Re-historicising religion: orientating mystics and their writing in the contextual milieu, c.1250-1350



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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Hilary 2025

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination not only of my own work, but of the support and dedication of many others. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Amanda Power, for her steady encouragement over the years, and to my co-supervisor, Almut Suerbaum, whose generosity in time and expertise fundamentally changed the shape of this thesis and without whom it might have remained unfinished.

I am extremely grateful to Hannah Skoda and Stephen Mossman, whose rigorous feedback and continued faith in the potential of my work has honed it into something of which I am proud.

This would not have been possible without the generosity of those who have enabled many stages of my education. I would like to acknowledge Helen Kelleher for the opportunities granted and for the values she instilled in me; those doors that have been opened to me I will endeavour to open for others. I am grateful to the Treasury at St Anne's for their understanding and sensitivity, and most especially to Mark Redman, whose Graduate Development Scholarship not only supported my studies but also allowed me to begin opening doors to others.

There are many scholars whose encouragement and wisdom I have carried with me in this process – chief among them Julia Smith and Peter Ghosh at Oxford, and Simon Ditchfield at York. They have been a hand on my shoulder at times when it was most sorely needed.

I am sincerely appreciative of the History faculty at St Anne's for their trust in my abilities as both a scholar and a teacher; it has been a privilege to learn from their masterclass in humane academia. I am also grateful to Sander Wagner for taking a chance in allowing me free rein in interdisciplinarity, and for the experience of working as a team.

My heartfelt thanks go to the undergraduate historians I have had the privilege of teaching, and most especially to the first cohort of the Astrophoria Foundation Year. I have been shaped beyond measure by being part of their journeys; they have taught me far more than anything I have imparted to them.

I am fortunate to have gathered a precious network of friends, whose quiet fellowship has been invaluable in this process. I am amazed and humbled by my good fortune in sharing parts of this journey with so many brilliant, kind, and supportive people. I hope that they know who they are.

Above all, I am most profoundly grateful to my family: to my mother and father, Lucie and Paul, and to my brothers, Harry and Angus. Their support, compassion, and fierce belief have defined much of this journey. It is a blessing beyond words to have such a wellspring of courage.

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Short Abstract

This study questions how the traditional categorisation of lives and works as religious, and more specifically as mystical, has shaped scholarly approaches. The separation of 'religious' individuals and texts from their secular counterparts by different expectations and questions has often resulted in secular and 'earthly' aspects being overlooked or understated in historical inquiry. By reorientating such texts and historical figures in their temporal, geographical, cultural and sociopolitical environments, this study reveals how religious elements reflected and responded to broader cultural, social and personal contexts. It highlights the ways in which they were grounded in their social, political and geographical realities, shedding light on unexplored aspects of these texts and those involved in their production.

This study focuses on Richard Rolle, his Latin work, *Incendium Amoris*, and its Middle English translation, *The Fire of Love*; Henry Suso, his Middle High German work, *Das Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit* and its Latin translation, *Horologium Sapientiae*; and *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit*, a work of central German dialect with Low German elements attributed to Mechthild of Magdeburg, and its Latin translation, *Lux Divinitatis*. Emphasis on these works as mystical texts representative of particular facets of religious life has directed approaches to what they might reveal about the past, overlooking aspects which do not seem immediately pertinent to the interests of these categories.

By examining patterns of change and continuity between the texts and their translations, this study reveals how those involved in their production amplified, diminished, or redirected aspects as they moved between languages, genres, audiences, and purposes. Orientating this against individual contexts reveals factors informing these patterns, reflecting the standards,

concerns and intentions of a given community or individual, and responding to the needs, preferences and expectations of particular authors, editors, and audiences. This reveals how religious elements both responded to and expressed cultural and social factors and explicitly engaged with issues traditionally categorised as 'secular'. This in turn points to vibrant networks of influence and exchange and compelling multiplicities which interact (often complementarily) in the lived reality. By better understanding such complexities and overlaps, we are better equipped to profit from what texts and individuals categorised as religious can reveal about subjects which might not appear relevant to 'religious' considerations.

Long Abstract

This study questions how the traditional categorisation of lives and works as religious, and more specifically as mystical, has shaped scholarly approaches. The separation of 'religious' individuals and texts from their secular counterparts by different expectations and questions has often resulted in secular and 'earthly' aspects being overlooked or understated in historical inquiry. By reorientating such texts and historical figures in their temporal, geographical, cultural and sociopolitical environments, this study reveals how religious elements reflected and responded to broader cultural, social and personal contexts. It highlights the ways in which they were grounded in their social, political and geographical realities, shedding light on unexplored aspects of these texts and those involved in their production.

This study focuses on figures and texts characterised as mystic, and whose footprint in historical scholarship has been shaped by considerations of mysticism and gender. The study examines Richard Rolle, his Latin work, *Incendium Amoris*, and its Middle English translation, *The Fire of Love*; Henry Suso, his Middle High German work, *Das Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit (BdEW)* and its Latin translation, *Horologium Sapientiae*; and *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit (FL)*, a work of central German dialect with Low German elements attributed to Mechthild of Magdeburg, and its Latin translation, *Lux Divinitatis (LD)*. Emphasis on these works as mystical texts representative of particular aspects of religious life has directed approaches to what they might reveal about spirituality and religious life. Facets of these texts which do not seem immediately pertinent to the interests of these categories of analysis have been overlooked. This study examines the ways in which they were grounded in their social, political and geographical contexts to reveal unexplored aspects.

Each chapter presents a contextualisation of the figures and works in question, followed by examination of patterns of change and continuity between the texts as they are translated between vernacular and Latin languages, identifying key features and trends in this process. Patterns reveal how the authors, translators, editors, and redactors involved in the production of the texts amplified, diminished, or redirected certain aspects as they moved between languages, genres, audiences, and purposes. Their examination against the backdrop of individual contexts reveals the factors informing these patterns of intervention, reflecting the standards, concerns and intentions of a given community or individual. The examination places particular emphasis on treatment of the expression of feeling in describing visionary experience. The expression of sensation and emotion is a useful access point in these texts as it strikes at the core of the challenge of conveying visionary experience. Changes in the vocabulary, metaphors and phrasing of these descriptions trace a mediation of interpretation and a framing of the example set by the mystic for different audiences. This sheds light on perceived differences in the expectations and capabilities of different audiences informed by different cultural, educational, linguistic, and institutional contexts. Situating this alongside other alterations, such as additional or redacted material, adaptation of formatting or style, and the adoption of different literary or generic tropes, we gain insight into authorial/editorial considerations which reflect intention for reception of the content, and the needs and expectations of respective audiences. Orientated in their individual contexts, these changes are indicative of a range of considerations that go beyond spiritual content to engage with concerns reflecting specific circumstances of time and place and individual interests in relation to them. This calls for greater attention to the function of mystic texts as more than just devotional works of 'religious' interest, but dynamic texts with multiple layers of engagement in the overlap between secular and religious concerns, embedded in the realities of interconnected communities and individuals existing in a specific milieu.

Contextualisation of Rolle and the translation of his work challenges traditional understandings of Rolle as an eccentric character whose rejection of institutional authority set him apart as a maverick figure. It highlights the constructed quality of such narratives, suggesting instead that his mystical work and example was treated by individuals representative of institutional guidelines as spiritually enriching and orthodox. Attention to Misyn himself offers new considerations for the possible implications of this translation beyond spiritual edification, orientating it at a particular turning point in his institutional career. It draws attention to audience, considering the potential of a wider reception beyond the individual patron, and how this might alter Misyn's treatment of the text and its depiction of mystical experience.

Investigation of Suso's personal context, particularly his relationship to the broader scholarly institution, and the regional struggles faced by Dominicans under papal-imperial conflict, sheds light on previously overlooked aspects which shaped his work. The redaction of his vernacular text into Latin as a reintegration into scholarly circles and a commentary on regional geopolitics as well as a spiritual guide draws attention to how focus on mystic texts in their religious setting has segregated them from their multifaceted reality.

This study draws on recent German scholarship to address the complex textual status of the *FL* and lack of verifiable individual author, approaching it instead as the product of multiple hands which engages with femininity and the presence of a female voice. Orientating the *FL* in its broader temporal and geographical context, the text speaks to connectivity and collaboration within a wider religious culture. It offers insight into important aspects which reflect more 'secular' concerns arising from the specific personal and regional contexts of those involved in the production of *FL* and *LD* which have been previously overlooked. This allows for a plurality of functions, meanings and powers in the work that extend beyond the spiritual or

gendered, actively embedding mysticism and mystical texts in their wider temporal, geographical and socio-political environments.

Ultimately, categorising lives and works as the premise of mysticism has tended to direct scholarly attention to certain aspects, such as spirituality and gender, leading to neglect of others, particularly practical, 'secular' interests and considerations which may not seem immediately relevant to the mystical experience or 'religious' context. For the texts in this study, this has overshadowed other aspects at play in their formation, such as regional and institutional politics, educational background, social status, and literary community. Investigating how changes and patterns in the translations relate to a number of factors identified through more fulsome contextualisation brings previously overlooked aspects of these works to the fore. It reveals how religious elements both responded to and expressed cultural and social factors and explicitly engaged with issues such as regional and institutional politics. This in turn points to vibrant networks of influence and exchange, and compelling multiplicities which interact (often complementarily) rather than segregate and fragment in the lived reality. This study demonstrates that consideration of any of these factors in isolation leads to simplistic, often dichotomous narratives which narrow our understanding of the realities of texts and authors. Creating more scope for overlap and plurality in how we understand categories of analysis will allow for a richer and indeed more 'realistic' understanding of the lived experience of individuals, communities, and institutions in the past.

Introduction

During the medieval period, religious life was understood as operating within formalised categories and hierarchies.[1] As is often the case, normative ideas of the past have exercised powerful influence on the shape of historical research. The study of medieval religion remains especially deferential to traditional ecclesiastical categories, which have tended to fragment research into subfields. These normative categories have been valuable to historical study, allowing for the identification of trends in belief and practice as well as the emergence and interaction of communities and allegiances which reflect and inform such changes, particularly continuous entities such as the mendicant orders. These categorisations have been essential for study of the development of religious culture and institution and have provided a useful shorthand across disciplines in medieval studies to allow broad and fruitful collaboration.

Concepts such as 'faith', 'law', 'religion', 'heresy', 'superstition', 'mystic' and 'cult' are both shared with, and imposed on, the past. They have become part of an established terminology, such that their meanings have become routinised and constricted. They have become labels for recognisable phenomena and are applied in often quite prescribed ways. This brings its own complicated set of considerations. Many of these labels were used contemporaneously in varying degrees of institutionalisation, and their appearance in our sources and historiography may be subject to miscommunications, inconsistencies and fluidity in their development and usage. They have often also been subject to layers of historical study which have directed the way we view and use them in our own work.

[1] 'Religious life' is here approached as a formal category in the terms laid out by Peter Biller. Biller qualified the claim that 'religion' in the Middle Ages for the most part simply meant the monastic life. He points out that 'religion' could also be understood as a system of faith and morals which could be participated in by laypeople, although the synonymity of 'religious' lives with 'stricter' and 'holier' lives suggests that the values of an organised monastic life were indeed the framework for what 'religion' was understood to be. See Peter Biller, 'Worlds and the Medieval Notion of 'Religion'', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36/3 (1985), pp. 351-69.

However, reliance on these normative categories has caused fragmentation of the field. Repeated applications of such labels and narratives crystalises the boundaries between categories, and we lose opportunities for exploring the rich overspill between them. Designation of historical subjects to distinct categories of analysis risks assuming what questions might be 'relevant' to the area and deters the application of multiple lenses of analysis. That is not to say that identifying general patterns of religious tendencies is not useful and that inferences cannot be drawn from them. However, this must be complemented with attention to local and specific developments which indicate something important about the combinations of contextual factors informing and responding to religious phenomena.

Contextualisation/re-contextualisation as scholarly practice reveals unexpected facets of historical subjects. It highlights the potential for an individual or text to function in multiple historical categories in both complimentary and contradictory ways. This study will demonstrate the potentials of re-contextualisation to highlight previously underexamined aspects of individuals and texts that have been overlooked due to prevailing interest in their status as representatives of certain historical phenomena, including gendered religious experience and relations, mysticism, and religious writing.

Refocusing on contextual detail in religious history addresses the issues that arise out of the fact that religious texts are often met with expectations which differ from those about secular texts and authors. This overlooks the fact that what may be imagined/experienced as spiritual is fundamentally social, cultural, even political in expression. Indeed, it is the imprint of the religious on the social and cultural lives of the past that allows us to access it as more than an abstraction. By better understanding the complexities and overlaps involved, we are better

equipped to profit from what texts and individuals categorised as religious might reveal about subjects which at first glance might not appear relevant to 'religious' considerations.

The category of 'mysticism' is a particularly rich area for this endeavour. Historical treatment of mysticism epitomises the issues of the separation of 'religious' texts and individuals from other 'secular' aspects of their context not traditionally considered pertinent to their understanding. Categorising lives and works as 'mystical' and the premise of 'mysticism' has tended to neglect important aspects of their context which may not seem relevant or perhaps seem contradictory when dealing with historical archetypes and complex theological and philosophical understandings of putatively asocial phenomena.

The question of how best to define and understand mysticism has been a contentious issue with a loaded history.[2] This study will approach the subject through a broad working definition of medieval Christian mysticism as divine knowledge received through extraordinary experience or direct revelation. Common characteristics associated with mystical experience include ineffability, transience, and the assumption of an intimate, unmediated relationship with the divine.[3]

The largely modern designation of 'mysticism' became widespread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4] Embodied in the work of scholars like Evelyn Underhill, Rufus Jones, W.T. Stace, Rudolf Otto and R.C. Zaehner, this early discourse was defined by an

[2] For a detailed overview of the history of modern attempts to define mysticism, see Sarah Beckwith, 'The Transcendent and the Historical: Inventing the Discourse of Mysticism', in *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London, 1996), pp. 7-20.
[3] Volker Leppin, *Ruhen in Gott: Eine Geschichte der christlichen Mystik* (Berlin, 2021), pp. 14-19; Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1991), pp. xviii-xix; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, 1902), esp. pp. 287-8.
[4] Louis Bouyer, 'Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word', in Richard Woods (ed.), *Understanding Mysticism* (New York, 1980), pp. 42-55; Michel De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, 1992), p. 2.

understanding of mysticism as transhistorical.[5] In this, mysticism was not bound to any of the social, economic, linguistic, institutional or doctrinal contingencies of the material world: 'mysticism becomes independent of concrete popular religion, timeless and non-historical, at most concealed under historical symbols'.[6] Thus, according to this understanding, the spiritual, experiential contents of mystical texts transcend the context of time and place. As William James claimed, 'mystical classics…have neither birthday nor native land…Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old.'[7] This approach understood mysticism as something fundamentally personal and interior, the premise of an ahistorical spiritual elite transcending the normative structures and measures of secular and even religious life. This is particularly problematic for historical understandings, as an idealised, ahistorical understanding means that not only 'mysticism' itself but also the subjects of study in relation to it become obscured. As Sarah Beckwith surmises, 'the embeddedness of the articulators of 'mysticism' in the social practices of their own times is then rendered just as invisible as the social practices of the texts for which they purport to account.'[8]

Critique of the use of 'mysticism' as an analytical category in the late twentieth century challenged the ahistorical approach, inadvertently shifting understandings to better serve the uses of historical study. The critical turn began in philosophy, with Steven T. Katz's *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, and gathered momentum over the course of the following decade. By 1983 Hans Penner declared 'mysticism' to be a 'false category' in philosophical theory on

[5] Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (London, 1913); Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London, 1923); W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London, 1960); Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (New York, 1932); R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford, 1957).
[6] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (London, 1931), p. 791.
[7] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 404.
[8] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 13.

account of its pretext of universality and transcendence.[9] In 1988, Nicholas Lash argued that our experience *is* what we understand it to be.[10] Any assumption that a reported experience can be separated from the understanding of that experience, which is informed by individual context, is therefore, he suggested, problematic.

Wayne Proudfoot's constructivist position that mystical experiences are determined by the cultural context of the experiencer set a useful precedent for approaching mysticism as something that, contrary to early transhistorical understandings, is best understood as embedded in specific context.[11] Bernard McGinn's monumental discussion of the history of mysticism from a theological perspective also cautions against separation of experience from understanding.[12] It is now broadly accepted that understandings of mysticism cannot be divorced from the systems in which each example existed, and that these systems varied broadly over the course of history. Indeed, medieval mysticism was certainly not a uniform phenomenon, taking different forms in different regions, and changing substantially from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. The tension between what is reported as experience and what is 'actually' experienced is perhaps irreconcilable, but that does not mean that mystical texts are any less useful to historians. How such experiences were recounted, understood and used by different groups and individuals in their specific contexts offers valuable insight into the

[9] Steven T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London, 1978), pp. 22-74; Hans Penner, 'The Mystical Illusion', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 89-116.
[10] Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville, 1988).
[11] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, 1985).
[12] See the volumes of Bernard McGinn's series *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*: Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1991); Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1994); Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York, 1998).; Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)* (New York, 2005); Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350-1550)* (New York, 2013); Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Reformation (1500-1650)* (New York, 2017); Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain (1500-1650)* (New York, 2017); Bernard McGinn, *The Persistence of Mysticism in Catholic Europe: France, Italy, and Germany 1500-1675* (New York, 2020); Bernard McGinn, *The Crisis of Mysticism: Quietism in Seventeenth-Century Spain, Italy, and France* (New York, 2021).

lived experience of the medieval past and how seemingly separate spheres intersect and interact.

Theologians since the period of the early church have explored the concept of mystical experience and sought to identify how one might become receptive to it. Medieval mysticism was a longstanding aspect of institutional Christianity, framed by common devotional practices such as prayer, meditation, liturgy and the reading of scripture.[13] As Largier notes, 'mysticism can in many ways be described in terms of a hermeneutic practice', embedded in mainstream theology and spiritual life.[14] Particularly within monastic traditions, mysticism was a practice for which there was a pedagogy and the accompanying practices of 'discernment of spirits'.[15] The later Middle Ages saw a shift which included the growth in mysticism outside of traditional monastic orders, particularly among women. This was supported by an increasing number of vernacular texts for communities of readers such as independent religious women and laypeople, blurring the institutional and hermeneutical framework in which mysticism existed.[16]

Steven Fanning describes the fourteenth century as ushering in an 'age of intolerance and repression' characterised by suspicion of the mystical emphasis on 'inwardness' and rejection of external devotion.[17] The mystical interpretation of scripture, and mystic visions conveying

[13] Bruce Milem, 'Medieval Christian Mysticism', in Glenn Alexander Magee (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Western Mysticism and Esotericism* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 107.
[14] Niklaus Largier, 'Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience', *Representations*, 105 (2009), p. 40.
[15] On the medieval practice of discernment of spirits, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2003); Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Suffolk, 1999); Niklaus Largier, 'Rhetorik des Begehrens: Die 'Unterscheidung der Geister' als Paradigma mittelalterlicher Subjektivität', in Martin Baisch (ed.), *Inszenierungen von Subjektivität in der Literatur des Mittelalters* (Königstein, 2005), pp. 249-70.
[16] Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', *Church History*, 65/2 (1996), p. 201.
[17] Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* (New York, 2006), p. 102.

divine will, favour, or condemnation, held potent potential to disrupt traditional religious and social hierarchies, and mysticism was increasingly 'often on the periphery of acceptable practice'.[18] Institutional unease about the evolution of mysticism can be seen in reactions curtailing beguine independence, criticism of vernacular theology including some aspects of vernacular mysticism, and a growing formalisation of understanding and enforcement of the discernment of spirits. This shift towards containment has contributed to a sense of subversiveness that has coloured the history of mysticism in this period.

The nature of mysticism means that it is inexorably linked (both for contemporaries and for historians) with questions of authority and authorisation, and also with concerns about the premise of the spiritual and the earthly, and how this relationship might be conceived and played out. It posed a challenge, both theoretical and practical, to the normative path of religious salvation. As Steven Ozment summarises: 'It fed on the *de facto* possibility of the exceptional, on God's freedom to communicate immediately with men, to speak more conclusively in the depths of the individual heart than through the official writings and ceremonies of even the most holy institution.'[19] That is not to assume that the term 'mysticism' connotes something essentially orthodox or dissident – it exists in a conflictual position determined by the individual context of each instance and its reception by others. It certainly carried the risk of undermining institutional claims to mediate God by an experience which resisted the teachings of dogma. Indeed, early-twentieth-century theorists emphasised seemingly radical individualism in medieval mysticism as a precursor to Protestant thought. Scholars such as Troeltsch asserted that "spiritual religion' of this kind does not admit the possibility of appropriating the benefits of redemption through worship, the sacraments, or

[18] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York, 1994), p. 3.
[19] Steven Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent* (New Haven, 1973), p. 1.

through church organisation.'[20] However, it could also function as conservative and orthodox by providing experiential authentication of the knowledge that theologians describe, and therefore authentication of dogma.[21] Indeed, mystics contributed a valuable anagogical or spiritual dimension to the interpretation of the scriptures which could augment the literal and allegorical interpretations made by others. Volker Leppin's recent history of Christian mysticism identifies that whether mystics were venerated as reformers and enlightened figures or fell under suspicion of heresy could be a question of chance and circumstance.[22] Mystical texts were widely consumed by readers in both religious and lay communities throughout the later Middle Ages despite any institutional unease. The demand for vernacular mysticism continued to grow and sanctions against particular texts or groups does not seem to have slowed this. This conflictual nature is a key aspect of medieval mysticism, constituting a spectrum of experiences and relationships to institutional authority which come to the fore when orientated within their individual contexts.

The assumed 'otherness' of mysticism and mystics in scholarship has informed a focus on relationships of institutional subversion and submission to the neglect of other aspects of these texts which have much to tell us about the individuals and communities involved in their production and reception. It strips away the secular, socially engaged, and embodied aspects of these individuals, their religious imagination, and their writings. Reading the mystic and the mystic text in their historical context sheds light on other facets and embeds them in a dynamic milieu of overlapping secular and religious communities and concerns with much to offer to understandings of a more integrated and 'holistic' experience of the medieval past.

[20] Troelstch, *Social Teaching*, p. 747.; Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, 1983), p. 180; Katz, 'The 'Conservative' Character of Mysticism', p. 21.
[21] Katz, 'The 'Conservative' Character of Mysticism', p. 21.
[22] Leppin, *Ruhen in Gott*, pp. 253-78.

Concerted efforts to reorientate 'mysticism' and medieval mystics in their historical and contextual milieus have been undertaken, most notably by Bernard McGinn. McGinn's multi-volumed history of mysticism under the general title *The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism* charts the development of distinctive forms of mystic practice and understanding in extensive detail.[23] Grace Jantzen brought this critical turn to medieval history in her 1995 *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism.*[24] Jantzen proposed that modern constructions of mysticism, in which it was privatised and domesticated, comprised a depoliticization of religious experience, which was in itself highly political. The call to dismantle and begin to reverse this depoliticization was enthusiastically answered by historians and scholars of religion.[25] However, there is further work to be done, and critics continue to call for change in the historical field. In 2004, Elizabeth Dreyer offered a decisive critique identifying the need to 'start again' and better attend to context in order to reverse entrenched anachronism in the history of medieval mysticism.[26] This thesis will contribute to this effort by demonstrating the new insights to be gained from reorientating mystics and their texts more fully in their historical context. It will show how paying adequate attention to aspects which do not seem immediately relevant to their 'mystical' aspect can reveal crucial elements of these texts and how they functioned in their historical time and place.

Understandings of medieval mysticism have been closely bound with understandings of gender and gendered experience in the medieval past. As Alexandra Verini points out, 'just as most

[23] McGinn, *The Presence of God* (New York, 1992-2021).
[24] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).
[25] Russel McCutchen, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York, 1997); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London, 1999); David Chidester, 'Material Terms for the Study of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 68/2 (2000), pp. 367-79; Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Experience', in Willi Braun and Russel T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London, 2000), pp. 125-39; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York, 2000); Russel McCutchen, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany, 2001).
[26] Elizabeth Dreyer, 'Whose Story Is It? - The Appropriation of Medieval Mysticism', *Spiritus. A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 4/2 (2004), pp. 151-72.

experiences are gendered, so too is the experience of god.'[27] Mysticism could be an important site for women in the medieval past to access agency that was usually barred to them by traditional social and spiritual hierarchies. Mystical experiences enabled recipients to take a stance on both religious and political matters through the authority of divine revelation, evading patriarchal spiritual monopolies and other gendered social strictures.[28]

Types of visionary experience have themselves been categorised in ways which create misleading hierarchies. The medieval experience of a direct relationship with God has traditionally been juxtaposed as two sub-categories. The negative, or apophatic, tradition is based on the belief that God is fundamentally unknowable and experience of the divine is ineffable.[29] It is characterised by an intellectual approach in which reason and knowledge must be paradoxically abandoned in order to achieve union and constitutes an inward knowing which defies articulation. Positive mysticism, on the other hand, involved experience of God through the spiritual senses, embracing rather than eschewing embodiment through a variety of emotional and sensory states, the experience of which could be articulated and shared with others.[30] These dichotomous categories are also tacitly gendered. Negative mysticism was traditionally associated with the 'male', intellectual and rational, and the positive with 'feminine' bodiliness and emotional idiosyncrasies. This polarisation of types of experience

[27] Alexandra Verini, 'Introduction', in Alexandra Verini (ed.), *Gender and Medieval Mysticism from India to Europe* (London, 2023), p. 4.
[28] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1988); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995); Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum* (Berlin, 1988); Christel Meier, 'Propheten als literarische Existenz: Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179); Ein Portrait', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed.), *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen, 1: Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (München, 1988), pp. 76-87, 519-520.
[29] Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994); Denys Turner, 'The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism', *Modern Theology*, 14 (1998), pp. 473-88.
[30] Rosalynn Voaden, 'Mysticism and the Body', in John Arnold (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 396-412; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Princeton, 1992).

and associated gender biases has marked out a discourse of gendered mysticism.[31] Bynum's work has been particularly formative in asserting a link between the theological association of women with somatic, affective, intensely emotional, and often physically embodied spiritual experiences.[32] Not only is the soul usually identified as female in relation to a male divinity, but understandings of the passivity and malleability of the feminine made women particularly apt vessels for divine agency on earth.[33] This has been amplified by scholars such as Sarah McNamer, who argues that affective texts for women anticipated a greater potential for spiritual reward in affective piety on account of their gender.[34]

Categories of negative and positive mystical experience exist on a spectrum, making the application of binary gendered assumptions all the more problematic. The concept of some definable 'feminine mysticism' and 'masculine mysticism' has been critiqued for its essentialism and tendency to reinforce associated dichotomies. Jantzen argues that association of women with mysticism risks reinforcing separation of women from 'public' spheres: 'the alleged inexpressibility of mystical experience correlates neatly with the silencing of women in the public arena of the secular world: women may be mystics, but mysticism is a private, intense experience not communicable in everyday language and not of political relevance.'[35] Amy Hollywood's examination of gendered mystical writings has provided a convincing challenge to the concept, arguing that embodied, affective spiritual experiences appear in both

[31] William Inge, *Mysticism in Religion*, p. 26.
[32] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages', in Jill Raitt (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York, 1987), p. 131.
[33] Elizabeth Robertson, 'The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in *The Life of Saint Margaret*', in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (eds.), *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 268-87.; Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in Linda Lomperis and Susan Stanbury (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 142-67; Dyan Elliott, 'The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality', in Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (eds.), *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 141-73; Nancy Caciola, 'Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 42/2 (2000), pp. 268-306.
[34] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010).
[35] Jantzen, *Power*, p. 326.

male and female accounts, and that there is no clear separation of male and female mystical thought.[36] As Newman points out, recording mystical experience necessitates that the human and the divine be related as two subjects requiring pronouns – 'it is this necessary, but distorting gap between the experience of relationship and the language of narrative that gives gender, fascinating though it is, more prominence than most mystics would say it deserves.'[37]

This is reflected in wider movements in historical scholarship of gender in medieval religion. As part of broader efforts for the recovery of women's history in the 1980s, scholars explored the role of sex and gender in shaping the spirituality of medieval women. With the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, Peter Dronke, Elizabeth Petroff, Barbara Newman, and others, the late-twentieth-century reappraisal of medieval Christian women's writings hinged on questions of 'female spirituality', agency and authority.[38] The past forty years have seen a change in emphasis towards complex gendered experiences. This has been a highly fruitful area, with the rapid development of source bases, analyses, methodologies, and exploration of fresh interdisciplinary collaborations. This process remains vibrant and ongoing, and in the last few years large digital resources dedicated to the study of medieval women, such as *Monastic Matrix*, *Feminae* and *Mittelalterliche Frauenklöster*, have brought this field into the digital age.[39] Investigation into the direction and care of religious women has raised important

[36] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago, 2010), p. 8.
[37] Barbara Newman, 'Gender', in Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Oxford, 2012), p. 82.
[38] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; Bynum, *Holy Feast*; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study from Perpetua (d. 203) to Margaret Porete (d. 1310)* (Cambridge, 1984); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford, 1986); Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter Bauer, *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter* (Ostfildern, 1985); Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: Saint Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, 1987).
[39] Monastic Matrix, http://monasticmatrix.usc.edu (12 May 2021); Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index, http://www.haverford.edu/library/reference/mschaus/mfi/mfi.html(12 May 2021); Mittelalterliche Frauenklösterat, http://www.frauenkloester.de (12 May 2021).

questions about the fluid nature of gender and authority within a professed religious life.[40] Attention has been turned to instances of collaboration between men and women, for example efforts towards monastic reform.[41] As recent studies have shown, the physical boundaries of cloisters were far more permeable than previously assumed on the basis of prescriptive literature, and religious women were active participants not just in networks of communication, but of shared activity.[42] Studies have extended their scope to encompass more demographically diverse female voices, adding more dynamic understandings to the breadth and variety of women's religious experience. Interest in the religious lives of women outside the cloister has expanded investigation into cultures of piety in urban spaces and within private lives.[43] This has nuanced understandings of women's reading practices, patronage, and use of material culture, and the importance of communal devotion.[44] Understandings of women's participation

[40] Fiona J. Griffiths and J. Hotchin (eds.), *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* (Turnhout, 2013); Fiona Griffiths, *Nuns' Priest's Tales: Men and Salvation in Medieval Women's Monastic Life* (Philadelphia, 2018); Catherine M. Mooney (ed.), *Gendered Voices, Medieval Saints and their Interpreters* (Philadelphia, 1999).

[41] Fiona J. Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia, 2007); Shelley Amiste Wolbrink, 'Women in the Premonstratensian Order of Northwestern Germany, 1120-1250', *Catholic Historical Review*, 89/3 (2003), pp. 387-408; Elsanne Gilomen-Schenkel, 'Das Doppelkloster – eine verschwiegene Institution: Engelberg und andere Beispiele aus dem Umkreis der Helvetia Sacra', *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige*, 101 (1990), pp. 197-211.

[42] Penelope Johnson, 'The Cloistering of Medieval Nuns: Release or Repression, Reality or Fantasy?', in Dorothy Helly and Susan Reverby (eds.), *Gendered Domains* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 27-39; Elizabeth Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (London, 2005); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,* (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 152-67.

[43] Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Devoted Holiness in the Lay World', in Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 464-79; Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death* (Philadelphia, 2008); Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2008); Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2005); Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries* (Philadelphia, 2001).

[44] Penny Galloway, 'Neither Miraculous nor Astonishing: The Devotional Practice of Beguine Communities', in Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liege and Their Impact* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 107-27; Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York, 2002), p. 190; June Halle McCash, *Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens, 2002).

in heresy have also been reconsidered, challenging the association of women with religious divergence, the nature of their visibility in heresies, and the roles they played.[45]

The introduction of the question of masculinities in gender history in the 1990s has aided in further nuancing understandings.[46] In religious history, this largely focused on the gendered identities of professional religious men which negotiated between different and sometimes directly competing versions of masculinity.[47] A growing body of work challenges the assertions of specifically gendered phenomena, identifying a multifaceted, fluid religious culture. As Hollywood has convincingly shown, 'when men's and women's religious writings are looked at together, we see that men and women engaged in often intense relationships of mutual influence, debate, and appropriation. As a result, any clearly marked distinction between men's and women's spirituality almost immediately breaks down.'[48] Indeed, a clear distinction between men and women in religious practice and spirituality is undermined by the fact that texts written specifically for religious women were made available to and enthusiastically

[45] Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 165-66; Peter Biller, 'Women and Dissent', in A.J. Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (eds.), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, 1100-1500* (Turnhout, 2010); Janine Larmon Peterson, 'Social Roles, Gender Inversion, and the Heretical Sect: The Case of the Guglielmites', *Viator*, 35 (2004), pp. 203-20.

[46] The field was established with four important collections of essays: Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval masculinities: regarding men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (eds.), *Becoming male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997); Jacqueline Murray (ed.), *Conflicted identities and multiple masculinities: men in the medieval West* (New York, 1999); Dawn M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in medieval Europe* (London, 1999).

