two,<sup>76</sup> assert themselves on a physical plane, taking up space, actively blocking access to grace. Even the four degrees of sin (delight, will, deed, and ‘long hauntyng’) are figured as the products of

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<sup>75</sup> *Jacob’s Well*, p.82.

<sup>76</sup> See above, pp.57-59.

decay and dirt, leaving a body that ‘stynketh’ as proof of their presence.<sup>77</sup> Such metaphors insistently materialise sin, stressing its tumour-like role as a physical manifestation that plays a real and significant role in the body.

This reifying drive is seized upon by these texts, where it becomes the positive condition for beginning the path of the true Christian. In the case of *Handlyng Synne*, the text self-consciously engages with the ambiguity of its title:

In frensche þer a clerk hyt sees,  
He clepyþ hyt manuel de pecches.  
Manuel ys handlyng with honde;  
Pecches ys synnye, y vndyrstonde,  
Do hem to gedyr, ys handlyng synne.  
And weyl ys clepyd, for þys skyle;  
And as y wote, 3ow shew y wyle.  
We handel synne euey day;  
In wurde and dede, al we may,  
Lytil or mochel, synne we do,  
Be fend and oure flesh tysyn vs þerto;  
ffor þys skyle hyt may be seyde  
Handlyng synne for oure mysbreyde;  
[...] Anoper handlyng þer shuld be,  
Wyþ shryfte of mouþe to clense þe.  
Handyl þy synne yn þy þouȝt,  
Lytyl & mochel, what þou has wroght;  
[...] Handyl þy synnes, & weyl hem gesse,  
How þey fordo al þy godenesse.<sup>78</sup>

The materiality of sin finally conditions how one approaches it. It is something to be *handled*, a process that takes place ‘euey day’, performed ‘with honde’ alongside other mundane activities. Sinning is an activity rather than a state, a type of doing or being-in-the-world. All of this activity is ‘handlyng synne’. These are sins one can grasp; sins one can wrap one’s tongue around. This explicit embedding of sin in the material quotidian world opens the way for a similarly structured solution. Enmeshed in the physical world, sin calls for ‘[a]noper handlyng’ to take place and empowers the body itself to take part

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<sup>77</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.68.

<sup>78</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.5.

in the process. Material solutions for material problems. These sins can be ‘[h]andyl[d] [...] yn þy þou3t’, can be turned over and around, considered, prodded, and moulded, and even *treated* through medical practice.<sup>79</sup> Their very presence in the world opens them up to specific kind of rejection, one rooted in physical interaction – as Miller notes, ‘[t]he insistent materiality of sin, the way it attaches to us in all of our dealings with the world, means that it is at the same time manipulable if we gain the proper training’.<sup>80</sup> Far from bogging pastoral theory and practice down, making sin material widens the scope of good penitential practice to the whole arena of the body, with its dangers and opportunities. It brings the body firmly into sin’s purview, allows its effects to extend through organs and across skin. In doing so, it licenses the extension of the pastoral disciplinary regime into physiological as well as psychological arenas.

*Jacob’s Well* also refuses to jettison the materiality of sin. Here the extensive allegorisation of the process of caring for the self turns a solid trowel into a good confession and, crucially, vice versa.

A scope is deep & hool, to resceyue watyr; so þi penaunce must be depe, to receyue watyr of contricyoun in-to þin herte, þat, depe in þin herte, þou sorwe for þi curs. [...] þi scope of þi penaunce muste ben hool, wyth an hole purpose, neuere to traspacyn a3en in þat curs. 3if þi scope of penaunce be to scheld, it takyth no watyre of sorwe [...] 3if þi scope of penaunce be brokyn, þat is 3if þi schrift be partyd, [...] þanne þi scope is brokyn, & þanne it voydeth not clene þe watyr of þe curs [...] þi scope must haue an handyll, for to holde wyth þi scope in þin handys, þat is, in þi werkys. þe handyll is satisfaccyoun [...] þe scepe of þi penaunce, it muste be deep in sorwe, & hool in schryfte, wyth þe handle of makyng amendys, 3if þou haue power & tyme, & ellys þou scopyst in veyn.<sup>81</sup>

The rhetorical structure of this passage refuses to let the trowel fade into obscurity. It is not merely a platform from which to launch a discussion of the intricacies of confession

<sup>79</sup> ‘Hondlen’ can mean ‘to care for (the sick or wounded), treat (a wound or disease)’. *MED*, ‘hondlen’ (v.).

<sup>80</sup> Miller, ‘Displaced Souls’, 613.

<sup>81</sup> *Jacob’s Well*, pp.65–66.

– it remains the organising image of the process, deeply embedded in the logic of pastoral power. At no point does it become a simple signifier in a divine hierarchy, entirely subordinate to the eternal truth to which it points; the text grasps and holds on to it as an object. Penance is not *like* a ‘scope’; it *is* one, it is the ‘scope of penance’. The text categorically demands that both material and spiritual reality be kept in play. Its two terms – the ‘scope’ and ‘penance’ – exist in a sort of symbiotic relationship in which neither can function without the other, in which they act as necessary supports for one another. In the act of connecting the two items, metaphor cannot suppress one in favour of the other. Instead, it thrives on contamination, on the conceptual ‘bleeding’ of one into the other and vice-versa.<sup>82</sup> Foregrounded so viscerally, pastoral power pushes further still, beyond any specific instance of metaphor: such deployments, understood collectively, become *metaphors of materiality itself*, of the organised relationship between the world and salvific meaning, of the epistemological move that will save the soul.

It is this specific re-organisation of the world that these texts finally prompt as the basis for the pastoral-disciplinary regime. Knowing is the first and most essential problem that such texts wrestle with, and they set out to do more than merely reel off endless lists of sins. Instead, they implicitly set out an epistemological paradigm within which the Christian self must place themselves as a subject in constant peril, a splicing of spirit and flesh that demands a very specific response. This response is generated by a double process which both estranges the pastoral subject from their quotidian existence and re-introduces this very existence back to them as the condition of their salvation. The first part of this process is performed by exempla, which deliver an epistemological shock to the system by apocalyptically revealing the true(r) order beneath appearance. This is

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<sup>82</sup> The paradigmatic Christian example is, of course, the Word made flesh in John 1:14. Metaphor actualised by divine might, the world and the spirit are held in balance as the former is redeemed without staining the latter.

entirely in keeping with the depth-model examined in Gregory the Great's thought in Chapter Two. The second half of the process, however, troubles the simple hierarchies of the depth model by tracing through examples and metaphors how sin inheres in, and is understood as part of, the material world around the pastoral subject. This process of reification, strengthened by systematic appeals to medical knowledge, pulls the spirit and the material close together, almost too close for comfort. The result of this twofold operation is to figure a knowing self who, armed with knowledge of the complex relations of this world and the next, can discipline themselves in both body and soul.

## 5: WRITING POWER

### Accounting for pastoral care

*Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need (as some do) epistles of commendation to you, or from you? You are our epistle, written in our hearts, which is known and read by all men: Being manifested, that you are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, and written: not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tablets of stone but in the fleshly tables of the heart.<sup>1</sup>*

*The chains of tormented mankind are made out of red tape.<sup>2</sup>*

As crucial as the demands of pastoral power are the methods by which it represents its own operation. It must depict its own operations in a manner than can structure the relations it engenders – both between and within the subjects it produces – as inherently just and fair. If it fails to do so it will struggle to produce its effects in an active and above all *willing* population. It will fall from an exercise of power into mere coercion.<sup>3</sup> It is thus essential to understand how the apparatus of pastoral power elaborates and performs this fundamentally important moment of exchange between the macrocosmic metaphysics of sin and salvation and the microcosmic instances of individual responses to it. One of the foremost images with which the Middle English confessional handbooks utilise in order to depict these relations is that of recording, as *Jacob's Well* makes clear:

An hermyte, in desert, fecchyd watyr euery day ferre fro his celle. & he was wery for trauayle, &, for sluggynes & slewthe, thouzte to haue esyd hym wyth schortere travayle, & purposyd to haue sette his celle faste by þe welle for to haue þe more ese. he lokyd be-hynde hym, & sey3 an aungyl folewyn hym, & tellyn his steppys. þe hermyte askyd hym what he mente, & why he dyde so. þe aungyl sede: 'I noumbre þi steppys in þi trayayle for to schewyn þe noumbre þerof a-for god azens þe feend, þat þou the-through mowe haue mede in heuen. for feendys noumbre þe steppys of man & womman to synne warde, & alle rownynges & ianglynges in dyvyn seruise, for to schewe þe noumbre of hem a-for god to manny dampnacyoun'. þe hermyte flytted his celle fyve myle ferthere for þe welle for to makyn þe manyere steppys to haue þe more mede.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 31:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Kafka, in Gustave Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971), quoted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986), p.58.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the difference between 'productive' and 'coercive' power, see Chapter One, esp. pp.23-25.

<sup>4</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.111.



The slothful hermit's attempts at cutting disciplinary corners are not so much rebuked as observed; it is made clear that his every move and indiscretion are carefully gathered by two opposed bureaucracies – the heavenly and the infernal, 'god azeens þe feend' – in a constant war for his soul. Faced with such mighty documentary technologies, the hermit must *account for*, and justify, his every step and action, the minutiae of everyday existence. As a result, the hermit understandably moves his home further from the well than ever before in order 'to makyn þe manyere steppys to haue þe more mede'. Behind the gross simplification which aligns many steps with much reward lies the imaginative force of an entire assemblage dedicated to recording deeds and misdeeds.

As þe feend wryteth & noumbryth þi slauthe, slugnes, & ydelnes, idell woordys, ianglyng, & þi rownyng in cherche, & slepynges, & ydell talys, and alle þi synnes, & alle þin euyll dedys, for to more þi peyne in helle; Ryȝt so, aungelys wryteth & noumbryth þi gode werkys, & þi gode ocupacyouns, & þi good gostly trauayle, & alle þi steppys to cherche ward, ȝif þou occupye þe wel whyll þou art þere, & all þi prayerys, & þi deuocyons, & þin heryng of goddys woord, & of dyvyn seruyse, to encresyn & to moryn þi mede in blysse.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing is missed. Divine and demonic scribes unite in their efficiency and attention to detail, greedily snapping up any piece of information which might strengthen their claim on a sinner's soul. The texts that one can imagine being produced under such circumstances by such hands, with their opposed lists of indiscretions and achievements, bear more than a passing resemblance to the confessional manuals themselves. Indeed, the structure of the language itself mimics this recording with exhausting specificity: 'slauthe, slugness, & ydelnes, idell woordys, ganglyng, & þi rownyng in cherche, & slepynges, & ydell talys' before finally adding an almost embarrassed 'and alle þi synnes'. This exemplar amounts to a kind of challenge: since devils and angels engage in such specific recording, the confessional self must, too. The pastoral subject must come to

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<sup>5</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.111.

understand itself as a measurable and measured entity, one that is recorded and who will have to prove its worth at the end of time.

Paul Binski has described late medieval piety as obsessed with ‘quantitative piety’ and centred ‘upon quantifiable, and mnemonically valuable, categories of doctrine and devotion’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the arrangement of candles described in the 1399 will of John of Gaunt and cited by Binski – ten representing the Commandments, seven for the Works of Mercy and the Seven Deadly Sins, and five for the Wounds of Christ – feed into a vast quantitative web. Similarly, the usual number of wounds suffered by Christ was given as 5,745, a number calculated through annual devotional activity, as the daily recitation of fifteen Pater Nosters and Aves for a year would account for the full number of injuries.<sup>7</sup> The carefully divided and numerated lists of sins in penitential handbooks themselves reflect the same drive towards careful codification and specific recording: the *Ayenbite*, for instance, divides the sin of pride into seven categories, each with a range of subcategories numbered between three and eight.<sup>8</sup> Not unlike the footprints of the monk, each devotional element becomes embedded in an analytical, numerical and seemingly objectivising network. Even more resonant are the so-called ‘metric relics’ which appear in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this tradition, images of the Passion are accompanied by text which attests to the length of, amongst other things, Christ’s body, his tomb, or the nails driven through his hands and feet. Despite variance between individual copies, texts of this type almost invariably declare the *exact accuracy* of the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.126.

<sup>7</sup> David S. Areford, ‘The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ’, in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), pp.211–39.

<sup>8</sup> These structures recall, and are derived from, the great confessional *summae* of the thirteenth century, produced under scholastic and mendicant influences. For the earliest gestures towards these traditions, see Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, especially pp.239–269. On scholastic influences on the *summae* tradition see Boyle, ‘The Quodlibets of St. Thomas’ and ‘The *Summa Confessorum* of John of Freiburg’. For the mendicant context, see Boyle, ‘The *Summa* for Confessors’, pp.126–130.

representation.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps a final development is evident on a flyleaf of Bodleian Libraries, Bodl. MS. 860, a fifteenth-century Book of Hours.<sup>10</sup> A ruler has been roughly drawn across the top of both columns, annotated with the words *mesura longitudinis Christi*. Abstracted entirely from the devotional symbols it is usually accompanied by, this notation has become a *purely geometrical* fact, an assertion of the inherent value of the specific numerical dimensions of Christ. Taken together, such elements point to the sheer power of a system under which the pastoral subject understands themselves as imbricated in an administrative network under whose rules the push-and-pull of divine reward and punishment can be quantified, measured, and tabulated. Through examples such as the monk of *Jacob's Well*, penitents are asked to think of their identity as moulded by the very possibility of being textually recorded and accounted for.

These dynamics and pressures revolve around the concept of rendering account – that is, the notion of formally answering for, explaining, or justifying one's actions. In twenty-first century parlance this refers primarily to monetary transactions, but the potential for now-obsolete moral (and pastoral) applications still resonates. The verb *account*, from Anglo-Norman *acounter*, is first attested to in the early fourteenth century, and appears in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Hoccleve's *Dialogus*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* and, most strikingly for our purposes, the *Ayenbite of Inwit*.<sup>11</sup> This linguistic development, as we shall see, is rooted in the legal and political practices that developed across Western Europe in the later middle ages. The term 'accounting' gathers a number of factors under the disciplinary gaze: a quantification of acts and intentions, a judicial-

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<sup>9</sup> Kathryn M. Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.208–213; see also Curt F. Bühler, 'Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls', *Speculum*, 39.2 (1964), 270–78; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety', *Bulletin of the GHI Washington*, 30 (2002), 3–46; and Areford, 'The Passion Measured'.

<sup>10</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Erik Kwakkel, who brought this manuscript to my attention.

<sup>11</sup> *OED*, 'account' (v.).

moral approach to truth, and a sense of stewardship or duty on the part of the subject. The pastoral-disciplinary texts I have examined in the previous chapter employ this concept of accounting regularly and, I will argue, systematically. *Jacob's Well* introduces us to a poor 'scolere of paryse,' who, having long dwelled in sin, finally attempts to confess his sins. When he approaches the prior of St Victor, however,

he hadde swyche sorwe, syghnes, & sobbynges in þe throte, & terys in þe eyzin, þat his voys fayled, & he myȝt speke no woord. þe pryour bad hym go & wryte his synnes, & schewe hem to hym wtretyn. he wente & wrote hem, & comm aȝen to þe priour, & no woord myȝt he speke to þe priour, for wepyng & sobbyng. þanne to þe priour he took þe scrowe, wretyn wyth his synnes. þe priour redde hem. þei were so grete, þat þe priour askyd him leue to schewe þat scrowe wyth his synnes to an-oþer wysere man, to askyn hym counseyl be leve of þe scolere. In presens of þe prior, an-oþer man, an Abbot, lokyd on þe scrowe, & seyde to þe abbot: 'here is wretyn ryȝt nouȝt'. [...] þe Abbot & þe prior togydere seydin to þe scolere þat god had voydyd his synnes out of þat lettere, in counfortyng him þat his synnes ben forgeuyn.<sup>12</sup>

*Jacob's Well* here lays the bones of this system of accountability bare. Rendering account crucially 'objectifies' a process by justifying it according to measurable legal and social norms, making it possible to quantify success or failure. Here this objectification is rendered material by the man's recourse to writing, a key part of both Foucault's 'care of the self' as well as the increasingly documentary culture surrounding accounting, officialdom, and the birth of the state in medieval England.<sup>13</sup> This objectified knowledge can then be assessed in the process of holding to account, as the priest – quite appropriately – analyses what he can and refers to his superior what he cannot. We thus see a system of accountability operating in the ideal. Of course, the miracle here – clearly instantiated *through* the material fact of the document, rather than *over* it – confirms that

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<sup>12</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> See Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, including p.51: 'Around the care of the self, there developed an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together'. On documentary culture and the state, see M. T. Clanchy, 'Law and Love in the Middle Ages', ed. John Bossy, *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* (Cambridge; London; New York; New Rochelle; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.47-69, pp.56-7 and Clanchy, 'Literacy, Law, and the Power of the State', *Publications de l'École française de Rome* 82.1 (1985), 23-34.

the ultimate offence of sin is committed to God, and that it is to Him that sinners must finally render account. The system of administrative accountability has enabled confession to take place, codified and reified it, and allowed it to be shared among experts, and the divine structure intervenes in order to confirm the hierarchy and prove final direction of accountability.

As if to confirm the specifically legal sphere of these proceedings, *Jacob's Well* notes that the Parisian man's sins have been 'voydyd', a term which held a weight Middle Ages not unlike the modern 'void': '[t]o make (sth.) legally null and void, deprive of legal force [...] to abstain from and correct (a wrong)'.<sup>14</sup> The applicability of such a reading carries additional potential, inviting us to read this passage as describing a specifically *legal* procedure, by which sins are annulled, deprived of condemnatory force. The effect is not ultimately to undermine earthly justice in favour of the divine (there was never really any competition); instead, each instant of accountability underwrites the value of the other in the constant struggle for the subject's soul. As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak writes in a discussion of charters, 'the written act functioned as representative of a superior, irrevocable order, and [...] the document itself might mediate divine punishment'.<sup>15</sup> The divine order is a kind of fantastical projection of the earthly order; the existence of each reinforces the power of the other; rendering account to your priest renders account, finally, to God.

This dynamic of accountability also marks a point at which we can extend some of Foucault's observations on pastoral power to get to grips with precisely this structure. Accountability is not a term which Foucault uses directly in his works; the analysis of

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<sup>14</sup> *MED*, 'voiden' (v.).

<sup>15</sup> Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Diplomatic Sources and Medieval Documentary Practices: An Essay in Interpretative Methodology', in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John H. Van Engen (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp.313–43 (p.321).