[47] Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (London, 2010); P.H. Cullum, 'Clergy, masculinity and transgression in late medieval England', in Dawn M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1999), pp. 178-96; Jacqueline Murray, "The law of sin that is in my members': the problem of male embodiment', in Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih (eds.), *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (London, 2002), pp. 9-22; Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy', *Gender & History*, 18 (2006), pp. 380-99; Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas' Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe', in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (eds.), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 52-67; Derek Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 89-122; Lauren Mancia, *Emotional Monasticism: Affective piety in the eleventh-century monastery of John of Fécamp* (Manchester, 2021).

[48] Amy Hollywood, 'Feminist Studies', in Arthur Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, 2005), p. 371

consumed by male readers, both lay and religious, with little revision.[49] This study will contribute to this understanding, using new points of access to gain a more nuanced view of how gendered considerations shaped mystic texts and their reception, and how gender existed as part of a nexus of interdependent factors.

Both gender and mysticism remain pertinent and productive categories of historical analysis. Indeed, 'gender and mysticism' as entwined categories have far from exhausted their usefulness, and this area of medieval religious history remains vibrant and fast-moving.[50] However, this study suggests that the predominance of these categories has overshadowed other aspects of texts and individuals used as key case studies in the historiography of these categories. By reorientating these texts and individuals more fully in their lived reality, it will highlight their multifaceted nature which reflected and responded to a myriad of contextual social, cultural, religious and practical factors.

This study will therefore focus on texts and individuals characterised as mystic, and whose footprint in historical scholarship has been clearly shaped by considerations of mysticism and gender, often overlooking aspects which do not fall clearly within the parameters of questions of religion and spirituality. This has caused a fragmentation in how these texts and those involved in their production are approached in historical inquiry, often resulting in secular and 'earthly' aspects being overlooked or understated.

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[49] Vincent Gillespie, *'Luykynge in haly bukes': Lectio in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies* (Salzburg, 1984); Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, 2008); Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2007).

[50] For some recent approaches, see Verini, *Gender and Medieval Mysticism.*

The three case studies for this investigation are Richard Rolle, (1305/10-1349), Henry Suso (1295-1366) and Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1282/94). These figures offer a remarkably rich and nuanced cross-section of experience in contemporary religious society. The content of texts associated with them and their appearance in historical record suggests that all three engaged in a diversity of relationships across a number of contexts and communities. They have also been subject to extensive historical scholarship. The juxtaposition of these three very different figures and texts allows certain aspects to be thrown into sharp relief by similarities and variations in how factors were reflected or responded to individual circumstances. A comparative approach is particularly useful in revealing subtle differences and/or similarities between how mystical experiences and lives are presented and conceptualised in these texts.

Mechthild is the most complex figure of this group. While there are traces of an individual named Mechthild on whose visionary experiences and record a text was based, we have no way of knowing her role in putting it together. Based on details in the text and archival witnesses, it can be surmised that she lived an uncloistered religious life, spending her last decade within a cloistered Cistercian community although never formally taking vows.[51] Her accounts of visionary experiences were recorded and disseminated during her lifetime and engaged in robust political commentary in collaboration with local Dominicans. Suso was a highly respected Dominican preacher, mystic and scholar, becoming one of the most popular vernacular writers of the Middle Ages. He was the product of the foremost scholastic institutions of medieval Northern Europe under the tutelage of several of the most noted intellectuals of his age. He was also distinguished by his spiritual care of women and writing of devotional literature. Rolle offers an example of a man pursuing a less 'conventional'

[51] Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch – vom Ich zum Autor. Zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des >Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit< Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 125-35.

religious life as a hermit, existing in a nether zone between laity, clergy, and monasticism. He too was noted for his spiritual direction both in individual relationships and literary output.

Each of these individuals has a work of mystical revelation attributed to them. The works taken as the subject of this study were written in the vernacular (Mechthild and Suso) or Latin (Rolle) and translated into the other either during the author's lifetime or shortly after their death. The movement of the work between languages is indicative of change in audiences, with their own social, cultural, educational, and religious backgrounds shaping the translations. These cases evince writers, translators and editors working to meet the needs, expectations, and preferences of different audiences, as well as their own intentions for the reception of the text.

Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* (early 1340s), notable for its emotional and physical intensity in expressing the experience of divine love, was, as far as we can see, written with a relatively undefined audience.[52] Rolle was highly educated and produced a considerable number of both Latin and vernacular works. The choice of Latin and initial patterns in the circulation of the *Incendium* indicate that it was written for an audience who shared Rolle's own educational and religious background. However, it is addressed to a universal audience and employs a mix of Latinate and vernacular stylistic and rhetorical features, catering to neither scholarly expectations nor practical uses, making his audience a more nebulous, perhaps 'imagined' entity. In 1435, the *Incendium* was translated into Middle English by the Carmelite Prior of Lincoln, Richard Misyn (d.1462). *The Fire of Love* was commissioned by Margaret Heslington, an anchorite and member of York's prestigious Corpus Christi Guild, an exclusive group of local nobility and civic and ecclesiastical elites united by secular and religious interests,

[52] Richard Rolle, *Incendium Amoris*, ed. Margaret Deanesley (Manchester, 1915). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (henceforth *Incendium*).

including devotional literature.[53] Misyn's translation reflects the different devotional preferences and interpretational needs of its new audience and what may have made it particularly appealing to readers. Contextualisation of Misyn himself and the literary and religious atmosphere in which his translation was made raises new possibilities for how this kind of 'professional' translation work might serve the reputation of an individual in a reform-minded institutional environment in which the demand for, and the use of, devotional literature in pastoral care was rapidly increasing.

Suso's Middle High German text, *Das Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit (Little Book of Eternal Wisdom)* (1328-1330), presented spiritual guidance on achieving mystical union.[54] Drawing on his extensive experience in *cura monialium*, the text was widely read in female Dominican convents populated by unusually well-educated women drawn from the ranks of the nobility and civic elites of the region. The *Horologium Sapientiae* (1334-1337) is a translation and redaction of *BdEW* into Latin with the addition of new material.[55] It represents a reconfiguration of the more informally toned vernacular text into a recognisably more 'scholarly' text intended for reception by Suso's contemporaries in the ecclesiastical and scholastic institutions of Europe. This reflected a change in purpose, as the focus of the text shifts from didactic guidance of female communities to the presentation of personal spiritual philosophy and institutional criticism alongside its devotional elements.

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[53] Richard Rolle, *The fire of love; and, The mending of life, or, The rule of living: the first Englisht in 1435, from the De incendio amoris, the second in 1434, from the De emendacione vitæ of Richard Rolle, hermit of Hampole*, ed. Ralph Harvey (London, 1896); This edition will be used for the purposes of this study with some modernisation of the English in quotations (henceforth *Fire*).

[54] Henry Suso, *Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit*, in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 196-325. This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (hereafter *BdEW*); Henry Suso, *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and Little Book of Truth,* ed. and trans. James Midgely Clark (London, 1953). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study, with some modernisation of the English in quotations (hereafter *LBEW*).

[55] Henry Suso, *Heinrich Seuses Horologium sapientiae*, ed. Pius Künzle (Freiburg, 1977). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (hereafter *HS*); Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch Upon the Hours*, ed. and trans. Edmund Colledge (Washington, 1994). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (hereafter, *WW*).

Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit (Flowing Light of the Godhead) (c.1250-1280) is attributed to Mechthild of Magdeburg, although an author figure is not named in the text.[56] It consists of accounts of visionary experiences and offers spiritual advice, some addressed to individuals, taking a range of forms including short tracts, songs, narrated visions, allegories and dialogues. These often challenged the legitimacy of the precedence of regular clergy and church officials over Dominicans. Multiple hands at work in surviving manuscripts and fragments make it difficult to ascertain a precise sense of the authorship or construction of the text. Examination of the earliest extant fragments indicates that the original was written in a central German dialect with Low German elements.[57] Although only one complete manuscript (a translation into Upper German) survives, fragmentary transmission suggests that the text was more widely known, both to male and female communities, than earlier scholarship suggested.[58] It is apparent from the manuscript evidence and from details within the text itself that it was read widely by a highly engaged contemporary audience, whose discourse with the *FL* helped shape the work. A Latin translation named *Lux Divinitatis* was made by local Dominicans in the decade following Mechthild's death.[59] Thus, *FL* was translated for an audience of different educational and institutional backgrounds with a new readership of Latinate, ecclesiastically educated men. The purposes of this translation and the expectations of its new audience shaped treatment of the text.

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[56] *Mechthild of Magdeburg: The Flowing Light of Godhead*, ed. and trans, Frank Tobin (New York, 1998). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (henceforth *FL*); *Mechthild von Magdeburg >Das fließende Licht der Gottheit< Band 1: Text*, ed. Hans Neumann (Berlin, 1990). This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (henceforth *DfL*).

[57] Catherine Squires, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg: Ein handschriftlicher Neufund aus dem elbostfälischen Sprachraum', *Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch*, 133 (2010), pp. 9-44.

[58] Ernst Hellgardt, Balázs J. Nemes and Elke Senne (eds.) *"Lux Divinitatis" – 'Das liecht der gotheit": der lateinisch-frühneuhochdeutsche Überlieferungssweig des "Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit": synoptische Ausgabe / Mechthild von Magdeburg* (Berlin, 2019), pp. xvii-xxvi; Sara Poor, 'Transmission and Impact: Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit*', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon (eds.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Boston, 2014), pp. 73-101; Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch vom Ich zum Autor. Zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 362-70.

[59] Hellgardt, Nemes and Senne, *"Lux Divinitatis" – 'Das liecht der gotheit"*. This edition will be used for the purposes of this study (henceforth *LD*).

We therefore have three texts and translations that are conventionally categorised as mystical texts and have been of particular interest for their presentation of gendered religious experience. They intersect with one another in a diversity of ways, presenting us with the same basic characteristics of didactic vision texts and critiques of institutional cultures from different personal and circumstantial contexts. They all moved between multiple audiences, crossing between groups traditionally categorised as having separate experiences and expectations. Alterations to the texts in translation reveal the factors informing these needs, expectations, preferences, and intentions, and how they were responded to in practice.

The three present an interesting spectrum of 'authorship'. Suso authored both the vernacular *BdEW* and its Latin redaction, the *Horologium*. Rolle wrote the *Incendium* himself, but despite translating several of his own works, it was not translated into the Middle English *Fire* until nearly a century later by Richard Misyn. The *FL* is more complex, as we are reliant on the prologue for the information that it was dictated to Mechthild's confessor. Although this is plausible, this prologue is a textual cento of passages from within the text and cannot be taken as an account of historical facts.[60] The *LD* was a translation made within years of her death by the local Dominican community, likely the brothers at Erfurt, although it is difficult to ascertain exactly who was involved and in what capacities. We therefore have three works with different levels of involvement of the 'mystic' themselves in the creation of the work and its translation. This offers insights into not only how translations might change to serve different communities in different times and places, but also how the contexts of the individuals involved, and their own intentions and circumstances might shape the works separately to the original 'author'.

[60] Nigel Palmer, 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (eds.), *Bildhafte Rede im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 221-6.

They also present different religious contexts. Suso is relatively 'conventional' in his status as Dominican brother, prior, and scholar, educated at significant Dominican institutions, holding an office of leadership in his community, and renowned for his pastoral care. Rolle, on the other hand, lived as a hermit, putatively rejecting institutional authority over his religious lifestyle. Mechthild also pursued a lifestyle outside of institutional bounds, living an independent religious life. However, she was closely related to the Dominican order through her confessor and spiritual direction at the convent in which she spent her final years and appears to have been both admired and criticised by local clerics.

All three offered criticism of contemporary institutions based on their personal relationships to them, presenting three different vantage points on the church and institutional bodies. All three faced disapproval from 'institutional' voices, whether it be clerical opposition to some of the content of *FL*, an accusation of heresy against Suso ending his early scholarly career, or contemporary criticism of Rolle's spiritual zeal and intensely embodied mysticism. Examination of the individual circumstances of production and how the works, both original and in translation, prompted and/or responded to criticism offers insights into how they were understood in their own contexts. This can assist in calibrating our understanding of institutional strictures and 'popular appeal' at a time in which various devotional currents were quickly developing within both religious and lay populaces.

Emphasis on these works as mystical texts representative of particular aspects of religious life has directed approaches in what they have to reveal about spirituality and religious life. They have each been used as exemplary case studies for gendered aspects of religious life and mysticism. Due to this, facets of these texts which do not seem immediately pertinent to the

interests of these categories of analysis have been overlooked at the expense of appreciating both works and individuals as grounded in their social, political, and geographical realities.

Scholarship of Rolle has been dominated by interest in his vernacular works, particularly his writings recounting personal experience, seemingly for the edification of women. This association of Rolle with the spiritual care of women has been overstated, arising from dedications in his vernacular writings and his historical reputation attached to the community of Cistercian sisters at Hampole.[61] The historical narrative of Rolle's work has been coloured by considerations of his bodily, imaginative mysticism as representative of male participation in a distinctively female spirituality. In the canon of 'female' spiritual writing and experience established in the late twentieth century, Rolle became a key case study, alongside others such as Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard of Clairvaux, Henry Suso, and Friedrich Sunder, for male participation in 'feminised' devotional practices, affective piety, and pious expression.[62] Readings of Rolle's mysticism within this framework have been largely binary, emphasising Rolle's atypicality as a male mystic experiencing and writing in a 'female' manner.[63] This continues the segregation of gendered experiences by seeking out aspects which reflect, and thus confirm, said framework. Particular attention has been paid to the potential eroticism of

[61] For overview of this scholarship see Elizabeth Freeman, 'The Priory of Hampole and its Literary Culture: English Religious Women and Books in the Age of Richard Rolle', *Parergon*, 29/1 (2012), pp. 1-25.
[62] On the canon of 'feminised' male mystics, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "…And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in Religious Writing in the Later Middle Ages', in Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (eds.), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, 1986), p. 262; Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman*, p. 26, 138, 144; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 135-54; Jo Ann McNamara, 'The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150', in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3-29; Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Christian Piety and the Legacy of Medieval Masculinity', in Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse (eds.), *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities* (Louisville, 1996), pp. 48-61.
[63] Ann Astell, 'Feminine Figurae in the Writings of Richard Rolle: A Register of Growth', *Mystics Quarterly*, 15/3 (1989), pp. 117-24; Patricia P. Fite, 'To sytt and syng of luf langyng: The Feminine Dynamic of Richard Rolle's Mysticism', *Studia Mystica*, 14 (1991), pp. 13-29; Kathleen E. Garay, "A Naked Intent unto God': Ungendered Discourse in Some Late Medieval Mystic Texts', *Mystic Quarterly*, 23/2 (1997), pp. 36-51; Voaden, 'Mysticism and the Body', p. 405.

the physicality of his embodied mystical experiences, often arising from a problematic imposition of modern expectations on the past, as seen too in studies of female mysticism.[64]

Linked to this sense of transgressiveness are popular understandings of Rolle as an eccentric, controversial figure whose rejection of institutional authority set him apart as a maverick figure.[65] This has emerged in part from the early twentieth-century categorisation of Rolle as one of the 'Middle English Mystics' – a group comprised of Rolle, Walter Hilton, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Julian of Norwich. Scholarship asserted that the works associated with these mystics represented a distinctive, refractory form of spirituality.[66] The historical reality of this grouping has been convincingly challenged.[67] However, the privileging of Rolle's mysticism and mystical writings as representative of something divergent and idiosyncratic in 'Middle English mysticism' has continued to colour his historical reputation.[68] This was reaffirmed in the work of late twentieth-century literary historians which read Rolle's embattled and isolated self-presentation as reflective of a

[64] Clare Davidson, 'Erotic Devotion: Richard Rolle's *The Form of Living*', *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 20/3 (2015), pp. 1-13; Michelle M. Sauer, 'Uncovering Difference: Encoded Homoerotic Anxiety within the Christian Eremitic Tradition in Medieval England', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 19/1 (2010), pp. 133-52; Brad Peters, 'Rolle's Eroticized Language in the Fire of Love', *Mystics Quarterly,* 21/2 (1995), pp. 51-8.

[65] Emily Hope Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole, and Material for His Biography* (New York, 1927), p. 7; See also Carl Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers* (London, 1895-96), p. 2; Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), p. xi, 52; Denis Renevey, *Language, Self, and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff, 2001), pp. 71-2; Kenneth Russel, 'Reading Richard Rolle', *Spirituality Today*, 30 (1978), pp. 65-80.

[66] For overview of the emergence and development of this canon, see Nicholas Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', in David Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 541-3; For examples of this scholarship, see David Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition* (New York, 1961); Eric Colledge (ed.) *Medieval Mystics of England* (New York, 1961); Valerie Maria Lagorio and Ritamary Bradley (eds.), *The 14th-Century English Mystics: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography* (London, 1981); Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London, 1993).

[67] Watson, 'Middle English Mystics', p. 565; Liam Temple, 'Returning the English 'Mystics' to their Medieval Milieu: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Bridget of Sweden', *Women's Writing*, 23/2 (2015), pp. 141-58.

[68] Wolfgang Riehle, 'Richard Rolle of Hampole: England's First Great Mystic', in *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England,* trans. Charity Scott-Stokes (New York, 2014), pp. 70-134; Annie Sutherland, 'The Middle English Mystics', in Rebecca Lemon, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 85-99.

historical self.[69] Interest in circulation of Rolle's work in heterodox circles, and contemporary criticism of the physicality of his mysticism has bolstered this narrative.[70] However, more recent work has begun to reappraise the image of an eccentric and controversial mystic, questioning the extent to which a 'real' Rolle can be accessed in his writings. Closer examination of Rolle in his literary and religious context has drawn attention to tropes and narratives which mirror pre-existing ideas of holiness. It reorientates many of the 'eccentricities' of the Rollean narrative as part of a purposeful construction of Rolle as a holy figure and exceptional character in his own work and by those who sought his sanctification.[71]

This study contributes to this developing picture by considering Rolle's descriptions of visionary experience in the *Incendium* in light of its translation by Richard Misyn. While the linguistic mechanics of the translation from Latin to Middle English have been previously analysed by Támas Karáth, patterns in these changes have not yet been considered in light of a fuller contextualisation.[72] There has been particular lack of scholarly attention to Misyn himself beyond Johan Bergström-Allen's study of his significance as an early Carmelite translator.[73] The place of this translation in Misyn's own trajectory has been under-investigated, with little attention to the purpose of his text and its audience beyond the fulfilment of a personal

[69] Watson, *Invention of Authority*; Renevey, *Language, Self, and Love.*
[70] On contemporary criticism, see: Michael Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle', *Analecta Cartusiana*, 55 (1981), pp. 160-205; Barry Windeatt, *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 15; On Rolle's work in heterodox circles, see Katherine Zieman, 'Rolle's *English Psalter* and the Possibilities of Vernacular Scriptural Commentary', in Tamara Atkin and Francis Leneghan (eds.) *The Psalms in the Medieval English Literature: From the Conversion to the Reformation* (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 149-70; Michael Van Dussen, *From England to Bohemia: Heresy and Communication in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 54; Anne Hudson, "Who is My Neighbour?' Some Problems of Definition on the Borders of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy', in Mishtooni Bose and Patrick J. Hornbeck (eds.), *Wycliffite Controversies* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 76-96.
[71] Tamás Karáth, *Richard Rolle: The Fifteenth-Century Translations* (Turnhout, 2018), pp. 13-35; Timothy Glover, "Strange in His Ways, Strange in His Words': Eccentricity, Eremitism, and Autobiography in the Works of Richard Rolle', *Speculum*, 99 (2024), pp. 1052-65; Katherine Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma: Richard Rolle as Public Contemplative', *Speculum*, 99 (2024), pp. 1066-80.
[72] Karáth, *Translations*.
[73] Johan Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing Religious Speculation: The Vernacular Literature of the Carmelite Order in Medieval England' (PhD Thesis, University of Lausanne, 2017), pp. 423-535.

commission. This study will consider the possible implications of this translation beyond spiritual edification, orientating it at a particular turning point in Misyn's institutional career. Well-regarded for his pastoral skills and holding various offices associated with the regulation of orthodoxy, Misyn's treatment of the text offers insight into which, if any, aspects of Rolle's mysticism were cause for concern in its reception by a new readership.

Suso is another male mystic who has been the focus of historical themes of gender. Examined as evidence of male participation in 'female' devotional practices and forms of expression, the bodily manifestations of Suso's visions and his extreme physical asceticism have been interpreted as sharing in a distinctive feminine experience separate from the mysticism of masculine, intellectual experience.[74] Indeed, as recently as 2017, Barbara Newman identified him as one of a group of male mystics 'whose religiosity was most experiential and visionary, often understood themselves in feminine images and learned their pious practice from women.'[75] His well-documented spiritual and literary relationship with his disciple, Elsbeth Stagel, informed his early historical reputation as an unusually 'open-minded' institutional figure in his support of and collaboration with women.[76] More recent work has fruitfully nuanced previous narratives, re-examining the evidence of the Suso-Stagel relationship to

[74] On Suso and feminised mysticism/spirituality, see Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: the Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, 1997); Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998); Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century', in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson and Nancy Bradley Warren (eds.),*The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature* (New York, 2002), pp. 209-38; Béatrice Acklin Zimmermann, *Gott im Denken berühren. Die theologischen Implikationen der Nonnenviten* (Freiburg, 1993); Barbara Newman, *God and Goddesses: Vision, Poetry and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003); Barbara Newman, 'Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 2/1 (2002), pp. 1-14; Lieke Smits, 'Wounding, Sealing, and Kissing', *Medium Aevum*, 88/1 (2019), pp. 1-22; On Suso and 'female' asceticism/affective practices, see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women', *Representations*, 11 (1985), p. 3; Drage Hale, 'Taste and See, for God is Sweet', pp. 3-14.
[75] Barbara Newman, 'New Seeds, New Harvests Thirty Years of Tilling the Mystic Field', *Traditio*, 72 (2017), p. 13; Drage Hale, 'Taste and See'.
[76] Julius Schweitering, 'Zur Autorschraft von Seuses Vita', in Ernst Koch (ed.), *Humanismus, Mystik und Kunst in der Welt des Mittelalters* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 146-58; 'Einleitung', in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 132-36.

establish a more circumspect view.[77] He has also been a key case study for investigations of a particular form of celibate, clerical masculinity, and increasingly for areas of overlap between aspects of spirituality traditionally understood as 'male' or 'female'.[78] This study draws attention to changes made by Suso himself in teachings presented to female and male audiences. This sheds light on nuances in his guidance and what they tell us about the conceptualisation of the spiritual capacities and journeys of the respective audiences.

Like Rolle, much historical interest in Suso has been driven by his categorisation as part of a particular mystic grouping. Historiography of Suso, particularly Anglophone scholarship, has been dominated by his reputed position as a 'disciple' of Meister Eckhart and one of three 'German Mystics', along with Eckhart and Johannes Tauler, who developed a distinctive form of German mysticism.[79] There has been little concerted investigation of Suso's personal context separately from this teleological framing, or the temporal and regional circumstances in which many of his works were written. Their recontextualization, particularly in terms of Suso's relationship to the broader scholarly institution, and the regional struggles faced by Dominicans

[77] David F. Tinsley, 'The Spiritual Friendship of Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel', in David F. Tinsley (ed.), *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 477-99; Frank Tobin, 'Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel: Was the Vita a Cooperative Effort?', in Catherine M. Mooney (ed.), *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 118-35; David F. Tinsley, *The Scourge and the Cross, Ascetic Mentalities of the Later Middle Ages* (Leuven, 2009), pp. 117-150.

[78] Meri Heinonen, 'Henry Suso and the Divine Knighthood', in P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds.), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Toronto, 2005), pp. 83-4, 88; Meri Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ: Gender and Body in Later Medieval German Mysticism* (Turku, 2007), p. 132; J. Christian Straubhaar-Jones, 'The Rivalry of the Secular and the Spiritual in the Masculine Personae of Henry Suso's Life of the Servant', in Ann Marie Rasmussen (ed.) *Rivalrous Masculinities: New Directions in Medieval Gender Studies* (2019), pp. 42-56; Jacob Randolph, 'Gender, Knighthood, and Spiritual Imagination in Henry Suso's Life of the Servant', *Church History*, 91/1 (2022), pp. 1-19.

[79] On Suso in the 'German Mystics' grouping, see: Kuno Francke, 'Medieval German Mysticism', *Philosophical Review*, 21/392 (1912), pp. 110-20.; James M. Clark, *The German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso* (Oxford, 1949); Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Meister Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics* (New York, 1957).; Charlotte C. Radler, 'Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Henry Suso', in Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 340-56; On Suso as a disciple of Eckhart, see Bernard McGinn, 'Mystical Language in Meister Eckhart and His Disciples', *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 21/1 (2012), pp. 214-32.

under papal-imperial conflict, sheds light on aspects shaping his works which have been previously overlooked.

Like Suso, the historical reputation of Mechthild has been linked to German mysticism through considerations of the *FL* as an influence on Eckhart.[80] The *FL* was taken as evidence of a thirteenth-century shift in mystical experience and writing, representing a 'later' phase which broke with preceding traditions and developed into fourteenth-century German mysticism.[81] Counter to Peter Dinzelbacher's initially influential assertion of Mechthild as an exceptional female mystic who offered something different, strange, and important in the emergence of the '*Frauenmystik*', twenty-first century German studies have orientated the *FL* within various pre-existing and developing literary and mystical traditions.[82] Viewed within this broader context, the text speaks to connectivity and collaboration in a wider religious culture.

Recent German scholarship on the complex textual status of the *FL* has done a great deal to challenge understandings of the text as representative of an identifiable female author.[83] Indeed, it has been conclusively demonstrated that it is not possible to assert the existence of a

[80] For an overview of this historiographical development, see Grete Lüers, *Die Sprache der deutschen Mystik des Mittelalters im Werke der Mechthild von Magdeburg* (Munich, 1926); Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit,* 3rd expanded edn. (Berlin, 1969), esp. p. 86; Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, 1995), pp. 163-91; Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhard and Beguine Mystics, Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete* (2002), pp. 45-62; Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg in ihrer Zeit,' *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004), pp. 153-170.
[81] Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik*, esp. p. 86; Leslie Batchelder, 'The Body as Author: A Study of the Lyrical Voice in Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit*' (PhD Thesis, University of California, 1992), p. 23.
[82] Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur*.; For developments in German scholarship, see collected works in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext: eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019); Nigel Palmer, 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (eds.), *Bildhafte Rede im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 229-32.
[83] See the collected works in Emmelius and Nemes, *Mechthild und das >Fließende Licht der Gottheit< im Kontext.*

verifiable individual author.[84] This poses new questions particularly in Anglophone scholarship, where historical study of Mechthild and the *FL* has been predominantly shaped by her value as a relatively accessible female voice in the medieval past. Building on Herbert Grundmann's use of Mechthild as a case study for the concept of a late medieval 'women's religious movement', *FL* became an established part of the traditional canon of women's mystical literature.[85] In this capacity, Mechthild has been employed as an exemplar to assert the existence of a particular iteration of medieval female spirituality and experience.[86] Late-twentieth century scholarship focused on her life and work as emblematic of the struggles met by women in the face of male institutional authority, and mysticism as a form of subversion.[87] This line of investigation has largely focused on Mechthild's status as a beguine, offering insight into the piety and devotional practices of this group alongside other women whose mystical voices have formed an established canon of texts for beguine studies.[88] The potentially erotic undertones of Mechthild's embodied bridal mysticism have been identified with a distinctive beguine spirituality met with hostility by the masculine clerical institution.[89] This

[84] See Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*.; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum. Die Moskauer Fragmente und andere Handschriftenfunde zur Rezeption des 'Fleißenden Lichts der Gottheit' und seiner lateinischen Übersetzung', *ZfdA*, 142 (2013), pp. 162-89.
[85] Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature.*; Katharine Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens, 1984); Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York, 1995); Elizabeth Spearing (ed.), *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York, 2012).
[86] Herbert Grundmann, 'Die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 12 (1934), p. 408, 420.
[87] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', *Women's Studies*, 11 (1984), pp. 184-5, 241; Rabia Gregory, *Marrying Jesus in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe* (London, 2019).; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia, 2012); Susan Clark, 'Introduction', in *Mechthild von Magdeburg: Flowing Light of the Divinity*, trans. Christiane Mesch Galvani, ed. Susan Clark (New York, 1991), pp. xi-xx.
[88] Fiona Bowie, *Beguine Spirituality: Mystical Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth, and Hadewijch of Brabant* (New York, 1990).; Fiona Bowie, 'Self-Transcendence and the Group: The Attitude to Life of Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Beguines', *New Blackfriars*, 73 (1992), pp. 584-98; Ashley Odebiyi, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Marguerite of Porete: The Annihilation of the Soul and the Challenge to Church Authority', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, 55/2 (2020), pp. 146-69; Hans Geybels, *Vulgarite Beghinae: Eight Centuries of Beguine History in the Low Countries* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 14.
[89] Susan Clark, "Ze Glicher Wis': Mechthild von Magdeburg and the Concept of Likeness', in Constance H. Berman, Charles W. Connell, and Judith Rice Rothschild (eds.), *The Worlds of Medieval Women: Creativity, Influence and Imagination* (Morgantown, 1985), p. 44; Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Sexuality, Gender, and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands', *Journal of Feminist Studies in*

helped to perpetuate the increasingly challenged narrative of a rebellious beguine spirituality in opposition to church authority – something that is not reflected in the context of Mechthild's life or the treatment of her work after her death.[90] This study will draw on the findings of German scholarship to recontextualise the *FL* as a text engaging with femininity and the presentation of a female voice, but whose authorship cannot be conclusively gendered.

Interest in reassessing essentialising binary narratives around gendered experience has already drawn on *FL* and the historical figure of Mechthild for insights into collaboration between men and women in religious environments, nuancing previously held assumptions of oppression and subversion.[91] More nuanced studies of sexuality in gendered mysticism have also done much to challenge the segregation of male and female mystical experiences in this aspect.[92] Growing interest in women writers and textual production as part of networks of information and power has been constructive in beginning to form a more well-rounded view of medieval women and the world in which they lived.[93] Contributing to these developments, this study

Religion, 7/1 (1991), pp. 35-52; Simone Kugeler-Race, 'Carnal Manifestations of Divine Love in the Mystical Writings of Elsbeth of Oye, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Margery Kempe', *Neophilologus*, 102/1 (2017), pp. 39-58; Emily Hunter McGowin, 'Eroticism and Pain in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light*', *New Blackfriars*, 91 (2011), pp. 607-22; Rita Perintfalvi, 'Eroticism and Mysticism as a Transgression of the Boundaries: The Song of Songs 5:2-8 and The Mystical Texts of Mechthild of Magdeburg', *Feminist Theology*, 22/3 (2014), pp. 229-40.

[90] For more recent work challenging this antagonistic dynamic, see Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, 'Did Beguines have a Late-Medieval Crisis? Historical Models and Historiographical Martyrs', *Early Modern Women*, 8 (2013), pp. 275-88.

[91] Sara Poor, 'Women Teaching Men in the Medieval Devotional Imagination', in Fiona Griffiths and Julia Hotchin (eds.), *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany 1100-1500* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 339-57; John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 156-296; John Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth-Century Franciscans and Dominicans', *Church History*, 60/4 (1991), pp. 445-60; Patricia Beckman, 'The Power of Books and the Practice of Mysticism in the Fourteenth Century: Heinrich von Nördlingen and Margaret Ebner on Mechthild's *Flowing Light of Godhead*', *Church History*, 76 (2007), pp. 61-83.

[92] Amy Hollywood, 'Sexual Desire, Divine Desire; Or, Queering the Beguines', in Virginia Burns and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 119-33; Elliott, *Bride of Christ*; Carolyn D. Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art* (Leiden, 2013).

[93] Barbara Newman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg at Helfta: A Study in Literary Influence', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis and John van Engen (eds.), *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 383-96.

offers insight into important yet previously overlook aspects of the *FL* which reflect more 'secular' concerns arising from the specific personal and regional contexts of those involved in the production of *FL* and *LD.* Indeed, the *FL* was both conditioned by and responding to the social and political contexts in which it was written, and these aspects were of significant consideration to those who translated it.

We are, therefore, faced with multiple scholarly versions of these figures and texts, and by extension their collaborators, networks, and audiences. These are the product of the categories, lenses of analysis, and factors informing historical approaches, which are often interested in the identification and investigation of certain phenomena in the past. Many of these approaches have been extremely valuable to the progress of historical study and are indeed often valid in their own terms. However, in individual case studies they have entrenched narratives in historical study which hinder understanding of the individual experience through a lack of integration between different aspects which no doubt existed in real lived experience. Decentralising the 'defining feature' of an individual or text and returning to the context of what can be 'known' of them allows questions to come to the fore which highlight areas of overlap and interaction between aspects previously viewed in separation. By endeavouring to recontextualise individuals, texts, artefacts, and other historical phenomena without the guiding lens of categories with their own directives and expectations, we may leave room for overlooked facets which appear in the overlap between 'spheres' of historical analysis. In particular, approaching these authors and texts outside of the categorisation of 'mysticism' allows them freedom to not fit into preconceived spheres and labels, allowing focus on other aspects of the text's content and reception reflective of specific circumstances.

A more integrated, circumspect approach not only nuances our understanding of the individuals and texts, but also in turn points to broader issues which have been under-interrogated. Thus, the pious mysticism of the *FL* can also be understood as powerfully and purposefully political. Not only do pragmatic and deeply personal factors informing Suso's authorial choices come to the fore, but more subtle signals of the gendered dynamics at play in his work become visible. Rolle's physicality and zeal becomes more clearly a part of the appeal and spiritual value of his work rather than any cause for institutional concern. The translation of his text offers insight into how religious literature could serve in religious institutional careers as the growing demand for the vernacular and a more 'personalised' devotional life placed emphasis on this aspect of pastoral care. As Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo say, 'the way people lived their religion was intricately linked with questions of the value of individual experience, communal cohesion and interaction, and power relations.'[94] Ultimately, a reorientation of mystic texts, and religious writing more broadly, in the context of time, place, and individual lives, offers a better understanding of their cultural and intellectual fluidity, public participation in the politics of both religious and secular institution, and the overlapping and integrated factors at play in their production, dissemination and reception.

The historical study of medieval mysticism faces a further challenge in the nature of the texts themselves. The majority of extant late medieval mystical literature is associated with mystics who were relatively uneducated members of religious orders and quasi-religious and lay communities. The experiences and interpretations of these mystics survive through written records made by individuals with greater access to education and resources, and who often had their own purposes in how the mystic and their experiences were presented. It is therefore

[94] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo, 'Religious as Experience', in Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.), *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c.1300-1700* (Leiden, 2017), p. 3.

difficult to separate the 'reality' of what the mystic wished to convey from hagiographical shaping or reinterpretation informed by different understandings.[95] Indeed, even in cases of mystics writing their own texts, how they understood their experiences and expressed their visions was shaped by contemporary theologies and conceptions of sanctity. It is therefore challenging to reconstruct a 'reality' or to judge the extent to which a mystic text represents an individual's experiences or intentions.[96] However, they can still reveal a great deal about what was considered important, desirable or dangerous to various groups in different contexts, or the concerns informing interpretation and expression where patterns are found.

Each chapter of this study will present a contextualisation of the individuals and works in question. This will be followed by an examination of patterns of change and continuity between the texts as they are translated between vernacular and Latin languages, identifying key features and trends in this process. These alterations reveal how the authors, translators, editors, and redactors involved amplified, diminished, or redirected certain aspects as they moved between languages, genres, audiences, and purposes. Examination of these patterns of intervention against the backdrop of individual contexts reveals the factors which inform such changes, reflecting the standards, concerns and intentions of a given community or individual.

The examination of patterns discernible in comparing the vernacular and Latin versions will place particular emphasis on treatment of the expression of feeling in describing visionary experience. The expression of sensation and emotion is a useful access point in these texts as it strikes at the core of the challenge of describing visionary experience. The mystical writings in this study communicate experiences of positive mysticism, describing physically that which

[95] For an illustration of this, see Amy Hollywood 'Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiography', in Catherine Mooney (ed.), *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 78-98.
[96] See Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, pp. 17-20.

was felt spiritually, or asserting that which was felt corporeally to be of divine origin. Attempting to render a linguistic mediation of divine communication was a particularly complex challenge in positive mysticism, where the senses and sensory perception were an important means of achieving and experiencing union with God.[97] Corporeal vision, perceived by the bodily senses, and spiritual vision, perceived internally through the soul, were viewed with caution. Bodily senses could be deceived, and the images of spiritual vision could be of demonic inspiration. Thus, these forms were considered inferior to intellectual mysticism and viewed with suspicion. How this aspect of sensation and feeling was handled by the authors, editors and translators in this study reveals where it was cause for concern in guiding correct interpretation and response, or not as the case may be. Changes in the vocabulary, metaphors and phrasing of these descriptions trace a mediation of interpretation and framing of the spiritual example set by the mystic for different audiences. This aspect is therefore an interesting access point for understanding perceived differences in the expectations and capabilities of different audiences informed by different cultural, educational, linguistic, and institutional contexts.

Situated alongside other alterations, such as additional or redacted material, adaptation of formatting or style, and the adoption of different literary or generic tropes, this offers insight into authorial/editorial considerations which reflect intention for how the text be received, and the needs and expectations of respective audiences. Orientated in their individual contexts, these changes are indicative of a range of concerns that go beyond the spiritual content of the works to engage with a number of concerns reflecting specific circumstances of time and place and individual interests in relation to them. This calls for greater attention to the function of

[97] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Princeton, 1992), p. 192.

mystic texts as more than just devotional works of 'religious' interest, but dynamic texts with multiple layers of engagement in the overlap between secular and religious concerns, embedded in the realities of interconnected communities and individuals existing in a specific milieu.

While this study is based on a form of close reading, it is not primarily concerned with details of phrasing. The focus is instead on how patterns in the texts challenge traditional assumptions about the social and gendered dynamics informing these works and the individuals involved. Indeed, the close reading does not seek to re-evaluate the content of these works but offer insight into the circumstances in which they were produced and received. Situated against individual contexts of those involved, patterns of change and preservation highlight areas of concern or particular emphasis, revealing various purposes and understandings of both the spiritual and practical usage of these texts and their content.

Ultimately, categorising lives and works as the premise of mysticism has tended to direct scholarly attention to certain aspects, such as spirituality and gender. This has led to the neglect of others, particularly practical, 'secular' interests and considerations, which may not seem immediately relevant to the mystical experience or 'religious' context. In scholarship on the authors and texts in this study, this has overshadowed other aspects at play in their formation, such as regional and institutional politics, social and educational background, and literary community. By investigating how these changes and patterns relate to a number of factors identified through more fulsome contextualisation, previously overlooked aspects of these works will be brought to the fore. Presenting considerations which encompass multiple influences and factors will provide a more 'realistic' understanding of how these individuals and texts operated in the past. Contextualisation reveals how religious elements both responded

to and expressed cultural and social factors and explicitly engaged with issues such as regional and institutional politics. This in turn points to vibrant networks of influence and exchange, and multiplicitous facets which interact, often complementarily, rather than segregate and fragment in the lived reality. It will demonstrate that consideration of any of these factors in isolation leads to simplistic, often dichotomous narratives which narrow our understanding of the realities of texts and authors. Creating more scope for overlap and plurality in how we understand categories of analysis will allow for a richer and indeed more 'realistic' understanding of the lived experience of individuals, communities, and institutions in the past.

Chapter 1: Richard Rolle

Richard Rolle was one of the most widely read English writers of the late Middle Ages. His works survive in nearly four hundred English and at least seventy continental manuscripts, almost all produced between 1390 and 1500. From his reception by close contemporaries to the present day, his name has become synonymous with a fresh current of mysticism and religious enthusiasm. However, his legacy has been marked by ambiguities between what some have understood as his model of spiritual life and what others have interpreted as eccentricity and self-determination stretching the boundaries of orthodoxy. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship which nuances the idea of the historical figure of Rolle and his mysticism as controversial or unusually nonconforming.

This study will focus on Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, a didactic, semi-autobiographical vision account written in the early 1340s.[98] This text was translated from Latin into the Middle English *Fire of Love* by the Carmelite Richard Misyn, marking a new audience and intentions for its reception, and introducing new concerns and priorities for its translator.[99] Misyn's impressive career placed him in a nexus of ecclesiastical and secular powers. However, attention has not been paid to the chronological position of his translations of Rolle's work, and particularly of the *Incendium*, in his career development. A lack of manuscript evidence for the circulation of *The Fire* makes it difficult to make concrete assertions. However, recontextualising Misyn and his translation orientates it at a turning point in his career when he became more engaged in life beyond his own order. The making of the translation shortly before entering the service of one of the most powerful nobles in England, and progression to high offices in both the church

[98] *Incendium Amoris*, ed. Margaret Deanesley (Manchester, 1915)
[99] *The fire of love; and, The mending of life, or, The rule of living: the first Englisht in 1435, from the De incendio amoris, the second in 1434, from the De emendacione vitæ of Richard Rolle, hermit of Hampole*, ed. Ralph Harvey (London, 1896)

and his own order, raises the possibility that it held some significance in this. Misyn seemingly anticipated a wider audience for his work. Orientating this potential audience in the social circles of the named recipient of the translation, which included both ecclesiastical and secular elites in the north of England, we can consider connections between the *Incendium* and Misyn's wider reputation for orthodox direction, pastoral care and scholarly ability. His skilful handling of the intense emotionology and physicality of Rolle's writing for a vernacular, lay readership showcased his pastoral skills, his careful regulation of orthodoxy, and promotion of devotional literature in an atmosphere enthusiastic for fresh expressions of personal, private devotion, while mindful of an institutional culture cautious of potentially heretical misinterpretations. Examining Rolle's work, its translator and its translation in this light allows for new insights into what such texts and individuals might tell us of networks of influence, and the potential purposes of such textual endeavours beyond devotional edification.

Rolle's writings describe the mystical experience of divine interaction achieved through contemplative practice as experienced through the recognisable sensations of *calor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*. These aspects of Rolle's mystical writings were both key to their appeal as inspiring models for a similar spiritual journey and also subject to contemporary criticism. Their treatment by Misyn in his translation reveals how they were understood by a stalwart representative of institutional orthodoxy and his regulation of vernacular theology and offers insight into key factors at play in this kind of editorial consideration.

Challenges of biography

Biographical information available on Rolle is largely drawn from his own writings and hagiographical material written after his death. Despite a number of his didactic works

purporting to be based on his own experiences, their biographical detail is sparse. The *Incendium* is the most comprehensive and explicitly autobiographical of them. It gives an account of Rolle's conversion and early years of visionary experience up until the 1340s. It is the only text to present this kind of concerted biographical narrative and leaves a considerable portion of his life unaccounted for. His other works advocating for the spiritual superiority of the contemplative life and functioning as apologia for his own eremitical lifestyle, namely *De amore*, *Contra amatores mundi* and *Melos amoris*, all written in the first half of the 1320s, and *Judica me Deus*, written no earlier than 1330, feature descriptions of the persecution and suffering of solitaries which can be interpreted as self-referential or at least generalising from his own experiences.[100]

This presents the challenge of a constructed literary persona who, while not necessarily wholly fictive, cannot simply be equated with the historical figure of Rolle himself. Timothy Glover's reading is helpful here. As he points out, self-authorising aspects of the texts only work 'if the speaker *is*, at least in some way, identified with Rolle, and his texts invite us to equate the speaker with the historical individual – they profess to be autobiographical'.[101] However, the authorial voice is still shaped by different genres, tropes, and conventions to suit the purpose of the writer – 'this is not an interior monologue, but a voice that is compiled from precedents and designed to invite the reader in.'[102] Rolle's self-depiction follows an established hagiographic trope, particularly in the English tradition of hermit hagiographies, in which personal eccentricities were emphasised as indicative of sanctity. Indeed, in the *Incendium* Rolle locates his practices in a tradition of saintly predecessors, such as John the Baptist, St

[100] *The "Contra amatores mundi" of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Paul F. Theiner (Berkeley, 1968).; *The "Melos amoris" of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Emile J. Arnould (Oxford, 1957); For dating of these texts, see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 274.
[101] Timothy Glover, "Strange in His Ways, Strange in His Words': Eccentricity, Eremitism, and Autobiography in the Works of Richard Rolle', *Speculum*, 99/4 (2024), p. 1055.
[102] Glover, "Strange in His Ways'', p. 1065.

Cuthbert and St Maglorius.[103] His embattled complaints also reflect the hyperbolic conventions of the broader *contemptus mundi* tradition.[104] That is not to imply that Rolle invented aspects of his eremitic life and its challenges but rather that his account of himself is a strategic rhetoric which must be handled with caution when read for historical information.

The most comprehensive material on Rolle's life comes from the *Officium et miracula*, an account of his life and posthumous miracles composed in the 1380s.[105] The compilers of the *Officium* rely heavily on the *Incendium*, quoting directly from it for the account of Rolle's early life and visionary experience. The *Officium* identifies itself as:

'The office of Saint Richard, [to be used] after he shall be canonised by the Church, because in the meantime it is not allowed to sing the canonical hours for him publicly in church, nor to solemnise his feast. Nevertheless, having evidence of the extreme sanctity of his life, we may venerate him and in our private devotions seek his intercessions, and commend ourselves to his prayers.'[106]

Rolle enjoyed a local cult following which flourished in the decades after his death, and the expectation that the *Officium* be used after his canonisation indicates that such a canonisation would soon be or had already been proposed. Despite this, no canonisation procedure was ever undertaken. Indeed, the silence on the matter suggests that efforts lost momentum relatively quickly, and no official *vita* is known to have been written to consolidate the sanctified 'biography' begun in the nine narrative *lectiones* of the *Officium*.[107] This kind of local cult and

[103] Margaret Deanesly, 'Introduction', in *Incendium Amoris* (Manchester, 1915), pp. 181-2.
[104] Innocent III, *On the Misery of the Human Condition: "De miseria humanae conditionis"*, ed. Donald R. Howard, trans. Margaret Mary Dietz (Indianapolis, 1969), p. xv; On Rolle in this genre, see Malcolm Moyes, 'Introduction', in *Richard Rolle's "Expositio super novem lectiones mortuorum": An Introduction and Contribution towards a Critical Edition, vol 1*, ed. Malcolm Moyes (Salzburg, 1988), p. 96.
[105] For dating of the text, see Emily Hope Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole*, p. 51.
[106] *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Reginald Woolley (New York, 1919), p. 12.
[107] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 295-8; André Vauchez, *Le Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge, d'après les procès de canonization et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1981), pp. 294-300.

unfulfilled canonisation effort was not uncommon – two other offices of uncanonised fourteenth-century Englishmen survive, and André Vauchez's survey identifies Yorkshire as a particularly fertile area for such cults.[108] The wording of the *Officium*'s introduction specifically defends the premature veneration of Rolle on account of 'the extreme sanctity of his life'.[109] This means that the account that follows had the distinct purpose of evidencing this claim. The *Officium*, therefore, with its apologetic purpose, devotional intention and distance in time from its subject's life, and reliance on the *Incendium*, cannot be treated as a straightforward source of biographical information.

In both the *Incendium* and the *Officium* we can see deliberate construction of a particular narrative of Rolle's life. Both texts make similar presentations of Rolle as an outcast from scholarly communities, disconnected from the academic world. The emphasis on his isolation from scholarly circles and resources served to authenticate Rolle's life and works as solely the product of divine inspiration, representative of sapiential rather than learned spiritual knowledge. Given his considerable corpus of scriptural exegeses, biblical commentaries, glosses and translations, as well as consistent use of quotation from various scholarly and scriptural sources, this cannot be an accurate representation of his relationship with books, book-owning communities, and perhaps even with academic institutions.[110] This suggests that either the *Officium* compilers were complicit in continuing Rolle's self-styling as a simple holy man claiming knowledge and authority from a divine source alone, or they relied entirely on the *Incendium* account in an ingenuous manner.

[108] André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), p. 95.
[109] *Officium*, p. 12.
[110] For detailed analysis of Rolle's interaction with scholarly literature reflected in his own scholarly output, see Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 295-8.

Another challenge of the *Officium* is the lack of information on those involved in its compilation, and therefore where the additional material not contained in the *Incendium* may have come from. The composition was most likely connected to the priory of Hampole. The priory certainly benefitted from Rolle's cult, as will be discussed further below, and would have had a vested interest in its promotion. The *Officium* is the only evidence outside of later manuscript details to mention Rolle's pastoral relationship with Margaret Kirkby, his spiritual disciple to whom some of his English work was dedicated, which suggests some involvement from the nuns.[111] Jonathan Hughes posits that it was written 'with the help of reminiscences of Margaret [Kirkby] and some of the older nuns' and draws a connection between Margaret returning to community and the composition of the *Officium.*[112] However, it is not possible to ascertain an exact date for Margaret's return to Hampole, nor it is clear what form any involvement from the nuns took. Frances Comper initially suggested that the nuns did the writing themselves, although later revised this to only 'prepared' the material.[113] Hughes' most recent understanding, shared with McIlroy, is that the *Officium* was 'compiled by the Hampole nuns thirty years after his [Rolle's] death'.[114] Elizabeth Freeman's survey of the literary culture and holdings of Hampole provides strong evidence that the nuns did not produce the *Officium* themselves, but likely encouraged and supported its composition and provided relevant details, perhaps as a collaborative effort with one of the priory's mendicant confessors.[115]

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[111] *Officium*, p. 39.
[112] Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late-Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 84-5.
[113] Frances Comper, *The Life of Richard Rolle: Together with an Edition of His English Lyrics* (New York, 1928), p. 3, 170, 195.
[114] Jonathan Hughes, 'Rolle, Richard', *ODNB* (Oxford 2008) https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24024 (30 March 2025).; *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*, ed. Claire McIlroy (London, 2004), p. 2.
[115] Elizabeth Freeman, 'The Priory of Hampole and its Literary Culture: English Religious Women and Books in the Age of Richard Rolle', *Parergon*, 29 (2012), pp. 14-16.

While the lack of historical material congenial to modern biographical purposes poses a significant challenge to our understanding of Rolle's exact social standing, lifestyle and movements, it is possible to draw together a partial biographical account by cross-referencing details of the *Officium*, *Incendium* and manuscript prologues with the verifiable details of places and individuals where they appear in official records. Indeed, the interests of both the *Incendium* and the *Officium* in perpetuating the holy narrative of Rolle's life allow us to identify certain aspects which were included despite an apparent incongruity with a sanctifying narrative. This may be considered to give us more confidence in their validity. These are namely that Rolle became a hermit without ecclesiastical licence, remained an eremitic 'irregular' throughout his life, moved cells and changed patrons, and was criticised for this.

Within its constructed narrative, the *Officium* does feature verifiable details such as people and places which suggest that the outline is to some extent factual, or that plausible inferences can be drawn from its framework. It tells us that Rolle was born at Thornton near the thriving market town of Pickering, North Yorkshire. Under the sponsorship of the archdeacon of Durham, Thomas de Neville, he attended the University of Oxford but left before he attained his degree to pursue a more holy way of life.[116] Commonly identified by the moniker 'Richard Hermit', representations of Rolle, from his own self-identification to the present day, define him as a solitary. Rolle refers to himself, and is referred to, as *heremite* in the prologues to the *Incendium*, *The Fire*, and in the *Officium*. The *Officium* tells in detail the story of his construction of a makeshift hermit's habit and abandonment of his home, and many of Rolle's writings make self-aggrandising defences of his eremitic lifestyle, portraying a life of embattled isolation.

[116] *Officium*, pp. 23-4.

Rolle lodged first on the estate of John de Dalton, a squire in Pickering.[117] The *Officium* says that he experienced his first and second visions during this time and increasingly withdrew from the temporal world.[118] He eventually left his Dalton lodgings, although an exact date for this departure is unclear. Dalton was arrested in 1322 in connection with the rebellion of Thomas, earl of Lancaster against Edward II: 'Henry [de Percy], by pretext of the king's appointment of him to arrest all persons opposing the king and in rebellion in the county of York and their adherents and to commit the same to prison until further order, arrested the said John as an adherent of the said earl and detained him'.[119] There is no reference to the arrest or the local context of the rebellion in any surviving material pertaining to Rolle, which suggests that either his association with the family had ended before that date, or that this was a tactful silence to remove Rolle from a discreditable connection. The Daltons are the only patrons we know of by name, and his exact location and social network for the following years is unclear. He tells us himself that he moved between places, opening his apologia for the eremitic lifestyle, *Judica me Deus*, with a defence of this practice:

'it is no scandal (nor should be) to anyone who hears that I occasionally change my physical dwelling, or move from one cell to another, as I am not obliged to dwell in one hermitage any more than in another. Thus it should not be thought unprofitable if in my youth I looked at many places so that I might choose from the better of them one which was best for me.'[120]

This supports the *Officium*'s picture of an unusually mobile iteration of retreat and suggests instability of one kind or another.

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[117] *Officium*, pp. 24-7; On Dalton's identity, see Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 444-66; Emile J. Arnould, *Richard Rolle and a Bishop: A Vindication* (Manchester, 1937), pp. 55-77.
[118] *Officium*, pp. 27-30.
[119] *Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward II, 1307-1327* (London, 1911), p. 116.
[120] *An Edition of the Judica me Deus of Richard Rolle*, ed. John P. Daly (Salzburg, 1984), p. 81; Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 98-101, 460-61.

The sparsity and ambiguity of information for these middle years of Rolle's life has allowed for broad speculation. Most notable was Maurice Noetinger's argument that Rolle attended the Sorbonne in Paris during the early 1320s, asserting that Rolle not only continued his theological studies there but was also ordained.[121] This was based on Pierre Féret's inclusion of Rolle among graduates of the Sorbonne.[122] Féret drew on information in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MSS 1020, 1021, 1022, 1023, 1166 and 1228. These manuscripts are collections of miscellaneous administrative documents gathered together in the mid-seventeenth century. Each volume begins as a copy of its predecessor with fresh corrections, annotations, insertions and deletions. The earliest entries for Richard Rolle are found in Arsenal MS 1228, which names a 'Richardus de Hampolo' in a list of 'Scriptores Sorbonici'. An appended note in Arsenal MS 1021 details that this 'Richardus' was admitted to the college in 1320 and entered into the prior's register – thus receiving ordination – in 1326.[123] It also specifies that he died in 1349 among the sisters of Hampole near Doncaster in Yorkshire, and that he 'died as a hermit with a reputation for sanctity'.[124] A longer note in Arsenal MS 1020 gives Rolle's name as 'Ricardus Anglici, seu Radulphi de Anglia', detailing that he is commonly said to be from Hampole, and was incorrectly documented in an earlier listing as 'Pampolitanus'.[125] These details certainly seem to correspond with Rolle. However, subsequent critical attention to the manuscripts and their source material has disputed the possibility of Rolle's presence in Paris. Doubt was first raised by Emily Hope Allen, and more conclusively by E.J. Arnould, John Alford, and Michael Sargent.[126] Sargent's analysis traced the prior's register mentioned in

[121] Maurice Noetinger, 'The Biography of Richard Rolle', *The Month*, 147 (1926), pp. 22-30.
[122] Pierre Féret, *La Faculté de Théologie de Paris et ses Docteurs les plus célèbres, vol. 3* (Paris, 1894-97), p. 247.
[123] Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 1021, f.78.
[124] 'Moritur autem Eremita cum opinione sanctitati.', Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 1021, f.78.
[125] Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 1020, f.415.
[126] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 490-500; Emile J. Arnould, 'Richard Rolle and the Sorbonne', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 23 (1939), pp. 68-101; John Alford, 'Richard Rolle and Related Works', in Anthony Edwards (ed.), *Middle English Prose: a Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres* (New Brunswick, 1984), p. 36; For an overview of this debate, see Michael Sargent, 'Richard Rolle, Sorbonnard?', *Medium Aevum*, 57/2 (1988), pp. 284-90.

Arsenal MS 1021 to the 1326 original which names one 'Magister Ricardus' with no further identification.[127] The seventeenth-century writer of the appended note in Arsenal MS 1021 cites Sorbonne MS 1065 as their source for the added family name, nationality, and bibliographic information. Sorbonne MS 1065, now Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 15700, contains Rolle's *Parce mihi Domini*, *Incendium*, *Emendatio Vitae* and the *Contra Amatores Mundi*.[128] Similarly, the reference to 'Richardus filius Rodulfi', when traced back to the original medieval list, is found to refer to Richard FitzRalph, later Archbishop of Armagh, known to have been in Paris in 1329 and 1330.[129] As Sargent concludes, the identification of Rolle with the medieval entries seem to have been 'the result of over-zealous librarianship' by seventeenth-century scholars.[130] We must, therefore, accept that we have no conclusive evidence for Rolle's movements in this period, only that he was most likely in eremitic retreat and moving between cells.

Scholarly reconstruction of Rolle's later years has focused on his association with the community of women at the Cistercian priory of Hampole, located between Wakefield and Doncaster in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Its exact foundation date is unknown, but it was confirmed and consecrated by Roger de Pont L'Évêque, Archbishop of York in c.1170.[131] On the basis of archaeological excavations it appears to have been relatively large by contemporary standards.[132] Elizabeth Freeman notes that the community was spared the Scottish raids that affected many other Yorkshire monasteries in the early fourteenth century, but in terms of

[127] Sargent, 'Richard Rolle, Sorbonnard?', p. 287.
[128] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 15700.
[129] Sargent, 'Richard Rolle, Sorbonnard?', p. 288.
[130] Sargent, 'Richard Rolle, Sorbonnard?', p. 287.
[131] *English Episcopal Acta: York 1154-1181*, ed. Marie Lovatt (Oxford, 2000), p. 54; See also William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum: A History of the Abbies and Other Monasteries, Hospitals, Frieries, and Collegiate Churches, with Their Dependencies, in England Wales…Originally Published in Latin, Volume 6* (London, 1849), pp. 486-7.
[132] C.E. Whiting, 'Excavations at Hampole Priory, 1937', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 34 (1938-9), pp. 204-12.

social makeup and economic status was largely 'indistinguishable from other Yorkshire nunneries of the time'.[133] The community is mentioned twice in the archbishop's registers. An entry in 1308 reports consultation for advice on managing finances, and another for a confession of sexual immorality by one of the nuns there in 1311-1312/13.[134] Like many other Yorkshire nunneries, the early-fourteenth-century community was largely drawn from local gentry or related to local clergy.[135] The community took their confessors from among local Franciscans at Doncaster. The archbishop's register of William Greenfield (d.1315; r.1304-1315) records licenses given for individual friars to hear confessions at Hampole from 1314 onwards.[136]

Despite the moniker 'Richard of Hampole', there is no evidence Rolle ever held a formal pastoral role there, and the nature and length of his connection to the priory is unclear.[137] It was likely mostly contingent on his relationship with his spiritual disciple the recluse Margaret Kirkby, who was associated with the community there. This relationship appears to have fitted within a broader pattern of pastoral interactions. The *Officium* represents Rolle as actively engaged in a wide range of active pastoral ministry, telling how

[133] Freeman, 'The Priory of Hampole', p. 3.
[134] For Hampole in the archbishop's registers, see (for 1308) *The Register of William Greenfield Lord Archbishop of York 1306-1315, vol 3*, ed. William Brown and A. Hamilton Thompson (Durham, 1936), pp. 138-39; (for 1311; 1312-13) *The Register of William Greenfield Lord Archbishop of York 1306-1315, vol 2*, ed. William Brown and A. Hamilton Thompson (Durham, 1934), pp. 114, 141-2.
[135] Janet Burton, 'Yorkshire Nunneries in the Middle Ages: Recruitment and Resources', in John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton (eds.), *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England 1000-1700* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 107-8.
[136] On assignment of Hampole to mendicant care, see *The Register of Walter Giffard, Lord Archbishop of York, 1266-1276*, *Vol 1*, ed. William Brown (Durham, 1904), pp. 295-96; On the licensing of individual friars, see *Register of William Greenfield*, p. 210.
[137] E.A. Jones, "Vae Soli': Solitaries and Pastoral Care', in Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (eds.), *Texts and Tradition of Medieval Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 29; Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, p. 512.

‘he had been accustomed to show himself greatly familiar to recluses, and those who were lacking spiritual consolation, and those who were suffering disturbances and torments in the soul or body from the working and malice of evil spirits’

and various examples of this array of pastoral roles are included alongside his care for Margaret.[138]

Margaret holds a particularly prominent place in the historical narrative as catalyst for the first of Rolle’s English writings, *The Form of Living*.[139] Watson goes so far as to declare that Margaret ‘deserves to be seen as a key figure in the development of English spirituality, even in the history of English prose.’[140] Rolle’s *Form* was one of the most widely circulated Middle English texts, surviving in almost fifty copies and over twenty further manuscripts of excerpts and translations.[141] Written between 1348-49, it was the first English vernacular guide for recluses since the *Ancrene Riwle* (c.1230).[142] It outlined and advised on challenges the reader would face in fulfilling her calling, as well as encouraging her efforts to achieve mystical union. Rolle dedicated the text to a certain Margaret: ‘Lo, Margaret, I have shortly said the form of living, and how you may come to perfection, and to love him that you have taken to yourself’.[143] The full name ‘Margaret Kirkby’ appears in only one surviving manuscript, a later collection of numerous works by Rolle, copied between the second quarter and middle of the fifteenth

[138] ‘ex abundancia caritatis solitus erat se multum familiarem exhibere reclusis et hiis qui spirituali indigebant consolacione et qui turbaciones et uexaciones operacione et malignitate malorum spirituum paciebantur in anima vel in carne’, *Officium*, p. 37.
[139] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 502-11; Jonathan Hughes, ‘Kirkby, Margaret (d.1391x4), anchoress,’ *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004) https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-57764 (31 March 2025); Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 246-56, 275, 335.
[140] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 242.
[141] For copies of *The Form*, see A.I. Doyle and Ralph Hanna, *Hope Allen’s ‘Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle’: A Corrected List of Copies* (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 41-5.
[142] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 34-36, 502-11.
[143] ‘Lo, Margaret, I haue shortly seid þe fourme of lyuynge, and how þou may cum to perfeccioun, and to loue hym þat þou hast taken þe to’, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse edited from MS Longleat 29 and related manuscripts*, ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson (Oxford, 1988), p. 194.

century.[144] However, the historically identifiable Margaret Kirkby is certainly a viable candidate.

Permission for an anchoress named Margaret Kirkby to move her cell from East Layton to Ainderby is recorded in the register of the archbishop of York in 1356-7.[145] Earlier in December 1348 one 'Margaret la Boteler a sister of the nuns' house of Hampole' was granted permission to be enclosed as a recluse at East Layton.[146] As the only anchorites recorded at East Layton, and sharing the same name, it is reasonable to suppose that the entries refer to the same individual upon their arrival and departure from that place. Allen's investigation very plausibly considers this Margaret to be the subject of reference to an anchorite at Hampole in 1382, and of references to anchorites at Hampole in the 1410s.[147] Although this is slender evidence, we can cautiously infer that Margaret Kirkby/la Boteler is the singular individual in whom we are interested, that she moved between cells in the region, and that she lived at Hampole as both a nun and a recluse for an unknown period of time. This is in keeping with the narrative of the *Officium*, in which the penultimate *lectio* details how Rolle often instructed 'Domina Margaret' the recluse in the art of the love of God and that she returned to Hampole at some time after Rolle's death.[148] Given the function of *The Form* as guidance for the establishment of spiritually productive solitary life, its date of composition in late-1348 to late-1349, and its addressee named Margaret, it is likely that it was written for Margaret Kirkby/la Boteler at the time she took up anchoritic solitude at East Layton.[149]

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[144] Warminster (Wilts.), Longleat House, Marquess of Bath, MS 29; Ralph Hanna, *English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Exeter, 2010), pp. 208-12; For the range of names used for the recipient, see Ogilvie-Thomson, *Prose and Verse*, pp. xxxvi-xliv.
[145] York, Borthwick Institute, University of York, *Episcopal Register 11 (John Thoresby 1353-73)*, fol. 287r.
[146] 'Margaretam la Boteler sororem domus monialium de Hampole', in York, Borthwick Institute, University of York, *Episcopal Register 10 (William Zouche, 1342-52*), fol. 72r.
[147] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 506-8.
[148] *Officium*, pp. 39-41.
[149] For detailed overview of the manuscript evidence for the relationship between Margaret and Rolle, see Freeman, 'Hampole and its Literary Culture', pp. 7-9.

Hampole itself is certainly significant to Rolle's historical narrative in a posthumous role. The *Officium* tells us that Rolle died there in 1349, and that he was buried in the priory church.[150] As previously discussed, the community was likely involved with development of his local cult and had some part in the compilation of the *Officium.* Other textual witnesses suggest that Rolle's connection with the priory was well known by the 1380s. Most notably, the earliest securely dated manuscript of Rollean work, British Library, Additional 34763, produced anonymously in 1384, identified Rolle as hermit 'de Hampole', and notes that he had died there.[151] The *Officium*'s telling of various miracles performed for penitents at his tomb suggests that by the late fourteenth century Rolle's resting place was an established pilgrimage site. Indeed, this capacity to attract pilgrims was acknowledged in 1400 by a papal mandate granting indulgences to penitents visiting Hampole.[152] Despite his lack of official canonisation, the cult had longevity; in the early sixteenth century, Henry VIII's commissioners for the dissolution of Hampole reported that it was a place of pilgrimage to 'Saint' Richard.[153] We are, therefore, dealing with a figure whose biography is fragmentary at best, whose exact movements and individual relationships remain opaque, and whose 'story' is at least in part a construct to serve subsequent ends.