‘the examination’ in *Discipline and Punish*, however, suggests some potential analytical routes to it. The examination, Foucault writes, ‘situates [individuals] within a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. The procedures of examination were accompanied at the same time by an intense documentary accumulation. A “power of writing” was constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline’.<sup>16</sup> Whilst medieval documentary practices and methods of accountability are a far cry from the eighteenth-century examinations of pupils, medical subjects, and prisoners, by producing a subject that becomes visible (to themselves and to the hierarchy at large) as an objective, recordable, accountable individual, they are enacting a very similar form of the ‘power of writing’. Indeed, when Foucault broaches the subject of the examination in detail, his analysis resonates with the concept of accountability:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgment. It is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. [...] In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. [...] One often speaks of the ideology that the human ‘sciences’ bring with them, in their discreet or prolix manner. But does their very technology, this tiny operational schema that has become so widespread [...], this familiar method of the examination, implement, within a single mechanism, power relations that make it possible to extract and constitute knowledge?<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps we can think of the act of *accounting* as a form of examination. Systems of accountability make ‘it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish’ by producing a set of norms, demanding evidence of adherence, and supplying mechanisms for the removal of those deemed to have failed.<sup>18</sup> This kind of dynamic depends directly on ‘the power of the norm’ – as Foucault describes it, ‘within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm

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<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.189.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.184–185.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of accountability in England, see Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability in Medieval England, 1170-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences'.<sup>19</sup>

These structures of accountability and administration are key to understanding the experience of power within the pastoral-confessional mode. The specific relations to authority these structures promote are those governed by legalism, a fundamental sense of justice in the regularity of execution. An awareness of the *systematicity* of the system – its rules, regulations, and protocols – produces faith in its operation. This essentially administrative dream has been analysed by Max Weber with reference to nineteenth-century bureaucratic practice:

the characteristic principle of bureaucracy [is] the abstract regularity of the execution of authority, which is the result of the demand for 'equality before the law' in the personal and functional sense – hence, of the horror of 'privilege', and the principled rejection of doing business 'from case to case'.<sup>20</sup>

Described here are the principles of regularity and systematicity that form a key part of the dynamics of accountability more generally. A powerfully normalising slant is clearly recognisable in 'the horror of 'privilege'; instead, an objective regularity of analysis is applied to generate a 'scientific' account of variation. This 'execution of authority', in contrast to lordly feudal power, remains diffuse, hidden, abstract. It is true that under early and 'high' feudalism power, as experienced by the vast majority of the European population, was largely exercised as violence, rather than as an abstracted or administrative process: 'Power was *not* felt, nor was it habitually imagined, as government'.<sup>21</sup> Twelfth-century experience was patterned by the petty systematic

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.184.

<sup>20</sup> Max Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Keegan Paul, 1948), pp.196–244 (p.224). Emphasis original.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.12.

violence of lords and princes lacking in ‘self-conscious action’.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the twelfth century, however, routines of officialdom and accountability had arisen across most of Europe as rulers consolidated their judicial hold over their subjects, who in turn increasingly came to understand themselves as accountable officials rather than feudal vassals.<sup>23</sup> Whilst by no means totally analogous to Weber’s sense of the modern bureaucratic state, we are here edging closer to a sense of accountability; it gains its strength precisely from its diffused nature, its surveilling-yet-removed epistemologies, and its own self-evidently systematic, and therefore just, processes.

The crux of this structure is precisely that, in its ideal form, it has the potential to equalise the experience of power. Whether or not this was the case at the higher ends of medieval politics, it certainly was the case before God. Here, every individual is allocated the same ethical and legal position within the distribution of knowledge; in the ideal, there are no get-out clauses. Discussing the accountability structures of inquisitions into priestly behaviour, for instance, Sabapathy describes something similar:

Inquisitions are conducted by *superiores*. But *inferiores* can instigate them. *Diffamatio* [the “accusation from fame” or rumour] can come from anywhere. It needed to come from anywhere if the insolence of office was to be moderated, otherwise the *pauperes* would fear to speak against the *potentes*. [...] There is, therefore, a symbolic logic that the reprimand for the abuse of *status* enables *inferiores* to complain against those powers ordained by God.<sup>24</sup>

In the inquisition, the rootlessness and omnidirectionality of *diffamatio* – the fact that it could be reported as rumour by anyone, allowing accusers a degree of insulation from retribution – underwrites the sense that *every* office must render account for its actions,

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<sup>22</sup> Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*, p.19.

<sup>23</sup> Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*, especially pp.574-582. In his *The Subject Medieval/Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), Peter Haidu offers another perspective on these developments. He argues that that new documentary technologies deployed during the twelfth century increasingly allowed for the ‘possibility of governance in absence’ (p.162) and paved the way for the elaboration of the state.

<sup>24</sup> Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p.167.



however powerful. It appears to be entirely egalitarian. This schema does not allow power to condense in individuals. Instead, power is diffused through the very operation of the system, immanent in its application. This ideal is well-represented by Mary Douglas, also quoted by Sabapathy, who writes that

hierarchy restricts position, it institutes authority. Its institutions work to prevent concentrations of power. It is a position system in which everyone has a place, every place has a prescribed trajectory of roles through time.<sup>25</sup>

As long as the machine is rational, predictable, and soulless, it also represents a fiction of egalitarian justice where the very mechanics of the system will measure, punish and reward all according to their deserts. This is also why *corruption* is the single greatest threat to a system of accountability – it indicates a failure in the very mechanics of dispersal by which power can condense in individuals rather than be redispersed into systematicity. This explains both the attraction and limitations of protests against corruption, whether levelled against the medieval priesthood or twenty-first-century banking corporations: they remain bound by faith in the redemptive possibility of the machine itself.

Writing of bureaucracy, Weber notes that ‘[i]t is the peculiarity of the modern entrepreneur that he conducts himself as the “first official” of his enterprise, in the very same way in which the ruler of a specifically modern bureaucratic state speaks of himself as “the first servant” of the state’.<sup>26</sup> The paradoxical effect of having a leader *serve* is mobilised by the accountability model, which relocates and consolidates power into the systematicity of the system itself. Such declarations are, however, less of a ‘modern’ phenomenon than Weber assumed. Perhaps he was not aware of – or chose to ignore –

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Douglas, ‘A Feeling for Hierarchy’, in *Believing Scholars: Ten Catholic Intellectuals*, ed. James L. Heft (Fordham, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp.94-120 (pp.95-6).

<sup>26</sup> Weber, ‘Bureaucracy’, p.198.

the fact that, from Gregory I onwards, and increasingly from the ninth century, popes used the title *servus servorum Dei* (servant of the servants of God) at the beginning of papal bulls. Matthew 20: 27-29 licenses this use, declaring ‘he that will be first among you shall be your servant. Even as the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister and give his life a redemption for many’. In this structure of accountability the play of leader/servant – and the implicit responsibilities and potential for assessment – is underwritten by a diffusion of power through an ultimately *just* (because rational, objective) machine.<sup>27</sup> There are of course notable differences in deployment – the metaphysical proposition of God, for instance – which should caution us against making any serious case for the identity of these disciplinary structures. Nevertheless, such systems return us again to the pillars of pastoral power: observation, individuation, and reform.

Whilst there is evidence that interests in accountability, estate management, and officialdom stretch back to pre-Conquest England, sustained engagements with these phenomena, and the immense documentary efforts required to systematise them, were renewed first under the House of Normandy and, later, the Plantagenets.<sup>28</sup> A key fulcrum of Henry I’s systematic expansion of the royal justice system, the Pipe Rolls – accounts of shire revenues taken at the Michaelmas sheriffs’ audit – are extant from as early as 1155, and survive well into the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The thirteenth century saw the growth of contractual, as opposed to traditional feudalism, as precise judicial formulae and legal protections replaced and re-structured the terms of relationships between lords

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<sup>27</sup> Sabapathy tells us that, by the fourteenth century, theories of accountability had affected the notion of kingship, too: ‘[i]deas of right rule [...] were connected to reformed practices of accountability;’ *Officers and Accountability*, p.237.

<sup>28</sup> Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, pp.57-60, quoted p.59.

<sup>29</sup> Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*, p.336, Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, pp.92-101.

and their subjects.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, methods by which officials could be held to account ‘became qualitatively more complex and quantitatively more widespread’, as Sabapathy argues.<sup>31</sup> Whilst there is little evidence to suggest that England was in any sense exceptional in its shift to methods of legal and contractual accountability, it nonetheless produced a huge amount of documentation as a result. By the High Middle Ages, the amount of extant legal material from England far outstrips those of any other European state.<sup>32</sup> Over the course of the High and Late Middle Ages, the culture of recording and documentation, enabled in part by a stress on accountability, would spread: originally at the insistence of the king’s government, this mindset had by the thirteenth century reached the manorial level, where bailiffs ‘were recommended to record in writing in the autumn of the year each tool and horseshoe and everything that remained on the manor, great and small’.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the High and Late Middle Ages, then, documents in a variety of languages must have been familiar to large swathes of English society, from royal and ecclesiastical courts right down to prosperous peasant smallholders, from whom hundreds of thousands of charters were made.<sup>34</sup> Even where literacy in the modern sense may have lacked, an administrative and often secular attitude – one that recognised the power of the written record and the document – increasingly triumphed.

English universities naturally responded to this demand – by the end of the thirteenth century it was possible to learn how ‘to draw a conveyance or a will, to perform the humbler legal duties which did not demand the services of a professional lawyer, [and] to keep manorial accounts’ at Oxford; in short, tutors offered ‘practical training for a

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<sup>30</sup> See Scott L. Waugh, ‘Tenure to Contract: Lordship and Clientage in Thirteenth-Century England’, *The English Historical Review*, 101:401 (October 1986), 811-839.

<sup>31</sup> Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p.222.

<sup>32</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Chichester, England, and Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.6.

<sup>33</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.329.

<sup>34</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.52.

business career'.<sup>35</sup> This tradition, which likely 'went back to the earliest days of the university' and is reflected in 'the strong English tradition of didactic treatises on estate management', accentuated the practical overtones of *dictamen*, the art of letter composition, stressing as a result 'such basic clerical skills as accountancy, conveyancing, the holding of courts, the drafting of legal documents and a knowledge of French'.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the period the number of clerics studying civil or canon law increased, aided by the addition of new colleges with a specifically legal mandate.<sup>37</sup> These trained bureaucrats could expect secular or ecclesiastical careers: at the same time as the Royal bureaucracy exploded, the church remained Europe's biggest landowner.<sup>38</sup> By 1216, monasteries owned around thirty per cent of landed property, transforming abbots 'into administrators of large states on a par with other feudal lords'.<sup>39</sup> The episcopate had by this time become a similarly administrative enterprise: aside from a brief dip in the middle of the fifteenth century, 'lawyers were very much the dominant group amongst graduate-bishops', a position which demanded experience in both administrative duties and canon law.<sup>40</sup>

Further, it would be a mistake to draw any sort of arbitrary divide between 'practical' and 'theoretical' interests in the medieval universities. Certainly, practitioners of theology and the arts considered their work to be deeply entrenched in the realities of

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<sup>35</sup> H. G. Richardson, 'Business Training in Medieval Oxford', *The American Historical Review*, 46.2 (1941), 259–80 (p.276).

<sup>36</sup> T. A. R. Evans, 'The Number, Origins and Careers of Scholars', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume II: Late Medieval Oxford*, ed. J. I. Catto and T. A. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.485–538 (pp.524–525). See also D. Oschinsky, 'Medieval Treatises on Estate Accounting', *The Economic History Review*, 17 (1947), 52–61.

<sup>37</sup> R. A. Griffiths, 'Public and Private Bureaucracies in England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 30 (1980), 109–30 (p.117).

<sup>38</sup> Justin Clegg, *The Medieval Church in Manuscripts* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), p.13.

<sup>39</sup> Olaf Pedersen, *The First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe*, trans. Richard North (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.98.

<sup>40</sup> Richard G. Davies, 'The Episcopate', in *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Later Medieval England: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of A. R. Myers*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1982), pp.51–79 (p.62).

the world: the Paris masters, for instance, saw their work as ‘vital to the common good. Their contributions to society were numerous: they removed doubt and error, elucidated the truth, defended the faith, and taught others how to preach, teach and see to the cure of souls throughout the Church’.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Sabapathy argues convincingly that ‘broad’ scholastic ‘faith in humans’ power to establish the truth about things through systematic inquiry’ enabled the very possibility of rendering account to one another, and therefore of making the whole accountability machine operate at all.<sup>42</sup> Further, many of the philosophical and theological developments of the period had an immediate effect on the methods by which knowledge was codified, stored, and could be called up – methods, that is, essential to the functioning (and even perhaps conception) of large-scale administrative programmes. M. B. Parkes, for instance, has argued persuasively that the transition from monastic to scholastic *lectio* prompted the development of a whole system of textual classifications, referencing systems and glosses and ‘providing a theoretical foundation for attempts to meet the readers’ practical needs’.<sup>43</sup> Analogously, M. T. Clanchy has stressed the effects of scholastic reading strategies on the roles of librarians: Benedictine custom demanded that the librarian ‘supervise the borrowing of books once a year on the first Monday in Lent’; these texts would then be kept as subjects for *meditatio* and *ruminatio*, lengthy monastic reading techniques, for the year. In contrast, ‘[t]he Dominicans, like modern academics, required extensive libraries in which they could glance rapidly over a whole series of books, many of very recent authorship, in order to construct a wide-ranging argument’.<sup>44</sup> Simultaneously, the Fourth Lateran Council demanded, alongside annual confession, that ecclesiastical judges keep copies

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<sup>41</sup> Ian P. Wei, ‘The Self-Image of the Masters of Theology at the University of Paris in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 46.3 (1995), 398–431 (421).

<sup>42</sup> Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p.236.

<sup>43</sup> M. B. Parkes, ‘The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book’, in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp.115–41 (p.121).

<sup>44</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.160.

‘of every document in the case, citations, excuses, exceptions, responses, interrogatories, appeals, etc.: a long catalogue of documents to be kept in triplicate, for the two parties and for the judge’, resulting in a sizeable increase in church judicial record-keeping.<sup>45</sup>

M. T. Clanchy describes a gradual shift in attitudes towards material documents and legal status over the course of the period. As an example, he notes how the Domesday Book was originally referred to as such ‘because it seemed comparable in its terrifying strictness with the Last Judgement at the end of time’.<sup>46</sup> A century later, however, the Domesday Book had become the basis of ‘routine use’, as requests for ancient demesne status – granting, in effect, certain rights and privileges to peasants working a particular piece of land – increased in popularity.<sup>47</sup> Such applications became a normal feature of conflict between landlord and tenants in the High and Late Middle Ages; in 1377, around forty applications from villages in Surrey, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Sussex and Devon were made within a few months.<sup>48</sup> Nor, in the fourteenth century, was ancient demesne ‘an old and fixed legal concept, but one that was new and developing, influenced by pressures from groups with conflicting interests’.<sup>49</sup> This speaks to a transition in attitude towards the role of record and documentation in the assertion and development of legal rights and responsibilities – a transition embedded, according to Clanchy, in developments of ‘practical business’.<sup>50</sup> Such developments had profound effects on literary production, too: Emily Steiner has argued that documentary culture provided medieval authors with ‘a theoretical vocabulary for describing the work of vernacular religious poetry’<sup>51</sup> and,

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<sup>45</sup> C. R. Cheney, *English Bishops' Chanceries, 1100-1250* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p.132.

<sup>46</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.25.

<sup>47</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.156.

<sup>48</sup> Miriam Müller, ‘The Aims and Organisation of a Peasant Revolt in Early Fourteenth-Century Wiltshire’, *Rural History*, 14.1 (2003), 1–20 (p.2).

<sup>49</sup> Rosamond Faith, ‘The “Great Rumour” of 1377 and Peasant Ideology’, in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.43–74 (p.51).

<sup>50</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.334.

<sup>51</sup> Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.17. See also Eric Jager’s excellent *The Book of the Heart*, which

by the end of the fourteenth century, Lancastrian poems increasingly employed ‘textual models and rhetorical tactics from the bureaucratic and legal culture in which their authors were immersed: parliamentary reportage, legal instruments, chronicles, and records’.<sup>52</sup> Studying the patterns of document destruction, creation, and literacy during the 1381 Peasant’s Revolt, Stephen Justice has temptingly argued that

[t]he rebels aimed not to destroy the documentary culture of feudal tenure and royal government, but to re-create it; they recognised the written document as something powerful but also malleable, something that, once written, could be *rewritten*.<sup>53</sup>

Writing and accountability, then, had the potential to play a serious part in the social and cultural technologies of the Middle Ages. Widely varied and dispersed, they nonetheless retained enough symbolic value to make an attack on charters a serious sin.<sup>54</sup>

Justice’s suggestion of the continuing *symbolic* importance of the document is important here, for it allows us to avoid the lure of both a symbolic/practical (or religious/secular) dichotomy and its underlying teleological narrative. The conclusion to Clanchy’s otherwise excellent study functions as a telling example of such teleology:

In early medieval Europe the skills of scribes were [...] primarily applied to acts of worship through the production of liturgical manuscripts like the Lindesfarne Gospels. Gradually, however, despite Christianity being a religion of a book and medieval culture being shaped by monks, writing on parchment was adapted and applied to mundane purposes of government, property-owning, and commerce.<sup>55</sup>

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charts the rise of the metaphor of the book as the heart, a site of interior feeling, individual record, or memory; on the deployment of this image in late medieval lay piety, see pp.103-119.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Grady, ‘The Generation of 1399’, in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp.202–30 (p.204).

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), p.48.

<sup>54</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p.18.

<sup>55</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.335.

But, as already noted, explicitly religious theories of reading and textuality did not remain unchanged; rather, the scholastic emphasis on analysis which displaced monastic *lectio* brought with it a host of changes designed to collect, divide, organise and make retrievable large amounts of textual information. Further, studies of late medieval piety suggest, as the previous chapter of this thesis has, that the ‘mundane’ and practical implications of worship were a key element of pastoral practice in the period.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the question of whether legal writing – especially under the rubric of accountability – can ever cease to carry immense cultural weight remains open; even in today’s largely literate Britain, ‘the ritual surrounding birth, marriage, death, and similar rites of passage’ is carried out by ‘paperwork, rather than any other form of ritual’.<sup>57</sup> In the vastly different cultural terrain of the Middle Ages, the conceptual stakes are perhaps more readily apparent: Bedos-Rezak comments that the legal seal ‘was *a fact of civilisation*; to think of it ‘merely as a means of documentary validation’ would fail to take adequate account of its role in the construction of medieval ‘social identity’.<sup>58</sup> The ‘additional dimensions’ of medieval charters mapped by Bedos-Rezak are resolved into comparative clarity by historical distance and alterity.