Rolle's historical reputation

From early nineteenth-century studies to the most recent scholarship, Rolle has been treated as a figure of rebellious and controversial individuality, unconventional and idiosyncratic, once

[150] *Officium*, p. 82.
[151] London, British Library, Additional 34763; See Ralph Hanna, 'The Oldest Manuscript of Richard Rolle's Writing', *Scriptorium*, 70 (2016), pp. 105-15.
[152] *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, *Volume 5*, ed. J.A. Twemlow (London, 1904), p. 375.
[153] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, *Volume 10* (London, 1887), p. 139.

described by Allen as a 'self-willed, bitter individualist'.[154] A long scholarly tradition has characterised Rolle as eccentric in both life and writings, rejecting institutions and embracing the charismatic authority of his mysticism.[155] This interest in exceptionalism and eccentricity was particularly amplified by early twentieth-century assertion of the existence of a distinctive 'English Mysticism' that captured an 'English Spirituality' characterised by independence and intensity.[156] This scholarship included expositions of Rolle's life and work privileging the narrative of a 'maverick figure' rejecting oppressive institutional authority and forging a unique mysticism.[157] The work of literary historians at the end of the twentieth century reinvigorated this idiosyncratic image of Rolle, reiterating Carl Horstmann's depiction of 'a strange man: strange in his ways, strange in his words' made a century earlier.[158] This was captured most influentially in Nicholas Watson's *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, and Denis Renevey's *Language, Self, and Love.*[159] Renevey positioned Rolle as a novel voice within a broader, largely monastic, theorising of love in medieval religious literature. Watson's seminal study traced Rolle's articulation of his personal authority through a thorough and still

[154] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, p. 7.
[155] See Carl Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers* (London, 1895-96), p. 2; Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. xi, 52; Denis Renevey, *Language, Self, and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff, 2001), pp. 71-2.
[156] Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*; *The Medieval Mystics of England*, ed. and trans. Eric Colledge (New York, 1961); Conrad Pepler, *The English Religious Heritage* (Oxford, 1958); For later twentieth-century history of the field, see essays in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales: Exeter Symposium VI* (London, 1999); For overview of historiographical developments, see Nicholas Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', in David Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 541-3.
[157] For material on Rolle in this tradition, see Caroline Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature* (Cambridge, 1913), pp. 116-20; Caryl Coleman, 'God's Lover Forsakes the World', *Catholic World*, 116 (1922), pp. 170-9; David Knowles, *English Mystics* (London, 1927), pp. 73-89; Earnest L. Ackley, 'People's Religion in Fourteenth Century England' (PhD Dissertation, Yale, 1933); Effie Mackinnon, *Studies in Fourteenth Century English Mysticism* (Chicago, 1934), pp. 1-16; R.M. Jones, 'Flowering of Mysticism in England', in R.M. Jones (ed.), *Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1939), pp. 209-33; Gerald W. Bullet, *The English Mystics* (London, 1950), pp. 46-55; R.M. Wilson, 'Three Middle English Mystics', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 9 (1956), pp. 87-112; Conrad Pepler, *The English Religious Heritage* (London, 1958); Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to the English Pastoral Tradition* (London, 1963), pp. 218-22; Phyllis Hodgson, *Three Fourteenth-Century English Mystics* (London, 1967); Thomas William Coleman, *English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1938), pp. 64-83
[158] Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers*, p. 2.
[159] Watson, *Invention of Authority*; Renevey, *Language, Self, and Love.*

authoritative literary biography. The notion that Rolle's writings reflect his historical self has privileged an understanding of personal eccentricity and strident rejection of contemporary institutional norms and values based on areas of his writings which feature acerbic attack on critics in defence of his eremitic lifestyle. This is seen most clearly in Watson's influential study, which treats the combative voice as expressing Rolle's true self, and tones which do not suit this register as a more palatable self-fashioning.[160]

More recent work taking an interest in the construction of the eccentric 'outsider' figure has reappraised its merits and purpose in its contemporary context.[161] Glover's study of the nature of Rolle's eccentricity makes a compelling case that his aggressive voice, which Watson previously identified as the site of the 'real' Rolle, was one of a number of conventionalised forms of language and expression used throughout his writings.[162] That is not to ignore the distinctive and unusual features of his works, but instead to place them within the context of a traditional understanding of eremitism. It fits within a tradition in which rejection of the world by hermitic individuals was in itself a critique of contemporaries who did not share in such sanctified priorities, and an invitation to self-reflection.[163]

The liminal status of a hermit set Rolle's spiritual journey apart from those of many contemporaries seeking religious life. The hermitical life came with both spiritual and cultural prestige. As Katherine Zieman says, this choice marked Rolle out as a paradigm of 'authentic

[160] Watson, *Invention*, pp. 87-90.
[161] Katherine Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma: Richard Rolle as Public Contemplative,' *Speculum* 99 (2024), pp. 1066-1080; Timothy Glover, "Strange in His Ways, Strange in His Words': Eccentricity, Eremitism, and Autobiography in the Works of Richard Rolle,' *Speculum* 99 (2024), pp. 1052-1065; Ann Killian, 'Lyric Anonymity: Songs of Love and Pastoral Care in Lambeth 853,' *Speculum* 99 (2024), pp. 1097-1115; Nicholas Watson, 'Afterword: The Nightingale and the Cuckoo,' *Speculum* 99 (2024), pp. 1149-1163.
[162] Glover, "Strange in His Ways',' p. 1055; Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 87, 90.
[163] On the relationship between eremitism and secular power, see E. A. Jones, 'O Sely Ankir,' in Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (eds), *Anchorites in Their Communities* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 13-34; E. A. Jones (ed), *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200-1550* (Manchester, 2019), p. 156, 160.

devotion and inner conviction at a moment when antimonastic discourse criticised institutionalised forms of the contemplative life as bureaucratic, routinised, and hypocritical.'[164] However, it also carried risk of suspicion and accusation in its rejection of institutional regulation.[165] Given the combative stance taken against the ecclesiastical institution in his writings, this rejection was likely central to Rolle's understanding of his eremitical calling, abandoning not just worldly things but also 'worldly' sources of spiritual authority. Indeed, in *Melos Amoris* he exhorts others to his cause: 'for behold, the youth armed with the zeal of righteousness rises up against the old man, hermit against bishop, and against all thinking similarly.'[166] The juxtaposition of hermit and bishop here suggests a particular intention of his eremitical life as a rejection of episcopal regulation over other forms of religious life. However, the extent to which this rhetoric of polarisation reflected a controversial or beleaguered reality is questionable, particularly as it was in keeping with the common medieval association of saintliness and persecution.[167]

Many of the 'eccentricities' of the Rollean narrative can be understood as the construction of a holy figure and exceptional character, both in Rolle's own works and in the *Officium.* The *Officium* drew on hagiographical precedents of spontaneous commitment and eccentric behaviour to establish the authenticity and importance of Rolle's embarking on the eremitical path. The text describes his actions as guided by spiritual inclination and not institutional knowledge or external influence. It tells in detail of how he fashioned his first robes from his sister's tunics in what appears to be a departure from reason before fleeing into the

[164] Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma,' p. 1068.
[165] E.A. Jones, *Hermits and Anchorites*, pp. 156-74.
[166] '*Ecce enim iuuenis zelo iusticie armatus insurgit contra senem, heremita contra episcopum, et contra omnes taliter opinantes*', *Melos amoris*, p. 147.
[167] For example, see Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 14-16; Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 158-9.

wilderness.[168] It is difficult to know where construction and reality intersect. As John Alford points out, this sequence imitates Christ's flight after his baptism by John, likely purposefully highlighted by the compilers of the *Officium*.[169] A similar commonality can be seen with an episode in Bonaventure's *Legenda Sancti Francisci*, in which Francis returns his father's clothes by stripping them off in the town square, appearing to have taken leave of his senses in the spontaneous passion of his symbolic renouncing the world.[170] The prominence of this scene in the *Officium* makes this extemporaneous adoption of the eremitical life in what seems a fit of 'madness' to those around him a key aspect of the construction of his holy persona, setting out Rolle's eccentricity and emotional spontaneity as signs of his genuine spiritual calling.

Watson proposed Rolle's self-robing and unlicensed status as a potential point of contention with ecclesiastical authorities, citing lack of formal episcopal approval as 'disregarding his [Rolle's] legal responsibilities'.[171] However, while the processes and procedures for becoming an anchorite were securely formalised by the end of the twelfth century, a comparable system of episcopal scrutiny and supervision for hermits was not developed until the early fifteenth century.[172] Indeed, many of Rolle's distinguished predecessors, such as Christina of Markyate, Wulfric of Hazlebury, and Robert of Knaresborough, had no official licensing or legislative status in episcopal records. The understanding that ecclesiastical apparatus was superfluous to the eremitical relationship with God did not become actionably problematic until nearly a century after Rolle took hermit's robes. Given that the compilers of the *Officium* were

[168] *Officium*, p. 23.
[169] John Alford, 'The Scriptural Self', in Bernard S. Levy (ed.), *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art* (Binghamton, 1989), pp. 17-18.
[170] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 41.
[171] On controversies faced by Rolle, see Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 40-53; On Rolle's unlicensed status, see Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 42.
[172] E.A. Jones, *Hermits and Anchorites*, p. 132.

interested in securing institutional acknowledgement of Rolle's sanctity, it is unlikely that Rolle's 'self-licensing' would have been foregrounded if it had been truly controversial.

Construction of a sanctifying narrative of the embattled holy man can also be seen in emphasis on Rolle's isolation and rejection which does not account for the scholarly engagement and practical provisions necessary for his written work. There is no mention of scholarly contacts or resources in the *Officium* or in any of Rolle's own writings. Indeed, there is no mention of Rolle reading or using texts at all. However, a substantial part of Rolle's written corpus takes inspiration from canonical sources, mostly glosses, and constitutes an impressive compilation of canonical theory and theological translation. The breadth and quality of scholastic expertise represented therein suggests that Rolle had not only received an extensive education before leaving Oxford but also had some form of continued access to scholarly material. Andrew Kraebel's recent investigation of intertextuality in Rolle's Latin writings suggests that he was equipped with a personal 'library' and had contact with texts outside of his own collection, although this external contact was 'at once discontinuous and fortuitous'.[173] Whatever shape this engagement with scholarly material and culture took, it was significant in its conspicuous absence from both the *Officium* and Rolle's own writings. This may have served to prevent it from undermining Rolle's claim on charismatic rather than institutional or intellectual authority.[174]

Similarly, there is no mention of provision for Rolle's writing activities in any of his works or the *Officium*. Lack of information on Rolle's patrons prevents a precise understanding of his connections with individual readers or communities, or with intellectual and literary networks.

[173] Andrew Kraebel, 'Hermit Libraries: Material Sources and the Making of Richard Rolle's Prose', *Speculum*, 99 (2024), p. 1083.
[174] For more on Rolle's claim to charismatic authority, see Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma', p. 1067-9.

However, it is possible to make the supposition that he received relatively consistent patronage of some kind to finance and provide for his writing activities. Such a commitment of support and approval was at odds with the narrative of a rejected and isolated life. As Watson says, 'Rolle's writing career must then have been a less isolated phenomenon than it looks'.[175] Lack of explicit reference to it in the biographical materials speaks to their purposeful construction of a life modelled on the traditional association of holiness with persecution.

As Glover most recently pointed out, Rolle's self-portrayal (and the *Officium*'s portrayal of him) as isolated and embattled, at odds with the institutional church and defensive of his eremitical lifestyle, could be viewed as largely conventional and performative.[176] The view of Rolle as an idiosyncratic figure corresponds with a more general understanding of such individuals, an established trope in which the personal eccentricity of the hermit directly correlated to their sanctity. This study will contribute to the ongoing reappraisal of historical narratives of Rolle by considering what, if anything, was received as controversial or divergent in his intensely emotional presentation of mystical experience. Examining Misyn's treatment of aspects of the *Incendium* which have been noted as contentious, this study sheds light on what, if any, aspects of the text and its author were of concern to a representative of institutional orthodoxy and regulation.

Works and Audiences

Surviving textual evidence marks Rolle as one of the most widely read medieval English writers. In her initial 1927 survey, Allen identified 270 manuscripts containing his texts, a

[175] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 297-8.
[176] Glover, "Strange in His Ways'', p. 1054.

number which was expanded in Doyle and Hanna's 2019 survey to around 430 manuscripts and books giving direct access to his writings.[177] Hanna notes an additional 200 manuscripts that transmit original English compositions which include citational materials from Rolle's work, usually his English writings.[178]

Rolle began writing in the early 1330s and continued until his death. His literary corpus is made up of early works written in Latin (*Canticum amoris*, *Judica me deus*, *Melos amoris* and *Super novem lectiones*), scriptural commentaries on the Psalter in both Latin and English (*Viridarium*/*De dei misericordia*, *The Latin Psalter and Canticles*, *The English Psalter and Canticles*, *Super magnificat*, *Super psalmum XX^m)*, miscellaneous Latin scriptural commentaries (*Super threnos*, *Super apocalypsim*, *Super orationem dominicam*, *Super symbolum apostolorum*, *Super mulierem fortem*), Latin treatises (*Contra amatores mundi*, *Incendium amoris* and *Emendatio vitae*), English epistles (*Ego dormio*, *The Commandment*, *The Form of Living*) and miscellaneous English works including *Meditations on the Passion* and lyric poetry to the Virgin Mary.

The exact chronology of his work remains uncertain. Watson, revising Allen's earlier chronology, made a thorough analysis of sources, themes, and inter-textual borrowings to establish groups of 'early', 'middle' and 'late' works.[179] The early works are comprised of *Judica me*, *Super symbolum apostolorum*, *Super symbolum S. Athanasii* and *Super orationem dominicam*, all written around the same time followed shortly by *Super apocalypsim* and *Super Threnos.* The middle works are *Incendium Amoris*, *Super psalmum vicesimum*, *Super canticum canticorum*, *Contra amatores mundi* and *Melos amoris*, in that order. The final body of later

[177] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*.; Doyle and Hanna, *Corrected List.*
[178] Ralph Hanna, 'Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*: A Prospectus for a Future Editor', *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 26 (2016), p. 228.
[179] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, pp. 271-94.; Allen, *Writings Ascribed.*

works is made up of *Super lectiones mortuorum*, *Emendatio vitae*, *The Commandment* and *The Form of Living*. The chronological position of the *English Psalter*, *Ego dormio* and the miscellaneous English works is less clear, but Watson's intertextual study places them some time after the 'middle' works. The *Latin Psalter* was written some time before the *English Psalter*, to which it lends part of a prologue. This chronology reflects aspects of Rolle's known circumstances. The heavily scholastic material of the early works is perhaps indicative of chronological proximity to his university years. The middle works see the emergence of the writings noted for his impassioned defence of his (purportedly) embattled eremitic lifestyle and include his mystical writings. His use of the vernacular to provide similar material and access to contemplative and devotional material in the later grouping maps onto his pastoral engagement with women in his later years.

Rolle can be understood primarily as a Latin author, using the vernacular only when necessitated by a specific recipient or community. Indeed, around 70% of the surviving volumes containing Rollean work present only Latin material.[180] Hanna's study of early manuscript transmission for Rolle's major Latin works finds no evidence for systematic early dissemination or centralised collection.[181] Instead, he identifies a common practice in anthologies of Rolle's work, where long books were constructed out of smaller excerpts, with signs indicative of several discrete acts of production, and rearrangements and spatial estimations that suggest uncertainty about the exact extent or shape of the complete text by scribes and compilers.[182] This discontinuous access to sources suggests that the source materials for transmitting Rolle's writings were not held in a single location, but instead were to be found among 'a range of book-owners, a mixed group of organisations and private

[180] Hanna, 'Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*', p. 228.
[181] Ralph Hanna, 'The Transmission of Richard Rolle's Latin Works', *The Library*, 14/3 (2013), pp. 313-333.
[182] Hanna, 'Transmission', p. 327.

individuals.'[183] Hanna suggests a form of interaction with these works that he calls 'associationalism' – a network of relations shaped by institutional mobility: 'individuals routinely passed through and among sequences of such institutions [e.g., university, clerical *familiae*, royal service], whilst retaining personal ties generated in the course of past education and duties.'[184] Thus, these Latin works underwent dispersal through clerical society via 'associative mechanisms' of social and intellectual networks before later compilation. It can, therefore, be plausibly inferred that the majority of Rolle's patrons, followers, and social network were Latinate and male, likely comprised of well-educated laypeople and clergy or members of monastic orders.

As we have seen, Rolle's vernacular works were written in the latter part of his career and seem to have been shaped by pastoral care of a woman he named as Margaret, thought to be Margaret Kirkby, and some kind of contact with the Hampole community. *The Form of Living*, *The Commandment*, and *Ego Dormio* constitute Rolle's guidance of contemplative endeavours and eremitic lifestyle for female vernacular readers. As well as the aforementioned Margaret in *The Form*, there are some clues in surviving manuscripts that his English texts were written for, or understood as written for, particular individuals, including a nun at Yedingham and another anonymous sister at Hampole mentioned in later colophons of the *Commandment*.[185] The anonymous author of the metrical prologue to the late-fifteenth-century manuscript of the *English Psalter*, Oxford, Bodleian, MS Laud Misc. 286, notes that Rolle produced the English gloss for a recluse called 'dame Merget Kyrkby'.[186] This cannot be conclusively corroborated, as no identification of a direct recipient is found in any of the other forty or so manuscripts

[183] Hanna, 'Transmission', p. 327.
[184] Hanna, 'Transmission', p. 331.
[185] See Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 247, 252, 501-2; Hanna, *English Manuscripts*, p. 26.
[186] Oxford, Bodleian, MS Laud Misc. 286.

from the same period, although it would explain the presence of a holograph copy of the *Psalter* listed in the Hampole priory collection in the mid-fifteenth century.[187]

Little is known of Rolle's earliest readers. An unidentified 'William' is mentioned as a recipient of Rolle's texts in the colophon of Oxford, MS Bodley 16, which contains a copy of *De Emendatio Vitae*, although the authenticity of the 'William' colophon is disputed by Rüdiger Spahl.[188] Rolle's *Judica me* was dedicated to an acquaintance, probably a priest, although any further detail is unknown.[189] Marginal notation in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 4483, a collection of theological and devotional works assembled in Bohemia in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, including Rolle's *Incendium*, name a certain William Stoups as Rolle's 'most intimate companion' (*valde intimus socius*).[190] The mid-fifteenth-century notation attributes some combination of editing and compilation of Rolle's work to him. Hanna has examined possible historical individuals, and surmised that Stoups was a scholarly monk living outside his cloister, likely associated with the Cistercian community of Meaux.[191] While Hanna's investigations conclude that the literary relationship between the two has been misrepresented in the notations, there is reasonable evidence that one of Rolle's early readers was 'a monk fascinated by the Holy Name and seeking spiritual support from its most prominent mid-fourteenth-century advocate', with whom Rolle had some form of relationship.[192] Overall, an exact pattern of early reception or intention is difficult to ascertain.

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[187] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 173-4; Hanna, *English Manuscripts*, p. xxxv.
[188] For the colophon mentioning 'William', see Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 230-1; For Spahl's problematisation, see his discussion of the relationship between MS Bodley 16 and earlier versions in Rüdiger Spahl (ed.) *De emendatione vitae: eine kritische Ausgabe des lateinischen Textes von Richard Rolle; mit einer Übersetzung ins Deutsche und Untersuchungen zu den lateinischen und englischen Handschriften* (Göttingen, 2008), pp. 117-18, 149-53.
[189] See Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, pp. 98-108.
[190] Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 4483, fol. 134r; Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, p. 41; For an edition of the text in question, see Ralph Hanna, *Editing Medieval Texts: An Introduction, Using Exemplary Materials Derived from Richard Rolle, 'Super Canticum' 4* (Liverpool, 2015).
[191] Ralph Hanna, 'Richard Rolle's 'Valde Intimus Socius': A Search for William Stoups', in Ian Doyle (ed.), *Middle English Manuscripts and their Legacies* (Leiden, 2021), pp. 9-25.
[192] Hanna, "Valde Intimus Socius'', p. 25.

However, it seems possible that many of Rolle's works, both Latin and vernacular, were written as components of pastoral ministry to individual patrons or followers.

Despite widespread demand later, Rolle's work received a relatively subdued reception in the decades following his death.[193] Doyle and Hanna's reappraisal of Allen's original conspectus reveals more than six hundred medieval books which offer primary evidence for Rolle's works and their transmission.[194] However, there are very few copies from before 1400, and most of these belonged to monastic foundations.[195] The time-lag in wider popularity fits the broader trend of fifteenth and early-sixteenth century interest in thirteenth and fourteenth-century spirituality. This likely resulted from Archbishop Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions*, which discouraged the circulation of unapproved vernacular religious literature and significantly limited the scope and originality of new English religious writing.[196] This makes ascertaining the immediate dissemination of Rolle's work a challenge, but one which has received fruitful attention in the last five years.

Hanna's assessment of the manuscripts of Rolle's English works suggests a largely epistolary model of dispersal for their initial transmission, passing from the individuals and/or communities for whom they were written to different readers and onwards into larger networks.[197] Some manuscript evidence suggests the existence of scribal copies associated with the north of England while Rolle was still alive, indicating some early circulation during his

[193] Wolfgang Riehle, 'Richard Rolle of Hampole: England's First Great Mystic', in *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England* (Berlin, 2014), pp. 70-135.
[194] Doyle and Hanna, *A Corrected List* (Turnhout, 2019).
[195] For overview of extant pre-1400 manuscripts, see Alexandra Barratt, 'Spiritual writings and religious instruction', in Nigel J. Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume II: 1100-1400* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 361-3.
[196] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, p. 46; Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, The Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70/4 (1995), pp. 822-64.
[197] Hanna, *English Manuscripts*, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

lifetime.[198] Andrew Kraebel's work has added to this picture. His assessment of medieval references to holographs of some works indicates that Rolle himself produced and distributed his own copies.[199] Kraebel also finds evidence of Rolle substantially redrafting works already in circulation in the survival of multiple versions of texts of the *Latin Psalter* and *Super symbolum Athanasii*.[200] It is certainly plausible that while Rolle wrote in response to the needs and/or preferences of individual readers, there was also consideration for wider dissemination.

A great deal of fruitful work has been done in the last decade to reassess the intended audience for Rolle's English works and its gendered implications. As early as 1927 Allen warned that there is no concrete evidence that any woman, including the community of Hampole, owned any copy of Rolle's English works until the fifteenth century.[201] Despite this, Watson's seminal study of Rolle's literary corpus conspicuously lacks any consideration of anything other than a female audience for Rolle's writings of personal experience.[202] This association with female readers has led to generalisations which do not account for the possibility of multiple audiences and intentions for these works. Although *Ego Dormio*, *The Commandment* and *The Form of Living* were addressed to individual women, detailed literary analysis has problematised the assumption of a solely female audience for his vernacular works. Scholars such as Clare McIlroy have recognised that avoidance of gender-specificity in the text of Rolle's English treatises dedicated to Margaret implicitly broadens the audience beyond Margaret and the community at Hampole.[203] The dedication to Margaret, 'Lo, Margaret, I have shortly said the

[198] Hanna, 'Oldest Manuscript'.
[199] Andrew Kraebel, 'Rolle Reassembled: Booklet Production, Single-Author Anthologies, and the Making of Bodley 861', *Speculum*, 94 (2019), p. 962.
[200] Kraebel, 'Rolle Reassembled', pp. 977-80; Andrew Kraebel, 'Latin Manuscripts of Richard Rolle at the University of Illinois', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 119/4 (2020), pp. 512-13; Andrew Kraebel, *Biblical Commentary and Translation in Later Medieval England: Experiments in Interpretation* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 192-202.
[201] Allen, *Writings Ascribed*, p. 512; Barratt, 'Spiritual Writings', p. 363.
[202] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 16.
[203] Claire McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 19, 97; Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representations and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional*

form of living…', although reasonably equated with a historically verifiable individual, also fits with contemporary literary *topoi.*[204] In particular, it reflects the *topos* in which didactic devotional prose written for women and addressed to an exemplary female reader – often a devout religious woman, literate only in the vernacular, and living an isolated life – formed part of a genre that appealed to both male and female readers.[205] Indeed, Margaret is not often addressed in the text, and wider references to mankind and 'every sinful man and woman' are more common.[206] McIlroy has also identified other areas in which search for gendered factors has overshadowed other considerations. She argues that instances that appear to address a woman in the text do not necessarily indicate an exclusively female audience. Instead, she suggests that Rolle simply took the traditional understanding of the soul as feminine, and thus the feminine directive is used where the soul is addressed by the divine.[207] McIlroy's conclusions raise important questions about where assumptions of audience gender have guided interpretation. It particularly encourages us to look beyond the named recipients or patrons of such texts to consider wider audiences and intentions.

Like Rolle's Middle English texts, the gender of the individual to whom *The Fire* was dedicated has overshadowed consideration of possible wider audiences for Misyn's Middle English translation of the *Incendium.* Contextualisation allows us to consider the possible implications of the active social and literary networks of his patroness, of which Misyn was likely aware.

Literature (London, 1995), p. 101; Kathleen Garay, "A naked intent unto God': Ungendered Discourse in some Late Medieval Mystical Texts', *Mystics Quarterly*, 23 (1997), p. 37.

[204] *Prose and Verse*, p. 194.

[205] Kathryn Vulić, 'De Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte and the Topos of the Female Audience', *Mystics Quarterly*, 34 (2008), p. 2-7; On this topos in established literary practices, see Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca, 1995), p. 19; Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual', *Chaucer Review*, 18 (1983), pp. 138-40.

[206] *The Form of Perfect Living and other Prose Treatises. By Richard Rolle, of Hampole, A.D. 1300-1349*, ed. Geraldine E. Hodgson (London, 1910), p. 3.

[207] Strohm, 'Chaucer's Audience', p. 18; On the feminised soul in contemporary religious culture, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 138; Joan Ferrante, *Women as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante* (Columbia, 1975).

We may then consider a broader spectrum of factors which informed authorial, editorial, and translational decisions. In order to shed light on what 'mattered' to Misyn and his audience in Rolle's text, we must first establish the respective audiences of both the *Incendium* and *The Fire* and consider how discourses around features of the *Incendium* may have had some bearing on Misyn's treatment of it.

Incendium Amoris

The *Incendium Amoris* represents something of a watershed in Rolle's career. It is his first work which constructs personal experience as didactic material and is the sole instance in which Rolle explicitly described visionary experiences and presented them for emulation. Watson identifies this originality and focus on experience as the beginning of Rolle's development of individual voice and personal *auctoritas.*[208]

The text opens with a declaration of belief in the perfection of contemplation, setting the tone of a manifesto for eremitic values. Rolle then makes a conventional demonstration of orthodox theology and correct doctrine. The main body of the text consists of guidance for practising a contemplative life, based on his account of an exemplary spiritual journey. Through detailed description of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations of visionary experience, Rolle illustrates the effectiveness of the prescribed contemplative methods and provides a script for the reader. This visionary feeling centres around the burning of divine love from which the work takes its title – a purging force which cleanses the soul to prepare it for union with the divine in perfect reciprocal connection. This experience is recounted in a framework of three sensory categories: *calor*, *dulcor* and *canor* (heat, sweetness, divine music). These expressions elevate the

[208] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 113.

physicality of emotional experience as an integral component of true union with God. They serve as emotive signposts for Rolle's readers to follow his example and understand their own progression.

The text ends with instruction on friendship between men and women, and how men might best conduct a holy life where complete separation from the opposite sex is not possible, for example when offering spiritual direction. Rolle proposed a Christianised form of classical friendship which allowed for the possibility of male-female friendships of mutual spiritual benefit within the bounds of religious life, moving away from the segregation which had characterised much of the early-medieval church.[209]

This particular understanding of divine experience and personal spirituality proved popular, and the *Incendium* was widely read in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Doyle and Hanna's most recent survey of known material, it survives in 44 manuscripts and a further 22 manuscript additions, with 9 excerpted citations identified and a further 21 attested copies.[210] Despite this volume of material, a thorough examination of the extensive and eventually pan-European transmission of the *Incendium* has yet to be undertaken and remains an important historical issue. We do know that the *Incendium* was transmitted in two versions, known as the 'long' and 'short' versions. The 'long' version consists of a full set of the prologue and forty-two chapters. The 'short' version is usually comprised of the prologue and approximately twenty-one to twenty-seven chapters, with many copies including an appendix

[209] R. Jacob McDonie, 'Performing Friendship in Richard Rolle's *Incendium amoris*', in Laura Ashe, David Lawton and Wendy Scase (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 81-114; Olli Lampinen, 'Just Friends? Richard Rolle and the Possibility of Christian Friendship Between Men and Women' (PhD thesis, University of Helsinki, 2014).
[210] Doyle and Hanna, *A Corrected List*, pp. 27-31.

containing materials from Rolle's commentary on the Song of Songs and some additional 'long version' passages.

The most authoritative and detailed appraisal of the extant material and its transmission can be found in Hanna's critique of Margaret Deanesley's earlier work on texts that informed her edition of the *Incendium*.[211] His findings indicate that transmission of the 'long' version falls into two main strands. The first strand is associated with two or three discrete early Yorkshire 'long version' sources, now lost, dating from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[212] A second strand of transmission dating from the latter part of the fifteenth century indicates circulation of the long version in the south, predominantly in Oxford, likely through links with Durham cathedral.[213] The 'short version' was contemporaneous to the 'long', not only appearing in books from shortly after 1400 at the latest, but also cross-referenced in the 'long version' of Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.5.64 dating from the second half of the thirteenth century.[214] Hanna's comparison of the textual content of a number of surviving copies confirms that the 'short version' is a direct derivate of the 'long', and that its truncation is likely purposeful tailoring for a specific audience rather than an authorial promulgation.[215]

The insular transmission of the 'short version' has proved more difficult to ascertain. A number of extant 'short version' copies can be associated to regular orders in contexts linked with the provision of education for religious women and sometimes lay people. It appears, for example, in MS Bodley 16 alongside other Latin texts associated with the spiritual edification of holy women, and in MS Laud Misc. 528, a mendicant-produced anthology which features a

[211] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*'.
[212] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*', p. 245-6.
[213] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*', p. 246.
[214] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*', p. 250; Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.5.64.
[215] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*', pp. 248-50

depiction of a Dominican kneeling before Rolle, as well as description of its presentation as a gift to a lay couple by a Franciscan.[216] This suggests that the 'short version' was a condensing of the text into a concise handbook for pastoral care and spiritual direction, particularly in the context of the *cura monialium.* Copies of the short version had considerable continental circulation, arising from the export of English texts to Bohemia at the turn of the century, and the movement of English clergy and church officials to the Council of Constance (1414).[217] This suggests that the 'short' version was likely created, copied, and transmitted to support spiritual ministrations. Conclusions on transmission patterns of either version are, to use Hanna's own word, 'tentative'. The sizeable analysis required to demonstrate how the *Incendium* spread from somewhere in Yorkshire to be read as far afield as Prague and Seville has yet to be undertaken.

Examination of the *topoi* and structure of the *Incendium* reveals a lack of specificity in Rolle's conception of an intended audience, which is often unremarked upon in historical study. In his recent examination of fifteenth-century translations of the *Incendium*, Karáth does not discuss audience.[218] Similarly, while Hanna acknowledges the importance of interrogating intended audience for manuscripts of the *Incendium*, he makes no mention of a possible original audience or their relevance.[219] Where Rollean scholarship does comment on the *Incendium*'s audience, it generally assumes solely professed religious men typical of Latin religious literature.[220] Although not entirely wrong, this is certainly not the whole picture.

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[216] Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 16; Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 528.
[217] On continental circulation of the text, see A.I. Doyle, 'Carthusian Participation in the Movement of Works of Richard Rolle between England and Other Parts of Europe in the 14th and 15th Centuries', in James Hogg (ed.), *Kartäusermystik und -Mystiker. Band 2* (Salzburg, 1981), pp. 109-20; Michael Van Dussen, *From England to Bohemia: Hersey and Communication in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 40-2, 45-8.
[218] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*.
[219] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*'.
[220] Daniel McCann, 'Medicine of Words: Purgative Reading in Richard Rolle's Meditations on the Passion', *Mediaeval Journal*, 5/2 (2015), p. 59; McDonie, 'Performing Friendship', p. 112.

Rolle's prologue takes the form of a dedicatory epistle, a rhetorical tradition popular among twelfth-century religious writers. Their warm, personal tone meant that the epistolary prologues usually only addressed a single group or individual for whom the work was intended or at least dedicated. However, Rolle does not identify a specific audience, instead presenting his work initially to the 'simple and unlearned'.[221] He specifies its use only for those intellectuals who seek contemplative perfection: 'forgetting and putting back that belonging to this world, they love to be given only to the desires of our Maker.'[222] Finally, he dedicates it expansively to 'all people'.[223]

Watson interprets Rolle's lack of direct audience beyond the imagined 'universos' as 'a forceful indication of both the scope and of the vagueness of the writer's ambitions at this point in his career.'[224] However, this interpretation fails to consider the form, style, and content of the text itself. Rolle's choice of Latin is at odds with the 'simple and untaught', who were a very much imagined audience, abstract enough that their diverse needs and abilities were not considered in its formulation. The scholastic form of dedicatory epistle, marking this work as a traditional religious treatise, might suggest that it was intended for an intellectual audience and Rolle's aspirations for 'all people' were a self-sanctifying *topos*. The sections on personal theology and female friendship which explain Rolle's own beliefs and lifestyle anticipate an audience who might challenge such things. Indeed, Rolle expected readers who were equipped to assess and sanction the legitimacy of his teachings and worldly position; that is, a highly educated, likely ecclesiastical readership.

[221] 'rudibus et indoctris', *Incendium*, p. 147.
[222] 'nisi postpositis et oblitis cunctis que ad mundum pertinent, solis Conditoris desideriis inardescant mancipari.', *Incendium*, p. 147.
[223] 'universos', *Incendium*, p. 147.
[224] Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 117.

Given the often-complex content, use of Latin and scholastic rhetorical devices, and Rolle's direct criticism of academia, it is most likely that the *Incendium* was written in part for the scholarly body Rolle had left, and against whom much of his vitriol was directed. Indeed, Rolle's description of his intended readership is mostly dedicated to denying any intention for a scholastic audience. He begins by announcing who the *Incendium* is *not* written for: 'philosophers nor wise men of this world, nor to great theologians entangled in infinite questions' except for those who 'flee all earthly dignity, hate all pride of knowledge and vainglory, and then conforming themselves to highest poverty, and in meditating and praying are constantly given to divine love.'[225] Rolle's effort to identify his not-audience perhaps suggests that this rejection was intended for their very eyes.

However, the *Incendium* differs significantly from Rolle's other Latin works which follow the conventions of commentaries and exegeses clearly written to be received in the broader flow of intellectual discourse. The *Incendium* instead juxtaposes material suited to contemplative 'beginners' with sophisticated expositions of concepts of mystical theology. The chapters mix pastoral instruction, theological discourse, arguments on the merits of active and contemplative life, autobiography, vision accounts and satirical criticism of academic institution, with no apparent thematic separation. Rolle seems to have paid little attention to practical considerations of organisation and genre, and the text lacks a coherent programme. This raises two possibilities. Firstly, that Rolle's stated aims and audience were undefined and not treated with much purpose in writing the body of the text. Or secondly, that he envisaged a particular audience for different parts, catering to multiple groups in the same work. The unifying feature

[225] 'non philosophis, non mundi sapientibus, non magnis theologicis infinitis quescionibus implicatis', *Incendium*, p. 147; 'omnem terrenam dignitatem fugiant, omnem ostentacionem sciencie et uanam gloriam odiant, ac deinde altissime paupertati se conformantes orando et meditando diuine dileccioni iugiter assistant.', *Incendium*, p. 147.

of these groups was that they be Latinate and educated enough to grasp his inferences and criticisms.

The *Incendium* also lacks structural organisation. While the text familiar to historians is made up of forty-two sections, manuscript investigation has revealed that the original was arranged in distinct but unnumbered sections. Chapters and headings were a later addition.[226] These sections appear in different divisions and arrangements in the 'short versions' of the text, which suggests no concept of an intrinsic or meaningful textual structure in its early transmission.[227] This lack of coherence in structure or mode makes it difficult to imagine that Rolle wrote with the practicalities of audience reception in mind at all. It certainly reduces the likelihood of any consideration for an illiterate or vernacular-reading audience, where it would require translation and perhaps oral delivery. It also sets the *Incendium* apart from his other Latin works clearly written for scholarly readers. The usually well-founded generalisations applied to Rolle's writing on the basis of language, such as McIlroy's reading of Rolle's Latin as public-facing, and English as private, do not fit so comfortably with the *Incendium*, which does not appear to be designed for public purpose.[228] This raises a third option, that Rolle did not intend for the extant version to be the final iteration of his work for publication.

Although it is not possible to label the intended audience as any single group, it seems that Rolle conceived of a broadly educated readership who could be addressed in generic terms, lacking the formality of scholastic traditions but participating in intellectual culture and debate. This allows for a predominantly, but not necessarily exclusively, male audience drawn from

[226] The chapter numbers and headings on which most modern translations rely appear in Deanesley's edition and are taken from MSS Dd.v.64 and Emmanuel 35. For a full discussion see Watson, *Invention of Authority*, p. 118, n.5.
[227] Hanna, 'Rolle's *Incendium*', p. 233.
[228] McIlroy, *English Prose Treatises*.

the ranks of both the professional religious and the social elite of lay religious life. Indeed, it is particularly well-suited to what the 'short version' seems to have been used for – as a resource for spiritual edification of less educated (although not necessarily non-Latinate) audiences by ecclesiastically educated readers.

The Translator – Richard Misyn

The *Incendium* was translated into Middle English by Richard Misyn in 1435. Misyn described himself in the Latin colophons of *The Fire* as 'brother Richard Misyn, hermit of the Carmelite Order and bachelor of sacred theology.'[229] Episcopal records show that he joined the Carmelites in Lincoln and undertook further studies in York, where he was ordained as an acolyte in 1419, subdeacon in 1419, and deacon in 1421.[230] Following ordination he attended university for the bachelor's degree mentioned in his colophons, most likely at the University of Oxford which lay within the diocese of Lincoln and was a centre of Carmelite education. His date of graduation is unknown, and there is no record of his movements between 1425 and 1434. Bergström-Allen posits that as a lector he may have returned to York to preach at the Carmelite *studium* there, although there is no evidence for this.[231] He reappears in historical record with his translation of Rolle's *Emendatio Vitae* into the Middle English *Mending of Life* which he completed at the Lincoln priory in 1434. The second colophon of *The Fire*, completed a year later, identifies him as Prior of Lincoln although it is not known when his time in that office began or for how long he held it.[232]

[229] 'fratrem Ricardum Misyn heremitam & ordinis carmelitarum Ac sacre theologie bachalareum.', *Fire*, p. 68.
[230] York, Borthwick Institute, University of York, *Episcopal Register 18: Register of Archbishop Bowet (1407-23)*, fo. 402, 404v, 409v.
[231] Johan Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing Religious Speculation: The Vernacular Literature of the Carmelite Order in Medieval England' (PhD Thesis, Université de Lausanne, 2017), p. 427.
[232] 'tunc Priorem Lyncolniensem', *Fire*, p. 104.

The Lincoln priory was a notable centre for Carmelite spirituality and book culture.[233] The house was a large and important foundation, favoured with royal bequests.[234] It was equipped with a new library in around 1400 at the personal expense of Bertram Fitzalan (d.1424), likely prior at the time.[235] The majority of this original book collection was destroyed in a fire at the end of the fifteenth century. However, it must have been considered an important resource, as the Archbishop of York granted an indulgence of forty days to those who aided in the repair and re-equipment of the library.[236] It seems plausible that the mentality of intellectual and literary investment evident in Fitzalan's library set the tone for the community. Fitzalan would have overlapped with Misyn when he first joined the order and had followed a similar educational trajectory from the *studium* at York to matriculation at Oxford. Given the literary resources and scholarly leadership of the wealthy and well-populated community, Misyn was prior at a time of likely intellectual and financial prosperity.

Misyn next appears in record in a 1441 papal dispensation for his service as 'a priest and chaplain of Henry, Earl of Northumberland'.[237] His exact role as private chaplain to Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland (1394-1455) is hard to ascertain. Misyn would have served as one of a number of chaplains attached to the Northumberland household, and there is no way of knowing whether his position was a major commitment or mainly ceremonial.[238] It is

[233] Keith J. Egan, 'Medieval Carmelite Houses; England and Wales', in Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard (ed.), *Carmel in Britain 1: People and Places* (Rome, 1992), pp. 1-85; Dorothy M. Owen, 'The Mendicants', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Welwyn Garden City, 1971), pp. 84-91; Andrew White, *Lincoln's Medieval Friaries* (Lincoln, 1979); Deirdre O'Sullivan, *In the Company of the Preachers: The Archaeology of Medieval Friaries in England and Wales* (Leicester, 2013), pp. 206-8.
[234] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing,' p. 431.
[235] John Bale, *Illustrium maioris Britannie Scriptorum…Summarium* (Wesel, 1549),186v.
[236] *The Register of Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York 1480-1500: Volume 1*, ed. Eric E. Barker (Torquay, 1976), pp. 232; *The Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, ed. James Raine (London, 1859), p 241.
[237] *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Volume 9, 1431-1447* ed. J.A. Twemlow (London, 1912), pp. 210-11.
[238] The 1511 'Northumberland Household Book' of the 5th Earl of Northumberland (1477-1527) lists eleven priestly offices in the household, each with a specific role. It is likely that his predecessor's household had a similarly well-equipped household. See *The Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland at His Castles of Wressle and Leckonfield in Yorkshire Begun Anno Domini MDXII. New Ed. Edited with Additional Notes*, ed. T. Percy (London, 1905), p. 311.

also unknown where he served it, whether at York, based at the Carmelite priory in Hulne, at court in London, or elsewhere.

Misyn's order, scholarly background and literary activities likely made him a highly attractive candidate as private chaplain. The Percys had a longstanding relationship with the Carmelite Order. The family had been patrons of the Carmelites since the establishment of their first hermitage at Hulne on the outskirts of the Percy feudal estate of Alnwick in Northumberland. A surviving book list from Hulne in 1365 records the lending of a bible to Lord Percy for life, despite legislation against lending books to those outside of the community at the time.[239] Misyn's fellow Lincoln Carmelite, Fitzalan, bequeathed a bible given to him by Lord Percy to the Hulne community.[240] The loan and gift together might indicate an established relationship between the Percys and Misyn's Lincoln community in the early fifteenth century.

Although the role of private chaplain could be vague, there were cases of chaplains of scholarly renown whose lords served as patrons of their work. Most notable is John Trevisa (c.1342-1402), who served as chaplain and confessor to Lord Thomas Berkeley.[241] He undertook a number of translations during his chaplaincy, including a translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, which he dedicated to Berkeley, and the decoration of the household chapel with passages from the Apocalypse in both Latin and French.[242] He also produced devotional guidance in his *Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk*, which represented his discussions with

[239] Frances Andrews, *The Other Friars: The Carmelite, Augustinian, Sack and Pied* (Oxford, 2006), p. 62; *Catalogues of the Library of Durham Cathedral at Various Periods, from the Conquest to the Dissolution including Catalogues of the Library of the Abbey of Hulne* (Durham, 1838), p. 128.
[240] *Catalogues of the Library of Durham Cathedral*, p. 131.
[241] *John Trevisa's Translation of the 'Polychronicon' of Ranulph Higden, Book VI: An Edition Based on British Library MS Cotton Tiberius D. VII*, ed. Ronald Waldron (Heidelberg, 2004), pp. xvi-xvii.
[242] *John Trevisa's Translation*; E.W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1955), p. 140; Emily Steiner, *John Trevisa's Information Age: Knowledge and the Pursuit of Literature, c.1400* (Oxford, 2021).

Berkeley for the edification of others.[243] Although Trevisa's case is certainly not typical, it does set an interesting precedent for nobles using chaplaincy as a means of engaging with religious literature and patronising literary endeavours. Misyn's translation of Rolle's work may have added a layer of appeal to his presence in the Percy household. While we do not know the exact shape or location of Misyn's chaplaincy, the position had no doubt introduced him to leading secular and clerical figures. Indeed, Northumberland's son, William Percy, held the positions of both Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and Bishop of Carlisle in 1452 at the age of just twenty-four.[244]

It is not known when Misyn left Northumberland's service. The fifteenth-century Carmelite historian John Bale, in his preliminary notes on the letters of the English Carmelite provincial Nicholas Kenton (provincial from 1444-1456; d.1468), recorded Misyn's appointment as 'inquisitor and prosecutor for apostates':

'And brother Richard Misyn, Bachelor [of Theology], vicar of the prebendary church of Colwich, in the dioceses of Coventry and Lichfield, has been ordained by the aforementioned Nicolas as inquisitor and prosecutor for apostates.'[245]

There is no record of what this office entailed for Misyn, but it most likely involved leading enquiries and exacting penances for brothers who had abandoned their religious vows.[246] Surviving evidence for the shape of English Carmelite apostasy is sparse, but concern about

[243] Steiner, *John Trevisa's Information Age*, pp. 66-105.
[244] Henry Summerson, 'Percy, William (1428-1462), bishop of Carlisle', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2010), https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-95127 (28 March 2025).
[245] 'Et bachelaureus frater ricardus mysyn, ecclesiae praebendalis de colywych, coventriensis et lychfeldensis diocesium, vicarius, ordinatus est a praefato nicolas inquisitor et prosecutor per apostatis.' John Bale, London, British Library, Ms. Harley 1819, fo. 200v.
[246] For an international counterpart to what this role might have involved, see Michael Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitor: Dominican Inquisitors and Inquisitorial Districts in Northern Italy, 1474-1527* (Leiden, 2007).

the issue appears to have escalated at the end of the fourteenth century.[247] From 1395 provincial priors were permitted to correct errant friars themselves rather than needing to petition the papacy, and were allowed to enlist secular authorities to bring apostates to obedience from 1399.[248] Donald Logan's investigation of errant religious based on Patent Rolls and writs against individual friars finds record of only thirty-seven Carmelite apostates in England between 1290 and 1453, suggesting that collaboration with external authorities was rarely necessary (or perhaps rarely resorted to).[249] However, these records do not necessarily present a measure of the issue, as it is likely that most cases were internally addressed. Misyn's appointment to this office speaks to a trusted reputation in matters of discernment and discipline in the midst of what Vincent Gillespie has described as 'a real if pragmatic and politically aware agenda for reform' across various English institutions under Archbishop Chichele.[250] Chichele's archiepiscopacy saw concerted efforts for the revitalisation of the English church, including reinvigoration of liturgy, fostering English hagiography, and the assertion of firmer distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Misyn's suitability for the role was likely already secure through his years as prior of the flourishing Lincoln community and bolstered by connections to the powerful Northumberland family and their social and ecclesiastical circles. But his association with the provision of orthodox vernacular mystical theology and spiritual direction certainly fitted the interests of this reforming agenda.

This trajectory continued when in July 1457 Misyn was appointed to the bishopric of Dromore in Ireland. The records of his rectory at Birstall note that he was consecrated bishop in Rome.[251]

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[247] On the issue of apostate friars, see Francis Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, c.1240-1540* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 71; Andrews, *The Other Friars* p. 46-7.
[248] Andrews, *The Other Friars*, p. 47.
[249] Logan, *Runaway Religious*, p. 70.
[250] Vincent Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church: Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel', in Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie (eds.), *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England* (Turnhout, 2012), p. 14.
[251] Henry Cradock, *A History of the Ancient Parish of Birstall* (London, 1933), p. 219.

This is notable as it was not necessary for Misyn to be ordained in Rome, so he may have made the journey there in relation to other official Carmelite business. Typical for Dromore, Misyn was an absentee bishop. Described by Anthony Lynch as 'the Cinderella diocese' of the medieval province of Armagh, Dromore had eight absentee bishops between 1417-71, mostly Carmelites with scholarly reputations and links to Oxford who acted as suffragans in England.[252] The bishopric was notoriously 'void and desolate', and was for the most part a symbolic accolade.[253] Misyn twice requested and was granted permission to retain parishes to sustain himself alongside his bishopric, taking the rectories of Colwich in 1458 and East Leake in Nottinghamshire in 1459.[254] Dromore perhaps held particular spiritual significance to the Carmelite order, as church officials could benefit from its destitution as symbolically living the ideal of poverty while in office.[255] It was an episcopal see in which eremitic values and high prelacy could be reconciled, achieving the balance of 'mixed-life' spirituality.

Misyn's election at this time is indicative of his respected position in both his order and the wider church as a representative of orthodox values. He was elected in the same year that Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, was accused of heresy in what Henry Ansgar Kelly describes as 'a sensational show trial'.[256] It was not until two years later, after abjuration under threat followed by a new accusations and a 'fraudulent' trial of relapse, that Pecock was convicted, formally stripped of his episcopacy and clerical orders, and placed in solitary imprisonment.[257] This high profile case was fundamentally about the risks of heretical

[252] Anthony Lynch, 'Religion in Late Medieval Ireland', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 36 (1981), p. 4
[253] Edward Atkinson, *Dromore, An Ulster Diocese* (Dublin, 1911), pp. 20-1.
[254] *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Volume 11, 1455-1464*, ed. J.A. Twemlow (London, 1921), p. 172, 322.
[255] Atkinson, *Dromore*, p. 19; Richard Copsey, 'Scrope [Bradley], Thomas (d. 1492),' in *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004), https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24965 (19 Dec. 2022).
[256] Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Judicial Processes For and Against Bishop Reginald Pecock: New Perspectives on the Mechanisms of his Downfall', *Viator*, 52/1 (2021), p. 360; Wendy Scase, *Reginald Pecock* (Aldershot, 1996).
[257] Ansgar Kelly, 'Judicial Processes', p. 360.

literature. Following the scrutiny and burning of Pecock's devotional and theological writings, he was confined with a strictly limited list of approved books and no writing materials.[258] Against this backdrop, Misyn's election speaks to an institutional confidence not only in his administrative capacities, but also his spiritual convictions and teaching, including his grasp of orthodoxy in vernacular religious literature. Given the nature of Pecock's 'heresies', it is likely that writing associated with any episcopal candidate would have been subject to scrutiny. Misyn's election to episcopacy can be understood as indicative of official approval of his work, and indeed his translations perhaps served as evidence of his orthodoxy and care in navigating the pitfalls of vernacular literature.

During his bishopric, Misyn resided in and around York, where in 1458 he was appointed as suffragan to Archbishop William Booth (r.1452-1464).[259] In this role, Misyn was responsible for advising the archbishop in both spiritual and administrative matters, and carrying them out in his absence, including episcopal duties such as ordination and confirmation.[260] Booth's register shows that he was more often than not absent from York, attending to matters of the realm pertaining to his role as Primate of England.[261] This means that Misyn was acting archbishop for the majority of this time. This contributes another layer to an image of Misyn as a man of not only exemplary administrative and intellectual reputation, but also spiritual and pastoral standing. During his time as suffragan, Misyn moved among elite ecclesiastical and civic circles in York and the wider north of England. His position in the local community was

[258] Scase, *Pecock*, p. 139-40.
[259] *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: VI Northern Province (York, Carlisle and Durham)*, ed. B. Jones (London, 1963), pp. 4-5; A. Hamilton Thompson, 'The Appointment of Suffragan Bishops', in *The English Clergy and their Organisation in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947), p. 203-4; On Booth, see A.C. Reeves, 'Booth [Bothe], William (d.1464),' *ODNB* (Oxford, 2008), https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2896 (28 March 2025); *The Register of William Bothe Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield 1447-1452*, ed. John Condliffe Bates (Woodbridge, 2008).
[260] L.A.S. Butler, 'Suffragan Bishops in the Medieval Diocese of York', *Northern History*, 37 (2000), pp. 58-9.
[261] York, Borthwick Institute, University of York, *Episcopal Register 20 (William Booth, 1452-64).*

consolidated with his admission to the Corpus Christi Guild in 1461-62, where he is recorded as the first person admitted to the guild that year.[262] The guild membership represented York's social elites, including local nobility and gentry, merchants, and ecclesiastical officials. Admission was both a mark of and opportunity for social advancement. Misyn died in September 1462 and was buried at the Carmelite convent in York.[263]

Misyn's stellar career engaged in intellectual, pastoral and administrative contact between various groups and powerful individuals. Despite the great deal of interest in Rolle and his texts, Misyn has received comparatively little historical study. Bergström-Allen's 2017 consideration of Misyn's significance as an early producer of Carmelite vernacular literature remains the only significant investigation of his life.[264] Misyn's Rollean translations have not yet been considered in light of the translator's personal circumstances, particularly his later career in the regulation of orthodoxy and overseeing of pastoral care, reflective of a reputation for spiritual teaching and intellectual ability. By orientating Misyn's *Fire of Love* within his personal context, we may consider how Rolle's mysticism was met by a paradigm of orthodox institutional values, and how his translation may have interacted with his career progression.

The Fire of Love

Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* has a much clearer intended audience than Rolle's original. His prologue explains that the translation was undertaken in answer 'to the inquiry of your desire, Sister Margaret'.[265] His Latin colophon provides us with further details, stating

[262] *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York; with an Appendix of Illustrative Documents containing some account of the Hospital of St Thomas of Canterbury without Micklegate-Bar in the Suburbs of the City*, ed. Robert H. Skaife (Durham, 1872), p. 62.
[263] John Bale, MS Harley 3838, fo.40; MS Bodley 73, fo.1; Butler, 'Suffragan Bishops', p. 58.
[264] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing'.
[265] 'to þe askynge of þi desyre, syster Margarete', *Fire*, p. 1.

that the text was 'translated in English at the insistence of lady Margaret Heslington, recluse'.[266] She has been identified as an anchoress at Saint Margaret's in York, appearing in records from the late 1430s until her death in 1439.[267]

Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* partook in a larger democratisation of devotional meditation and the contemplative life.[268] The rise of English, both in ecclesiastical and secular circles of authority, indicates the growing importance of the laity both in shaping theology and implementing it in devotional practice. Vernacular texts could, as Barbara Newman puts it, 'mediate between ecclesiastical tradition and secular experience, inspiring fresh thought and remarkably powerful new modes of expression.'[269] In his prologue, Misyn writes that he has 'taken this work to translate from Latin into English for the edification of many souls' and for 'all readers'.[270] This suggests that he anticipated, perhaps intended, for his translation to circulate beyond its patroness, and understood it as part of the broader work of literary provision for instruction of laity.

At this time, Carmelite translation of devotional texts from Latin into the vernacular as a form of personal devotion and for the edification of both professional and lay audiences was established practice. The English Carmelite province to which Misyn belonged was a considerable producer of religious texts. It fostered an expansive network for transmission of English-authored Latin and vernacular religious literature both at home and abroad. This was a natural product of the order's emphasis on scriptural knowledge and understanding, and their

[266] 'Translatus in Anglicum instanciis domine Margarete Heslyngton recluse', *Fire*, p. 104.
[267] E.A. Jones, 'A Mystic by any other Name: Julian(?) of Norwich', *Mystics Quarterly*, 33/3 (2007), pp. 2-3.
[268] The phrase 'democratisation of meditation and contemplation' is coined in Karl Baier, 'Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe', in Eli Franco (ed.), *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness* (Vienna, 2009), pp. 325-49.
[269] Barbara Newman, 'Latin and the Vernaculars', in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 239.
[270] *Fire*, p. 1.

promotion of the practice of *lectio divina* – 'holy reading'. This literary focus was reflected in the considerable scriptural familiarity evident in medieval Carmelite works, and their domination of seats related to biblical scholarship in universities across Europe.[271]

This engagement in religious literature was also a key component of the order's pastoral mission, facilitating scriptural and devotional teaching, and enabling wider lay engagement with religious literature.[272] By the fifteenth century, houses of the order were increasingly outward-looking in their capacity as book-owning communities. The *Constitutions* of the Order included a chapter on *De libraria et custodia librorum* ('The library and care of books'), which supported the regular transfer of literary materials into, within, and from Carmelite communities.[273] Copying and disseminating texts also served as part of an organised campaign against prevailing heresies. For example, a number of Carmelite copies were made of the *Doctrinale fidei catholice*, a treatise against Wyclif, Lollardy and other heresies, written in the 1420s by the prior provincial, Thomas Netter, and circulated widely within the order and beyond.[274] As Bergström-Allen says, 'through their preaching, teaching and writings, medieval English Carmelites demonstrated their awareness of the growing connection between spirituality, literacy and language.'[275]

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[271] On *Lectio divina*, see Ann Matter, '*Lectio Divina*'', in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 147-56; Johan Bergström-Allen, 'Lectio Divina and Carmel's Attentiveness to the Bible', in *Climbing the Mountain: The Carmelite Journey* (Faversham, 2010), pp. 253-77; Henricus Pidyarto, 'The Use of the Bible by Medieval Carmelite Writers', in *Studia Philosophia et Theologica*, 1/2 (2002), pp. 142-52; On Carmelites in European universities, see Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing,' pp. 56-7.

[272] For a comprehensive overview of surviving late medieval Carmelite literature, see Richard Copsey, 'The Carmelites in England: Surviving Writings', *Carmelus*, 44 (1997), pp. 188-202.

[273] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 128.

[274] On the copying and dissemination of this text, see Malcolm Parkes, *Their Hands before Our Eyes [a closer look at scribes: the Lyell lectures delivered in the University of Oxford, 1999]* (London, 2016), pp. 28-30; Margaret Harvey, 'Netter Manuscripts and Printings', in Johan Bergström-Allen and Richard Copsey (eds.), *Thomas Netter of Walden: Carmelite, Diplomat and Theologian (c.1372-1430)* (Faversham, 2009), pp. 137-77.

[275] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 58.

Use of English as a means of religious education had seen considerable growth during the fourteenth century. Vernacular didactic materials, such as the translation of John of Thoresby's 1357 catechetical programme into alliterative English, spread widely and rapidly among the laity.[276] Rolle himself pronounced the need for new styles of writing and articulation for theological works in English rather than Latin. In his treatise *Off thre wyrkynges in man saule*, he wrote that 'The other working is with travail and with fruit, and it is called Thinking or Meditation. But Thinking is proper English thereof, for Meditation is not English, but it is a word feigned like to Latin.'[277] Carmelite writers contributed to this literary environment, particularly in the translation of vernacular theology, often devotional material that made the meditative elements of contemplative life more widely accessible. The first known Carmelite writer in English, Richard Maidstone (d.1396), composed a verse translation and meditation on the seven penitential psalms in the late fourteenth century, sometime before 1390.[278] Within the same few years, his fellow Carmelites Richard Lavenham (fl.1399), Thomas Ashburne (fl.1384) and Richard Spalding (fl.1399), and perhaps other unknown contributors, produced religious writings in English that were widely disseminated for spiritual practice and pastoral guidance among laity and religious alike. Misyn's translation was part of this pastoral mentality which increasingly prioritised literary 'accessibility' and how best to serve lay and religious devotional practices.

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[276] Moira Fitzgibbons, 'Disruptive Simplicity: Gaytryge's Translation of Archbishop Thoresby's *Injunctions*', in Renate Blumenfeld Kosinski, Nancy Warren and Duncan Robertson (eds.), *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature* (New York, 2002), pp. 39-58; *The Lay Folk's Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People*, ed. T.F Simmons and H.E. Nolloth (London, 1901).

[277] 'The tothyr wyrkyng is with trauell and with frute, and it is calde Thynkyng or Meditacyon. Bot Thynkyng is propyr Inglysch þerof, for Meditacyon is noon Inglysch, bot it is a worde feyned lyke to Lattyn', in *Uncollected Prose and Verse*, p. 84.

[278] For a concise overview of Maidstone's literary career, see Michael Van Dussen, 'Maidstone, Richard.', in *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* (Oxford, 2017), https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/doi/10.1002/9781118396957.wbemlb335 (28 March 2025).

Misyn's translation must be orientated within the context of his education. York was an important centre for Carmelite education, where book production and collection was actively encouraged. Ordination records as well as the frequent appearance of Carmelite friars in local wills show that highly qualified scholars were well-represented in the priory at York.[279] The work of Carmelite writers based there demonstrates an interest in regional identity. For example, the *Poppleton Manuscript* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. latin 4126), a collection of texts on Scottish, British regional, and Carmelite history, was contributed to and edited by the York priest and Carmelite Robert Populton.[280] Similarly, the donation of books to the Carmelite priory in York by the Prior of Hulne included Bede's *Life of Saint Cuthbert*.[281] York was also home to influential scholarly-minded clerics, the so-called 'Arundel Circle'. These individuals, largely educated at Cambridge, served the administrative and clerical needs of the episcopacy of York under Thomas Arundel from 1388-1396. These scholars and administrators influenced spiritual trends and patronised book-production in the north of England for an extended period of time, consolidating York as an important intellectual milieu for orthodox textual production and transmission.[282] Misyn's years in York were, therefore, spent among Carmelite bibliophiles in an atmosphere shaped by intellectuals who permeated the Minster curia, the diocesan clergy, religious communities, and civic guilds, invested in the exchange of books and ideas and interested in the production and acquisition of pastoral literature, particularly with links to regional spiritual identity. Misyn's interest in Rolle's

[279] Richard Copsey (ed.), *Biographical Register of Carmelites in England and Wales, 1240-1540* (Faversham, 2020); Richard Copsey, *The Medieval Carmelite Priory at York: A Chronology* (Forthcoming).
[280] *Catalogue des manuscrits en écriture latine portant des indications de date, de lieu ou de copiste*, *Tome II*, ed. Charles Samaran and Robert Marichal (Paris, 1962), p. 488; On Populton, see York, Borthwick Institute, University of York, *Register of Archbishop le Zouche*, fo. 11, 13, 13v, 280; John. B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (New York, 1995), p. 41.
[281] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 428.
[282] On the influence of the 'Arundel Circle' on religious culture and literature in York, see Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 174; Barrie Dobson, 'The Residentiary Canons of York in the Fifteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), pp. 145-74; On York book production and book culture, see Friedman, *Northern English Books*.; Vincent Gillespie, 'Cura pastoralis in deserto', in Michael Sargent (ed.), *De cella in speculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 178, 180.

Emendio and *Incendium* as works of spiritual guidance by a figure of local cult following are reflective of this environment.

His translations were also shaped by his time at the University of Oxford. In the early fifteenth century, Oxford was at the centre of a push to combat heresies and reinvigorate devotional practice within the institutional church. Having been tainted by Wycliffite controversy in the 1370s, by the 1420s the university had 'manoeuvred to position itself as the home of orthodox reform under Henry V and the Oxonian Henry Chichele'.[283] These efforts permeated the institution, perhaps seen most clearly in the founding of Lincoln College in 1427 by the Bishop of Lincoln, Richard Fleming, for the express purpose of training orthodox theologians to engage in combatting heresies.[284] The matter of the translation of theological texts as an anti-heretical issue was at the forefront of the Oxonian agenda. The anti-heretical work of the Carmelites afforded them a strong reputation for orthodoxy and spiritual authority in Oxford. In 1414, Carmelites participated in an inquisition into the spread of heretical ideas at the university. That same year, the *Articuli concernantes reformationem universalis ecclesiae editi per universitatem Oxoniensem* (*Articles on the Reform of the Universal Church*) prepared at Oxford for the Council of Constance addressed the issue of vernacular translation.[285] They complained of incompetent translation hindering and misleading readers, encouraging tighter regulation of translation and the confiscation of existing work until examination could be made of it. The articles called for a deferral and the production of reliable, scholarly translations to be made under orthodox clerical supervision.[286] Misyn was educated in this reform-minded

[283] Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church', p. 21.
[284] Kantik Ghosh, 'University-Learning, Theological Method and Heresy in Fifteenth-Century England', in Michael Van Dussen and Pavel Soukup (eds.), *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378-1536: Textual Transmission and Networks of Readership* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 289-313; Gillespie, *Chichele's Church*, p. 16.
[285] *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, ab Anno MCCCL ad Annum MDXLV. Volumen Tertium*, ed. David Wilkins (London, 1737), pp. 360-5.
[286] Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church', pp. 21-2.

atmosphere, himself one of the Carmelite theologians trained for the defence and spread of orthodoxy. His own translations were an application of his training, and perhaps an answer to the call of the *Articles*, shaped by understandings from within his order as well as broader institutional discourses.

Misyn's Audience

The recipient of *The Fire*, Margaret Heslington, was a member of York's Corpus Christi Guild, a community which included most of the literate, book-owning gentry of the city and wider region. Bergström-Allen plausibly equates Margaret with one 'Dom. Isab. Heslyngton, reclusa' found in the guild's admissions list for 1429-1430.[287] Isabel was likely her baptismal name, and Margaret her religious name taken from the church to which she was anchored, St Margert's in Walmgate, York. This was not uncommon practice, as seen of other anchorites like Julian of Norwich.[288] She is the only woman with the honorific 'Domina' in the admissions list, and is the third woman listed, preceded only by two female relatives of local noblemen.[289] This suggests that she was of significant social standing in the local community.

Margaret's entry into the guild was not necessarily at odds with her reclusive vocation. Given their physical enclosure, anchorites required a network of support to live and worship. Although reconciling withdrawal from society while remaining part of it could be complex, anchorites at parish churches were firmly embedded within parish communities.[290] Physical

[287] Johan Bergström-Allen, 'The Whitefriars' Return to Carmel', in Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (eds.), *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 80; *Register of the Guild*, p. 29.
[288] Jones, 'A Mystic by any other Name'.
[289] *Register of the Guild*, p. 29.
[290] Clare M. Dowding, "Item receyvyd of ye Anker': The Relationships between a Parish and its Anchorites as Seen through the Churchwardens' Accounts', in Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (eds.), *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 117-30; Mari Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices* (Cardiff, 2012), pp. 41-58.

solitude did not negate visitors and wider participation in social networks. Late medieval anchoritic literature depicts a paradoxical reclusive sociability, in which 'the cell, textually speaking, is constructed as the focal point for a community that is to be made welcome there, yet it houses an occupant whose primary aim is to leave the world utterly behind'.[291] Hilton instructed the recipient of *The Scale of Perfection* to welcome visitors as an opportunity for charity, writing that 'if he [a visitor] has come to tell you of his troubles and to receive words of comfort from you, hear him gladly and let him say what he wants in order to ease his heart'.[292] Indeed, among common warnings in late medieval anchoritic guides was the danger of visitors drawing the anchorite into gossip.[293] From her appearance in the wills of several citizens of York, we can surmise that Margaret was well-connected and generously supported by her social circle.[294] Rather than being at odds with her calling, her guild connections were likely a key source of practical and spiritual support and service.