Medieval religious writers readily embraced textual modes of thought about the self.<sup>59</sup> A Latin sermon added to the margins of Durham Cathedral MS. B. IV. 12 folio 37<sup>r</sup> provides a startling ancestor to Freud’s magic writing-pad, carefully dissecting the

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<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992). See also Chapter Four.

<sup>57</sup> David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2015), pp.49–50.

<sup>58</sup> Bedos-Rezak, ‘Diplomatic Sources’, p.327.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 2. For a discussion of biblical and patristic attitudes towards writing, see also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.1–45.



elements of pastoral psychology with ‘a technical virtuosity almost without equal’, as it shows its audience how ‘we may become scribes of the Lord’:<sup>60</sup>

The parchment on which we write for him is a pure conscience, wheron all our good works are noted by the pen of memory, and make us acceptable to God. The knife wherewith it is scraped is the fear of God, which removes from our conscience by repentance all the roughness and unevenness of sin and vice. The pumice wherewith it is made smooth is the discipline of heavenly desires... The chalk with whose fine particles it is whitened indicates the unbroken meditation of holy thoughts... The rule (*regula*) by which the line is drawn that we may write straight, is the will of God... [...] The pen (*penna*), divided in two that it may be fit for writing, is love of God and our neighbour.<sup>61</sup>

Durham Cathedral MS. B. IV. 12 demands one writes one’s own salvific history. The act of copying perfectly encodes every element of the path from sin and damnation to redemption and rebirth, where the tools of the art become the will of God and even the bifurcated nib of the pen becomes the twofold injunction of *agape*. The intensely *material* aspect of parchment, which insists on the reality of its production and subsequent history, forms the driving force behind much of the analysis: the act of scraping animal skin becomes the gap between ‘the roughness and unevenness of sin and vice’ and ‘the discipline of heavenly desires’, whilst the process of whitening the material into usable pages comes to represent ‘the unbroken meditation of holy thoughts’. Despite the sermon’s own insistence that ‘[t]he place where we write is contempt of worldly things’,<sup>62</sup> the textual metaphor refuses to lose its materiality, much like the spade of *Jacob’s Well* – in fact, it insists on it to an even greater degree.

We can even go further than this, and suggest that whilst the sermon itself focuses only on the act of literary production, its reception, as a deeply textualising gesture ensconced within a manuscript itself, adds a further dimension to its meaning. Michael

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<sup>60</sup> Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, p.52.

<sup>61</sup> *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts to the End of the Twelfth Century*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.9.

<sup>62</sup> *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts*, p.9.

Camille has written evocatively on the experience of reading medieval manuscripts, saying

when I open a medieval manuscript [...] I am conscious not only of the manuscript, the bodily handling of materials in production, writing, illumination, but also how in its subsequent reception, the parchment has been penetrated; how it has acquired grease-stains, thumb-marks, erasures, drops of sweat; suffered places where images have been kissed away by devout lips or holes from various eating animals. In short, humans, animals, and insects have left the imprints of countless bodies upon it.<sup>63</sup>

Our textualised pastoral subject is unlikely to remain pristine and clean for very long – indeed, the sermon’s very status as *marginalia* means it is always already proof of the potential for disruption, alteration, and *history* that comes with medieval textuality. The psyche that a reading of MS. B. IV. 12 folio 37<sup>r</sup> is likely to depict, then, becomes much closer to the breached, contradictory, unstable subject the confessional manuals reflect; the subject of a long, visceral, and complex set of conditions that make salvation a constant struggle with shifting parameters.

Religious writing in the English vernacular was not very far behind such trends. Interestingly, one of the very earliest literary texts transmitted in cursive script forms is *Vices and Virtues*, a Middle English penitential poem, dating from c. 1200.<sup>64</sup> Cursive scripts developed in response to the increasingly documentary demands of medieval England; Malcom Parkes notes that in many administrative situations:

speed and ease of writing came to be as important to the scribe who copied the books as they had become to the scribe who prepared or drafted documents. [...] [T]he increasing demands upon time and energy of the scribes and the need to conserve space led to the development of smaller, simpler hands both to keep books within a manageable format and to accelerate the process of production.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Camille, ‘The Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury’s *Philobiblon*’, in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Frese and O’Keeffe, pp.34–77 (pp.41–42).

<sup>64</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.131. Cursive script is used prior to this for non-literary forms of writing.

<sup>65</sup> M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p.xiii.

Clanchy describes the development of cursive hands in the thirteenth century as ‘a product of the shift from memory to written record’; but this shift must also reflect the demand for ‘documents written economically yet legibly’ and the management of labour costs for large scriptoria, the specific result of developing trends that were intimately bound up with increasing attention to the roles of officials and accountability in general. That the techniques and technologies of legalism should intersect with specifically pastoral exercises in the cursive copying of *Vices and Virtues* (as in the Canons of Lateran IV) is suggestive, but cannot be much more than that. It must suffice to note that the development of legal and primarily documentary scripts certainly enabled the copying of many cheaper devotional and pastoral texts, and more generally that pastoral projects and material administrative designs are (at least) occasional bedfellows in the Middle Ages.

But this development in the vernacular has also left behind some suggestive traditions, one of which in particular bears heavily on this discussion of pastoral identities. The *Charters of Christ*, extant from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, feature a crucified Christ who performs his fundamental salvific act as an explicitly legal gesture, promising salvation to all worthy members of humankind.<sup>66</sup> Steiner argues that these charters ‘probably originated in penitential contexts ranging from preachers’ miscellanies to lay books of penance’; many of the early manuscripts of the *Long Charter* are found copied amidst pastoral texts including the *Prick of Conscience*.<sup>67</sup> Crucially, in these text Christ’s savaged skin itself becomes the parchment on which the charter is written and signed:

Ne myȝte I fynde no parchemyn  
ffor to laston wel and fyn

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<sup>66</sup> *The Middle English Charters of Christ*, ed. Spalding. Latin versions of the *Charter* do also exist, but in far fewer numbers. Unless otherwise noted quotes will be taken from the A-Text of the Long Charter, ‘the oldest extant form’ (p.lxvii), specifically from British Museum MS. Additional 11307 (15<sup>th</sup> c.), the ‘best’ manuscript of the A-Text (p.xciii).

<sup>67</sup> Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p.76.

But as loue bad me do  
Myn owne skyn y 3af þer to.<sup>68</sup>

As in the Durham sermon, the specific production techniques employed in the construction of the manuscript ('Hou þis chartre was y-wryton') are once again put to devotional service.<sup>69</sup> In fact, many of the same elements of documentary production appear in the *Charters*; the 'parchemyn', of course, but also the 'neb', the 'enke / of iewes spotel', and the 'pennes' that finally inscribe Chris's 'loue-dedis'.<sup>70</sup> The charters further draw on the rhetorical structures of their secular inspirations, inserting Latin tags and transforming the devotional gaze into the performative legal act of witnessing:

3e men þat gon forþ by the weye  
Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye  
And redeþ on þis parchemyn  
3if eny serwe be lyk to myn  
*O uos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite*  
Wipstondeþ and hereþ þis chartre  
Whi I am wounded an al for-blad  
*Sciant presentes & futuri &c*  
Witeth 3e þat ben and shul betyde  
[...]  
Þe kynges sone of heuene a-boue  
Wip my fader wille and loue  
Made a sesyng whan I was born  
To þe mankynde þat was for-lorn  
I make heron confirmament  
That I haue granted and y-3eue  
To þe mankynde with me to leue  
In my revme of heuon blisse  
To haue & to holden withouten mysse<sup>71</sup>

The effect of this transformation seems to be, as Steiner has suggested, to allow worshippers to 'dramatise the continual availability of the word made flesh'; Christ

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<sup>68</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.18, ll.1-4.

<sup>69</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.26, l.76.

<sup>70</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.26, ll.77-79. Reflecting on a number of medieval descriptions of writing, Isabel Davis has stressed the associative links drawn between parchment and human skin, arguing that 'eschatological dramas' were continually written 'through the image of skin, making time cutaneous: susceptible, elastic, and plicated' in reflection of Christian history, folded by typology and punctured by the Incarnation. See her 'Cutaneous Time in the Late Medieval Literary Imagination', in *Reading Skin*, ed. Walter, pp.99-118 (p.116).

<sup>71</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.28 ll.93-114.

speaks out of history, for all time, into every space, no matter how local or contingent.<sup>72</sup>

Thus the texts alternate between traditional devotional motifs such as the witnessing of the passion – ‘3e men þat gon forþ by the weye / Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye’ – with legalistic formulae and forms of verification drawn from legal culture – ‘redeþ on þis parchemyn / 3if eny serwe be lyk to myn / *O uos omnes qui per via attendite* / Wiþstondeþ and hereþ þis charter’. Further, both the textual success and rhetorical power of these texts suggest that thinking salvation in terms of accountability structures – in which doing good could without any apparent tension be figured as ‘rente’ – was not a difficult procedure for pastoral writers.<sup>73</sup> Christ’s relationship to the saved has become that of a chartered guarantee speaks volumes in a society increasingly arranged around recourse to legal methods of accountability rather than earlier feudal ties.<sup>74</sup> The emotive devotional weight of these lines is derived in substantial part from a grant enmeshed in these legal dynamics – Christ has ‘graunted’ heaven to mankind, ‘[t]o haue & to holden’ – which figure the pastoral subject as an office holder, a figure offered specific rights *and the responsibilities* that adhere to them. It is only natural for Christ the judge to expect his officials to be held to account. The text’s ‘relative emotionlessness becom[es] the badge of its authority.’<sup>75</sup>

This analysis is borne out by the wealth of evidence that suggests that the legal nature of the *Charter* was understood as more than an internal allegory or fiction. Steiner suggests that the *Short Charter*, found copied into bundles of charms and medical prescriptions, might have had ‘iconic and practical application[s]’.<sup>76</sup> The efficacious nature of the legal document certainly left an impression: a copy of the *Long Charter* B-Text (Magdalene

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<sup>72</sup> Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p.72.

<sup>73</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.30, ll.127, 225, 232.

<sup>74</sup> Trajectories of this sort have been isolated in varying vocabulary and to varying degrees by a number of different legal histories. See M. T. Clanchy, ‘From Love to Law’; Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*; and Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, for three complementary analyses of this process.

<sup>75</sup> Laura Ashe, ‘The “Short Charter of Christ”: An unpublished longer version, from Cambridge University Library, MS ADD. 6686’, *Medium Aevum* 72:1 (2003), 32-48. Ashe uses this observation to reconfigure the relationship between the ‘Long’ and ‘Short’ versions of the *Charter*, arguing that the latter is ‘evidently engaged in a different [and more legalistic] task’ (p.32) rather than simply being inferior.

<sup>76</sup> Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p.77.

College Oxford MS. St. Peter-in-the-East 18 e) is copied onto the back of secular charter, whilst some copies of the *Short Charter* (British Museum MS. Sloane 3293; British Museum MS. Stowe 620) boast christological seals and lists of formal signatories including St. John, the three Marys, and the Evangelists (British Museum MS. Additional Charter 5960; British Museum MS. Harley 6848).

The *Charter of Christ* is strictly not a guarantee of salvation. The *Long Charter* makes this abundantly clear with a reference to the judgement, '[w]han þis chartre shal ben rad'. Then, the speaking Christ explains, '[t]ho þat ben of rente be-hynde / And þuse dedes haue noȝt in mynd [...] Alle þey shulle to hell pyne'.<sup>77</sup> The charters thus dramatise a clearly reciprocal relationship of legal dues owed to a benefactor, and in doing so they shift the constitutive force of the agreement from a personal promise to a strictly legal framework. The same structure empowers the justices of the church through the Eucharist itself; a competent bureaucrat, Christ has written his charter in duplicate:

On endenture I lafte with þe  
That euere þou sholdest syker be  
In prestes hond my flesch and blod  
That for þe dyed vpon þe rod.<sup>78</sup>

Worldly traditions of accountability and administration intersect faultlessly with divine justice here, each enabling the other through one of the most essential gestures of medieval piety. Elevated at the central moment of an explicitly social, unifying religious gesture, the charter of Christ has become sacramental.<sup>79</sup> The implications of this moment reverberate back through the entire heavenly documentary structure: the dynamics encoded within the charter – the Foucauldian power of writing, the rational-abstractive force of legalistic accountability, the tug-and-pull of informational hierarchies – refract

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<sup>77</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.42, ll.225-230.

<sup>78</sup> *Middle English Charters of Christ*, p.38, ll.205-208.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of the Eucharist in medieval religion, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

and redistribute the energy of the eucharist, becoming in the process salvific in their own right. Divinity, as John Alford as noted, becomes coded into the very fact of law.<sup>80</sup> Sir John Fortescue's note that 'it was the habit of his fellow justices to hear cases in the morning and to read Scripture in the afternoon' may point to more than a supposed shared origin,<sup>81</sup> further suggesting that the very nature of medieval justice was coextensive with a conception of divinity heavily structured by pastoral-disciplinary logic. Again it is the very weight of the system, imagined in its entirety, which underwrites and guarantees any given specific deployment.

Sinners, the handbooks constantly remind us, are guilty of violating the very principles of divine law. Their guilt is therefore twofold (or rather, belongs to two overlapping spheres): metaphysical and legal. The Father's creation of the world and Christ's sacrifice mean that the individual is owed to God twice, as *Handlyng Synne* reminds us: 'Ȝyf god haue lent þe handes & fet, / Armes, legges, feyre & suet, / Be nat ouer proud of þys: / Þey are nat þyne, but þey beyn hys'.<sup>82</sup> The individual – body, soul, all – is essentially rented from, and owed to, God. Every second spent 'in fole gemenes in ydelness and in niedes þet ne byep naȝt i-diȝt to god' constitute a squandering of this gift.<sup>83</sup> To sin, then, is to mis-handle or mistreat God's gift to humankind. Such representations of ownership bleed naturally into figurations of specifically feudal ownership, where the demands of the law are underscored by an ethical duty to serve one's lord. This allows the handbooks to exploit an ethical-legal imperative – the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, for instance, declares that the sinner 'is Goddis traitour, for þe castel of his herte and of his body, þat God haþ take hym to kepe, he haþ y-ȝolde to his mortel

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<sup>80</sup> John A. Alford, 'Literature and Law in Medieval England', *PMLA*, 92.5 (1977), 941–51 (p.942).

<sup>81</sup> Alford, 'Literature and Law', p.943.

<sup>82</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, pp.84–85.

<sup>83</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, pp.213–214.

enemy, þat is to þe deuel'.<sup>84</sup> The human body has become a castle, a fortress kept in the name of the lord of heaven. The gates, however, have been opened, and the enemy has been allowed to take it without resistance – a breach that makes the sinner a 'traitour' to the laws of both this world and the next. Feudal culture's fascination with fealty, house and lineage had developed into a deeply documentary and legal process, perhaps most obvious in the complexities of heraldries and the rolls that accompanied them;<sup>85</sup> here, however, it is the feudal lord's legalised ownership of his subject understood as a piece of territory – and the structures of accountability this relationship implies – that is the rationale for bringing the sinner to penance.

The feudal economy that had developed by the fourteenth century could not run only on loyalty between subjects and lords. Instead, it required a developed and technical bureaucracy staffed by reeves and bailiffs to oversee imports and exports, rent, and stocks of everything from cattle to horseshoes.<sup>86</sup> A tenth of a given manor's produce was, of course, set aside as a tithe to the organised church, a fact which once again explicitly introduces a specific element of officialdom into salvific discourse. If God can be a feudal lord, can he not become a type of reeve too? *Jacob's Well* offers an extended treatment on the correct manner of tithing, finishing with an extended passage in which this dynamic is made clear:

3if a styward fynde in þe old court-rollys & rentallys, & in þe newe bothe,  
 þat þou art behynde of þi rente to þi lord for þi tenement, and þou seyst þat  
 þou wylt noȝt payin in, because þou ysedyst noȝt to paye before þat tyme;  
 schal þin euyl vsage excuse þe, & proue fals þat is wrtin in þe court-rollys &  
 rentallys? I trowe, nay. þou schalt paye it, or be put out of þi tenement. Ryþ  
 so, ihesu, þe styward of þe fadyr of heuen, whanne he sytteth in þe last court

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<sup>84</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.172.

<sup>85</sup> N. Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry 1254 to 1310: A Study of the Historical Value of the Rolls of Arms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

<sup>86</sup> See Oschinsky, 'Medieval Treatises on Estate Accounting', pp.52–61; Clanchy, *From Memory*, p.49. Sabapathy devotes the opening chapter of his monograph to the developing culture of accountability amongst bailiffs – see *Officers and Accountability*, pp.25-82.



of þe doom, ȝif he fynde þe in þe old lawe, & newe, þat þou art behynde of  
þi tythe, schal þin euyl vsage excuse þe for to dystroye goddys lawe?<sup>87</sup>

Christ is indeed a reeve. The Son of God, the saviour of humanity and heroic harrower of hell, is here represented as a lord schooled in the legal and administrative powers of officialdom and accountability, capable of searching the local ‘court rollys’ of both the Old and New Testament. Justice and good deeds are transformed into a type of tithe or rent in their own right, inserted into an economy in which Christ performs the role of local, monastic or chancery clerks whose time was spend uncovering (or forging) documentary proof of ownership.<sup>88</sup> Here the Bible itself becomes entirely imbricated in a documentary-archival culture, charged with the same type of truth represented by Chancery tally-sticks or rolls of dusty documents. In the process, the pastoral subject comes to see itself as an official or steward, trusted with great responsibility and burdened with the charge to account for their every action before the Judge.

The ease with which salvific and mundane structures of accountability can energise each other may shed some light on the status of tithing itself in the Middle Ages. Remarkably, *Jacob's Well* devotes its sixth and seventh chapters to the matter of tithes, including five pages (in Brandeis' 1900 edition) to specifics of tithe giving. Only an introduction and an explication of excommunication precede it. Amidst all this, *Jacob's Well* declares that ‘þe moste cause why dysseise & mischeef fallyn on man, womman, & beste, & on opere godys, frutys, & profyȝtes on erthe, is for fals tythyng’.<sup>89</sup> By virtue of it being ‘þe moste cause’, all the suffering on earth – not only of humans but also of goods and animals – is implicated in the failure to give tithes properly. There is something centrally violent or disturbing about the failure to give tithes. A cynical (and superficial)

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<sup>87</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.41.

<sup>88</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory*, pp.29–59.

<sup>89</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.42.

reading might simply point to the importance of tithes to the Church's economy. Instead, I want to suggest that there is a deeper, structural concern underlying the issue.