Founded in 1408 by 'chaplains and other worthy parsons, both secular and regular,' the Corpus Christi Guild was a gathering of ecclesiastical officials, regional nobility, and civic elites both male and female.[295] The guild was originally a clerical organisation with an exclusively clerical leadership, although lay-members were strongly represented from the outset. The foundation was largely a collaboration between secular clergy and the clerks and other Minster clergy of the 'Arundel Circle' who had remained in York after Arundel's transfer to Canterbury.[296] The feast of Corpus Christi grew in popularity across England in the fourteenth century, and while there had been a Corpus Christi procession in York since at least 1366, the establishment of an

[291] Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*, p. 49.
[292] Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. and trans. John P.H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward (New York, 1991), p. 153.
[293] Mari Hughes-Edwards, "How good it is to be alone'? Solitude, Sociability, and Medieval English Anchoritism', *Mystics Quarterly*, 35 (2009), p. 37.
[294] Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 244-5.
[295] *Register of the Guild*, p. v.
[296] Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 192.

associated fraternity occurred considerably later than in other areas. Its foundation can be attributed to the convergence of religious interests and regional political issues. Established the same year that Arundel issued the *Constitutions* to halt and remedy the spread of heretical material, the guild reflected the concerns of the 'Arundel Circle' for the correction and prevention of heresies. The register of guild members was prefaced by a discourse on the doctrine of Christ's true presence in the Eucharist, in opposition to its disputation by Wyclif.[297] It was also well-connected with local Carmelites, who propagated the cult of Corpus Christi in opposition to Lollard detraction of Eucharistic belief. Ten Carmelites were admitted to the guild between 1430 and 1469, representing shared theological, devotional, and literary interests. The concerns of its founding members were reflected in continued interest in religious education and the promotion of orthodoxy through a thriving literary network of members.

The guild was formed of political as well as devotional relationships. Momentum for its foundation gathered pace following the 'martyrdom' of Archbishop Richard Scrope for his role in the 1405 Northumberland rebellion against Henry IV.[298] Many of the founding members and later patrons had ties to this rebellion and were discontents of the new regime.[299] Many were also staunch supporters of Scrope and sought the commemoration, even sanctification, of his death.[300] Thus, the guild was boosted by association with Scrope, and in turn promoted his cult. As Susan Broomhall points out, 'we are here at the heart of a community, that though politically marginalised by the events of 1405, found solace and strength in their shared devotional interests.'[301]

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[297] *Register of the Guild*, p. v.
[298] Dana Piroyansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Latin Medieval England* (London, 2008), pp. 49-73; On Scrope and his cult, see the essays in P.J.P. Goldberg (ed.), *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donnington, 2007).
[299] *Register of the Guild*, pp. 239-48; Piroyansky, *Martyrs in the Making*, pp. 67-73.
[300] Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*; Goldberg, *Richard Scrope.*
[301] Susan Broomhall, *Authority, Gender and Emotions in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (London, 2015), p. 75.

This foundational duality of the guild as a political and devotional body deepened over the course of its history. The register bears witness to intermarriage of merchants and city officials with members of the local townships, and the gradual intermarriage of local gentry, even nobility, with this civic elite. Notable contemporaries of Margaret Heslington included Edmund de la Pole and members of the Fairfax family who intermarried with the powerful Neville and Percy families. This pedigree expanded to include major nobility and even royalty, with the 1477 induction of Richard III, then Duke of Gloucester, and his wife Anne.[302] By the late fifteenth century the degree of noble membership was such that the guild was significantly impacted by the Wars of the Roses. The usual patterns of the northern nobility were disturbed and the bonds of fraternity on which bequests were made were distorted.[303] Indeed, the decline of the guild was synonymous with the gradual decline of its northern nobility.

Hughes describes the guild as a religious fraternity that 'attracted men and women of intellectual and social distinction', almost all of whom owned books.[304] The largely literate membership made the guild a hub of intellectual culture in northern England. This was reflected in its role as a book-owning and producing community. The noble membership regularly commissioned religious works, marrying the guild's foundational ideals of political and devotional unity. A notable example of this is the Bolton Book of Hours, made in York in around 1415 at the commission of the mayor, Nicholas Blackburn. The Blackburns joined the guild in 1414 and intermarried with its gentry and mercantile elite. The Hours reflect the social status of the donor family and their local religious culture. The rich illuminations venerate

[302] *Register of the Guild*, p. 101.
[303] David Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Guilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389-1547* (London, 2000), p. 172; On guild members of noble houses and their affinities during the Wars of the Roses, see A.J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England during the Wars of the Roses: Lay Society, War, and Politics 1450-1500* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 189-90.
[304] Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 122.

northern and national saints, Archbishop Scrope, and the Holy Trinity, presenting a catalogue of those venerated in the holy foundations of York's west bank, where the guild and its members were most active.[305] They also included fashionable new cults, such as that of St Bridget. Particular attention to the feast of St George, whose cult was vigorously promoted by Henry V, indicates broader national interests. The Hours demonstrate how the northern nobility participated in the development of religious cultures, promoting regional cults and writing while incorporating the religious culture of royal court. As loyal supporters of Henry IV, the Blackburns were initially outsiders in the political atmosphere of York. Perhaps the blending of the cult of Scrope with northern saints and royal interests was an attempt to secure their social position. In this elite civic culture, book-owning, producing, and exchange were key political and social tools.

The guild was a notable setting for women's participation in literary culture. As demonstrated by Anne Dutton in her study of medieval women and religious books, the exact nature of book ownership and women's literacy in medieval England is hard to ascertain.[306] However, it is clear that at least some women did own and read devotional texts, with a distinct rise in numbers in the fifteenth century.[307] Susan Bell identifies a broader trend in which elite women began engaging in religious life through devotional texts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. She interprets this as a way of evading traditional exclusion from institutional piety: 'because women's public participation in spiritual life was not welcomed by the hierarchical male establishment, a close involvement with religious devotional literature, inoffensive because of

[305] On the Bolton Hours, see R.A.J. Fletcher, *The Bolton Hours, York Minster Library, MS Add. 2: Piety Patronage and Civic Pride* (Manchester, 2001); Pamela King, 'Corpus Christi Plays and the 'Bolton Hours' 1: Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century York', *Medieval English Theatre*, 18 (1998), pp. 46-62.
[306] Anne Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England' (PhD Thesis, University of York, 1995).
[307] Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature', p. 145.

its privacy, took on a greater importance for women.'[308] Women with considerable resources at their disposal and seeking spiritual advancement therefore commissioned, purchased and shared books.

Such women were well-represented in the guild, which had a significant female membership from the outset. Many were wives, daughters and widows of the mercantile elite, whose economic monopoly was key for political power and civic unity. This meant that any women with economic capital as owners, heirs, or co-heirs in the locale were included, often listed under their own names separately to their male relations. For example, the Blackburn women were often guild members. Noted for their piety, they were prominent book-owners and patrons, particularly of religious literature. They facilitated the transmission of texts and the continued development of literacy among local families.[309] As Dutton notes of women readers more generally, their book-ownership and reading were part of a more communal approach, forming 'networks that facilitated the lending and sharing of books'.[310] The wills of guild members evidence this kind of network among both male and female guild members. William Revetour bequeathed an English translation of *De oracione dominica et stimulus conscientiae* to Alice Bolton, daughter of his patron Nicholas Blackburn, and an illustrated Primer to Alice's daughter Isabelle.[311]

Although neither Margaret Heslington's copy of *The Fire* nor any textual witnesses to its transmission survive, it is possible to speculate that the translation that she had commissioned

[308] Susan Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', *Signs*, 7/4 (1982), p. 752.
[309] Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg, 'How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours', in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carole Meale and Lesley Johnson (eds.), *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 217-36.
[310] Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature', p. 259.
[311] Alexandra Johnston, 'William Revetour, Chaplain and Clerk of York, Testator', *Leeds Studies in English*, 29 (1998), p. 169.

from Misyn for personal devotion also had a wider reception through Margaret's social connections in this dynamic literary community. Misyn's conceptualisation of his task beyond its immediate patroness 'for edification of many souls' suggests that he did not consider it a 'private' text bound by the confines of the anchorage.[312] Despite occupying liminal physical space, anchoresses were often active participants in textual communities, writing, commissioning, and sharing devotional texts.[313] Reading was an important part of literate anchoritic practice. The *Speculum inclusorum*, an early fifteenth-century guide, instructed that

> '(if you are literate) you should gladly read holy literature, saints' lives, the passions of martyrs, devout meditations…but if someone does not understand Latin, he should practise devout reading in English or in French, or in his vernacular language, so that he may be similarly edified. And he should read aloud, for when one reads the living voice usually has the greatest effect on the heart.'[314]

The importance of this practice for female anchorites can be seen in the wide circulation of female-specific guides, from the *Ancrene Riwle* (c.1230) to Rolle's *Form of Living* (c.1348) and Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (c.1384-6). The later guides encouraged readers to share their learning with others, disseminating anchoritic ideology and contemplative theology. Anne Clark Bartlett identifies a focus on 'the community's need for the reader's spiritual instruction, rather than on [the recluse's] need for protection'.[315] Misyn's translation of Rolle, therefore, offered material for both private devotional practice and communal spiritual guidance within the liminal physical and social space of Margaret's anchoritic life. Given that she was already a recluse at the time of her entry into the guild, it seems likely that Magaret's 'community'

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[312] *Fire*, p. 1.
[313] Catherine Innes-Parker, 'Anchoritic Textual Communities and the Wooing Group Prayers', in Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (eds.), *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 177-181.
[314] *Speculum Inclusorum*, in *Speculum Inclusorum / A Mirror for Recluses: A late-medieval guide for anchorites and its Middle English translation*, ed. and trans. E.A. Jones (Liverpool, 2013), p. 65.
[315] Anne Clark Bartlett, 'A reasonable affection: gender and spiritual friendship in Middle English devotional literature', in Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas Bestul, Janet Goebel and William F. Pollard (eds.), *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor V.M. Lagorio* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 142.

included fellow guild members who, given the religious and literary culture of the guild, shared a common interest in such devotional literature.

Misyn's work for a guild member introduced his work to a book-sharing community of considerable regional power with an extended social network among ecclesiastical and secular elites. It is plausible that Margaret's commission arose from contact with his earlier work through that same literary network. His translation of the *Emendio* was made in 1434, and within a year the translation of the *Incendium* had been commissioned. The request of a second translation of a Rollean text specifically from Misyn suggests that he was known to Margaret or those advising her through the literary and religious networks in which she was embedded. Although it cannot be known for sure, his first translation may have come to the attention of Margaret through connections between the guild and the Carmelite community at York.

Entry to the guild or the patronage of a guild member presented opportunities for social, political, and professional advancement. Those who garnered the favour of guild members reaped the rewards of easy access to patronage both for literary endeavours and ecclesiastical careers, often culminating in elevated social positions. An instructive example for our purposes is Misyn's contemporary, Revetour, whose Creed Play was either composed for our commissioned by guild members, and it was bequeathed to the guild in his will to be performed every twelve years.[316] Revetour joined the Corpus Christi Guild in 1423-24.[317] In 1428, he was appointed to the chantry chapel of Richard Toller at the chapel of St-William-on-Ousebridge, by his patron and fellow guild member, Nicholas Blackburn. This position significantly

[316] Douglas Cowling, 'The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York', *Records of Early English Drama*, 1/2 (1976), p. 8; Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (London, 2007), p. 93.
[317] *Register of the Guild*, p. 23.

increased Revetour's annual income.[318] He was later named executor and beneficiary of a number of Blackburn and Bolton wills.[319] While serving as Keeper of the Guild in 1440-41, many of Revetour's social circle became members, and are also named in Blackburn family wills. Thus, we see a powerful combination of patronage, literary culture and ecclesiastical patronage both shaping and reflecting the currents of social mobility.

The commission of the *Incendium* came at a juncture where Misyn's career took a new direction, bridging the gap into secular and ecclesiastical politics beyond his order. Within a few years of completing his translation, he was appointed chaplain to Northumberland. As previously discussed, the guild had been founded in the wake of the rebellion of Northumberland's father against the crown in 1403, reflective of a regional political identity defined by loyalty to the interests of the northern powerhouses. Northumberland had familial and social contacts in the guild. Both his son, Sir William Percy, and his daughter Elizabeth and her husband, Henry, 6th Lord Scrope of Bolton, were members. His brother-in-law, William Gascoigne, was also a member, as was his eldest nephew and two other daughters-in-law. Misyn's connections in York, particularly among the guild, may have built upon the aforementioned links between the Percys and the Lincoln Carmelites in his selection for the role. The office of Bishop of Dromore also had links to the guild. Among Margaret's contemporaries was Nicholas Wartre, bishop of Dromore from 1419-27, and then rector of St Mary's in Castlegate until his death in 1453.[320] Such connections may have augmented Misyn's recommendation for the position in due course. Indeed, given the context of the Pecock heresy scandal, knowledge of his orthodox translation of vernacular devotional literature among

[318] *York Memorandum Book, A/Y, Pt. II*, ed. Maud Sellers (Durham, 1915), pp. 134-5.
[319] Johnston, 'William Revetour', p. 154.
[320] *Register of the Guild*, p. 28.

prominent ecclesiastical guild members may have been helpful. Similarly, an established social and spiritual reputation in York would have bolstered his choice as suffragan bishop there.

Although it is impossible to say whether Misyn actively courted advancement through his translation, changes to his self-presentation in the respective colophons of *The Mending* and *The Fire* could be taken as indicative of change in how he intended to be perceived in association with this second translation. Misyn's self-identification in *The Mending* appears at the end of the text, and states simply that 'Thus ends the xii chapters of Richard Hampole, translated into English by brother Richard Misyn to [the] information of Christian souls.'[321] The simple identification as 'ffrere Richard Misyn' is in keeping with traditional Carmelite practices of identification. The lack of specific dedication or audience suggests that this text was perhaps undertaken as a devotional exercise and intended primarily for Carmelite pastoral use. Just over a year later Misyn ended each book of *The Fire* with Latin colophons constructing a very different image of their author. The first colophon tells us of

'The first book of *The Fire of Love* by Richard Rolle of Hampole, hermit, translated from Latin into English by Brother Richard Misyn, hermit and of the Carmelite Order and Bachelor of Sacred Theology'.[322]

The second colophon repeats his academic title as Bachelor of Theology, and provides information on his position within the Carmelite Order:

'The book of *The Fire of Love*, by Richard Hampole the hermit, translated into English at the request of Lady Margaret Heslington, the recluse, by Brother Richard Misyn, Bachelor of Sacred Theology, then Prior of Lincoln,

[321] 'Thus endys þe xij chapetyrs of Richarde Hampole, in-to englys translate be ffrere Richard Misyn, to informacion of Cristyn sauls', *Fire*, p. 131.
[322] 'Explicit liber primus Incendij Amoris Ricardi Hampole heremite, translatus a latino in Anglicum per fratrem Ricardum Misyn heremitam & ordinis carmelitarum Ac sacre theologie bachalareum.', *Fire*, p. 68.

of the Carmelite Order…on the feast of the translation of Saint Martin the Bishop, which is the fourth of the nones of July, written and corrected by the aforementioned Brother Richard Misyn.'[323]

The inclusion of his academic credentials in the colophons of *The Fire* is a shift in how Misyn presented his authority as translator in this work compared to its predecessor. His identification as prior in this second colophon could mean that he entered that office while his translation work was ongoing. However, it signals a shift in his spiritual and institutional life from hermit to prelate, and perhaps an associated change in how he and others understood his spiritual authority. While these differences have been noted before by Karáth and Bergström-Allen, neither proffers a reason for the change to Misyn's self-presentation.[324]

Considering Misyn's colophons in the context of traditional Carmelite authorial practices and the emergence of practices of 'professional' translation in this period, it seems that Misyn anticipated his authorial identification with *The Fire* to be of some personal significance. The crystallisation of translation as a professional literary practice in fifteenth-century England responded to both intellectual and commercial demands, shaped by increased patronage and a greater demand for vernacular literature to serve devotional practices among the laity. Although Middle English translators of religious texts did not usually take the status of *auctores*, they nevertheless exercised considerable power over their material, able to manipulate content through choices as both compilers and commentators (whether directly or indirectly), actively mediating meaning.[325] The idea of translation as a 'craft' and translators as 'professionals'

[323] 'Explicit liber de Incendio Amoris, Ricardi Hampole heremite, translatus in Anglicum instancijs domine Margarete Heslyngton, recluse, per fratrem Ricardum Misyn, sacre theologie bachalaureum, tunc Priorem Lyncolniensem, ordinis carmelitarum…in festo translacionis sancti Martini Episcopi, quod est iiij nonas Iulij, per dictum fratrem Ricardum Misyn scriptum & correctum.', Fire, p. 104.
[324] Karáth, *Fifteenth-Century Translations*, pp. 78-80; Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 83.
[325] On approaches to Middle English religious translation, see Ian Johnson, 'Middle English Religious Translation', in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Translation* (Amsterdam, 2020), pp. 37-50; On the practice and potentials of compilation, see M.B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and

emerges in translators' prefaces and prologues where they explained their methods, acknowledged their patrons, and justified their choices.[326] These features can be viewed as a a 'bibliographic ego', a concept defined by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton as an 'authorial intrusion which serves to establish, protect, and/or market – not simply glorify – the author.'[327] The bibliographic ego offers insight into how an individual wished themselves to be perceived by their audiences, and by extension into their professional aspirations. Misyn's new self-styling fits with Kerby-Fulton's understanding of the role of a colophon to 'establish, protect, and/or market' the translator, highlighting his credentials as a scholar and institutional authority figure.[328]

Misyn's addition of a bibliographic ego is unusual in the context of his translation as an aspect of Carmelite pastoral vision. The majority of Carmelite writers and translators generally eschewed such 'career-minded' additions, avoiding self-promotion with a preference for anonymity.[329] Indeed, as Elizabeth Dearnley points out, 'for the most part, prologues and prologue-type material reveal little about specific translation processes or individual translators' in general, usually only featuring an individual's name and identification as Carmelite.[330] Misyn's colophons are distinctly at odds with this, and raise the question of what the purpose of this kind of self-identification may have been. They indicate a change in Misyn's approach to translation for *The Fire*, and in his conception of himself as its translator. While more detailed colophons were necessary to dedicate the work to a patron, the additional development of Misyn's bibliographical ego asserts personal authority, perhaps even some

Compilatio on the Development of the Book', in M.B. Parkes (ed.), *Scribes, Scripts and Readers. Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London, 2010), pp. 35-70.
[326] Elizabeth Dearnley, *Translators and their Prologues in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016).
[327] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Langland and the Bibliographic Ego', in Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Written Work: Langland, Labour, and Authorship* (Philadelphia, 1997), p. 69.
[328] Kerby-Fulton, 'Bibliographic Ego', p. 69.
[329] Michael Hofer, 'Carmelite Anonymity', *Carmel in the World*, 52/3 (2013), pp. 167-87.
[330] Dearnley, *Translators and their Prologues*, p. 101.

self-promotion. Tracing Misyn's career trajectory, a secure reputation as a competent translator of devotional texts not only within his own literary-minded order, but also among elite secular and ecclesiastical circles, would certainly have augmented his standing, whether purposeful or not.

The colophons and content of the work may also indicate a concern for the issue of balancing official duties and worldly status with contemplative devotion. Misyn's self-identification as hermit and then prior suggests that he was a proponent of the 'mixed life', balancing the tensions of his eremitical aspiration and pastoral position. This aspect of the bibliographic ego combined eremitic ideal and academic and ecclesiastical standing, making him an exemplar of mixed life spirituality. Karáth argues that a core intention in Misyn's translation was 'reinstating Rolle as an eremitic ideal for his own endeavours.'[331] He posits that the *Incendium* was translated at a time when Misyn's lifestyle was closer to Rolle's contemplative ideal and focused on that spiritual journey.[332] However, this only considers the content of the first colophon, not his position as prior identified in the second. This development is especially pertinent in light of his departure from the 'eremitical' Carmelite community at Lincoln to enter the public-facing service of chaplaincy in the Northumberland household a few years after completing his translation. *The Fire*, therefore, appears to have been located at a particular point in Misyn's personal journey that took him from the contemplative lifestyle of a hermit to 'worldly' engagement and eventually the prestigious pastoral role of bishop and archiepiscopal suffragan.

[331] Karáth, *Fifteenth-Century Translations*, p. 78.
[332] Ibid., p. 82.

The spiritual path of the 'mixed life' had grown in popularity during the thirteenth century. Previously a monastic premise, the increasing literacy of gentry and nobility saw a greater participation in contemplative aspects of devotional meditation such as reading scripture and didactic literature. The late medieval rise of devotional culture embraced the role of voluntarism in religiosity.[333] Devotional practice often involved texts borrowed or borrowing from monastic liturgical practice which enabled the ritual practice of devotion outside of liturgical contexts – creating an individual practice that was separate from but not at odds with institutional practice. As Zieman summarises, devotion 'affirms the individual's Christian identity – whether that individual is cleric, religious, or lay – and promises the possibility of approaching the divine outside of clerical mediation.'[334] While translating the bible into English was officially prohibited in 1409, provisions for laypeople to engage with scripture continued apace. Most significant was Nicholas Love's 1410 *Myrror of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Crist,* a Middle English translation of the *Meditationes vitae Christi.* Love was prior of the Charterhouse of Mountgrace, and his translation was both approved by his order and licenced by Archbishop Arundel. The *Myrror* recommended Walter Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life* (c.1390) for devotional reading. This extended church sanction for the laity not just to practice contemplative devotion, but to educate themselves by reading works to support it.[335]

Hilton's *Epistle* outlined how spiritual and worldly concerns, part of the lives of both lay and religious men, could be reconciled in the 'mixed life' by a 'good man'. Hilton argued that the complicated duality of the role of prior as both wealthy lord with secular obligations and

[333] Valerie Allen, 'Belief and Knowledge in Love's *Mirror*', in Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (eds.), *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe* (Leiden, 2014), p. 558; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011), p. 18.
[334] Katherine Zieman, "Good Sauore and Deuocyon': Attention in Devotional Ritual', *Viator*, 54/2 (2023), p. 135.
[335] Hilary Carey, 'Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England', *Journal of Religious History*, 14/4 (1987), p. 373.

religious leader with spiritual ones was much the same as the dual responsibilities of secular men.[336] Rolle's *Incendium* was frequently circulated with Hilton's *Epistle*. It taught the pursuit of a 'good' life and contemplative practice as the path to an intimate personal relationship with God. This pursuit was undefined and unlimited by social or institutional status, thus presenting a 'mixed life' form of devotion.

The importance of this aspect of the *Incendium* to Misyn is emphasised by his use of the feast of the translation of St Martin of Tours to mark the completion of *The Fire* ('in festo translacionis sancti Martini Episcopi').[337] The inclusion of a notable end date for *The Fire* and not *The Mending* suggests that this was a meaningful choice intended to communicate something about the work and its translator. Karáth and Bergström-Allen interpret St Martin as indicative of Misyn's struggle with the tensions between his eremitic aspirations and his position as prelate.[338] Considering his absence from record from the late-1420s and early-1430s, and his identification as 'hermit' in the first colophon of *The Fire*, Misyn may have lived in eremitic solitude during this time. Given his reappearance in historical record as a prelate, he perhaps felt personal resonance with St Martin's trajectory. A fifth-century bishop and hermit, St Martin was called from his life of contemplation to active service in the church. He achieved a spiritually fruitful balance between his life among the eremitic monks of Noirmoutier and his role in office as bishop of Tours. In the context of *The Fire* as a prompt for 'mixed life' spiritual pursuits, and Misyn's own entry into the challenges of 'mixed life' at this time, the link between *The Fire* and St Martin was a notable choice, signalling how Misyn intended the text and its translator to be understood.

[336] Catherine Sanok, 'John of Bridlington, mitred prior and model of the mixed life', in Patricia Cullum and Katherine Lewis (eds.), *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages* (London, 2013), pp. 152-3.
[337] *Fire*, p. 104.
[338] Karáth, *Fifteenth-Century Translations*, pp. 80-1; Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 501-2.

Misyn's choice of St Martin is particularly significant in comparison to the saints chosen by Rolle as sponsors of the *Incendium*, St Magloire and St Cuthbert. Rolle wrote that

'A hermit's life is a great one if it is greatly lived! Take for instance, the blessed Maglorius, a miraculous man if ever there was one, and who had rejoiced in angelic visits from childhood. As his predecessor, the blessed Sampson, had foretold, he was made an archbishop, and he ruled the Church of God both long and laudably. But an angel visited him with heavenly counsel, with the result that he gave up his archbishopric, and chose to live as a hermit. And at the end of his life his passing was revealed to him. Similarly the blessed Cuthbert exchanged the life of a bishop for that of an anchorite.'[339]

Both figures left episcopal office to seek a solely contemplative eremitical life. Misyn's choice of St Martin instead represents the reconciliation of contemplative life with the duties of prelacy. The reframing of Rolle's insistence on the exclusive perfection of contemplation reflects a change in Misyn's anticipation of how the work might be received, or at least of his specific intention for its interpretation.

Misyn's foregrounding of aspects of mixed life point beyond its immediate patron to a wider audience of particular social and devotional composition. Given her status as a recluse, Margaret Heslington's interest in Rolle was most likely located in his eremitism and contemplative guidance. The presentation of 'mixed' contemplative life compatible with the demands of earthly responsibilities to the well-being of others was instead fitting for an audience of nobility, civic elites, clergy and church officials, whose iteration of contemplative spirituality required space for the demands of their social and institutional positions – a profile

[339] 'Magna est igitur uita heremitica si magnifice agatur. Nam et beatus Maglorius qui fuit miraculis plenus et a puericia uisitacione angelica gauisus, cum iuxta propheciam predecessoris eius beati Sampsonis, fuisset factus archiepiscopus, et ecclesiam dei diu et laudabiliter rexisset, uisitante eum angelo monitus, dimisso archiepiscopatu, uitam elegit heremiticam, et in fine uite significatur est ei transitus eius. Similiter beatus Cuthbertus ab episcopate ad anachoriticam uitam transiuit.', *Incendium*, p. 13.

well-represented by the social circles of the guild membership. If Misyn's bibliographic ego can be taken as an indication of his understanding of the audience and reception of his translation, the elite social circles of York in which Margaret was embedded are certainly plausible.

Indeed, this wider reception for whom the mixed life held a particular significance may well have extended to Misyn's future patron, Northumberland. The Earl was a formidable power, having recovered the status of his family and restored its position after the unsuccessful rebellion of his father. With considerable landholdings and responsibility for defending the border against Scottish invasion, he also served as a councillor during the minority of Henry VI and as Constable of England in 1450. His career also involved ecclesiastical matters. He served as envoy to the Church Council of Pavia-Siena in 1423/4 where new decrees were issued against followers of Hus and Wyclif, and calls were made for an escalation of action against heresies. This council was significant in shaping the reform-minded direction of the English ecclesiastical institution in the early fifteenth century.[340] Northumberland was also closely connected with Henry Beaufort (c.1377-1447), Lord Chancellor and Bishop of Winchester.[341] Created cardinal in 1426, Beaufort was appointed Papal Legate for the 'fourth crusade' against Hussites in Bohemia, and presided at the trial of Joan of Arc in 1431. Northumberland was, therefore, part of a circle of powerful elites involved in the defence of orthodoxy and calling for greater vigilance against heresy. Mertes argues that household chapels were significant as an expression of 'the personalisation of Christianity, especially among the aristocracy'.[342] Along with his institutional, and intellectual credentials, Misyn's emphasis on the mixed life

[340] Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church', p. 28.
[341] G.L. Harriss, 'Beaufort, Henry [called the Cardinal of England] (1375?-1447)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2008), https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1859 (28 March 2025).
[342] R.G.K.A. Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250-1600* (Oxford, 1988), p. 139.

may have held considerable appeal for the personalised spirituality of the lord of one of the leading noble families in England. Given his iteration of the mixed life in his own office at Lincoln and its foregrounding in his translation, this aspect of his professional persona would make him well-equipped for the role.

When appraising Misyn's choices as editor and translator of the *Incendium*, we must therefore consider them in the context of reception by a wider audience beyond the named patron at a particular point in the translator's career. Changes to the text in translation as it is adapted for new readership shed light on factors shaping that process, reflecting understandings of audience, purpose and content. Unlike the *Incendium*, *The Fire* was a direct response to the tastes and circumstantial requirements of its readers, and through this we can begin to understand what 'mattered' to this audience, to Misyn as translator, and to the wider establishment in which he moved.

Rolle – a controversial author?

Given that Misyn seems to have had a clear reputation for the defence and promotion of orthodoxy, his treatment of the text highlights what, if anything, needed to be handled carefully in Rolle's work. Indeed, its translation by Misyn itself challenges the previously discussed historical narrative of Rolle as a controversial outsider to the institution or his works as representing anything particularly disconcerting.

Vernacular material in this period was marked by tensions between institutions of normativity and religious dissenters, particularly Wycliffites and Lollards whose criticism of the

institutional church was increasingly vocal from the 1370s.[343] There was growing concern over the degree of spiritual and religious agency that vernacular religious writing and teaching might afford the laity. The danger that laity unequipped to present correct definitions or discern complex heretical issues might engage in theological teaching and discussion was particularly troubling.[344] This challenge was addressed in the 1409 Arundel *Constitutions*, drawn up by Thomas Arundel as Archbishop of Canterbury (r.1399-1414), prohibiting translation of scripture or owning any such translation without diocesan permission.[345] Crucially, the *Constitutions* failed to make any distinction between 'heterodox' and 'orthodox' vernacular theological texts. Thus, in theory, the enthusiastically continued transmission and ownership of works such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection,* the *Pore Caitif,* and Rolle's English scriptural works was prohibited. While the *Constitutions* indicate an institutional atmosphere of disquiet over vernacular religious literature, the gap between principles and practice in this area was considerable. The *Constitutions* represented a minority conservatism every bit as radical as the 'heterodoxy' they sought to quash.[346] Alongside literature which criticised institutional hierarchy, defended translation of scripture, and challenged sacramental doctrine, the translation and compilation of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century contemplative and devotional

[343] The pejorative term 'lollard' was used indiscriminately to indicate anything that could be broadly termed 'heresy'. On the contemporary medieval and historiographical issues of establishing who was a heretic and what pertained to a heresy, see J. Patrick Hornbeck II, *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2010); Hudson, "Who is My Neighbour?'; Mishtooni Bose, 'Religious Authority and Dissent', in Peter Brown (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 40-55.

[344] Kevin Alban, *Teaching and Impact of the 'Doctrinale' of Thomas Netter of Walden (c.1374-1430)* (Turnhout, 2010), p. 112; Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 113.

[345] Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', p. 828.

[346] On interpretation and implementation of the *Constitutions*, see Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', p. 835; Vincent Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England* (Turnhout, 2011); Sarah James, 'Debating Heresy: Fifteenth Century Vernacular Theology and Arundel's 'Constitutions'' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004); On vernacular religious writing in late medieval England, see Vincent Gillespie, 'Religious Writing', in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in England, Volume 1: 700-1500* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 243-83; James Simpson, 'Saving Satire After Arundel's *Constitution:* John Audelay's 'Marcol and Samson'', in Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchison (eds.), *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson* (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 387-404; Nicole Rice (ed.), *Middle English Religious Writing in Practice: Texts, Readers and Transformations* (Turnhout, 2013).

literature, sermon collections, and hagiographies continued apace. Indeed, manuscripts of the English Wycliffite Bible were owned by many orthodox aristocrats and affluent civic elites, surviving in more copies than any other Middle English text.[347] The continued popularity of such works, and their promotion by influential religious bodies like the Carmelites, suggests that in practice such prohibitions were relatively theoretical.

Some of the Rollean corpus was popular in heterodox circles. Like the Carmelites and Carthusians, Wycliffites took an interest in Rolle's work as a vehicle for their teachings, particularly its emphasis on eremitic contemplation.[348] Wyclif himself certainly read Rolle, even adapting parts of *The Form of Living* in his own writing.[349] His work on divine love, *De amore*, set out to answer five questions on its nature – questions closely resembling those set out by Rolle in *The Form.*[350] Rolle's work is often found bound with condemned Wycliffite, pro-Wycliffite or Lollard material in manuscript compilations, usually sharing the common theme of promotion of an eremitical contemplative life.[351] A notable example of this is the use of Wycliffite *Glossed Gospels* alongside various Rollean texts by the maker of the *Pore Caitif*, an anonymous late fourteenth-century manual of devotion and religious instruction intended for lay use.[352] This appears to be the product of broad patterns of readership and textual circulation which did not entirely distinguish between orthodox and heterodox material, even after the *Constitutions*.

[347] Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), p. 24.
[348] On Wycliffite use of Rolle, see Zieman, 'Rolle's *English Psalter*'.
[349] Fiona Somerset, 'Wycliffite Spirituality', in Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchinson (eds.), *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson* (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 278-86.
[350] John Wyclif, *De amore*, in *Opera minora*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1913), pp. 19-27.
[351] Van Dussen, *From England to Bohemia*, p. 54.
[352] M. Teresa Brady, 'Lollard Sources of 'The Pore Caitif'', *Traditio*, 44 (1988), pp. 389-418.

Copies of Rolle's works were produced by heretical groups, with the *English Psalter* particularly highly sought after in Lollard circles. This heretical association was significant enough to cause suspicion of copies of *The Psalter* in circulation, evidenced by some orthodox texts including defences of their edition. For example, one such prologue noted that

> Conveyed has this Psalter been, of evil men of Lollardy:
> And afterward it has been seen, grafted in with heresy
> […]
> To bring them in, to cause them grief, against their faith in great folly
> And slandered foully this holy man. [353]

The seriousness of this issue for those involved in the production of these texts is perhaps best captured by a mid-fifteenth century copy of the *Psalter* in which the writer takes pains to stress that his edition contains no Lollard interventions. The prologue directs the suspicious reader to Rolle's autograph copy which can be found chained at Hampole should they wish to check:

> 'His [Richard Hampole's] works were full profitable; to poor and rich and all alike,
> That they are well and true and nothing of them is fable; at Hampole you may this know'[354]

Pre-emptively addressing rumours of amalgams of orthodox and heterodox edits suggests that such mingling was not uncommon and was an acknowledged issue. Indeed, surviving examples of this include Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 953, a lavish copy owned and likely

[353] 'Copyed has þis Sauter ben, of yuel men of Lollardry:/ And afterward hit has bene sene, ympyd in wiþ eresy […..] To bring hem in, so hem to greue, ageyn þe feyth in grete fole,/ And slaundird foule þis holy man.' Richard Rolle, *The Psalter or Psalms of David and Certain Canticles, with a Translation and Exposition in English by Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. H.R. Bramley (Oxford, 1884), p. 2.
[354] 'His [Rychard Hampole's] werkis were ful profetabul; to pore and rych and all on rowe,/ That thei bene soth and nothing fabul; at Hampole 3e may hit knowe.', Oxford, Bodleian, MS Laud Misc. 286. For the text of the prologue, see *The Psalter*, pp. 1-2.

commissioned by Gloucestershire nobleman Thomas Berkeley which included Lollard versions of five of the canticles.[355]

However, the implications of the popularity of Rollean work with heterodox readers have been overstated in relation to his textual corpus and his authorial reputation. Indeed, in correction of this, Gillespie suggests that Rolle's works were a 'safe' choice for those wishing to engage in contemplative devotion while avoiding the implications of the Wycliffite controversies of the 1380s.[356] His writings promoted accepted forms of affective piety which drew on the traditions of Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux, and his commentaries were widely read as authoritative and spiritually beneficial interpretations of scripture.[357] Censorial interest in the *Psalter* was more concerned with its copying and ownership, rather than its authorship – Rolle himself is not implicated. Indeed, heresy investigations generally stemmed from idiosyncrasies in preaching, but not from writings unless they were unusually polemical.[358] A lack of evidence for any investigational interest in Rolle's work suggests that it was not considered particularly inflammatory, and indeed, the aspects of contemplative instruction and critique of ecclesiastical hierarchy that appealed to heterodox readers were probably the same aspects that appealed to his orthodox audience as well. As Fiona Somerset summarises, early fifteenth-century religious literary culture was: 'a textual milieu where it was typical for manuscripts to be anonymous and undated, where biblical translation, paraphrase and interpretation proliferated in a wide variety of forms, where a dizzying array of vernacular works of religious instruction was

[355] Hudson, "Who is My Neighbour?'.
[356] Vincent Gillespie, 'The Nearly Man: 'Saint' Richard Rolle and His Textual Cult', in Susan Powell (ed.), *Saints and Cults in Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2015 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donnington, 2017), pp. 161-62.
[357] On the reception of his commentaries, see Kraebel, *Biblical Commentary*, pp. 91-132.
[358] Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 11-76; Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 305-9.

available and where social satire involving criticisms of clerical abuses was widespread and by no means invariably associated with heresy'.[359]

Bergström-Allen suggests that the heresy trials of Wyclif and Hus, and censorship under the *Constitutions* 'coloured the religious landscape in which Richard Misyn was formed as a young friar, tinting his perspective as the producer of vernacular theological texts.'[360] Although true, it takes the *Constitutions* at face value and does not allow for the fact that Misyn continued to live, work, and hold the office of Prior in an atmosphere enthusiastic for vernacular devotional literature. Indeed, Misyn's translations were made nearly three decades later under Arundel's successor, Chichele (d.1443; r.1414-1443). Under Chichele, the catechetic and doctrinal potentials of the vernacular were embraced anew in a reformist atmosphere that was encapsulated in priestly ideals expressed at the Charterhouse of Syon Abbey.[361] Like many charterhouses, Syon was a centre for vernacular translation, following the example of its mother house at Vadstena.[362]

Rolle's work was also popular among Carthusians, another order concerned with devotional teaching and countering the threat of prevalent heresies. The Carthusian Order in England was responsible for producing, owning, or transmitting a considerable proportion of the major

[359] Fiona Somerset, 'Censorship', in Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (eds.), *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 244.
[360] Bergström-Allen, 'Policing and Promoting', p. 423.
[361] On Chichele's reformist approach, see Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church'; On the priestly ideals at Syon, see Vincent Gillespie, '"Hid Divinite": The Spirituality of the English Syon Brethren', in E. A. Jones (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VII: Papers Read at Charney Manor, July 2004* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 189-206.
[362] Susan Powell, 'Syon Abbey as a Centre for Text Production', in Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg and Mia Åkestam (eds.), *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena* (Stockholm, 2010), pp 50-7; C. Annette Grisé, '"Moche profitable unto religious persones, gathered by a brother of Syon": Syon Abbey and English Books', in E.A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion c.1400-1700* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 129-54; On translation at Vadstena, see Lars Wollin, 'The Monastery of Vadstena: Investigating the Great Translation Workshop in Medieval Scandinavia', in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator, Vol. 2* (London, 1991), pp. 65-88.

surviving manuscripts of later medieval mysticism. Their engagement with Rollean material was extensive and arguably essential to the widespread later medieval reception of his writings.[363] The influence of Rollean mystical writing in Carthusian works, and evidence for Carthusians reading and copying his writings, situates them in the midst of textual communities concerned with the balance of communality and individuality in devotional practice.[364] This suggests that by the time Misyn's translation was commissioned, Rolle's writings were popular with religious communities who not only safeguarded orthodoxy, but also sought to inject fresh vigour into religious practice.

Misyn's translations must therefore be contextualised in this environment of enthusiastic vernacular literary production supporting devotional development in a reform-minded atmosphere. There is little reason to suppose that demand for Rolle's texts in heterodox circles was of any significant concern to Misyn or his contemporaries. Nor is there any reason to consider that his translation of Rolle's mystical theology would be received as anything other than participation in a flourishing culture of translation to support pastoral direction and devotional guidance which was entirely sanctioned by ecclesiastical officials.

Moving away from more generalised concerns of heterodox literary cultures and the translation of theology, it is possible to identify some areas of specific criticism in the reception of the *Incendium.* Given that correct interpretation of vernacular texts by lay audiences was a priority

[363] Michael Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), pp. 225-40; Ian Doyle, 'Carthusian Participation in the Movement of Works of Richard Rolle between England and Other Parts of Europe in the 14th and 15th Centuries', in James Hogg (ed.), *Kartäusermystik und -Mystiker: Dritter internationler Kongress über die Kartäusergeschichte und -Spiritualität* (Salzburg, 1981), pp. 109-20.
[364] Tekla Bude, 'Solitary Lives and Social Texts: Carthusian Responses to Richard Rolle's *Amore langueo*', *Speculum*, 99/4 (2024), pp. 1116-31.

in the regulation of orthodoxy, Misyn's translation must be considered in light of contemporary criticism of Rolle's writing.

Contemporary concern about Rolle's methodology is demonstrated by the *Defensorium contra oblectratores*, written by Thomas Basset, a Norwich-based hermit.[365] The *Defensorium* is a defence of the legitimacy of Rolle's work, and a key source of information on opposition to it. The surviving copy is found in Uppsala Universitetsbiblioteket MS C.621, written at the Birgittine house of Vadstena in around 1400. This manuscript contains various works by Rolle as well as a shortened version of the *Office* and the *Defensorium*, introduced as 'the defence against the detractors of the same Richard'.[366] The detractor against whom it is written is identified as 'distinguished by the title of priestly dignity and a professor of the venerable Carthusian order'.[367] This suggests that while Charterhouses were important channels for promotion and circulation of Rolle's work, there was some internal resistance to the legitimacy of his teachings.

Basset's arguments outline the main complaints against Rolle, which he calls 'the wind of vain talk or the storm of malice'.[368] These include suspicion of the truth of his visions, allegation that Rolle had caused more spiritual deception than profit, and that his self-sanctioning encouraged others to exercise unwarranted autonomy in spiritual matters. Basset particularly refutes the accusation that feelings described by Rolle could be physical sensations mistaken for spiritual experiences. He argues that,

[365] Thomas Basset, *Defensorium contra oblectratores*, in Michael Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle', in James Hogg (ed.), *Kartäusermystik und Mystiker: Dritter Internationaler Kongress über die Kartäusergeschichte und Spiritualität* (Salzburg, 1981), pp. 188-205.
[366] 'Incipit defensorium contra oblectratores eiusdem Ricardi', *Defensorium*, p. 188.
[367] 'eo quod sacerdotalis dignitatis insigniti titulo et venerande Cartusie', *Defensorium*, p. 188.
[368] 'vento vane loquacie vel malicie turbine', *Defensorium*, p. 189.

'the ardour of divine love so abundantly inflames the affections in certain wayfarers with the purest minds that it even overflows in an indescribable manner into the actual burning of the physical heart itself. Hence the venerable Richard the Hermit says: 'I call it fervour when the mind is truly set ablaze with eternal love, and the heart is felt to burn with the same love not merely in thought but in reality.'[369]

Basset, like Rolle himself, argued that suspicion of the veracity of Rolle's visions was a response typical of those learned men of status who refused to believe that God might grant gifts to simpler men of great virtue. His counter to the charge of Rolle enabling others in blasphemous self-determination was again similar to Rolle's own:

'If the spirit of God was in any man, the books of the venerable Richard did not make him his own judge; but because the spirit of God is truth, he would of necessity be compelled to consent to the truth regardless of Richard and his books.'[370]

Basset warns his detractor against challenging the veracity of such divine revelations:

'Cease, therefore, brother, I beg you, from your blasphemies…Otherwise, do not think that you will escape unpunished—rather, you have much to fear, lest the venerable Richard should mourn over you.'[371]

Basset's *Defensorium* is useful in illustrating both enthusiasm and concern in the reception of Rolle's mystical writings, highlighting aspects which drew criticism or doubt, particularly the physical register of his expression of divinely inspired emotion.

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[369] 'In tantum enim habundat ardor caritatis obiectiue affectum concremando in quorundam viatorum mentibus purgatissimis, quod eciam in excogitabili modo redundat ad realem inflammacionem ipsius cordis corporalis. Inde venerabilis ille Ricardus heremita sic inquit: Feruorem voco quando mens eterno amore veraciter incenditus, et cor eodem amore ardere non estimatiue sed realiter sentitur.', *Defensorium*, p. 193.
[370] 'Libri ergo venerabilis Ricardi si fuerit in homine spiritus dei, non faciunt eum iudicem sui, sed cum spiritus dei veritas est, necessario compellitur consentire veritate. Alioquin nihil sibi et libris Ricardi.', *Defensorium*, p. 201.
[371] 'Cesus ergo frater obsecro a blasfemis tua…alioquin non putes te euadere impunem, ymmo satis est tibi formidandum, ne venerandus Ricardus lugeat super te.', *Defensorium*, p. 200.

The intense physicality of Rolle's writing was also discouraged by other mystics in a broader atmosphere of suspicion of somatic experiences. Writing in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, Rolle's fellow mystic, Hilton, was vocal in his criticism of the kind of mysticism presented in Rolle's texts. Drawing on a tradition of intellectual mysticism, Hilton expressed suspicion of physical sensations. Indeed, two chapters of his *Scale of Perfection* are dedicated to discussing the discernment of true and false pleasure of the soul.[372] His discussion narrows to focus specifically on the dangers of devotion to 'heat, sweetness and song'. He cautions against trusting these sensations, writing that

'visions or revelations of any kind of spirit, appearing in the body or in the imagination, asleep or awake, or any other feeling in the bodily senses made in spiritual fashion – either in sound by the ear, or tasting in the mouth, or smelling to the nose, or else any heat that can be felt like fire glowing and warming the breast or any other part of the body, or anything that can be felt by bodily sense, however comforting and pleasing it may be – these are not truly contemplation.'[373]

It does seem that Hilton had specific mystical accounts in mind similar to the content of the *Incendium*. He cautions against misinterpreting descriptions of divine love as a fire: 'not all those who speak of the fire of love really know what it is…but some are simple, supposing that because it is called fire it should be hot like material fire'.[374] Hilton's minor English treatise, *Of Angels' Song*, is written in answer to an anonymous correspondent on the subject of heavenly music – *canor.*[375] Like his previous warnings against bodily sensation, he advises that one's soul must be in a state of perfect humility and devoid of all earthly things in order to

[372] *The Scale of Perfection*, pp. 83-6.
[373] *The Scale of Perfection,* pp. 83-4.
[374] *The Scale of Perfection*, p. 98.
[375] Walter Hilton, 'Walter Hilton's *Of Angels' Song* edited from the British Museum MS Additional 27592', in *Two Minor Works of Walter Hilton*, ed. Fumio Kuriyagawa and Toshiyuki Takamiya (Tokyo, 1980), pp. 3-31.

avoid falling into presumption and heresy. He specifies that practising certain kinds of devotion may contribute to experiencing and misinterpreting false heavenly sound.[376] Although Rolle is not explicitly named, it is hard to identify another contemporary text that would fit the arguments and defences as his work does, particularly the *Incendium*'s emphasis on *canor.*

Hilton was engaged in concerted efforts to assert orthodoxy and moderation in spiritual life, particularly in extreme contemplative 'enthusiasm' seen in the ideology of 'Free Spirt' devotion on the continent. Clark suggests that Hilton's concerns were mostly focused on discouraging unconventional attitudes or forms of devotion that might escalate into heterodox interpretations, such as the literal interpretation of mystical feeling in Rolle, and his particular form of self-directed extreme eremitism.[377] Therefore, although Hilton would not have categorised Rolle as a 'heretic', nor his writing as 'heretical', clear concern is expressed that aspiring contemplatives seeking similar religious experience could stray into heterodoxy in the process of following the kind of 'enthusiasm' found in Rolle's work.

Ultimately, these criticisms do not deny Rolle's visions or condemn Rolle's mystical writing but instead encourage caution in its interpretation. Wide demand for the *Incendium* and its spread in the Carthusian canon of spiritual literature suggests that its orthodoxy was entirely defensible. Indeed, the sensory intensity of the text that troubled some readers may well have been key to its appeal. This has been best summarised by Katherine Zieman, who writes that:

'Rolle's gift was a heightened contemplative awareness of divine presence, a gift that could only be described as it was embodied in his lived experience. On the one hand, then, his reputation as *auctor* stemmed from his alignment with the stable authority of orthodox institutions, confirmed by the idea that an *auctor*'s authority

[376] *Of Angels' Song*, p. 14.
[377] J.P.H. Clark, 'Walter Hilton and "Liberty of Spirit"', *The Downside Review*, 96 (1978), pp. 61-78.

remains after his death…And yet, on the other hand, Rolle's claim to public attention as a contemplative relied on the perception of a living presence, both a divine presence to which he had special access and the hermit's own bodily presence as he experienced the divine within.'[378]

The *Incendium*'s appeal lay in Rolle's ability to convey the enigmatic aspects of contemplative life, not only sharing experience of it, but making it an accessible path for others. Unlike contemporaries like Hilton, Rolle does not simply offer instruction, but a model for contemplative experience, inviting their participation in a shared journey. Zieman identifies this as a crucial difference in Rolle drawing on charismatic rather than institutional authority.[379] However, it is important to note that controversy around Rolle came from contemporary writers and commentators rather than from within the ecclesiastical institution itself – his observances, preaching, pastoral care and writing did not warrant any official assessment for sanction. Given scholarly interest in Rolle as an abnormal and 'anti-establishment' figure, until recently this institutional palatability has rarely been acknowledged outright.

As an arbiter of orthodoxy, Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* is testimony not just to its palatability, but to its perceived value to the pastoral activities of those who sought to reinvigorate and safeguard orthodox spirituality in the English church. Given the juncture in his institutional career at which the translation was produced, Misyn's literary endeavours did not hinder his progression, but could instead have served as a recommendation of his intellectual standing and pastoral skillset.

[378] Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma', p. 1067.
[379] Zieman, 'Resonant Charisma', p. 1068.

Editions

Misyn's translation survives in three main manuscripts: Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 236; Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS 331; and British Library, MS Additional 37790 (Amherst MS). The Corpus Christi MS was produced some time in the second quarter of the fifteenth century after 1435, and the Beinecke and Amherst MSS in the mid-fifteenth century. *The Fire* appears alongside Misyn's translation of *The Mending* as a sequential unit in all three. Each features the colophons attributing the translation to Misyn and dedicating it to Margaret. None is Misyn's autograph, however; Margaret Laing's dialectological analysis of each concludes that the Corpus Christi MS served as the exemplar for other two and was likely made by close reference to the original.[380] Although we are limited by the extant evidence, the three demonstrate a particular interest in Misyn's translations which suggests his work was quickly met with interest and regard. This adds to the layers which begin to form a picture of Rolle's mystical writing as 'mainstream material', and the potential of its translation for bolstering Misyn's reputation as an authoritative figure in pastoral and literary provision.

The three extant manuscripts suggest broader uses and circulation of the translations. The Corpus Christi MS contains Misyn's translations alone, indicating interest in them as a specific entity. Laing's analysis locates the dialect of the Corpus Christi MS scribe to Lincoln. Bergström-Allen asserts that their exemplar for *The Fire* was likely an early copy of Misyn's autograph, or the autograph itself while still at the priory in Lincoln before being sent to York.[381] Its proximity to the completion of *The Fire* could indicate pre-existing or anticipated demand for Misyn's Rollean translations, at least within his order and perhaps beyond. If true,

[380] Margaret Laing, 'Linguistic Profiles and Textual Criticism: The Translations by Richard Misyn of Rolle's Incendium Amoris and Emendatio Vitae', in Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels and Margaret Laing (eds.), *Middle English Dialectology* (Aberdeen, 1989), pp. 195. 208.
[381] Bergström-Allen, 'Promoting and Policing', p. 460.

this would further imply a larger ambition for their reception. It is possible that although *The Fire* was commissioned separately by Margaret Heslington, the two translations were conceived of as a pair at the time of their completion, if not before. This lends weight to the sense of 'professional' significance suggested by Misyn's introduction of a bibliographic ego in *The Fire.*

The other two manuscripts contain Rolle's texts within anthologies of devotional writings. The Beinecke MS was written in the mid-fifteenth century and has been heavily annotated by various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hands. The Rolle texts were copied from the Corpus Christi MS.[382] They are the central feature of the anthology, accompanied by short poems, including a verse life of another northern holy man, John of Bridlington, which follows *The Mending*.[383] The choice of the texts implies an interest in northerly saints and hermits. The prominence of Misyn's translations is indicative of Rolle's writings being the main focus in this area, eclipsing the reputation of other key figures of the same locale, namely John of Bridlington and Richard Scrope.[384]

The translations appear as the first section of the Amherst MS, a mid-fifteenth century Carthusian anthology.[385] It differs from the others by incorporating the texts as part of a broader

[382] Laing, 'Linguistic Profiles', p. 205.
[383] *Catalogue of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Vol. II: MSS 251-500*, ed. Barbara Shailor (New York, 1987), pp. 154-55; Charles Sleeth, 'Textual Observations on a *Verse Life of John Bridlington*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74/1 (1973), p. 128.
[384] Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 3.
[385] Marleen Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse. A Study of London, British Library, MS Additional 37790* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 17-18; *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1906-1910*, (London, 1912), pp. 153-6; Cré and Sargant argue for a Carthusian origin on the basis of Carthusian association with the dissemination of most of the texts included in the anthology. However, Watson cautions that an exclusive Carthusian ownership does not equate to Carthusian production, a view shared by Doyle who concludes that although it cannot be proved that Amhurst was a Carthusian production, it was certainly a Carthusian commission. See Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 18-19; Sargent, 'Transmission by the English Carthusians', pp. 28-9; Watson, 'Melting into God the English Way', p. 32; Anthony Doyle, 'English Carthusian Books Not Yet Linked with a Charterhouse', in Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (eds.), *"A Miracle of Learning": Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning.*

thematic corpus rather than as the 'main event'. It features a compilation of works on contemplation, including a Middle English translation of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer des simples ames*, the short texts of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Divine Love*, and extracts from others such as Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, Bridget of Sweden's *Revelationes*, and materials from the author of the *Cloud.*[386] Although the Rollean texts appear as a separate unit, they do not seem to have been circulated as a separate booklet, and were likely produced for the purposes of the anthology. Their position at the opening of the anthology speaks to an interest in Misyn's translations as part of a larger corpus of vernacular mystical literature that served a demand for contemplative devotion.

As the earliest copy and likely closest to Misyn's autograph, the Corpus Christi MS edition will serve the purposes of this study, using Ralph Harvey's 1896 printed edition.[387] Hanna's reassessment of manuscripts of the *Incendium* challenges Margaret Deanesley's seminal 1915 Latin edition on which much study of the *Incendium* has been based.[388] Hanna has highlighted the need for reappraisal of the *Incendium*'s manuscript transmission, and correction of various editorial issues. Unfortunately, his call has yet to be answered, and much historical analysis must for now rely on Deanesley's work, as does this study.

Misyn's translations of Rolle have already been subject to extensive linguistic analysis by Karáth.[389] Karáth argues that 'Misyn's editorial interventions, as divergent as they may seem, have the overall purpose of tuning Rolle's devotional model and mystical discourse to a lower

Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan (Aldershot, 1998), p. 127; For an overview of the debate on Carthusian attribution, see Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*, pp. 102-3.
[386] For detail of full contents, see Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 17.
[387] *Fire*.
[388] *Incendium.*
[389] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations.*; Tamás Karáth, 'Mediating the Immediate: Richard Rolle's Mystical Experience in the Translations of his Self-Revelations', in Miklós Vassányi, Enikó Sepsi and Anikó Daróczi (eds.), *The Immediacy of Mystical Experience in the European Tradition* (Cham, 2017), pp. 85-103.

intensity and affectivity', considering them a 'taming' of Rolle's emotionology.[390] However, his analysis does not offer an explanation for Misyn's interventions beyond purely censorial intentions. Considering Misyn's translation in light of a plausible wider audience of regional elites, both lay and ecclesiastical, and of Misyn's own career trajectory, we may consider new possibilities for how his translation of *The Fire* reflected and responded to religious and social concerns. Translating Latin into English was not just a question of transposing a language, but also theology and specific spiritual meaning. As Gillespie puts it, 'acts of translation…invariably involve complex editorial acts of selection, reordering, lexical choice, and responsiveness to the needs and abilities of a real or imagined audience.'[391] Therefore, by comparing the expression of emotion in the context of production and intent of the respective texts, this study allows for a more nuanced identification of aspects of Rolle's work which may have been considered controversial, particularly appealing, or simply unhelpful, and how these aspects related to particular audiences or intentions.

Preservation of Voice

Misyn's main concern appears to be the preservation of Rolle's original tone and meaning in his descriptions of mystical experience. Despite some contemporary suspicion of the physicality of Rolle's mystical writing, Misyn's translation sought to preserve the depth and variety of emotional description. Indeed, he appears to have been confident of his audience's ability to discern the meaning of the text for themselves. It seems that he anticipated a large degree of independent interpretation, referring to his reader's personal 'discretion', understood here as their 'discernment'.[392] He recommends deference to ecclesiastical guidance if doubtful

[390] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*, p. 139.
[391] Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', in Paul Strohm (ed.), *Middle English* (Oxford, 2007), p. 402.
[392] 'descrecioun', *Fire*, p. 11.

of any meaning, advising that his reader 'call to you firm counsel, for fear you err.'[393] These instructions establish the boundaries of spiritual independence in theological interpretation and religious life, prescribing humility, meekness, and deference to church authority – key components of *discretio spirituum.* It seems that he considered his lay audience capable, with his own editorial guidance and clerical support where necessary, of exercising appropriate caution in interpreting Rolle's mystical teachings. Therefore, where instances of alteration are found, whether through deletion or revision, we must ask why they were treated differently, placing them into the context of both translator and audience to shed light on more precise areas of concern in the reception of Rolle's writing.

Misyn's intention to retain Rolle's distinct authorial voice can be seen in the stark difference between the prose of his translator's prologue and the rest of the text. The prologue is written in 'curial' style, a formal style defined by features drawn from administrative documents which produced an effect of 'congratulatory ceremoniousness and continuous clarity.'[394] Main features of this style were the use of Latinate constructions, changes to syntax and verbal groups in imitation of Latin constructions, and formulaic phrases associated with particular functions such as epistolary greetings.[395] Misyn's prologue is dense with Latinate words, particularly those pertaining to the nature of the writing itself, such as 'edificacyon', 'exposicione' and 'protestacyon'.[396] The use of this style for his own authorial voice established Misyn's intellectual status and perhaps signposted to an audience familiar with it from ecclesiastical and administrative positions. By contrast, Misyn shows reluctance to defer to Latinate words

[393] 'kall to the sad councell, for drede þou erre', *Fire*, p. 14.
[394] J.D. Burnley, 'Curial Prose in England', *Speculum*, 61/3 (1986), p. 596.
[395] On the historical development and identification of curial style, see Burnley, 'Curial Prose'; Diane Bornstein, 'French Influence on Fifteenth-Century English Prose as Exemplified by the Translation of Christine de Pisan's *Livre du Corps de Policie*', *Medieval Studies*, 38 (1977), pp. 369-86; J.D. Burnley, 'Christine de Pizan and the So-Called Clergial Style', *Modern Language Review*, 81 (1986), pp. 1-6; Norman Davis, 'Styles in English Prose of the Late Middle and Early Modern Period', *Langue et literature: Actes du VIIIe congrès de la Fédération internationale des langues et littératures modernes* (Paris, 1961), pp. 165-84.
[396] This is noted in more detail in Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 79.

in the body of *The Fire* itself. This suggests that his approach was one of 'Englishing' Rolle's vocabulary and preservation of the quintessence of his voice in that process. This 'Englishing' is clearly seen in Misyn's treatment of Rolle's language of heat. Rolle uses *ignis/flamma,* and derivates such as *igniculus*, *inflamares*, *scintilla* and *cauma*, to convey the physical aspects of heat, such as fire or flame. These words are translated with their literal Middle English counterparts, *fyre*, *firy*, *falwme* and *sparkyl.* For example, 'letificat et inflammat' (it makes joyful and inflames) becomes 'it gladdis & enflaumys' (it gladdens and inflames).[397]

The degrees of love

Looking at Misyn's efforts to retain Rolle's intensity and tone, we will examine his treatment of the three degrees of love, *calor*, *dulcor* and *canor*, starting with the 'fire of love' for which the text was named. Karáth established the useful concept of an 'economy of heat', referring to the intensity of warmth, its verbal equivalents, and their application for physical and spiritual sensations in Rolle's work.[398] This 'economy of heat' draws on the concept of an 'economy of emotions', a product of the methodology of literary research in the history of emotions which describes the patterns of emotions in a text.[399] In translating Rolle's 'economy of heat', Misyn seeks to preserve meaning, displaying a high level of creativity to best serve the linguistic needs of his readers in the process. The 'economy of heat' is perhaps the most complicated of the three spiritual sensation groups. It not only refers to the sensations of visionary experience, but also other types of heat and fire, such as hell fire, fire of the Holy Spirit, and zeal for God.

[397] *Incendium*, p. 197.; *Fire*, p. 42.
[398] Karáth, *Fifteenth-Century Translations*, p. 117.
[399] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', *Passions in Context: Journal of the History and Philosophy of the Emotions*, 1/1 (2010), pp. 1-32.

Karáth's interrogation of this language identifies five main blocks of vocabulary, each defined by a key word: *calor*, *ignis/flamma*, *incendium*, *ardor* and *feruor.*[400]

As discussed, some contemporary criticism focused on this particular mystical sensation. Participating in religious literary circles concerned with the prohibition of heretical material and the safeguarding of orthodox interpretation, Misyn was almost certainly aware of general discourse suspicious of this particular sensation. For example, the anonymous author of *The Cloud* warned that misled disciples 'believe it to be fire of love', and Hilton cautioned that 'some are simple, supposing that because it is called fire it should be hot like material fire'.[401] However, in his translation of this sensation in visionary experience Misyn's focus appears to be on preserving Rolle's tone and literal meaning. This suggests that rather than being an issue, this was an important aspect to both translator and audience, and its emotional intensity may have been a core part of Rolle's appeal.

Calor is the least common word of warmth in Rolle's text, appearing in various derivations, including *calor*, *calefacere*, *incalescere*, *calere* and *concalere. Calor* was a specifically divine form of heat. In medieval medicine it was understood as the active principle of the soul, by which it 'warmed' and kept the body alive.[402] Rolle's *calor* conveyed the sensation of the soul filled by the reciprocal love of God, causing intensification of the heat which sustained the body. Misyn directly translates these hot, elemental sensations in *The Fire*, preserving Rolle's affective, bodily meaning. For example, 'Truly if he considers himself intently, he finds that he is immeasurably warmed in the heat and sweetness of the divine love, and that he proceeds greatly in a contemplative life,' is translated as, 'Truly, if carefully considering himself, he

[400] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*, pp. 115-16.
[401] 'þei wene it be fiir of loue', *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling,* ed. Phyllis Hodgson (London, 1955), p. 86.; *The Scale of Perfection*, p. 98.
[402] James Bono, 'Medieval Spirits and the Medieval Language of Life', *Traditio*, 40 (1984), p. 117.

finds he waxes marvellously warm in the heat and sweetness of God's love, and rises highly in contemplative life.' [403] We see 'feruore et suauitate' translated as 'heet & swetnes', preserving the expression of a physically experienced warmth rather than an alternative abstract or spiritual emotion, such as 'passion' or 'zeal'.

Rolle uses *incendium* and its derivatives as the active verbs of burning, usually used to describe setting or nourishing a fire. It is the most frequently used heat vocabulary and appears in both highly emotive mystical descriptions and practical instructions. Facing lack of a Middle English equivalent to capture the specific notion of rising fire, Misyn translated this vocabulary to communicate a similar sense of growing heat, using words such as *growand*, *kyndyld* and *stirryd.* For example, 'while the sight of the eye sets the mind on fire' is translated to 'whilst truly the sight of the eye kindles the soul'.[404] Similarly, 'whence suddenly by scorching fire he was engulfed and blinded,' becomes 'wherefore suddenly with burning of a ruinous fire he is enveloped and blinded'.[405]

Places where vocabulary has been reinterpreted results in both losses and additions. These rarely diminish the intensity of Rolle's emotional experience. Indeed, there are a number of instances where Misyn makes additions to the 'economy of heat' without precedent in the original text. For example, 'in sweet love' becomes 'in so sweet love burning'.[406] The addition of 'burning' does not inherently change the meaning of the phrase but instead matches the tone of other areas of *calor* imagery. Misyn seems to have embraced this embodied spiritual feeling,

[403] 'Si uero seipsum uehementer considerans reperit se in feruore et suauitate diuini amoris inestimabiliter incalescere, atque in contemplatiuam uitam eminenter exire', *Incendium*, p. 171; 'If treuly hym-self woundyr-fully behaldand in heet & swetnes of godis lufe he fynde meruelusly wax warme, And hely to go in-to lyfe contemplatyue', *Fire*, p. 21.
[404] 'dum enim oculi uisus animum incendit', *Incendium*, p. 210; 'qwhilst truly syght of ee þe saull kyndils', *Fire*, p. 52.
[405] 'unde subito, noxii ignis aduscione obuoluitur', *Incendium*, p. 210; 'Qwharfor sodanly with byrnyng of a noyus fyre it is vmbelappid & blyndy', *Fire*, p. 52.
[406] 'dulci amore', *Incendium*, p. 37; 'in so swete lufe byrnand', *Fire*, p. 81.

perhaps appreciating it as something specifically Rollean, central to preserving his tone and voice. Rolle's emotional intensity was clearly highly appealing to both translator and audience. Despite a few critics finding it cause for concern, Misyn's translation suggests that institutional officials, including this translator who would go on to serve as inquisitor of the Carmelite province and bishop, were not troubled by it and indeed valued its capacity for spiritual inspiration.