*Jacob's Well* engages with a developed medieval tradition that associated Judas Iscariot directly with refusing to give tithes.<sup>90</sup> Following the lead of John 12, it was held that Judas regularly stole ten percent of the apostles' collective incomes. Paraphrasing John 12:4-6, *Jacob's Well* writes that upon observing Mary Magdalene washing Jesus' feet, Judas became 'wroth & grucchyd þat þat oynemenet, worth iij. hundred pens, was so poured out on crist, & noȝt sold, þat he myȝt a stolyn þe tythe þer-of'. Feeling short-changed and wrathful, Judas instead 'thouȝte to rekouere þo xxx. pens, & he wente & solde crist for xxx.pens. þere he gette aȝen þo xxx. pens þat he forbare in þe oynement'.

<sup>91</sup> The central crime of the New Testament is therefore written into the history of tithing. False tithers repeat Judas' most awful crime, effectively selling God, faith, and their own souls for an additional tenth of their income: 'þe fals tythere rehersyth aȝen in his fals tythyng þe synne þat crist was do fore to deth'.<sup>92</sup> The question of ownership has been set into a specifically transactional context, where buying, selling, giving, and owning are carefully measured and proper amounts distributed to their respective owners. *Jacob's Well* stresses that even God's punishment of Judas conforms to a rational, restitutive structure: 'for þo xxx. pens he hadde xxx. sythes goddys curse [...] for euery peny he hadde a sundry curs of god'.<sup>93</sup> Thirty curses for thirty pennies: the punishment itself is folded back into an economic, systemic logic. Refusal to pay a tithe is a refusal to take part in an entire nexus of relations that finally resolve into a glimmering legal web with

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<sup>90</sup> In English it is mostly found in the mystery plays. See Rosemary Woolf, 'The Devil in Old English Poetry', in *Art and Doctrine: Essays on Medieval Literature*, ed. Heather O'Donoghue (London: Hambledon, 1986), pp.1–14 (p.6); Lynette Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.128. See also 'It wes upon a Scere Thorsday', in *Medieval English Lyrics. A Critical Anthology*, ed. R. T. Davies (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp.75-7.

<sup>91</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.43.

<sup>92</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.45.

<sup>93</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.44.

God at its centre – refusal to pay the tithe, in other words, is a fundamental betrayal of every steward's promise to God himself *via systematicity itself*. Further, if sheriffs and bailiffs were understood as representatives of their lords in the discharging of their duties, then the failure to tithe besmirches the reputation of the lord of heaven. This is why tithing occupies such an essential place in *Jacob's Well*, and why it was associated with the most infamous sin of the New Testament.

This legalistic threat, composed of tallies and records, manifests itself more directly in the handbooks from time to time. *Handlyng Synne*, for example, explores the moment of accountability in great detail. The narrator of this exemplum is a sinful knight who, despite the pleas of his lord and his own failing health, refuses to confess. As he lies alone in his chambers, he receives a ghostly visitation:

Ryght at þe our of mydday,  
Twey ȝunge men come hydyr to me,  
Þe feyrest þat any man myghte se.  
Me þoghte ryght whan y sagh þo  
Þat y felte nopyng of wo.  
[...]  
Þey sette hem down on my bed syde.<sup>94</sup>

Appearing suddenly in his chamber, these angelic visitors perfectly represent the deployment of pastoral power: slipping effortlessly into the most private, personal spaces, they arrest feelings of unease and disorder ('y felte nopyng of wo'), occupying the position of carers or confidants at an invalid's 'bed syde'. This is a disciplinary system at once diffuse and immanent, capable of deploying observational and curative apparatuses at a moment's notice. This system is also programmatically documentary:

Whan þey sett were, furþ þey toke  
And shewede a lytl feyr boke,  
And bad me þat y shulde hyt rede,  
For al hyt was myn owne dede.

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<sup>94</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.112.

And y þat neuer on boke couthe,  
 Al y hyt redde wyþ opon mouthe.  
 Þe lest þoght þat y coude þynke  
 Þat of godenes hadde any blynke,  
 Al y sagh hyt before me,  
 For lytyl was hyt vnto se.  
 [...]

Why y hadde red þat y myghte rede,  
 Þey shette here boke & furþ þey ȝede.<sup>95</sup>

The law invades every intimate space. The ‘lytl feyr boke’, perhaps reminiscent of a book of hours, is a proper, carefully-curated object into which the knight’s good deeds – down to the ‘lest þoght þat [he] coude þynke’ are inscribed. At this point there are no get-out clauses; even the knight’s illiteracy is no barrier to his understanding of the weight of this document. The accountable-disciplinary moment demands that everything be laid bare here in explicitly textual terms: ‘al y sagh hyt before me, / For lytyl was hyt vnto se’. Some of the force of this moment clearly derives from the fact of ‘objectification’: the metaphysical truth of a wasted life is made palpable, touchable – it performs the statement with which *Handlyng Synne* begins: ‘We handyl synne euery day / Yn wyde & dede al þat we may’.<sup>96</sup> However even this possibility is first licensed by the disciplinary fact of observation, by the reality of an immense metaphysical administrative nexus which makes the individual health of the soul its object of study. The angelic visitors do not even speak; there is no blessed admonition, no fiery warning of a hell to come. Indeed, there is no need: ‘here boke’ condenses the entire disciplinary apparatus into a single gesture.

The Book of Life is, of course, only half of the vision. Soon after they have departed with their tiny book, the angelic pair’s demonic opposites, ‘blake [...] and foule stynkyng, / Wyþ glesyng eȝen & mouth grennyng’ arrive on the scene. This is the other

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<sup>95</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, pp.112–113.

<sup>96</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.5. See above, Chapter Four, pp.141–143.

side of the disciplinary machine: despite his best attempts, the knight is unable to escape from the demons. Crucially, the demons do not directly interact or restrain the knight; rather, the very fact of their immanence eventually pushes him to resignation and tacit acceptance: ‘why y sagh no better bote, / Y lay styll boþe hand and fote’. The exercise is still premised on the exercise of productive power which disguises itself beneath its subject’s willing performance.

Whan þey hadde traueyled me so wyþ yll,  
A stounde sate þey by me styll,  
And drogh furþ a moche boke,  
Þe moste þat y euer on gan loke.  
So gret hyt was and so orryble,  
Þer yn was more þan yn a byble.  
For al þat y haue do wyth synne,  
Eurydele ys wrete þer ynne.<sup>97</sup>

Everything missing from the first book is included in this second text. Here the awesome weight of the apparatus is transformed into a palpably weighty book, one that the devils are forced to ‘drogh furþ’ onto a pedestal rather than merely ‘shew[ing]’, as the angels had done. The immense regulatory potential of the entire legal-accountable model is once again condensed in this document which, crucially, contains more information ‘þan yn a bible’, that ultimate metric of textual power in the Middle Ages. Inasmuch as these devils may appear to operate differently from their angelic counterparts, these differences only underscore the immense reach of a regime that can figure punishment and salvation, health and disease, as elements of an immense documentary system. Between these two texts, *every moment* of this knight’s moral existence has a place: ‘[E]urydele’ of sin is written in one text, ‘of godenes’ in another.

The divinely documentary nature of disciplinary power allows it to figure the self as something specific but measurable, essentially personal but also caught up in a

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<sup>97</sup> *Handlyng Synne*, p.113.

profoundly normalising gaze. Thus some of the most basic suggestions of the handbook are licensed by this apparatus – when, for example, *Jacob's Well* notes that ‘þou kun mesure þin herte, & mowth, & þi dedys, fro the wose of wretthe’, it is able to do so precisely because the administrative apparatus offers the documentary language as a means to map out heart, mouth and deeds in a cartography of the individual.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, this becomes a central motif in exercises intended for the individual penitent. Thus, for instance, the *Ayenbite of Inwit* urges its subjects to meditate on the documents that will await them at the day of judgement, saying ‘[y]ef þou wylt in þise manere recordy þi lyf: þou sselt ysi þet þou hest more ziþe y-zene3d ine zuyche manere of prede [...] þet þou kanst nazt telle’.<sup>99</sup> Reflecting on the textual nature of sin opens the discursive field on the immensity of the subject’s never-ending struggle against sin of a size and breadth ‘þet þou kanst nazt telle’. In such a scheme sloth becomes a kind of spiritual illiteracy: it ‘blendeþ þe zenezeres. þet hi ne zyeþ nazt ine þe boc of hire inwyte’.<sup>100</sup> Confession itself acts as a kind of salve for this illiteracy, where the priest’s sequence of questions and demands for self-examination demand that the penitent ‘guo in-to his house þet is in-to his ehrte. [...] Panne he ssel him diligentliche þenche beuore and izy þet writ: of his inwyte. þe he ne faly ine his rekeninge’.<sup>101</sup> The final moment of self-knowledge, hidden deep within the body and heart of the penitent, is figured as a confrontation with the text of ‘inwit’, the documentary fact of conscience. With such a gesture, the penitent has completed their journey; they can put aside the documentary artefact of the handbook and inscribe into their own soul the truths of their sins, so that they make themselves accountable to God and hope for salvation. The transformation from penitent-and-book to penitent-as-book to penitent as speaker of the book is the ultimate aim of a disciplinary apparatus rooted in an epistemology of reading. It also completes the dream of an entirely

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<sup>98</sup> *Jacob's Well*, p.99.

<sup>99</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, p.22.

<sup>100</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, p.33.

<sup>101</sup> *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, p.173.

legalised ‘object’, firmly rooted in a rational order of observation, normativity, and controlled variation. The logical final step of this process has the subject express itself in the terms of this power and ‘objectify’ itself through an ethical-accountable interplay as the accountable subject of that power.

Legal writing-power (expressed variously through the lawyer, the reeve, and the scribe) performs an immensely productive role in the medieval confessional *dispositif*. Heaven has never looked quite this much like the Exchequer. Historical and analytical distance may suggest that such articulations would no longer find favour or symbolic purchase in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. John Alford, for example, suggests that only the law ‘of earlier times’ (‘less technical, more humanistic’) is capable of harbouring the creative energy that could be exploited in literary cultural production.<sup>102</sup> Such a position would struggle to account for the following lines:

You’re on the stand  
With your back against the wall  
Nowhere to run  
And nobody you can call  
Oh no  
I just can’t wait  
Now the case is  
Open wide  
You’ll try to pray  
But the jury will decide

These could be mistaken for a modernised Middle English lyric with only a little imagination. Instead they come from the English boy band Blue’s 2001 worldwide hit, *All Rise*.<sup>103</sup> The subject matter may be betrayal and heartbreak rather than salvation, but the mobilising metaphor is strikingly legalistic. From the courts of the soul in the thirteenth century *Ancrene Wisse* to twenty-first century pop music, the law has yet to

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<sup>102</sup> Alford, ‘Literature and Law’, p.941.

<sup>103</sup> *All Rise*, All Rise (Stargate Studios, Norway: Innocent, Virgin, 2001).

loosen its grip on our souls. Much as with our medieval ancestors, the articulation of the most salient moments of our emotional histories – heartbreak, despair, loss, revelation, salvation – is enabled, rather than suppressed, by the judges, lawyers, officials.



## 6: PERSONAL DOOMSDAY

Autobiography and the strategic elaboration of confession

*The Romance of the Rose is written today by Mary Barnes; in the place of Lancelot, we have Judge Schreber.*<sup>1</sup>

Brought to the point of death by disease, Julian of Norwich reawakens from her first vision. Convinced that her end is at hand, she turns to the people assembled around her bed and declares '[i]t es todaye domesdaye for me', explaining to her readers that 'that daye that man or woman dies is he demed as he shalle be withouten ende'.<sup>2</sup> This statement is theologically accurate, deriving from the distinction between *individual* and *general* judgement developed and re-articulated during the course of the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> The reckoning to which she looks is deeply intimate: she notes that it is 'domesdaye for me;' a personal moment of judgement, when her life's story will be weighed and tabulated and entry into heaven granted or barred. Up to this point, the doomsday that I have treated in this thesis has generally been conceived of as universal, awe-inspiring in its majesty and capacity for destruction. It is the promise of absolute knowledge in Chapter Two; the return of the Flood in Chapter Four; and the final legal-bureaucratic moment of accountability in Chapter Five. Here, in the particular moment of one Christian's death, we have something rather different. The unifying universality of judgement has been squeezed into a single point, the moment of personal salvific history that each Christian must look forward to.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.194.

<sup>2</sup> Julian of Norwich, 'A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman', in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp.61–120 (chap. 7), p.77. The apparent authenticity of this moment in Julian's work has been complicated by Amy Appleford, who stresses Julians's engagement with and manipulation of the medieval *ars moriendi* throughout both texts. See her 'The "Comene Course of Prayers": Julian of Norwich and Late Medieval Death Culture', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 107:2 (2008), 190-214.

<sup>3</sup> For developments in the theory of judgement, including the growing distinction between individual (occurring immediately after the death of the individual) and general (occurring at the apocalypse, the end of time) judgement, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, esp.pp.279-317, and Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Scholar Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of Julian's relationship to fourteenth century penitential theology and devotional practices, see Emma Louise Pennington, "'Al the Helth and Life of the Sacraments... It I am": Julian of Norwich and the Sacrament of Penance' (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2014).

Julian's account of her visions, in as much as it effaces its own author, remains caught in this play between the particular and the universal. As such it is balanced on the knife's edge that exists between the self and history, between individual experience and the collective backdrop that gives it meaning. Julian expresses this balance herself, stating pointedly that '[a]lle that I saye of myself, I meene in the persone of alle mine evencristene, for I am lernede in the gastelye schewing of our lorde that he meenes so'.<sup>5</sup> As she sees it, her individualised experience diffuses throughout the totality of Christians, for whom she feels and thinks. Her contemporary, Margery Kempe, expresses a similar version of this topos at the beginning of her book, justifying an account of her life in the process: 'Alle the werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl and struccyon, and what grace that he werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth, yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce'.<sup>6</sup> In the writings of both of these women – even in Kempe's pre-emptive attack on those that might 'lak [the] charyte' to read her text properly – a sense of the individual's relationship to the whole, of the tension between personal and public experience, hovers over the page.

Such explicit articulations of this tension are part of a developing construal of the relationship between the internal experience of the subject and the external demand – a relationship that connects these texts to the genre that will come to be known as autobiography, a genre which I shall argue derives from the type of pastoral power examined in this thesis.<sup>7</sup> The dynamics of this relationship between the internal subject

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<sup>5</sup> Julian of Norwich, 'A Vision', 6.1-2, p.73.

<sup>6</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 1.6–9, p.41.

<sup>7</sup> This chapter approaches similar territory to that explored by David Lawton in his *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), which reflects on the production of 'public interiorities... personal but inhabited areas... [that] already exist as text before they are inhabited' (p.63). For Lawton, the 'act of spontaneous autobiography – of confession – by the poet beyond his text' is a function of textual public interiority itself. This function is determined by 'the needs of the poem' itself, which produce 'the figure of the poet' (p.109). We are thus both interested

and the external demand makes cases such as Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich appear remarkably *tangible* to twenty-first century readers. Modern readers of narratives and texts filled with naturalistic particularities have tended to assume that a historical person stands behind the text, and furthermore that these rhetorical or generic gestures offer specific and detailed forms of access to that person's existence and subjectivity. Given their reception history, it is clear that texts like Margery Kempe's *Book* fall into this category. Barry Windeatt comments on the contrasting responses the first edition of the *Book* received, noting that 'by 1940 the EETS edition already acknowledged early judgements of "hysteria" and "neuroticism" [...]. Some of Kempe's first modern readers were (easily) embarrassed; others blamed her for not fitting their (inappropriate) categories and criteria'.<sup>8</sup> All of these responses share a sense of Kempe as a historical woman, as a perceiving and embodied (even medicalised) subject above and beyond her textual remains. Perhaps surprisingly, Julian's more visionary approach has solicited analogous responses; her *homely* theology has produced among modern scholars a clear picture of Julian-as-thinker, that is, as subject. Thus Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross are able to conceptualise the use of *lectio divina* as 'the admission price of crossing the threshold of Julian's house' and describe their progress reading her as an attempt 'to approach the threshold'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Gillespie and Ross' responses to Julian are more careful and nuanced than many accounts of Kempe – the threshold remains, largely, a metaphor – such a play with thresholds blurs distinctions between textual, conceptual, and historical ('real') space, asserting in the same gesture that there is something particularly palpable about the historical fact of Julian, of her threshold and her home and her anchorhold.<sup>10</sup>

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in the production of the subject – although for Lawton this is bound up with concepts of voice, identification, and performativity, where I foreground the Foucauldian apparatus that enables and enforces this process.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Windeatt, 'Introduction', in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp.1–35 (p.32).

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, "'With Mekeness Aske Perseverantly": On Reading Julian of Norwich', *Mystics Quarterly*, 30.3/4 (2004), 126–41 (p.126).

<sup>10</sup> Here I refer not to the idea of *the* anchorhold in the abstraction, but rather to the historical fact of *an* anchorhold, Julian's anchorhold, a space determined by the personhood of Julian herself.

Readings of these texts tend, then, to fall into orbit around the sense of an author as a historical personhood. This gravitational pull is essentially the pull of autobiography.

Philippe Lejeune famously approached the problem of autobiography from exactly this reader-response perspective, arguing that it ‘is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing; it is a historically variable *contractual effect*’.<sup>11</sup> According to Lejeune, autobiography is structured by an agreement between two parties, one of which is the reader, that determines the kind of readerly responses that become valid. This makes autobiography a ‘*contractual genre*’.<sup>12</sup> The other party of this contract is represented by the name of the author, which is effectively the author: ‘[t]he entire existence of the person we call the *author* is summed up by this name [...] the place assigned to this name is essential: it is linked, by a social convention, to the pledge of responsibility of a *real person*’.<sup>13</sup> The contract guarantees the threefold identity of ‘the *name* (author-narrator-protagonist). The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity’.<sup>14</sup> It is the legalised promise of a continuous subject linking three versions of the same name. Admittedly, Lejeune claims that in pre-1770 ‘personal literature’ this contractual structure ‘becomes anachronistic or not very pertinent’, but in the case of a late medieval writer such as Kempe I believe that the differences can be overstated. In fact, the systematic use of ‘[p]is creatur’ in place of Kempe’s name and the third person make the mechanics of the pact all the clearer, as readers have to build the identity of author-narrator-protagonist themselves. Of course, modern editions perform this work for their readers by supplying Kempe’s name on the cover and flyleaf of their editions, the positive addition of which licenses the modern autobiographical pact, which refers ‘back in the

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<sup>11</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.30.

<sup>12</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p.29.

<sup>13</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p.11.

final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover', and which becomes a promise of veracity: '[t]he autobiographical pact comes in very diverse forms; but all of them demonstrate their intention to honour his/her *signature*'.<sup>15</sup> One wonders what effect Wynkyn de Worde – who gave us, first, a name – has had on the modern reception of Margery Kempe.<sup>16</sup>

This autobiographical pact mirrors in a number of essential ways the operations of pastoral power. It would not seem inappropriate to postulate the existence of a 'confessional pact' existing either between the penitent and a confessor or between a penitent and their own understanding of themselves *as penitent*. In either case, a certain 'objectification' – a split between experience and analytical response, must take place. This split occurs either between penitent/author and confessor/reader or within the psyche (textual or no) between penitent-as-sinner and penitent-as-judge.<sup>17</sup> In either case, it is finally the moment of *reception* – reading, hearing a confession, or reflecting on oneself, that creates the subject. Pastoral power as developed in the Middle Ages gives the 'I' of the penitential subject the tools with which to extract and express its own depth of subjectivity and place in the world, and the documentary imagery with which to freeze this 'I' and locate it within a textual-bureaucratic array. That this should manifest in other forms of cultural production need not surprise us. Indeed, in *Confession and resistance* Katherine Little has suggested the relevance of confession to the development of new forms of literary subjectivity. For Little the removal of the confessional subject from the institutional 'frame' of the church – something she argues happens in Thomas Hoccleve's

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<sup>15</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Kempe's surname occurs only once in the *Book*, buried near the end in an interpolative encounter – the 'creature' of the text is identified as 'Mar. Kempe of Lynne' by 'sum dissolute personys' (II.8.8185-8186).

<sup>17</sup> As the *Ancrene Wisse* notes, 'Hwa-se [...] biuoren þe muchele Dom demeð hir seoluen, eadi he is ant seli, for as þe prophete seið, *Non iudicabit Deus bis in idipsum*'. *Ancrene Wisse*, p.117. The Latin reads 'God will not pass judgement twice on the same case.'

poetry – shows how releasing ‘those [personal] narratives from that frame might generate new ways of defining the self, perhaps the refusal to confess at all’ and she points the way to a language of selfhood resistant to the demands of the fourteenth-century church.<sup>18</sup> However, where she finds in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a ‘shift away from one form of self-definition [...] associated with confession’,<sup>19</sup> I believe we are instead on the brink of what Foucault would call a strategic elaboration of pastoral power, a definition to which I will return in my conclusion. These texts, displaying so many signs of a nascent autobiography, are the product of a trajectory of individualisation (or subjectivisation) by power that is enabled rather than limited by confession and pastoral power.

For Paul de Man, however, the function of the name goes further than the autobiographical pact. His ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’ begins with a challenge to the assumed causalities of autobiographical writing:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical aspects of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?<sup>20</sup>

Undoing the causal assumption that life necessarily precedes autobiography allows us to effectively de-mystify the process of autobiographical production. Set loose from historical causality, autobiography reveals itself as a formal structure or textual disposition that is broadly prosopoetic: it posits ‘a voice or face by means of language’.<sup>21</sup> For de Man, the ‘mimesis’ of autobiography becomes ‘one mode of figuration among others’, made to seem unique and specific ‘in a text which the author declares himself the

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<sup>18</sup> Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.127.

<sup>19</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p.130.

<sup>20</sup> Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, *Comparative Literature*, 94.5 (1979), 919–30 (p.920).

<sup>21</sup> de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, p.930.

subject of his own understanding'.<sup>22</sup> This uniqueness is finally misleading, as every authored text finally performs this kind of prosopopoeia by virtue of having a name inscribed upon it: autobiography is 'a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. [... It] makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case'.<sup>23</sup> To the deconstructivist, this figure of reading necessarily limits *différance* and the play of the signifier: it re-injects the gravitational pull of presence into the operation of textual systems. Or, as de Man puts it, '[d]eath is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography [...] deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores'. Challenging naturalistic assumptions about autobiography leads to the realisation that to do so does not deprive of us life but frees us from 'the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding', a revelation that liberates readers and texts from the pull of the author. This is why autobiography finally causes for de Man 'a defacement of the mind'.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, it is this same defacement that produces the Christian autobiographical subject in the first place. This 'sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding' is a key component of both autobiography and pastoral power. Indeed, a drive to interpret textual remains through the fact of their authorship is also a profoundly Christian gesture, traceable back through the intertwined history of pastoral power and literary hermeneutics. This gesture can be found, as Chapter Two has discussed, in Augustine, for whom signifiers are 'footprints', markers of absent presence.<sup>25</sup> In Cassian this sense is transformed into a hermeneutics of the self defined by

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<sup>22</sup> de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', pp.920–921.

<sup>23</sup> de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', pp.921–922.

<sup>24</sup> de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', p.930.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 2.II, p.30. See the discussion in Chapter Two, esp. p.68-70.

exactly this sense of privative meaning: all that is available to the reflecting subject are ‘the prints of whatever enters’ the heart; only markers of the sin that has already passed through and left surface traces are available for analysis.<sup>26</sup> The analysis of sin is determined by exactly this experience of lack, something that is as true for Julian as it was for Cassian. Julian reflects on the non-existence of sin, explaining that she ‘lefe[s] it has na manere of substance, na partye of beinge, na it might nought be knawen bot be the paines that it is cause of’.<sup>27</sup> The sense of sin-as-nothingness is not unique to Julian – it derives, ultimately, from Augustine of Hippo – but it further illustrates and exacerbates the problem of knowing the self that is at issue in autobiography.

For de Man and the interpretative tradition in which his work exists, the hierarchy implied by the depth model is best expressed in the tension between voice and text.<sup>28</sup> Describing the Western European tradition of logocentrism, Jacques Derrida writes that ‘the voice [...] has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind’.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, writing is understood as a necessary evil, a ‘mediation of mediation and [...] a fall into the exteriority of meaning’.<sup>30</sup> This tradition has relied in no small part upon pastoral power for its continuance. The very interpretative dynamic of pastoral power, which insists on its project to access the spirit within the body, mirrors the logocentric call for a hierarchy of presence/voice over absence/writing. What deconstruction’s assertion of a language structured by lack allows us to understand is the role that the disciplinary apparatus of confession has played in the history of such ideas.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*. 1.1.XXII.2, p.63.

<sup>27</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 13.55-56, p.93.

<sup>28</sup> David Lawton suggests an alternative way of thinking about voice in his *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature*. He argues that voice is actually already imbricated in this system of loss: that ‘[v]oice arises, as it were, both from within and from below, and it passes into air. Though it arises from the body, it is evident only by virtue of leaving it [...] Voice is not quite presence, then, but a memory of it’ (p.24).

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.11.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp.12–13.

<sup>31</sup> Lawton appears to associate the kind of structure assessed here with Reformation tendencies, typified by ‘the radical downgrading and decentring of confession [which he treats as a form of public interiority]: a privatisation of voice’ (*Voice in Later Medieval English Literature*, p.78). I seek to emphasise



autobiographical-pastoral gesture thus performs in microcosm the mechanics of the history of Western logocentric thought.

Approaching these problematics from the perspective of pastoral power, furthermore, allows us to flip the script: the very *techniques* by which this inaccessible subject expresses itself constitute the subject in the first place. The various elements of the apparatus of pastoral power – including medical knowledge and documentary writing power – produce circumstances under which the truth of the self is accessible only partially and as the result of extensive observation and interpretative of its ‘phenomena’, that is to say, the symptoms or signs of the self that *are not it*. Such techniques are prior to, and produce, the subject that seeks its own truth through their mechanisms. The logocentric individual, forever troubled by a privative fiction, is produced by pastoral power.

This same tradition also allows us to read ‘autobiographically’, that is, to read whilst recognising the contractual relations in which the text is engaged. We can also take issue with John Fleming’s distinction between ‘modern’ and ‘early’ life writing, in both its autobiographical and biographical forms:

[M]odern biography is grounded in *subjectivity* (the writer’s consciousness and individuality) and *expression* (the artistic presentation of subjectivity). It thus tends to emphasise its author’s uniqueness of consciousness and experience. Early autobiography, on the other hand, is generally grounded in *exemplarity* (a demonstration of the *generalised* meaning of a particular life in its illustration of broad human or transcendental truths.)<sup>32</sup>

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continuity rather than discontinuity, and suggest that the ‘downgrading and decentring’ of confession into ‘a privatisation of voice’ is an example of Foucauldian *strategic elaboration* (see the discussion in Chapter One, pp.16-17), and one that we can already observe operating in these late medieval texts.

<sup>32</sup> John V. Fleming, ‘Medieval European Autobiography’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.35–48 (p.35).

For Fleming, autobiography is a specific genre, identifiable at the moment of completion rather being also engaged in a reception relation. Admittedly, the vast majority of medieval historical narratives *are* exemplary in structure, insistently undercutting the personal or particular in favour of the universal. This coheres with John Fleming's assertion that '[t]he medieval biographical mode par excellence is hagiography';<sup>33</sup> saints' lives are famous for their tendency towards exemplarity.<sup>34</sup> But such statements still miss the point, precisely because these genres do not have *the effect of biography*. Biography too presupposes an inner life and a subjectivity, that is, operates under the conditions of a biographical pact. It is to Kempe and Julian that modern readers have looked for Fleming's twin criteria of subjectivity and expression. Unlike medieval saints, these fifteenth-century women arrive at the reader as selves whose historical experience is available – as David Aers puts it, they avoid 'the fantasia of superpersons with which saints' legends are packed'.<sup>35</sup> If we understand autobiography not as a distinct genre but a kind of urge or tendency – one determined in no small part by pastoral power itself – then we can answer back to Fleming, and declare that it is to the writings of authors like Kempe, rather than hagiography, that we should look to for medieval (auto)biography. This is because they speak in forms that readers of the twentieth and twenty-first century can understand. This language, the subject of this last chapter, is certainly marked by a sense of personal particularity and a dialogue with the external world. But it is also fundamentally conditioned by the languages of pastoral power, penitential subjection and medical and disciplinary surveillance. The languages are, of course, contractual. And it is these languages that, I suggest, produce subjects that are recognisable across the gulf of time. In this chapter I am not interested in drawing new conclusions as to the

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<sup>33</sup> Fleming, 'Medieval European Autobiography', p.36.

<sup>34</sup> On hagiography as a genre, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). I would, of course, dispute the terms of the title.

<sup>35</sup> David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p.110.

personality or subjectivities of either of these two medieval women. What I am interested in doing, however, is exploring the methods by which these texts produce entities that are recognisable as subjects that we treat as historical fact rather than as fiction.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* has a special role in the history of English autobiography. Its rediscovery in 1936 came at a time when national myth required an injection of such a grounding identity; David Wallace writes that, throughout the 1930s and 1940s Margery Kempe was celebrated as the ‘only begetter of a whole new narrative world’.<sup>36</sup> Throughout World War II, hopes that Kempe could be canonised and elevated to a comparable level with Joan of Arc – canonised in 1920 – reached a fever pitch.<sup>37</sup> Kempe’s historical *personhood*, the *referentiality* of her authorial name, thus served – and continues to serve – as an excellent handhold for national narratives. The authorial truth of Kempe, a truth condensed and produced by the medical-disciplinary technologies of pastoral power, is the basic axis around which such readings turn. It is telling, then, that medicalisation and a strong tendency towards diagnosis have been a recurrent strand in the attention received by Margery Kempe and her *Book* – the existence of the distinction is telling enough – which has circulated for a long time around questions of her personality and psychology. Thus, as Roberta Bux Bosse noted in a 1979 article, ‘[t]he majority view, existing mostly on the level of faculty lounge gossip, regards Margery and her *Book* condescendingly, implying, if not explicitly arguing, that she is a menopausal hysteric with strong tendencies in egomania’.<sup>38</sup> Such approaches have escaped the faculty lounge into publication rather often, where the deployment of clinical and psychiatric knowledges mixes with character judgements that verge on the unpleasant: still in the

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<sup>36</sup> David Wallace, *Strong Women: Life, Text, and Territory 1347-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.69.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, *Strong Women*, p.73.

<sup>38</sup> Roberta Bux Bosse, ‘Margery Kempe’s Tarnished Reputation: A Reassessment’, *14th Century English Mystics Newsletter*, 5.1 (1979), 9–19 (p.9).

1990s, Claridge, Pryor and Watkins were able to write that '[i]t is more than likely that she [Kempe] was a schizophrenic, for whom the religious beliefs of her day provided a means of escape from the daily life with which her *inadequate* personality could not cope', adding that 'she *harassed* her scribes and possible scribes continually – to death, it would appear in the case of the first one'.<sup>39</sup> Such observations are no doubt empowered by gendered power dynamics (frequently written into the clinical model),<sup>40</sup> but they are primarily enabled by a different quality, recognised implicitly or explicitly in almost every study of Kempe's *Book*. Claridge *et al.* note that Kempe's 'writings contain abundant evidence of her psychological disorder', adding that Kempe's 'insanity [...] is not in doubt'.<sup>41</sup> At the other end of the scale, Julia Long praises Kempe's 'vigorous striving for, and success in achieving, a subject position which is a refusal of the victim role',<sup>42</sup> whilst Bosse's thoughtful call for caution notes the 'undeniable fact' that 'Margery's *Book* fascinates' and that it does so 'due to the vividness with which it depicts her personality'.<sup>43</sup> All of these critical responses circulate around and are underwritten by a shared sense in which, unlike so many troublingly anonymous medieval authors, Kempe – as a psychological, individual subject – makes herself knowable through her *Book*.

The scholarship of the last decades has pushed back against the twin tendencies of pathology and misogyny with a great deal of success. In this process, much of this work has naturally shifted away from a focus on the retrieval of the historical Kempe to

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<sup>39</sup> Gordon Claridge, Ruth Pryor and Gwen Watkins, *Sounds from the Bell Jar: Ten Psychotic Authors* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1990), p.61.

<sup>40</sup> In her comparison of Margery Kempe and the Breuer-Freud case subject known as 'Anna O', Julia Long rightly notes that '[t]empting as it may be to see these manifestations of a liberating [...] discourse, it should be borne in mind that a condition of its existence is that the woman becomes a spectacle, and as such can be viewed, judged and named by men'. See Julia Long, 'Mysticism and Hysteria: The Histories of Margery Kempe and Anna O.', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.88–111 (p.102).

<sup>41</sup> Claridge, Pryor and Watkins, *Sounds from the Bell Jar*, p.2, p.x. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Long, 'Mysticism and Hysteria', p.107.

<sup>43</sup> Bosse, 'Margery Kempe's Tarnished Reputation', p.9.

the level of discourse analysis.<sup>44</sup> This trend has led Jeremy Cohen to note in his 2003 book that he ‘start[s] with the confidence that the feminist and queer rescue of Kempe from pathologisers, sexists, and skeptics has been successful’.<sup>45</sup> This confidence only lasts until the endnotes of his text, however, where he adds that ‘this rescue is at best a fragile achievement’.<sup>46</sup> Two brief examples drawn from late twentieth-century scholarly literature will illustrate this.

In his 2000 essay ‘Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse’, Richard Lawes draws on the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association to diagnose both Kempe and Julian (alongside their famously ‘disordered’ contemporary Thomas Hoccleve); Kempe ends up assigned temporal lobe epilepsy and a single post-partum psychotic episode. According to Lawes, ‘the disruption of identity’ and ‘ongoing puzzling experiences’ caused by these breaks ‘might be expected to produce self-questioning’ and generate a propensity towards self-reflection and autobiographical work.<sup>47</sup> Whilst there are other issues with his argument – he states, for instance, that ‘human neurobiology is stable across... massive expanses of time’ and productive of autobiography, but without accounting for the marked uptick in such texts beginning in the late medieval period<sup>48</sup> – his argument produces a deeply clinical and circular argument that can be mapped as follows: the

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<sup>44</sup> In addition to the studies cited elsewhere in this chapter, see Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); David Aers, *Community Gender, and Individual Identity*, Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), Chapter Three; and *How Soon is Now?: medieval texts, amateur readers, and the queerness of time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), Chapter Three; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*; and Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). This list is by no means exhaustive.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, *Medieval Cultures*, 35 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.155.

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p.261.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Lawes, ‘Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve’, in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp.217-245 (p.232).

<sup>48</sup> Lawes, ‘Psychological Disorder’, p.226.

generic markers of autobiography prove that autobiography is the product of a particular interest in the operations of the self and psychology: in short, a product of the generic markers of autobiography.<sup>49</sup> Without situating itself within a historically-particularised analysis of pastoral power – a constellation of discourses and practices that include accountability, confession, and pathology – such an analysis will miss the fact that it *produces* or *fixes* a subject within a predetermined analytical framework. The analytical paradigm Lawes invokes is unable to do more than interpolate its subjects within its own closed, sterile, system.

The second case, cited by Cohen in his endnote, is a paper by Mary Hardiman Farley, which appeared in *Exemplaria* in 1999.<sup>50</sup> Farley, a registered psychiatric nurse at a Los Angeles hospital, takes especial aim at those critics she paints as lacking the necessary clinical experience to properly assess the *Book* of Margery Kempe. She cites examples of patients under her own care, arguing that ‘critical exegesis’ should ‘resist the temptation to explicate’ the fact that Kempe is restrained following her difficult pregnancy – because such exegeses arise from uninformed, lay responses to medical procedure.<sup>51</sup> Farley does not suggest why her twentieth-century clinical experiences should have much application in a fifteenth-century context; nor does she explain why twentieth-century psychiatric practice should be free from similar exegesis. The structures and assumptions of her approach are most telling when Farley declares that David Aers’ work on Kempe ‘valorises her [Kempe’s] delusional system’, rather than engaging in ‘reality testing’, which is, Farley adds, ‘important in the clinical management of twentieth-century Western psychotics.’<sup>52</sup> Whilst she stops short of explicitly accusing

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<sup>49</sup> Lawes, ‘Psychological Disorder’, p.234.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Hardiman Farley, ‘Her Own Creature: Religion, Feminist Criticism, and the Functional Eccentricity of Margery Kempe’, *Exemplaria* 11:1 (1999), 1-21.

<sup>51</sup> Farley, ‘Her Own Creature’, p.4

<sup>52</sup> Farley, ‘Her Own Creature’, p.4.

Aers of somehow failing a duty of care towards Kempe, such asides are revealing. Neatly illustrating the convergence of autobiographical and pathologising readings, Farley sees this fifteenth-century woman and visionary *as one of her patients*. There is thus a heavy irony to Farley's article, entitled 'Her Own Creature'; the Kempe that reaches us through Farley's work is not a ranging, challenging figure of the fifteenth-century, but a twentieth-century patient, sequestered away in a Los Angeles psychiatric ward. In its desire to grasp the real individual, the pathologising lens risks reducing the text itself to a witness of a trans- or a-historical artefact, shorn of its complexity and ambiguity.

Pathology – as a method for subjection through medical apparatus – did not begin, and will not end, with Farley. Indeed, Chapter Two discussed at length the function of a particular historical medical disposition in the early theorists of the Christian pastoral mission. There we saw how a particular medical technology was applied to the body, establishing a complex relationship of overlapping zones between the mutually antagonistic spirit and body. It was licensed to do so by the investigative impulse of pastoral inquiry, which depended on what I have called a depth model of the subject to operate. This impulse construes the body as a sort of tool for the soul, an instrument through which the essential *pneuma* of the subject is expressed with varying degrees of efficacy. In this depth-model scheme, 'the office of the body', is, according to Gregory the Great, 'to be the organ of the mind; and though the musician be ever so skilled in playing, he cannot put his art in practice unless outward aids accord with himself for that purpose'.<sup>53</sup> The body is secondary, necessary for communication but unable to do anything but repeat what the soul wishes. Medical knowledge – medieval or modern – a hermeneutics of traces that seeks to regain access to the hidden places of the heart through exterior signs, reverses the problem. It makes the body into a tool for the spiritual doctor,

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<sup>53</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, II.8, p.73. See also Chapter Two, above.

both in ‘reading’ the truth of the soul through the body and in cleansing it within and by body through satisfaction. Pathology fixes the body, and through it the soul, as conditioned by a fall into exteriority.

My paraphrasing of Derrida is not accidental or incidental here; this treatment of the body has, as its necessary analogue, the Scriptural tradition of author-centric literary theory. In this tradition, the ‘soul’ of the text, its determining-but-ever-absent kernel, is the author. Where confessors and physicians traced evidence of the soul’s misdeeds back through the exterior body, exegetes traced evidence of the author’s (and especially the Divine Author’s) intentions back through the exterior text. The analogy, expressed simply, runs: spirit versus body, author versus text. What Farley and readers like her remind us is that, just as with the spirit/body relation, to read in a pathologizing mode is to assert a particular relationship between author and text. This relationship is one of clear and strict hierarchy; the author’s particular historicity and pathology explains, or determines, the meaning of the text. It thus asserts, against the state of textuality (which always points threateningly towards dis-closure, openness, and, in a word, *différance*), the clear and strict association of the text with its author. This overdetermining of the text via author, so clearly essential to autobiography, also explains why autobiography and medical readings so often go hand in hand.

The enduring irony of readings like Farley’s is, of course, that Margery Kempe’s *Book* must first of all offer evidence for such interpretations. Even as such readings appear to work against the grain of scholarly opinion, they cohere with precisely what Kempe-as-author offers us. Kempe’s famous ‘gift of tears’ is, in fact, already imbricated in the medical-penitential apparatus whose tradition I have been tracing. Thus, as Kempe and



her company explore the numerous pilgrim sites of Jerusalem, she offers herself to us in what are clearly pathologising terms as a somaticized subject:

And whan thei cam up on to the Mownt of Calvarye, sche fel down that sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn, but walwyd and wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys abode, and cryed wyth a lowed voys as thow hir hert schulde a brostyn asundyr, for in the cite of hir sowle sche saw veryly and freschly how owyr Lord was crucified. [...] And sche had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn that sche myt not kepe hirself for kryng and roryng, thow sche schuld a be ded therfor. And this was the first cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon.<sup>54</sup>

‘And this was the first cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon’; with these words the *Book* concludes the founding moment of what could be called – with a heavy dose of irony –Margery Kempe’s case history. From within the pastoral enclosure, this is the traumatic break which functions as the key to Kempe’s mystical-pastoral (or pathological – we can take our pick) individual journey. From its first occurrence, the wailing and writhing that will characterise Kempe’s devotional performances structure exactly the relationship between internal and external that I have argued characterises medical hermeneutics. Thus the vision she has of Christ is explicitly internal, hidden ‘in the cite of her sowle’ (although, characteristically for Kempe, the Passion appears ‘verily and freschly’, that is, with the vividness of sensory experience), but its effects reverberate through her physiology, affecting her ‘as thow hir hert schulde a brostyn asundyr’, playing itself out in a visceral, spasmodic reaction that leaves her unable to stand, forced to spread her arms wide in an *imitatio Christi* that resembles a seizure more than it does a devotional gesture. Like a pilgrimage badge, or an illness contracted, Kempe carries this experience back through her travels to England. Her outbursts remain insistently personal but also stridently public, so that ‘it wolde aperyng wythowteforth swech as was closyd wythinneforth’.<sup>55</sup> Her internal state of contrition is so strong that it demands that it be

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<sup>54</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.28.2206-2217, pp.162-163.

<sup>55</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.6122-6123, p.337.

shown – ‘sche myt not kepe hirself for kryng and roryng’, a theme that reverberates through accounts of her outbursts: ‘sche myt not wythstonde whan God wold send it’, we are told, and later we learn that God gave his grace ‘so plentyvowsly that sche cowed not wythstonde it’.<sup>56</sup> One can perhaps see why she was both a nightmare and a blessing to those entrusted with her pastoral care: the irrepressible physical violence of her contrition makes her a sort of hyperreal confessional subject, threateningly transparent in the face of a vast interpretative array designed around the play of absence and presence in opacity. Perhaps Kempe is what happens once one can see through the glass, clearly.

It is with exactly this clarity that Kempe continues to paint a picture of the dynamics of the depth model. What starts within her must, time and time again, bubble up to the surface in a series of ‘symptoms’. Thus the saintly speeches delivered to Kempe via a series of visions trigger an unstoppable avalanche of emotion that bursts into the public eye:

Her dalyawns was so swet, so holy, and so devowt, that this creatur myt not oftyntymes beryn it, but fel down and wrestyd wyth hir body, and mad wondyrful cher and contenawns, wyth boystows sobbyngys and gret plente of terys.<sup>57</sup>

The pastoral apparatus has by now taught us what to look out for and here, again, the structure is clear. The internal, private ‘dalyawns’ of the saints is too much for Kempe to bear, and so it bursts out as a series of disturbing physical symptoms. This causal progression again exists as a way to structure a hermeneutic relationship which places the body hierarchically below the interior, as a tool or externality which merely reflects

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<sup>56</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.30.2421-2422, p.173 and I.40.3224-3225, p.208. Such examples could be multiplied.

<sup>57</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.17.1265-1269, p.116.

internal dispositions and experiences. Bodily reactions, to the pastoral-medical-pathologising eye, work as a kind of interfacing agent between external fact and interior reality.

This hermeneutic dynamic conditions the aggressive responses Kempe's performances often engender. Thus, after the saintly 'dalyawns' overwhelms her, slanderous locals suggest 'that sum evyl spyrit vexed hir in hir body, or ellys that sche had sum bodily sekenesse'.<sup>58</sup> These twofold suggestions – of possession or medical illness – follow in Kempe's wake regularly enough to appear almost formulaic; at the Church of John Lateran in Rome, the locals are so disturbed by her cries that both accusations are repeated within the space of four lines: 'the pepil was ofntymes aferd and gretly astoynd, demyng sche had ben vexyd wyth sum evyl spirit, er a sodeyn sekenes, not levyng it was the werk of God, but rather sum evyl spirit, er a sodeyn sekenes'.<sup>59</sup> The alternatives offered as explanations of her outburst remind again and again of the basic hermeneutics of pastoral power, of the play between body and surface that allows revelation to be mistaken for disease in the first place. In other words, the very possibility of a mis-diagnosis rests on the constant threat of a misleading body, capable of overturning or subverting stable sign systems. The threat of the hypocrite, touched upon in Chapter Two, is structured by the pastoral epistemology of depth explored and developed by thinkers like Gregory the Great. Indeed, Kempe's Roman contemporaries might as well have been referring to John Cassian or Evagrius of Pontus as authorities on the matter – their twin suggestions reflect again and again the hermeneutical regimes articulated in the early church fathers, developed and redeployed through centuries of the pastoral tradition.

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<sup>58</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe* I.17.1271-1272, p.116.

<sup>59</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.33.2711-2714, p.186.

The most emblematic and, I believe, suggestive example of this dynamic occurs relatively late in the *Book*. By this point in Kempe's career, the tide of public favour has largely swung in her favour; her days of being arrested and tried for heresy are over, and she is widely celebrated by many of the ecclesiastical celebrities of fifteenth century Norfolk and, indeed, England. However, one particular friar – 'holdyn an holy man and a good prechowr' and tentatively associated by Barry Windeatt with the Franciscan William Melton – remains a thorn in her side.<sup>60</sup> After some early displays of patience, Melton reveals his true colours as an unbeliever, and 'wolde not suffyr hir to her hys sermown, les than sche wolde levyn hir sobbyng and hir crying'.<sup>61</sup> After some discussion, however, Melton's position eases somewhat. Still deeply critical of Kempe, the Franciscan offers her a kind of deal:

[H]e seyde, yf sche myght not wythstond it whan it cam, he levyd it was a cardiakyl, er sum other sekenesse, and yf sche wolde be so aknowyn, he seyde, he wolde have compassyon of hir and steryn the pepil to prey for hir, and undyr this condicion he wolde han paciens in hir and suffyr hir to cryen anow, that sche schulde sey that it was a kindly seknes.<sup>62</sup>

What is so striking about this passage is not merely that a respected preacher so adamantly fails to believe Kempe's condition is divinely inflicted – the *Book* documents scores of those. Instead, what marks Melton's suggestion out from the others is that what he 'leves' is not finally important. Neither, really, is what Kempe may or may not believe, nor (somewhat more contentiously) the actual truth of the matter. What Melton seeks from Kempe instead is *her own acknowledgment of her illness*. She will be accepted into the community of the faithful, even prayed for, if only she will declare herself a medical case. Kempe, of course, does no such thing. The preacher's only demand of Kempe, then, is

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<sup>60</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.61.4979-4980, p.286.

<sup>61</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.61.5026-5027, p.288.

<sup>62</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.61.5061-5067, p.290.

that she confess (*knouen* means, under certain circumstances, to confess)<sup>63</sup> the medical-pastoral ‘truth’ about her condition. The words must come from her, and be received by him in a medico-pastoral ‘contract’.

Four hundred years later, this gesture would be repeated. This time, instead of a cowl there is a doctor’s coat; instead of a church, a closed psychiatric institution.

In a work consecrated to the moral treatment of madness and published in 1840, a French psychiatrist, Leuret, tells of the manner in which he has treated one of his patients – treated and, as you can imagine, of course, cured. One morning Dr. Leuret takes Mr. A., his patient, into a shower room. He makes him recount in detail his delirium.

‘Well, all that’, says the doctor, ‘is nothing but madness. Promise me not to believe in it anymore’.

The patient hesitates, then promises.

‘That’s not enough’, replies the doctor. ‘You have already made similar promises, and you haven’t kept them’. And the doctor turns on a cold shower above the patient’s head.

‘Yes, yes! I am mad!’ the patient cries.

The shower is turned off, and the interrogation is resumed.

‘Yes, I recognise that I am mad,’ the patient repeats, adding, ‘I recognise, because you are forcing me to do so’.

Another shower. Another confession. The interrogation is taken up again.

‘I assure you, however’, says the patient, ‘that I have heard voices and seen enemies around me’.

Another shower.

‘Well’, says Mr. A., the patient, ‘I admit it. I am mad; all that was madness’.<sup>64</sup>

Aside from incidental details (century, location, profession) this is the same movement. By this period, the primacy of medical (physiological and mental health) over spiritual (spiritual ‘ill-health’; the disease of sin) regimes is certainly more established, but the manner in which subjection is developed is remarkably similar. Caught in the pastoral array, where the body veils the hidden depths of the soul, the subject-before-power must declare its truth or risk disappearing forever. Only the contingencies of history save Kempe from the same fate as Mr. A.; her experiences are recouped into an idiosyncratic

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<sup>63</sup> *MED*, ‘knouen’ (v.).

<sup>64</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth’, ed. Mark Blasius, *Political Theory*, 21.2 (1993), 198–227 (p.200).

attempt at self-hagiography. This legitimising discourse is not available to Mr. A., who as a result reaches us only as one of Dr. Leuret's successes, another subject cured. In both cases, however, it is as Foucault – from whose late lectures the Leuret example is taken – suggests: '[t]o declare aloud and intelligibly the truth about oneself – I mean, to confess – has in the Western world been considered for a long time either as a condition for redemption of one's sins or as an essential item in the condemnation of the guilty'.<sup>65</sup> Around the 'reality' that both Kempe and Mr. A. must 'aknowen' circulate the demands of the endlessly complex, endlessly muddled depth model and autobiographical subject that pastoral power produces and maintains, then and now.

Bound to exactly this depth model, the pathologising reader looks, above all, for evidence of authorial 'psychology'. The apology that ends Kempe's own textual preface to her *Book* is an oft-cited example of this psychology.

Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn.<sup>66</sup>

This comment works to challenge its own textuality, driving against the organisational motifs of genre and literary structure in favour of the text 'lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend', choosing to follow the associative leaps of internal psychology instead. In so doing it reminds of those modernist projects, like the stream of consciousness, which strive to reflect the reality of psychological experience through literary structure. Indeed, this commitment to psychological or experiential non-linearity is upheld later in the text, where comments in parenthesis refer the reader back to earlier entries: 'Rede first the xxi chapetre, and than this chapetre aftyr that'.<sup>67</sup> No effort is made to reconfigure or

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self', p.201.

<sup>66</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Introduction, 134-147, p.49.

<sup>67</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.16.1206-1207, p.112.

restructure the book according to the linear progression of historical, non-subjective, time.<sup>68</sup> In the process, such gestures elaborate a distinction between the act of textual production (conceived as external, public, artificial) and psychology (conceived as internal, private, natural) that should by now be familiar to readers. By making the structure of the text secondary to the psychological experience of remembering, Kempe effectively rehearses this hierarchy. The text therefore asserts its own naturalness, suggesting access to a private subjectivity unmediated by restrictive attention to literary style. In the process, it also obfuscates Kempe's own self-fashioning as a textual subject. The effects of such a programme have been noted before – Bosse, in fact, describes them rather well:

[U]sing hagiography as her model, she [Kempe] set out to grope her way toward the more appropriate *genre*. However, a work combining two such disparate impulses – the public and laudatory tone of the saint's life with the intimate and uncompromisingly revealing confessional – inevitably suffers inner tensions which can prove tonally disastrous.<sup>69</sup>

Bosse concludes that Kempe 'takes no pains to present her experiences as other than they were'.<sup>70</sup> In concluding so, Bosse has effectively taken the end-product of a specific technique as a given, accepting the hierarchy between text and subject generated by such an apology. The tension Bosse notes is not so much a failure to reconcile the demands of genre as it is a productive tension generated by the techniques of pastoral power.

Julian of Norwich's *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* produces, I think, an analogous effect. Julian dwells on the veracity of her reports near the end of the text, declaring that 'I haffe saide as I sawe' and 'for the wordes fourmed, I hafe saide tham right as oure lorde shewed me thame'. It is only with 'gastely sight', the spiritual meaning

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<sup>68</sup> On the importance of examining our sense of time, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*.

<sup>69</sup> Bosse, 'Margery Kempe's Tarnished Reputation', p.13.

<sup>70</sup> Bosse, 'Margery Kempe's Tarnished Reputation', p.16.

and transmission of information, that she expresses a caveat, noting that ‘I hafe saide somdele, bot I maye never fully telle it’.<sup>71</sup> Whilst such promises do not generate quite the same effect as Kempe’s aside, their content – and the first-person pronouns that clamour for our attention – do amount to a writerly technique that appears to reflect a historical or experiential reality.

However, for Julian, more than for Kempe, this drive is worked through the very fabric of the text at the level of syntax. Her visions are masterpieces of Middle English prose, experiences shot through with vividness and crispness:

I sawe that swete face as it ware drye and bludyelesse with pale dyinge; sithen mare dede pale, langourande; and than turnede more dede to the blewe; and sithene mare blewe, as the fleshe turnede mare deepe dede. For alle the paines that Criste sufferede in his bodye shewed to me in the blissede face, als farfurthe as I saw it, and namelye in the lippes, thare I sawe this foure colourse – thaye that I sawe beforehande freshlye and ruddy, liflye and likande to my sight. This was a hevy change, to see this deepe dyinge. And also the nese chaungede and dried to my sight. This lange pininge semede to me as he hadde bene a sevensight dede, allewaye sufferande paine. And methought the dryinge of Cristes flesche was the maste paine of his passion and the laste.<sup>72</sup>

Above and beyond the ‘evidence’ provided by the sheer descriptiveness of this passage – the abundance of adjectives, the slow exploration of Christ’s battered features – it is notable that this passage is structured by a very specific *subjectivity*. We are far from the ‘dietetic’ mode – a tendency to use the I-voice as a vehicle for description without any ‘implied assertion that the first person either does or does not correspond to a real-life individual’ – that A. C. Spearing detects in Middle English literature.<sup>73</sup> The ‘I’ that repeats four times in five lines and aided by two occurrences of ‘to my sight’ strongly claims to refer to a specific individual and her subjective capacities. Thus it is that Christ’s face

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<sup>71</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 23.51-55, p.115. The limitations of this statement are a theme I will return to at the end of this chapter.

<sup>72</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 10.1-11, p.83.

<sup>73</sup> A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p.7.



appears ‘as it *ware* drye and bludylesse’; visible to readers ‘als farfurthe as I saw it’ and no further. Throughout, the vocabulary of vision and perception (‘shewed to me’; ‘as I saw it’; ‘thare I sawe’; ‘thaye that I sawe beforehande’; ‘to my sight’) recalls that this is *Julian’s* vision, related through her subject and words back through us. Even the specific progression of time, paced out to us through a punctuating ‘sithen’ and ‘and than’ in the first lines, reflects the elapsing of an imagined, personal, and subjective time. The rhetorical structures of such moments perform and produce a subjectivity, offer themselves as half of the autobiographical pact. Here we have a subject who takes pains to present her necessarily limited experience *exactly as it happened to her*, rather than translated into general truths, a gesture which produces a sense of personal, specific subjective experience precisely by clearly circumscribing and limiting its remit.

Such a process also reflects Julian’s efforts at a form of self-documentation through vision. Writing on the relationship between the shorter ‘Vision’ and Julian’s later *A Revelation of Divine Love*, Felicity Riddy describes a ‘process of self-textualisation’, involving a sustained effort of

first giving to pre-discursive mental experience [...] verbal and then written shape, separating the inchoate and indeterminate visions [...] so they could be analysed and discussed, so that the writer could cross-refer from one to the other, [...] so that, as a book, they could become part of other people’s reading.<sup>74</sup>

Certainly, the relationship between the two texts – a short visionary account developed over many years into a theological manifesto – points to exactly this form of self-documentation wherein subjective experience is recorded, textualized into objectivity or publicity. Indeed, *A Vision’s* very rhetorical structures, as I have suggested, produce this

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<sup>74</sup> Felicity Riddy, ‘Julian of Norwich and Self-Textualisation’, in *Editing Women*, ed. Anne M. Hutchinson (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp.101–24 (p.105); For a similar argument, see also Elizabeth Robertson, ‘Julian of Norwich’s “Modernist Style” and the Creation of Audience’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp.139–53.

sense of a ‘pre-discursive mental experience’ and subjectivity that becomes progressively reified as it enters the public, exterior realm of language. Tellingly, Riddy notes in an aside that this process ‘is of course what happens with much writing’, a subtle nod to the assumptions of the confessional-autobiographical pact that is the focus of this chapter. For Riddy, as for me, Julian’s texts represent a particularly telling example of a general trend. For Riddy this is coded into the very experience of language and writing; to me, it reflects the continuous effect of the historically contingent phenomenon that is pastoral power.

*A Vision*’s moments of rational discussion follow a similar structure – so much so that they appear as *accounts* (with all of the documentary weight of this term) of reasoning as much as actual arguments. Thus, after observing Christ’s dying face and becoming overwhelmed with suffering, Julian develops a blow-by-blow account of her theorising:

Than thoughte me, I knewe ful litille whate pain it was that I asked, for methought that my paines passed any bodilye dede. I thought: ‘Es any paine in helle like this paine?’ And I was answered in my resone that ‘dispaire is mare, for that es gastelye paine. Bot bodilye paine es nane mare than this. Howe might my paine be more than to see him that es alle my life, alle my blis, and alle mye joye suffer?’ Here feled I sothfastlye that I lovede Criste so mekille aboven myselfe that methought it hadde been a grete ese to me to hafe diede bodilye.<sup>75</sup>

Syntactically this passage is rather similar to the previous one. First-person pronouns abound, breaking apart the progression of argument into specific moments and revelation. The direct speech of the passage splits Julian’s psyche into separate parts that ask and answer questions, as her ‘thought[s]’ are responded to ‘in [her] resone’ until she reaches a suitable conclusion. Such forensic examination of the flow and dynamics of her thought are a hallmark of Julian’s work; at the same time, they reflect a preoccupation with psychological veracity and accuracy derived in no small part from the pastoral tradition

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<sup>75</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 10.31-37, pp.83-85.

within which Julian is explicitly working. As she herself tells us, '[a]lle this that I hafe nowe saide, and mare that I shalle saye efter, es comforthinge againe sinne'; elsewhere, she paraphrases Richard Rolle's *Form of Living*, a paradigmatic example of the 'discretion of spirits' tradition, which offered specialised pastoral advice to contemplatives.<sup>76</sup> The psychic 'split' necessitated by pastoral power and discussed at the beginning of this chapter is also obvious in Julian's internalised conversations; self-analysis requires one constitute oneself as one's own object and split one's self between observer and observed. From this position the leap to active debate – enabled by parallel and long-running genres like the *psychomachia* or debates between the soul and the body – is a small step indeed.

Whilst Kempe's *Book* does not perform the same sustained, textured representation of subjectivity, it presents its readers with moments that produce a similar effect. The opening of the text, for instance, presents within its first chapters scenes of vivid subjective experience. Brought to the edge of death by sickness and a difficult childbirth, Kempe is thrown into despair by the sharp reproofs of a curate and 'went owte of hir mende and was wondyrlye vexed and labowryd wyth spyritys half yer, viii wekys and odde days'.<sup>77</sup> Not content with such a brief description, the *Book* embarks on an account worth quoting in its generous length:

And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brenny[n]g lowys of fyr, as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sumtyme rampyng at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullyng hyr and haling hir bothe nygth and day during the forseyd tyme. And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys, and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntyngs in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and

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<sup>76</sup> Julian of Norwich, 'A Vision', 16.8-9, p.97; 25.24-27, p.119. Note also that Margery Kempe visits Julian, not for theological insight, but for *pastoral* aid and 'to wetyn yf ther wer any decyte in [her visions], for the ankres was expert in swech thyngys and good counsel cowd yevyn'. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.17.1335-1381, pp.119-123. In contrast to both her contemporaries and Julian's own apparent understanding of her work as pastoral, modern critics celebrate her primarily for her theology.

<sup>77</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.1.117-180, p.54.

alle hire frendys. And so sche dede. Sche slawndred hir husband, hir frendys, and her owyn self; sche spak many a reprevows worde and many a schrewyd worde; sche knew no virtu ne goodnesse; sche desyryd all wykkydnesse; lych as the spyrytys temptyd hir to say and do, so sche seyde and dede. [...] And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body ayen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon other instrumentys, and wers sche wold a don, saf sche was bowndyn and kept wyth strength bothe day and nygth that sche mygth not have hir wylle.<sup>78</sup>

Beginning with an assertion of sheer interiority ('as hir thowt'), this passage develops a lengthy description of the process of sin in which Kempe engages. Thus the temptation begins internally, with 'develys' who demand she forsake the constituent elements of both her faith ('Crystendame', 'feyth', 'God', 'hys modyr', 'alle the seyntys', 'goode werkys', 'good vertues') and her social bonds ('hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys'.) A short sentence functions as the fulcrum of the passage, as she assents to sin: 'And so sche dede'. From there her sins seem to accelerate in an unending spiral. In her telling, the conditions of her illness, her temptation, and her sins are played out in extensive detail. They are an essential component in a spirituality which, whilst it may signify to Christianity in general, remains in an important way specifically hers. Her narrative fulfils almost exactly the demands of a formulaic confession, fulfilling six out of the seven 'circumstances'.<sup>79</sup> Thus we learn *quis* (who: Kempe); *quid* (what: forsaking both her religion and her earthly ties); *quibus auxiliis* (aided by whom: tempted and threatened by devils, limited by those who restrained her), *cur* (why: despair following the curate's remonstrations), *quomodo* (how: through slandering earthly connections, abandoning all virtue and loving vice), *quando* (when: after childbirth, for half a year, eight weeks and sundry days). Only *ubi* (where) is missing. It is not necessary to assume that this passage is informed directly by such circumstances, although it seems likely that Kempe would have been familiar with them. It suffices to note that there is a developed tradition behind

<sup>78</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.1.201-222, pp.54-55.

<sup>79</sup> The number and form of the circumstances of confession varied widely over the period. For the circumstances' origins in classical rhetoric, see Chapter Two, pp.69-70, and Robertson, 'A Note on the Classical Origin of "Circumstances"'.

her apparent psychological immediacy and clarity. Confessional circumstances provide the tools, in other words, which promise to give modern readers the same kind of insight into Kempe's life that her confessors must have demanded.

Indeed, even those moments constituted (whether by later critics or the *Book* itself) as most originally Kempe's can and should be reconceived as instances produced by the mechanics of the pastoral subjection apparatus. This often happens when the internal logic of the text seems to set her in opposition to the commonplaces of her day. Thus a priest, observing Kempe's contortions, notes

'Damsel, Jhesu is ded long sithyn'. Whan hir crying was cesyd, sche seyde to the preste: 'Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyde this same day, and so me thynkyth it awt to be to yow and to alle Cristen pepil. We awt evyr to han mende of hys kendnes and evyr thykyn of the dolful deth that he deyde for us'.<sup>80</sup>

Here historical time is set against Kempe's individualised, psychologised time; for her, spiritual associations trump linear time and produce spontaneous and overwhelming associations. Kempe's advice here – that 'alle Cristen pepil [...] awt evyr to han mende of [Christ's] kendnes and evyr thykyn of the dolful deth that he deyde' – is anything but original, echoing a sentiment found throughout the pastoral tradition in a number of forms: *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, for instance, reminds its readers that 'þou schalt wite þat al þe tyme þat þu þenkest not on God þou schalt holde as lost'.<sup>81</sup> The manner in which she responds to the imagery and speech of the Passion, styled as idiosyncratic and anomalous, is actually a triumph of the hermeneutical structure the pastoral texts of Chapter Four try to impart to their readers. The pain and horror of the crucifixion is constantly in danger of bursting onto the scene and saturating the quotidian experience of late medieval life with hyperreal meaning – as, the manuals suggest, they *should* be.

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<sup>80</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe* I.60.4963-4968, p.286.

<sup>81</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.236.

Kempe's entirely conventional insistence of the abiding relevance and importance of keeping the passion alive through devotion and meditation is nonetheless inserted into a context of disbelief and laxity, where it seems that, out of the priest and 'alle Cristen pepil', Kempe is the only true devotee.

Further, the very methods by which Kempe keeps Christ alive and fresh, seemingly a product of an individualised psychology, are remarkably similar to the play of realities outlined in Chapter Four. For Kempe, Calvary is a turning point – once she has visited the site of the crucifixion and performed her own (non-volitional) passion, the interpretative array by which she accesses the world is radically configured.

And sumtyme, whan sche saw the crucefyx, er yf sche sey a man had a wownde er a best whethyr it wer, er yyf a man bett a childe befor hir, er smet an hors er another best wyth a whippe, yyf sche myth sen it er heryn it, hir thowt sche saw owyr Lord be betyn er wowndyd, lyk as sche saw in the man er in the best, as wel in the feld as in the town, and be hirselfe [a]lone as wel as among the pepyl.<sup>82</sup>

What begins as an example of good devotional practice – experiencing the event of the Passion through a meditation on the crucifix – dilates through a series of 'er yyf' phrases into an entire interpretative structure. For Kempe the passion is everywhere, encoded into the daily acts of violence that pattern medieval life, from those adults injured in the course of their lives through to beatings of children and even animals. Later, this 'mynde of the Passyon' is expanded further to include the sick, especially lepers: 'sche myth not duryn to beheldyn a lazer er another seke man, specialy yyf he had any wowndys aperyng on hym. So sche cryid and so sche wept as yyf sche had sen owr Lord Jhesu Crist wyth hys wowndys bledyn'.<sup>83</sup> At other times, Kempe's particular fascination with the human Christ gives this interpretative impulse a different inflection: '[s]che was so meche

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<sup>82</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.20.2226-2231, p.164.

<sup>83</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.74.5924-5927, pp.325-326.

affectyd to the manhode of Crist that whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, yf sche myth wetyn that thei were ony men children, sche schuld than cryin [...] as thei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode'.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the specific triggers for Kempe's outbursts vary, the hermeneutic structure is always the same: figments and elements of her quotidian existence remind her constantly, unavoidably and insistently, of the key moments of Christ's life and therefore of salvific history itself. Chapter Four has described exactly such a dynamic, in which penitential texts and the pastoral power that produces and manages them seek to produce a dual-layered conception of reality, where *exempla* and other rhetorical figurations call attention to the meta-physical truth behind and beyond the everyday. Kempe performs this dynamic effortlessly, without choice, and at times to her own immediate detriment. She performs the gestures of pastoral subjectivity without reflection or pause, constantly parsing material reality as a cipher of spiritual reality. She embraces, in other words, the depth model.

These hermeneutics are characteristically performed with an unstoppable immediacy. To those with access to Kempe's interior, or 'depths', this once again allows for a kind of diagnostic clarity, where the pain and the fear of a successful interpretative gesture is communicated by her trembling, weeping body. Indeed, Kempe's travelling accounts are saturated with examples of communication, failed and achieved. The *Book* dwells in remarkable length on passages in which Kempe succeeds in communication with speakers of other languages, devoting some lines of (relatively unusual) direct speech to one such instance, featuring the charitable 'Margarete Florentyn': 'And neithyr of hem coud wel understand other but be syngnys er tokenys and in fewe comown wordys. And than the lady seyde unto hir: 'Margerya in povert?' Sche, undirstondyng

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<sup>84</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.35.2823-2827, p.190.

what the lady ment, seyde ayen: ‘Ya, grawnt poverté, Madam’.<sup>85</sup> The detail of this passage reflects both the halting interpretative process of translation and the inflections of medieval Italian in the dangling -a appended to ‘Margerya’. The attention of such vignettes reflects an enduring concern with the problems of interpretation, translation, and understanding.

Kempe frequently finds herself lacking English-speaking companions. Forced conversations in stilted English, are, however, rare in the *Book*: the more usual recourse is to divine intervention. Bereft of spiritual guidance in Rome, Kempe receives a vision in which Saint John the Evangelist acts as a sort of substitute confessor, hearing her confession and allocating satisfactory penance: ‘sche teld hym alle hir synnes and al hir hevynes wyth many swemful teerys, and he herd hir ful mekely and benyngly. And sythyn he enjoyned hir penawns that sche schuld do for hir trespass, and asoyled hir of hir synnes’.<sup>86</sup> There is little in such an account to tell the Evangelist apart from a competent earthly confessor; indeed, this is part of the effect of the passage. It stresses Kempe’s specific need for the specific kind of communication licensed by the confessional pact as an overriding determiner of the aid she receives. Often this aid enables her to interact, not only with visions, but worthy foreign priests. Shortly after she has been shriven by Saint John, Kempe meets a ‘Dewch’ priest (later identified as one ‘Wenslawe’)<sup>87</sup> to whom she wishes to confess. The substantial language barrier between the two of them proves insurmountable without divine assistance – it is only once she has prayed for a miracle that the effects of the fall of Babel are suspended:

And aftyr therten days the preste cam ageyn to hir to prevyn the effect of her preyerys, and than he understood what sche seyde in Englysch to hym, and sche undirstod what that he seyde. And yet he undirstod not Englisch that other

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<sup>85</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.38.3056-3061, p.201.

<sup>86</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.32.2641-2644, p.183.

<sup>87</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.37.2999, p.198.



men spokyn; thow thei spokyn the same wordys that sche spak, yet he undirstod hem not, les than sche spak hirselfe.

Than was she confessyd to this preste of alle hir synnes, as ner as hir mende wold servyn hir, fro hir childhode unto that owre, and recyved hir penawns ful joyfully.<sup>88</sup>

Crucially, the miracle does not impart either Kempe or her priest with any special knowledge of other languages – the *Book* goes to some lengths to stress that Kempe still speaks English and the priest Italian, and that the language of others – even when they repeat ‘the same wordys that sche spak’ – remains unintelligible to others. What this miracle licenses is essentially a *private language*, a grace-fuelled medium of supra-linguistic perfect communication. This is not unlike the confessional or autobiographical projects, which both presuppose a privileged line of communication between confessant and confessor, author and reader. Vignettes like this, then, echo in microcosm the fantasies and desires of those selves who, subjected by pastoral power, struggle to overcome the play of depth and surface.

The special supra-linguistic relationship enjoyed by Kempe and her Roman confessor is not allowed to pass without a substantial interrogation. A visiting English preacher, determined to test the veracity of Kempe’s claims, invites Wenslawe to dine with them:

Hyr confessor was preyd to mete and, whan tyme cam, sett and servyd wyth this good preste and hys felaschep, the seyde creatur being present, the good preste of Inglonde dalyng and comownyng in her owyn langage, Englysch. The Duche preste [...] satt al stille in a maner of hevynes, for cawse he undirstod not what thei seyden in Englysch. [...]. And thei dede it in purpose, hys unwetyng, to prevyn yf he undirstod Englysch er not.

At the last, the seyde creatur, seyng and wel undirstondyng that hir confessowr undirstod not her langage, and that was tediows to hym, than [...] to prevyn the werk of God, sche telde in hyr owyn langage, in Englysch, a story of Holy Writte, [...] Than thei askyd hir confessowr yf he undirstod that sche had seyde, and he anon in Latyn telde hem the same wordys that sche seyde befor in Englysch.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.33.2698-2706, p.185.

<sup>89</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.40.3197-3214, pp.207-208.

Their interrogators are understandably impressed, and offer no more resistance to their relationship. Once again, the specific mechanics of this understanding are essential: it is not the case that Wenslawe has learnt English, through divine intervention or more mundane means: ‘he undirstod not what thei seyden in Englysch’. Further, this ‘thei’, indicating the rest of the company, *includes Kempe*: Wenslawe is as incapable of understanding her as he is any other English speaker; it is Kempe who realises ‘that hir confessor undirstod not her language’. It is only when she turns to a biblical source, telling ‘a story of Holy Writte’ that her confessor is able to comprehend her words and relate them back to the rest of the group in Latin. This encounter is therefore not, strictly speaking, an exercise in translation: it is, rather, a demonstration of the common language of sanctity, the perfect signifier, which appears through grace in clarity to the worthy, no matter the terrestrial tongue involved. This is why it constitutes a type of private language, a perfect mode of communication from mind to mind, routed only through God Himself.

*The Book of Vices and Virtues* demonstrates the twisted inverse of this dream: those who pray ‘wip-oute deuocion of herte [...] spekeþ to God a langage þat men clepen patrolard, as who-so spekeþ half Engliche and half Latyn’.<sup>90</sup> A disjunction between internal and external performances generates a half-breed mixed language of English and Latin, incomprehensible and unclear. In *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, Julian’s most trying encounter with temptation is in large part aural:

I harde a bodely jangelinge and a speche, as it hadde bene of two bodies, and bathe to my thinkinge jangled at anes, as if thay had haldene a parlamente with grete besines. And alle was softe mutteringe, and I understode noughte whate thay saide. Botte alle this was to stirre me to dispaire, as methought.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.233. The MED provides the gloss ‘a confused or jumbled language’ for *patrolard* and has only two attestations of the term – that in *The Book of Vices of Virtues* and that in the *Ayenbite of Inwit*, translated from the *Somme le Roi*. The OED suggests a likely etymological ancestor in the Old French *patroullart*, related to *patrouiller*. MED, ‘patroillart’ (n.); OED ‘patroillart’ (n.).

<sup>91</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 23.3-7, p.113.

The devil's speech recalls the 'patrolard' of *Vices and Virtues*. In its muddled double-speak it represents a whole parliament of 'besy' voices, whose indistinct 'jangelinge' threatens to drive Julian straight to 'dispaire', that greatest of sins. For both Kempe and Julian, the language of the world reflects a medium that can only reach so far, and in which meaning is always in danger of being distorted. This is a position underwritten by pastoral power. Kempe is fortunate that divine grace allows her to overcome the dangers of the linguistic (and *all*) dividers. In the process, it allows her to avoid the internal fictions of pastoral power with which both women struggle: the fall into exteriority and the privation that necessarily marks the linguistic act, as de Man and Derrida have argued.

Further, such moments of communicative success occur time and time again in direct opposition to Kempe's treatment at the hands of English-speakers, those with whom she shares a terrestrial language. Thus, for instance, the *Book* celebrates Wenslawe's comprehension with a short aside: 'So blyssed mote God ben, that mad an alyon to undirstondyn hir whan hir owyn cuntre-men had forsakyn hir and wolde not heryn hir confessyon, les than sche wolde a left hir wepyng and spekyng of holynes'.<sup>92</sup> This exclamation develops an opposition between the 'alyon', touched by God's grace, and Kempe's own 'cuntre-men', who have abandoned her and, crucially, 'wolde not heryn hir confession'; their ears are closed to her words in a perverted echo of Christ's words in Matthew 11:15 and variants thereof: 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'. Indeed, everywhere she travels, she is abused, defamed, and abandoned by English-speakers; by her original 'felawship' (I. 40.3187,3190, pp.206-207), by 'men of hir owyn nacyon' (I.42.3326-3333, p.213), and by 'hir cuntremen' (I.30.2460-2461, p.175). In contrast, many of the foreigners – whether natives or fellow pilgrims – Kempe encounters on her journey respond positively to her presence and the attendant cries. Around

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<sup>92</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.40.3219-3222, p.208.

Jerusalem, for instance, Kempe is aided by a sequence of non-English people: ‘tweyn pylgrymys of Duchemen [... keep] hir fro fall yng’ during an onset of her gift of tears and ‘a Sarazyn’ takes ‘hir undyr hys arme and let[s] hir up on to the hey Mownt wher owyr Lord fastyd fowrty days’.<sup>93</sup> As Kempe reaches the Chapel of the Apparition, the final stop in her exploration of Jerusalem, she reflects on such events:

[T]he Frerys of the Tempyl mad hir gret cher and yovyn hir many gret relykys, desiryng that sche schuld a dwellyd stille amongs hem, yyf sche had wold, for the feyth thei had in hir. Also the Sarazines mad mych of hir and conveyd hir and leddyn hir abowtyn in the cuntre wher sche wold gon. And sche fond alle pepyl good onto hir and gentyl, saf only hir owyn cuntremen.<sup>94</sup>

Blind to Kempe’s graces, ‘hir owyn cuntremen’ are the only ones who fail to see and appreciate her special grace. Throughout the *Book*, then, there is a marked sense in which facility with language does not guarantee a privileged understanding of interiority – indeed, it appears that it can almost *harm* attempts to perceive, beneath Kempe’s white clothes, true sanctity.

Nowhere is this preoccupation with the limits of language clearer than in the oft-quoted ‘textual introduction’ included in the *Book*. The first manuscript of the *Book* – the version dictated by Kempe – was, we learn, copied by a scribe from the Low Countries, ‘an Englyschman in hys byrth’, whose facility with his mother tongue seems to have waned in the intervening decades.<sup>95</sup> The result is far from satisfactory, as Kempe’s priest and the first reader of the text discovers: ‘The booke was so evel wretyn that he cowl lytyl skyl theron, for it was neithyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne the lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as other letters ben’. Reminiscent of the mixed-language prayer

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<sup>93</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.28.2189-2190, p.161, and I.30.2412-2413, p.173.

<sup>94</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.30.2439-2444, p.174.

<sup>95</sup> Sebastian Sobecki has recently made a compelling case for identifying the first scribe as Kempe’s own son. See Sobecki, “‘The writyng of this tretys’: Margery Kempe’s Son and the Authorship of Her Book”, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37:1 (2015), 257-283. For an investigation into the second scribe, see Anthony Bale, ‘Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the Scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, *The Chaucer Review* 52:2 (2017), 173-187.

recounted in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, such a mutant linguistic performance is ‘evel’ not only in its defectiveness; it constitutes one more example of the very state of textuality under pastoral power, the fundamental sense that meaning is always lost somewhere behind it. ‘Therefore the prest leved fully ther schuld nevyr man redyn it, but it wer special grace’.<sup>96</sup> This grace is, of course, forthcoming, via the intercession of Kempe herself:

Than sche gat ageyn the book and browt it to the preste wyth rygth glad cher, preying hym to do hys good wyl, and sche schuld prey to God for hym and purchasyn hym grace to reden it and wrytyn it also. The preste, trusting in hire prayers, began to redyn this booke, and it was mych more esy, as hym thowt, than it was beforntym. And so he red it ovyr befor this creatur every word, sche sumtym helpyn where ony difficulte was.<sup>97</sup>

The *Book*’s intense fixation on the problematics of communication reminds throughout of the assumptions under which Kempe’s book and its modern editions are produced. For many twentieth and twenty-first century readers, the important truth of Kempe still rests somewhere behind or beyond the text, buried both by the centuries and the problem of language itself. Behind such desires, and the relationships to the text they generate, lies the long history of pastoral power. We are not yet out of the confessional enclosure.

For Julian, this enclosure – and its attendant depth model – has structured her deeply Augustinian response to sin. As she develops her theology, she brings this absence of sin into dialogue with the fullness of God:

A, wriched sinne! Whate ert thowe? Thow ert nought. For I sawe that God is alle thinge: I sawe nought the. And when I sawe that God has made alle thinge, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe that God is in alle thinge, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe that God does alle thinge that is done, lesse and mare, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe our lorde Jhesu sit in oure saule so wyrshipfully, and luff and like and rewle and yeme alle that he has made, I sawe nought the. And thus I am seker that thowe erte nought. And alle tha that luffes the and likes the and folowes the and wilfully endes in the, I am seker thay shalle be brought to nought with the, and endleslye confounded.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Introduction, 99-103, pp.47-48.

<sup>97</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Introduction, 126-133, p.49.

<sup>98</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 23.23-31, p.113-115.

In this vision, she pieces together part by part a vision of a universe filled to the brim with plenitude. ‘God is alle thinge’, she writes, inherent in and filling every existing thing; and therefore sin, that is ‘nought’, is not to be found there. In action, too, God drives and puts into action every movement, ‘lesse and mare’, of the world – thus, here too, sin is absent. These responses lead her to a state of surety (‘I am seker’) that sin is nothingness, a condition of absence that makes sinners, too, into nothing – ‘alle tha luffes the [...] shalle be brought to nought with the’. The transition from confessional to theological writing is at the heart of Julian’s self-textualisation as a writer; as we follow it through, we can detect a fully theorised version of the discomfort only gestured at by Kempe. This discomfort begins with the tension between absence and presence that has proven so enduring to pastoral power. Thus she oscillates between the plenitude of God and the utter lack of sin, from God who is in and creates, as the refrain states, ‘alle thinge’, to the ‘nought’ that follows ‘sinne’ syntactically as surely as ‘noughting’ follows sinners. All that is created, Julian suggests, owes its existence to God’s work: viewing creation, she notes that ‘I merveylede howe that it might laste, for methought it might falle sodaynlye to nought for little’, that is, be noughted and fall into the nothingness of sin. The answer, beamed like radio waves straight to Julian’s understanding, asserts the primacy and fullness of God’s love as the guarantor of existence and non-sinfulness: ‘It [creation] lastes and ever shalle, for God loves it. And so hath alle thinge the beinge thorowe the love of God’.<sup>99</sup>

The ontological play of absence and privation written into pastoral power is at play here too. For Julian there is something ungraspable about this overwhelming plenitude of God. Just as it inheres in and drives every thing and action in the world, it

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<sup>99</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 4.10-13, p.69.

remains immanent, generalised, and *between* instances. Thus, when Julian asks for a specific revelation in the midst of visions shown ‘plentyously and fully’, she is rebuffed:

‘Take it generally, and behalde the curtaysy of thy lorde God as he shewes it to the. For it is mare worshippe to God to behalde him in alle than in any specialle thinge’. I assented, and therwith I lered that it is mare wyrshippe to God to knawe alle thinge in generale than to like in anythinge in specialle. And if I shulde do wisely efter this techinge, I shulde nought be glad for nathing in specialle, na desesed for na manere of thinge, for alle shalle be wele’.<sup>100</sup>

Specificity falls away in the face of divine plenitude. Her visions lead Julian away from caring for anything ‘in specialle’ and towards a generalised faith in the restorative, determining power of God’s love, summarised in the famous refrain: ‘alle shalle be wele’. Her visions suggest a movement away from the specifics of the world and towards this purposefully nonspecific divine plenitude. Julian’s desire to see a specific vision is a ‘desire’ in which she ‘letted [her]sylfe’, an error in thinking and doctrine which undercuts faith in God and edges dangerously close to error.<sup>101</sup> In the process specificity itself becomes almost sinful, a challenge which must be overcome if worshippers are to ‘do wisely efter this techinge’.

This teaching is, however, self-effacing: it cannot, Julian reminds us, be grasped in this life:

This I understande in twa manerse: ane, I am wele payed that I wate it noght; anothere, I am gladde and mery for I shalle witte it. It is Goddes wille that we witte that alle shalle be wele in generale. Botte it is nought Goddes wille that we shulde witte it now, botte as it langes to us for the time. And that is the techinge of haly kyrke.<sup>102</sup>

‘[A]lle shalle be wele’ is itself shrouded in the mystery of Christian time. It is not for mortals to know why, or how – only the fact of salvation is a certainty. This problem of

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<sup>100</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 16.15-21, p.97.

<sup>101</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 16.13, p.97.

<sup>102</sup> Julian of Norwich, ‘A Vision’, 15.27-31, p.97.

knowledge (and the stance of faith it demands) echoes the hermeneutics to which the early fathers of the church introduced us, a hermeneutics of hopeful waiting for the apocalyptic vision that will render truth accessible in its simplicity.<sup>103</sup> This state of interpretative deferral licenses, as Chapter Two has shown, exactly the tension between inaccessible internality and accessible-but-flawed externality that this chapter has explored in relation to the confessional/autobiographical pact, and informs Margery Kempe's own linguistic relations. It also underscores the dynamics of Julian's entire mystical and theological project.

This project is one that, in adherence with Christian mystical tradition, passes from 'lower' levels of revelation and signification towards higher ones.<sup>104</sup> Coded into this ascent from the material into the spiritual is a discomfort with the capacity of language accurately express the plenitude of visionary experience. Julian herself describes the three modes of experience through which divine truth reaches her: through bodily sight, through the words spoken to her by God, and through spiritual ('gastely') sight. Her ability accurately to describe these experiences becomes, she tells us, increasingly frustrated as she progresses from the bodily to the spiritual: 'For the bodily sight, I haffe saide as I sawe, als trewelye as I can. And for the wordes fourmed, I hafe saide tham right as oure lorde shewed me thame. And for the gastely sight, I hafe saide somdele, bot I maye never fully telle it'.<sup>105</sup> Julian admits head-on what Margery's frustrations imply; that, to the mystical subject, language is always marked by privation and loss. We cannot, Julian tells us, ever know through language *exactly* what she learnt. Vincent Gillespie and

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<sup>103</sup> For more on the epistemological drive of the apocalyptic in pastoral power, see Chapters Two and Four.

<sup>104</sup> On Julian's relationship to the general trends of medieval mysticism, see Brant Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1982); and, more generally, *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008).

<sup>105</sup> Julian of Norwich, 'A Vision', 23.51-55, p.115.



Maggie Ross rightly point out that this tension of signification is present in the very notion of salvific history, where ‘[t]he game of mystical hide and seek acted out over centuries generates a longing for release from the play of language’.<sup>106</sup> The longed-for release from language is, however, accompanied by an injunction to bare all, to tell as much as can be told, over and over until the moment of personal doomsday. Both Kempe and Julian reflect on the importance of their texts for Christians at large; Julian even returns to ‘A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman’, expanding it manifold times in order more adequately to explore and communicate the abiding relevance of her experiences. Underlying this immensely productive swing between the privacy of the autobiographical mode and the publicity of the *act of public-ation* (another version of the logocentric myth of a ‘privative’ language) are issues structured by the techniques and technologies of pastoral power. The dynamism of this ‘play of language’ is structured by these twin demands and produces subjects through the confessional-autobiographical pact. Where Julian finds an impassable wall in language, modern readers mourn the kind of death that her and Kempe’s entry into writing represent. In both cases, language itself functions as a symbol for exteriority *per se*, for a threshold behind which an unreachable subjectivity sits. This tension fuels the motor of the pastoral apparatus.

In ‘How to avoid speaking’, Derrida takes up the problem of mysticism and language. What he writes mirrors, in effect, Julian’s own suggestions. Thinking through a definition of ‘God’, Derrida declares that

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<sup>106</sup> Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, ‘The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, V (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), pp.53–78 (p.53). For Gillespie’s more recent thoughts on Julian, see Vincent Gillespie, ‘“[S]he Do the Police in Different Voices”: Pastiche, Ventriloquism and Parody in Julian of Norwich’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. McAvoy, pp.192–207. He has also suggested that such processes may typify late-medieval devotion more widely, arguing that affective piety exploits ‘kinetic’ images to catalyse ‘something like a blind stirring of love’. Vincent Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012), pp.223, 226.

“God” would name *that without which* one would not know how to account for any negativity: grammatical or logical negation, illness, evil, and finally neurosis which, far from permitting psychoanalysis to reduce religion to a symptom, would oblige it to recognise in the symptom the negative manifestation of God.<sup>107</sup>

Derrida describes, much as Julian already has, the functional role that God plays within structures of meaning; his ineffable, overwhelming plenitude allows for us to discover sin in the ‘nought’, the not-God: ‘God’s name would suit everything that may not be broached [...] except in an indirect and negative manner’.<sup>108</sup> Functioning as the unrepresentative core of a sign system this ‘God’, Derrida suggests, is equally ‘Being’ or the inaccessible internal reality of subjective experience, a kind of prior unrepresentable which regulates the play of language and *différance*. To dare to sketch this indescribable centre of signification is, Derrida argues, ‘to speak in order to command not to speak, to say what God is not’.<sup>109</sup> What Julian and, I think, Margery Kempe gesture towards, is exactly the urge to write this non- and un-representable core. Derrida writes that the crucial drive of apophatic mysticism finally leads to a different evaluation of Being itself: the joining of the injunction to speak and the injunction towards silence occurs in a specific ‘place’:

The place is only a place of passage, and more precisely, a threshold. But a threshold, this time, to give access to what is no longer a place. A subordination, a relativisation of the place, and an extraordinary consequence; the place is Being. What finds itself reduced to the condition of a threshold is Being itself. Being as a place.<sup>110</sup>

‘Being as place’ is the fundamental result of the twofold gesture demanded by pastoral power: both to bury the secret of being deep within, and to speak of it, to make it accessible. It opens the field for a necessary and unstoppable play between presence – the *need* for communication, confession, diagnosis – and absence, the inevitable failure of

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<sup>107</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’, in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, trans. Ken Frieden (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp.3–70 (p.7).

<sup>108</sup> Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking’, p.6.

<sup>109</sup> Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking’, p.52.

<sup>110</sup> Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking’, p.52.

this project to fully account for the truth it creates. Thus the play of *differance* Derrida and de Man explore can be thought of as part of a historically-contingent apparatus of pastoral power.

Julian and Kempe are thus both imbricated in the structures of this push-and-pull between openness and hiddenness as they gesture towards a mode of signification that might overcome the limitations of the world. At the same time, however, both texts *produce* this tension in their own operation. It is only through their own rhetorical constructions that these two women reach us *as historical subjects* whose meaning is overdetermined by their own performance of the confessional/autobiographical pact. In this work they offer one half of a contract which we, as confessional and autobiographical readers, are asked to seal and complete. In refusing this offer, a new kind of work begins and the paradox of their position becomes all the clearer. Both their idiosyncrasies and their desires to *overcome* specificity are coded into the operation of an apparatus for whom the truth of the self is both forever hidden and must necessarily be reproduced, fallibly and endlessly.

## CONCLUSION

### Forwards into the past

Julian of Norwich was born a century and a half before Martin Luther. Margery Kempe was born about fifty years later.<sup>1</sup> The one hundred and fifty years that stretch between these two women and the face of the Reformation are populated by any number of modern historical divides, many of which have come under sustained critique.<sup>2</sup> Thus the 'Early Modern' period replaces the 'Medieval'; the 'Medieval Church' becomes the 'Catholic Church', and, of course, the institutional control of confession comes under increasing pressure. In Kempe's wrestling with the problems and limitations of language one can, perhaps, see something akin to a proto-Protestant challenge to the institutionalised sacrament of confession – whilst stressing that the extreme orthodoxy of her case should prompt us to reconsider the association of internal confession with the Reformation. Such behaviour also recalls, of course, the Lollards, whose fate Kempe narrowly avoids on a number of occasions – 'I wold thu wer in Smythfeld, and I wold beryn a fagot to bren the wyth', she is told in London<sup>3</sup> – and who articulated a sustained critique of confession. For Katherine Little, the 'crisis of the speaking subject' she rightly detects in Wycliffite texts points towards a future away from confession.<sup>4</sup> She finds in these texts a similar preoccupation to that which I have identified in Kempe: a sense that language-as-exterior finally renders true, distilled subjectivity unreachable. Thus she suggest that William Thorpe, the archetypal lollard,

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Windeatt suggests that Kempe was born in c. 1373. For his justifications and some discussion, see Windeatt, 'Introduction', in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> On the distinction between 'medieval' and 'early modern' culture and its ramifications for histories of subjectivity see most famously David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject"', in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp.177-202.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, I.16.1152-1153, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 64.

seems to posit a knowledge of oneself that is unmediated by language, whose limitations will be overcome by the spirit of God and the Holy Ghost. [...] Thorpe's investigation of his interior suggests that the distinction between inner and outer is perhaps unbridgeable – that showing and opening the heart (or the internal wounds of sin) in language may well be impossible.<sup>5</sup>

The 'resistance' that Little charts is, then, a type of response which rejects the formalised language of the church – and thus the sacrament of confession – on grounds of insufficiency, choosing instead to invest in 'new ways of defining the self'.<sup>6</sup> Such a position is not that foreign to the assumption that the power of confession might end, or at least wane, after the Reformation. What this chapter, and this thesis as a whole, argues, however, is that such a reaction to institutionalised confession actually takes place from *within* the depth model licensed by pastoral power. Thus, what Kempe's apparent idiosyncrasies point towards is not the end of confession *qua* confession, but rather the *strategic elaboration of pastoral power*. 'Strategic elaboration' is a term used by Foucault to designate '[a]n entirely unforeseen effect [of a particular power-apparatus] which had nothing to do with any kind of strategic ruse on the part of some meta- or trans-historic subject conceiving or willing it'.<sup>7</sup> It is, in other words, an appreciation of not just the ultimate blindness of participating historical individuals to the consequences and internal logic of mechanisms of power, but of the blindness of these structures and mechanisms to the consequences of their own logic. The mode of pastoral power formulated by the early Christian church, then, would outlive the sacrament it was attached to; confession would, finally, be used to critique confession.

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<sup>5</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Confessions of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. & trans. by Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 194–228 (p. 195).

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