Misyn's attention to conserving Rolle's meaning for vernacular readers is further seen in preference for operating within the familiar conceptual space of English vocabulary rather than direct Latinate equivalents. Misyn avoided Latinate words which were unusual in common parlance to provide spiritual, conceptual tools in a more accessible vocabulary. Minor alterations to meaning in this process reflect an editorial interest in capturing the essence of Rolle's writing, rather than the exact distinctions of Rolle's original vocabulary and syntax – a construing of meaning rather than translation of words. This choice is attuned to the needs, preferences, and expectations of Misyn's immediate and wider audience.

Some changes to instances of heat reflect this attention to accessibility. *Ardor* is a key site of Misyn's assertion of autonomy over the text. It most often appears in the *Incendium* in relation to the sensory experience of an intense passion for God's love. *Ardor* had direct Latinate equivalents in the vernacular. The Middle English *ardour/ardowr/ardure* connoted a depth of feeling, a passion or intensity. Misyn rarely used these direct translations, instead drawing on semantic variants to preserve Rolle's metaphor of flame, most frequently 'burning'. Although this was by no means an unconventional translation choice, it is indicative of a wider pattern of attention to translating Rolle's imagery of fire with deference to the literal elemental aspect. For example, on how the true lover of God despises earthly things and feels only heavenly

desires, *ardor* is translated with the vocabulary of literal burning. 'For the soul of the faithful longs ardently [*ardenter*] for the mere presence of the bridegroom,' becomes 'while a true, sure soul only burningly desires the presence of the spouse'.[407] Elsewhere, Misyn translates 'but nevertheless, so ardent [*ardens*] can the movement and effect of love towards God be', as 'but nevertheless, so burning may be the moving and desire of love in God'.[408] Similarly, 'amatoribus ardentibus' become 'burning lovers'.[409] Misyn's assertion of the fire motif, rather than any use of the Middle English *ardour*, perpetuates the 'economy of heat'. While the reliance on 'burning' to translate this aspect somewhat diminishes the variety of language Misyn seems keen to have preserved elsewhere, it remains truer to the tone and character of Rolle's expression. It offers insight into Misyn's priority as a translator in communicating the distinctive sensory motifs that capture the effusive emotion of Rollean mysticism.

The preservation and, in some areas, extension of Rolle's economy of heat indicates that this aspect of Rolle's writing was considered central to the appeal and efficacy of the text. Indeed, despite instances of contemporary criticism, the language and imagery of *calor* was considered an intrinsic part of Rolle's mysticism and its spiritual benefit to others. Misyn's work belies little concern for misguided interpretation of its physicality by a lay audience. Indeed, the concerted effort to capture its intensity suggests that this was part of the appeal of the text and its efficacy in inspiring devotional practice. This begs the question of how typical or widespread criticisms of this aspect were in reality. Misyn's efforts to replicate Rolle's highly sensory 'economy of heat' challenge any concerns in this respect. Given Misyn's status as a proponent of orthodoxy, and the trajectory of his career into official roles actively charged with

[407] 'Dum enim fidelis anima solam sponsi presenciam ardenter concupiscit', *Incendium*, p. 223; 'Qwhils a trew sawll certan only presens of þe spouse byrnyngly desyrs', *Fire*, p. 62.
[408] 'Sed tamen tam ardens potest esse motus et affectus amoris in Deum', *Incendium*, p. 207; 'Bot neuer-þe-les so byrnand may be þe meuyng & desire of lufe in god', *Fire*, p. 50.
[409] *Incendium*, p. 156; 'byrnyng lufars', *Fire*, p. 10.

its maintenance and defence, Rolle's mystical writing may have been unusual, eccentric even, but still conformed to the clear parameters of institutional propriety.

Misyn's translation of *dulcor* also suggests confidence in the ability of the reader to discern proper scriptural and devotional meaning based on an established use of this vocabulary in devotional media, and a developing vocabulary of contemplative emotion. Patterns of both gains and losses can be seen in Misyn's treatment of Rolle's vocabulary of sweetness throughout the text. However, where it appears in mystical/spiritual contexts it is for the most part directly translated, usually as 'swe(i)t/swetnes'. Most instances of addition are the result of the reinterpretation of Latin words, often relating to music, whose meaning was difficult to capture in Middle English. For example, 'mirabilem melodiam' (wonderful melody) is translated as 'full swete melody' (full sweet melody), and 'mensuram modulacionum' (measure of melody) becomes 'mesure of swetnes' (measure of sweetness).[410]

The association of sweetness with divine love, holy experience, and salvation was entrenched in medieval understandings.[411] The sensation of taste was long associated with metaphorical expressions of physical interaction with the divine, namely kissing and tasting the holy body of Christ.[412] This sensory language reflects the literal sacramental consumption of the body and blood of Christ essential to Christian practice and doctrine. Sweetness was particularly associated with descriptions of Christ's humanity, his salvific suffering, and its imitation.

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[410] *Incendium*, p. 241; *Fire*, p. 72; *Incendium*, p. 244; *Fire*, p. 75.
[411] Rachel Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps. 33:9): The Flavour of God in the Monastic West', *The Journal of Religion*, 86/2 (2006), pp. 169-205; Franz Posset, '*Christi Dulcedo:* The 'Sweetness of Christ' in Western Christian Spirituality', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 30/3 (1995), pp. 245-65; Friedrich Ohly, *Süsse Nägel der Passion: ein Beitrag zur theologischen Semantik* (Berlin, 1989); Edith Scholl, 'The Sweetness of the Lord: *Dulcis Suavis*', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 27/4 (1992), pp. 359-66; Carmela Vircillo Franklin, 'Words as Food: Signifying the Bible in the Early Middle Ages', *Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo*, 52 (2005), pp. 733-62; Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol 2: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, 2000), pp. 162-77.
[412] Nicolas James Parella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretive History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley, 1969).

Augustine (d.430) was an early proponent of the sweetness of the divine as both physical and spiritual metaphor.[413] In his commentary on the Psalm 134:3 ('Praise the Lord for He is good; sing to his name because it is sweet'), he wrote that

'He would be good, but He would not be sweet if He did not allow you to taste Him…it was a great thing for you to taste the sweetness of God, that sweetness so distant and exceedingly high.'[414]

This metaphor was central to Augustine's understanding of God and was similarly drawn upon by other formative writers. The Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz (c.1075/1080-c.1129), writing in the early twelfth century, spoke of the experience of such sweetness:

'An ineffable taste, a taste of sweetness lingered in the mouth of my soul for the better part of a day, but gradually fading, and at last finally expired, still makes me mindful of this verse: *Taste and see how sweet is the Lord* [Ps. 33:9].'[415]

Rupert's fellow Benedictine, Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109), further developed the metaphor, drawing on the biblical imagery of honey: 'chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavour which is sweeter than sap, swallow their wholesome sweetness…'[416] The writings of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), the 'mellifluous doctor' of the Cistercians, particularly cemented the association of Christ's sacrifice with the sensation of sweetness for later scholastic traditions. This imagery became a well-established tradition permeating devotional

[413] Posset, 'The Sweetness of God', pp. 143-78.
[414] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos 141-150*, ed. Franco Gori (Vienna, 2005), pp. 29-30.
[415] 'Gustus autem quidam ineffabilis, gustus suauitatis eius in ore animae aliquamdiu ipsa die superfuit, qui tamen paulatim recedens, tandemque deficiens, memorem adhuc facit me uersiculi huius: *Gustate et uidete quam suauis est Dominus* [Ps. 33:9]', Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Mattheum,* ed. H. Haacke (Turnhout, 1979), pp. 369-70.
[416] Anselm, 'Meditatio 3', in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion,* ed. and trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 230.

writing in the later Middle Ages. Proliferation of this imagery in the *Incendium* locates Rolle's work within a recognisable framework of literary tradition and influence. This has been comprehensively mapped in Denis Renevey's investigation of the influence of commentaries of the Song of Songs on Rolle's writing.[417] Malcolm Moyes also finds a similar 'upcycling' of features of twelfth-century Cistercian writing from the North of England in Rolle's *Expositio super Novem Lectiones Mortuorum*, suggesting that his Latin works consciously drew on source material that might be appreciated by an audience of a similar social and religious background.[418]

There was no Latinate monopoly on the motif of sweetness, and it also pervaded vernacular religious culture. It appeared in works such as the anonymous Middle English meditation, *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* ('Jesus sweet Jesus…my honey-drop, my balm. Sweeter is the memory of thee than honey in the mouth') and 'The Fifteen Oes' attributed to St Bridget of Sweden ('Oh Jesus, endless sweetness of loving souls'), as well as Rolle's own Middle English texts.[419] Misyn's direct translation of this vocabulary reflects the centrality of this feature in both scholarly Latin literature and broader religious culture.

Another aspect of sweetness particularly pertinent to the context of contemplative devotion and divine experience is the use of 'sweetness' and the closely related term 'savour' as an indication of the efficacy of prayers and/or devotional practice. Zieman's examination of these terms finds that 'to feel 'sweetness' or 'good savour' means to be fully present to ritual's heightened reality

[417] Renevey, *Language, Self and Love.*
[418] *Richard Rolle's 'Expositio super Novem Lectiones Mortuorum': 2 Volumes*, ed. Malcolm Moyes (Salzburg, 1988).
[419] 'Ihesu swete ihesu…mi huniter, mi haliwei. Swetter is munegunge of þe þen mildeu o muðe', *Pe Wohung of ure Lauerd*, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London, 1958), p. 20; 'O Jheus, endles swetnes of lovyng soules,' Bridget of Sweden, 'The Fifteen Oes', ed. Rebecca Krug, in Anne Clark Barlett and Thomas Bestul (eds.), *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca, 1999), p. 112.

and its truths.'[420] This sensation was understood to be more 'reliable' as an indicator of divine presence, as it focuses on interior experience inside the body, avoiding the risks of exteriority. Other contemporary writers instructing in devotional practice also encouraged the seeking of sweetness. Hilton warns his readers that lack of proper attention in their prayers would risk that they 'feel neither savour nor rest in your prayer nor devotion in what you are saying.'[421] This use of sweet taste as a method of discerning efficacy of devotion and a means to greater revelation was widely prescribed. For example, *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, a liturgical manual made in the early fifteenth century for the Bridgettine nuns of Syon Abbey, instructed for the practice of 'good sauoure and deuocyon'.[422] Thus, anticipation of sweet taste in a spiritually fruitful practice of contemplative devotion was an accepted concept, and one which was routinely used as a signpost in directing devotional practice. Misyn's direct translation of Rolle's vocabulary of *dulcor* reflects this broader understanding. His direct translation of the 'sweetness' of spiritual experience throughout the text is in keeping with a sensory tradition recognisable to audiences from any echelon of society or religious profession.

Misyn's treatment of the third degree of love, *canor*, is a site of more concerted interference in meaning. Karáth interprets Misyn's interventions in Rolle's sonority of mystical union as 'censoring'.[423] However, this does not consider that reduction in the diversity of musical vocabulary may serve accessibility rather than propriety. Misyn's treatment of this aspect best demonstrates the difficult balance of preserving the emotive description of Rolle's work while catering to a non-Latinate patron and the varying levels of Latin literacy and ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical education present in any wider audience.

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[420] Zieman, 'Good Sauore and Deuocyon', p. 141.
[421] *The Scale of Perfection*, p. 103.
[422] *The Myroure of Oure Layde, Containing a Devotional Treatise on Divine Service*, ed. John Henry Blunt (London, 1873), p. 49.
[423] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*, p. 139.

Rolle identifies *canor* as 'the melody of the tone of heaven' and uses the language of music to express the emotional exultation of the soul as it experiences divine union. It is the highest of the mystical 'gifts' described by Rolle, an echo of the music of heaven itself. Although comparison is made to the *Alleluia* chorus, Rolle specifies that it is not the same as earthly liturgical singing. In *The Form* he clarifies that 'of that manner of [earthly] singing speak I not, for that song has both good and ill, and this manner of song [*canor*] has none.'[424] Rolle refers to *canor* most often in the *Incendium* as *iubilus* or *pneuma,* denoting a wordless, inarticulate melodious utterance. He displays an advanced knowledge of musical theory in his use of technical Latin terminology to describe this 'tone of heaven', such as *alimphona* and *modulanicum.*

Rolle's language assumed technical knowledge of monastic or liturgical music. This could not be assumed of Margaret Heslington, nor of a wider lay audience, for whom this precise musicology may have clouded ease of understanding. Misyn transfers Rolle's sophisticated musicology into more accessible forms for an audience less familiar with such complexities. Most of the language of music is translated using the four most comment Middle English words for human music: music, melody, song, and ditty. 'Ditty' is used almost solely to translate *carmen* and its derivatives. By this, Misyn creates his own hierarchy of vocabulary which preserves Rolle's distinction between *canor* and *carmen* as spiritual and earthly music. The reduction of Rolle's sonorous descriptions to a choice of only four words significantly decreases the emotive flamboyance of *canor*. The heaviest area of loss is in Misyn's removal of exacting technical descriptions. *Almiphona* is translated as 'hevynly', in instances such as

[424] 'of þat maner of syngyng speke I noght, for þat sang hase bath gude and ill, and þis maner of sang [*canor*] hase nane.', *The English Writings of Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole*, ed. Emily Hope Allen (Oxford, 1931), p. 106.

'renewed in heavenly song' translated as 'renewed in heavenly mirth'.[425] Similarly, 'mensuram modulacionum' is tempered as 'mesure of swetnes.'[426] Where this technical language is not replaced, Misyn rephrases the text to remove it completely. For example, 'as though with a certain singing breath/spirit [*pneuma*] he chants prayers,' becomes 'as it were with notes his prayers he sings'.[427]

These changes do not reduce the sonority of the text, but instead respond to a lack of direct Middle English equivalents for the terminology of musical theory and technicality. Indeed, modern English faces the same deficiency. Like his avoidance of 'curial' Latinate equivalents available for the translation of the 'economy of heat', Misyn chooses to avoid 'curial' terminology available for the musical phenomena of *canor*. Anglicised iterations of *neuma* and *modulacio* – 'newme' and 'modulacioun' – are not used by Misyn, reflecting his anticipation an audience who would not benefit from such technical nuance. This prioritisation of understanding at the expense of the rich diversity of expression is a stark contrast with Misyn's efforts to preserve such variegation in the language of *calor.* It shows a careful consideration for where engagement might be limited by differing degrees of Latin literacy and education.

Misyn's faithfulness to Rolle's emotionology in the degrees of love, reconstruing rather than directly translating the Latin in order to preserve it, is indicative of his understanding of his task – translating Rolle's meaning in the manner which would be of most use to the educational background of the audience. There appears to have been little, if any, concern that Rolle's sensory expression would be misleading. It seems that where critical voices were concerned

[425] 'innouata alimphona inuoluitur amenitate', *Incendium*, p. 186; 'enuwid in hevynly mirth', *Fire*, p. 34.
[426] *Incendium*, p. 34; *Fire*, p. 75.
[427] 'quasi cum quadam pneuma canens, preces modulatur', *Incendium*, p. 208; 'als wer with notis his prayers he singis', *Fire*, p. 51.

with an unorthodox interpretation of heat, Misyn was more concerned with an inaccessibility of sound.

The apparently unproblematic translation of these sensory aspects undermines areas of historiographical emphasis on controversy and originality, instead suggesting that Rolle's descriptions of intensely emotional mystical experience fitted comfortably into preexisting frameworks. Misyn translated for an audience engaged with religious literary traditions, well-equipped to interpret sensory expression within established interpretational frameworks, and with the assistance of external guidance where necessary. His careful preservation of the diversity and dynamism of Rolle's sensory language indicates that this was considered not only an important aspect of the spiritual value and appeal of the text, but also well within the remit of traditional frameworks of expression and interpretation. Misyn's concerted efforts to preserve such aspects, for the most part showing more concern that Rolle's descriptions be rendered accessible to a Middle English readership unfamiliar with certain scholastic concepts, suggests that any sense of controversy has been overstated. Indeed, the physicality of Rolle's 'presence' in the text is an important aspect of the spirituality of immanence and sensation that was undoubtedly highly attractive in a religious culture in which the concept of 'savoure' in devotional practice was a measure of its value.[428]

The perfection of contemplatives

Changes to areas of emotional expression outside of Rolle's distinctive three-part mystical emotionology suggests that some aspects of the *Incendium* did raise interpretational concerns. Misyn's usual reluctance to make alterations to meaning or tone means that patterns of

[428] Zieman, 'Good Sauore and Deuocyon'.

intervention reveal areas of sensitivity and clear imperative for the translator to guide interpretation. These offer insight into what was considered spiritually appropriate or warranted stricter definition for vernacular lay readers and an audience of mixed educational standards.

One such area can be seen in alterations to the language of enjoyment and pleasure relating to the divine rewards of contemplative practice. Throughout the *Incendium*, Rolle asserts the superiority of extreme contemplative practices as a path to spiritual perfection and divine experience. This is particularly seen in his descriptions of the pleasure of divine reward for those who follow his spiritual path. Given that Margaret Heslington was herself an anchorite, Rolle's emphasis on the rewards of contemplative devotion would have been fitting for her spiritual journey. However, Misyn tempers the emotional register in these areas, redirecting emphasis to 'mixed life' practice rather than the absolute contemplative devotion of eremitism. This alteration on Misyn's part is in keeping with anticipation of a broader audience for the translation, to whom a more tempered mixed life approach was more pertinent.

Misyn's translation of Rolle's teachings on spiritual perfection and the highest rewards afforded contemplatives sees concerted reduction in descriptions of delighting in holy sweetness. For example, describing the pleasure experienced by the spiritually perfect as they are cleansed by intense love, Rolle writes that they burst into song, 'with the delightfulness of angelic sweetness'.[429] Misyn reduces this to 'with angels' sweetness', translating a single descriptor rather than Rolle's ebullient original.[430] This captures a broader editorial trend of careful clarification that the heavenly reward of the perfect will not be received on earth. For example, 'by which perpetually gladdened, they have the inestimable comfort of the eternal

[429] 'cum dulcedine suauitatis angelice', *Incendium*, p. 270.
[430] 'with aungels swetnes', *Fire*, p. 98.

electuary,' is translated as 'by which greatly gladdened, they have greater comfort of the spiritual electuary than may be believed.'[431] Misyn's translation of 'eterni' as 'gostely' removes the suggestion that the perfect might expect to receive an eternal reward in this life.

Descriptions of the position of perfect contemplatives in the afterlife are also translated with a reduction in the extent of contemplative reward. While Rolle declares that perfect contemplatives will be 'sublimius coronatur', Misyn removes the lofty connotation of *sublimius* (eminently/loftily), stating simply that 'he shall be crowned'.[432] The same caution is exercised in limiting the extent to which a contemplative might expect to experience the divine in this life. While Rolle writes that 'nothing is better than mutual love', Misyn translates 'nothing truly is better than love,' perhaps a correction to more firmly assert the boundary that no man, not even Rolle's 'perfect' contemplative, can reciprocate the true extent of God's love.[433] Indeed, Rolle's use of the concept of spiritual perfection is sometimes avoided by Misyn entirely. For example, 'for I should know that perfection and the end of my unhappiness were near' is translated as 'for I should know the end of my unhappiness and that joy were near'.[434]

Through this adjustment of Rolle's generosity in the rewards of contemplative commitment, Misyn reorders Rolle's spiritual hierarchy. The implications of this are twofold. Firstly, Misyn's intervention highlights Rolle's depictions of holy reward, particularly before death, as a possible site of contention for those involved in the regulation of orthodox eremitic practice.

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[431] 'Quo iocondati iugiter inestimabilem habent eterni electuarii confortacionem', *Incendium*, pp. 152; 'with the whilk þai, gretely gladdyd, has gretter comforth þen may be trowed of gostely letwary', *Fire*, p. 7; Electuary/letwary - a sweet, medicinal liquid.
[432] *Incendium*, p. 167.; 'he schall be crouned', *Fire*, p. 19.
[433] 'nihil quidem melius est dileccione mutua', *Incendium*, p. 214; 'nothyinge truly is better þen lufe', *Fire*, p. 78.
[434] 'agnoscerem quam prope sit illa perfeccio et finis infelicitatis mee?', *Incendium*, p. 246; 'for I schulde knawe the ende of myne vnhappynes and þat Ioye were nere?', *Fire*, p. 102.

As an anchorite pursuing contemplative life, the *Incendium*'s very emphasis on contemplative reward and guidance of its pursuit was likely at the heart of its appeal for Margaret Heslington. In clarifying the limits of earthly experience and tempering claims to spiritual perfection Misyn's interpretational direction shows concern that such aspects might encourage the kind of 'enthusiasm' that strayed into heresy. Secondly, Misyn's adjustment of this aspect is in keeping with his more 'mixed life' emphasis seen elsewhere. This could be in consideration of a wider audience of the text beyond Margaret. Thus, the thrust of Rolle's teaching is preserved without asserting absolutes which might exclude readers for whom eremitic dedication was not possible.

Sighing and groaning

The other main area in which Misyn shows notable circumspection is in translating verbs of sighing and groaning. His translation establishes a strict framework of interpretation for these expressions that is not seen in other aspects of bodily experience and physical expression. Karáth identifies this change, arguing that 'Misyn's deletions of sighs and groans as affective and audible bodily responses to contemplation portrays a more disciplined contemplative, inasmuch as (s)he displays fewer uncontrolled reactions.'[435] However, he locates it within a broader trend of censorship. This study instead argues that it stands out as the only site of complete deletions and is therefore addressing something distinct from other areas of interpretational guidance. The severity of this intervention marks sighing and groaning as the most troubling form of emotion expression to Misyn as a mediator of orthodox meaning in Rolle's text.

[435] Karáth, *Fifteenth Century Translations*, p. 139.

In the *Incendium*, audible expression of feeling not equated with *canor* takes two main forms: *suspiro/suspirium* (to sigh/a sigh) and *gemo/ingemisco/gemitus* (to groan/a groan). This vocabulary is rare elsewhere in the Rollean corpus, with the exception of his Middle English *Meditation on the Passion* where Mary's audible expression of anguish at the cross is given to invoke compassion in the affective reader. There, the bodily expression of intense interior suffering served as a script by which the reader could share in the emotional experience of witnessing the Passion. However, in the *Incendium*, sighing and groaning do not appear in response to holy suffering. They are instead used chiefly to convey longing for the love of God, impatience for the arrival of *calor*, and resignation to unfulfilled desire.

Misyn's intervention differs from his treatment of other areas of Rolle's emotionology where, as seen previously, intense expression is preserved as an important aspect of the text and its efficacy. *Suspiro* and *gemitus* are subject to a number of complete deletions in *The Fire.* In both Classical and Medieval Latin, *gemo* and *suspiro* both indicate a reflexive, emotionally charged expiration without accompanying words. While *suspiro* took a secondary meaning of 'longing for' in Medieval Latin usage, both words retained their primary physical meanings. In using this vocabulary, Rolle associated the spiritual feeling of longing for divine love with impulsive bodily expression. This creates a site of possible blurring between the spiritual and physical senses.

Medieval understandings of 'spiritual' breath can be located in two aspects: the classical concept of *pneuma* – the vital spirit or creative force of a person – and the medieval theology of the *spiritus* – the divine force which animates the bodily spirits. The double-meaning of *pneuma* as both the breath of God and the bodily spirits meant that *pneuma* was both physical and spiritual. Rolle uses *pneuma* mostly in reference to qualities of *canor*, featuring as part of

his vocabulary of the spiritual feelings of visionary experience. The sound of physical sighing relating to bodily spirits is referred to by *suspiro* and *gemitus*, making a clear distinction from *pneuma* which is reserved for the spiritual sensation of *canor.* Misyn's interventions suggest some discomfort with the lack of clear distinction between spiritual and bodily emotion in this aspect of visionary feeling, which risked undermining the assertion that Rolle's intense emotionology was purely of the soul.

In some cases, Misyn quantifies *suspiro* with words conveying sorrow, or substitutes it with words meaning longing, or desire in the sense of moving towards the object of affection. For example, 'for/to you my heart sighs' becomes 'to you my heart desires'.[436] Similarly, 'sighs with unrelenting love' becomes 'with love abiding desire'.[437] In instances where alternative vocabulary or additional guiding words could not be used to direct interpretation *suspiro* is removed. *Gemitus* is removed from the text completely. While Misyn felt that direction to seek professional guidance was enough to ensure the proper interpretation elsewhere, this absolute omission suggests that possible misinterpretation of this vocabulary as connoting bodily expression was a site of considerable consternation. It is a significant break from the emphasis on preservation of Rolle's original expression of feeling elsewhere. Misyn clearly considered this area to have more serious implications and may have been a site of true controversy in the discernment of subtle differences between spiritual and physical feeling on the contemplative journey. We may surmise that it was not the emotions themselves or their intensity, but the nature of the emotions as spiritual or physical that Misyn considered to be the site of the most interpretational risk. Therefore, Rolle's intense emotionology would not court controversy or

[436] 'Ad te suspirat anima mea', *Incendium,* p. 152; 'to ye my hert desyres', *Fire*, p. 7.
[437] 'suspiret perseueranti amore', *Incendium*, p. 252; 'with lufe abydynge desire', *Fire*, p. 84.

risk misleading readers as long as these interpretational parameters were clear, much the same as for any aspect of mystical experience.

Conclusions

Overall, Misyn's translation belies little concern for the content of the text or the ability of his patron and extended circle to exercise the appropriate judgement in taking inspiration from its guidance. Editorial intervention in the text instead speaks predominantly to more practical concerns of accessibility in terms of educational and linguistic limitations rather than spiritual expectations. As Ann Killian has argued in her recent work on Rolle's lyric poetry, where his work has previously been set apart by his use of ecstatic language and mystical imagery, we see instead that it fitted readily among other contemporary poetry written for the purposes of pastoral care.[438] There is only one significant area of alteration to the expression of emotion, which locates for us the sole site of editorial concern to mediate an orthodox interpretation – the spiritual nature of the feeling in question. We can surmise that the 'controversial' physicality of the *Incendium* was both an important aspect of its efficacy as a devotional resource and of its appeal to readers, which Misyn accordingly endeavoured to preserve in as much depth and variety as possible.

Misyn's translation of Rolle's Latin texts needs to be orientated in its environment of enthusiastic vernacular literary production for the purposes of supporting devotional development in a reform-minded atmosphere. Against this backdrop, we may see it as distinctive, holding its own appeal for its content and forms of expression, but still situated in the same religious and cultural milieu as other devotional texts. Indeed, the inclusion of *The*

[438] Killian, 'Lyric Anonymity'.

Fire in the Carthusian Amherst MS compilation indicates that Rolle's work participated in a larger tradition, certainly with its own appeal – its own particular 'brand' of mysticism – perhaps even a hint of the controversial but still serving similar purposes and attitudes. Any consideration of Rolle must note the not-incompatible duality of his work and historical reputation as both controversial outsider and popular devotional inspiration. This is most strongly demonstrated in Misyn's own person – his translation of the *Incendium* was produced at a turning point in his career, rising to hold high institutional offices in the church and his own order. This would certainly not have been possible if any concern over Rolle's teachings was not entirely reconcilable with an institutional position responsible for regulation of orthodoxy. Indeed, his handling of the text may well have contributed to a reputation for pastoral care and orthodox direction which was borne out in his offices of bishop, suffragan, and inquisitor.

Orientating Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* to account for a wider network of reception beyond its named patron provides additional context to Misyn's editorial choices which widens the scope of how we might consider this text, its author and its translator. Although it is impossible to say whether Misyn intended for his translation to aid his institutional career, the social connections of its patroness and the opportunity to showcase intellectual and pastoral abilities cannot have hindered it. The construction of a bibliographic ego at odds with his previous Rollean translation and with the general practices of Carmelite authors speaks to a specific purpose in associating himself with this text as it moved beyond his order and into a broader network of exchange and patronage. The particular emphasis placed on the mixed life aspects of Misyn's professional persona, rather than the eremitical aspects which would have best served the anchoritic Margaret, is more fitting for the devotional profile of her social circle of guild members. The extended circle of the guild very plausibly served to further Misyn's

reputation as a proponent of the devotional practices and spiritual journeys of the laity, and as a figure of authority in literary as well as personal guidance. The possible use, maybe direct purpose, of *The Fire* as a demonstration of Misyn's own capabilities offers new questions of *why* such texts were translated beyond the availability of their devotional content. It also demonstrates the potentials of religious literature in this period to elevate individuals in specific professional contexts and calls for attention to its possible use as such in the face of growing demand for a literary aspect to devotion and spiritual guidance among social elites.

The question of reception and purpose also nuances how we might consider the involvement of women in Rolle's work. While Rolle did not write the majority of his works for women, women certainly played a part in the proliferation and preservation of his writings of personal experience, even those not written directly for their consumption like the *Incendium*. This suggests that the greater value of Rolle's work to gender history lies not in identifying a female spirituality, but rather a literary culture and network of communication across the locale which establishes female reading communities as significant regional intellectual and cultural influences. Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* was commissioned by a woman who belonged to a book-owning and sharing community whose membership included a considerable number of highly educated women. His treatment of the text therefore speaks to some extent of an appeal to a female readership within the broader scope of a vernacular lay audience. It is certainly worth questioning how many other religious texts have been considered in light of their patrons or patronesses without a broader view to who else might have been considered as a secondary stage of reception in communities where book sharing and bequeathing was increasingly common and immediate practice.

Chapter 2: Henry Suso

Suso was celebrated during his life and to the present day for his extensive body of writing. Steven Rozenski's concept of 'devotional mobility' – 'mobility of devotional authors in catering to vastly different readerships over the course of their careers' – is helpful in understanding the range of Suso's writing and engagement with different audiences.[439] He demonstrates a wide-ranging and flexible use of a prestigious Dominican education for the purposes of teaching across different contexts, particularly in the setting of the *cura monialium*, merging experiential detail with scripture, religious canon, exegesis, and rhetoric.[440] Contextualisation of his life and work reveals a complex backdrop against which his texts responded to the specific temporal, geographical, and institutional circumstances in which they were produced. This chapter will argue that it is important to consider his works in context in order to shed light on what they might signify in terms of Suso's relationship to various institutions, communities, and individuals, in turn nuancing what questions might be asked of their content and what they reflect of their author and audiences.

Suso's redaction and expansion of his vernacular devotional guide, *Das Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit (The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom)*, into his most widely transmitted popular work, the scholastic Latin text *Horologium Sapientiae (The Clock of Wisdom)*, exemplifies the concept of 'devotional mobility'.[441] Examining the shape of this 'mobility' (i.e. the features and patterns of this redaction/expansion) offers insight into how Suso's personal context and

[439] Steven Rozenski Jr., 'Authority and Exemplarity in Henry Suso and Richard Rolle', in E.A. Jones (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 93.
[440] Alois Maria Haas and Kurt Ruh, 'Seuse, Heinrich', in Kurt Ruh (ed.), *Verfasserlexikon, pt. II* (2004), p. 1125.; Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961).
[441] Henry Suso, *Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit*, in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 196-325; Henry Suso, *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and Little Book of Truth*, ed. and trans. James Midgely Clark (London, 1953).

respective audiences influenced the texts. Written during the exile of his community from Constance in the midst of papal-imperial conflict, against a backdrop of repeated interdicts that disrupted Dominican life and mission, new material that appears in the *Horologium* speaks directly to the experiences and concerns of these circumstances. This was also the first Latin work written by Suso since his earlier defence of Meister Eckhart's heretical articles of teaching, which had warranted his own trial and removal from the office of lector. It can be understood as a point of reintegration with a community from which Suso had been distanced, perhaps even excluded as an active participant. The adaptation of the earlier vernacular material of *BdEW* into a Latin text intended for reception in elite scholarly circles reveals much of the intellectual and spiritual expectations of this new audience and how certain concepts or experiences might be 'repackaged' for different receptions.

Suso's writings were largely intended to support the audience in their spiritual journey, providing guidance on sharing in Suso's own experience of knowing and loving God. They also engaged with critical discourses on the church and academic institutions and weighed in on complicated and high-stakes regional politics. This 'secondary' function comes to the fore when texts and their content are properly understood in the contexts of their production. Throughout his life, Suso lived in an environment of institutional conflict which often saw Dominican communities caught between civic, ecclesiastical, royal, and monastic factionalism. In order to appreciate both the intersecting 'devotional' and 'institutional commentary' aspects of his works, we must consider the circumstances in which they were written, and the personal experience of their author in relation to the wider discourses with which they interact.

Challenges of biography

Much of the biographical material for Suso's life is drawn from his writings, particularly the *Vita.* How to assess the authorial voice of this work has been a matter of considerable debate. Written in the 1340s, during a period when his Dominican community were in exile from Constance, the *Vita* (also known as *Seuses Leben* or the *Life of the Servant*) recounts the spiritual journey of the figure of 'the Servant'.[442] Details of the protagonist's life and spiritual journey are used to analyse the meaning of human existence and present a universally accessible path to God. The work recounts ascetic practices and visions, largely through a correspondence between the spiritual mentor and his spiritual disciple, the historically verifiable Elsbeth Stagel (c.1300-c.1360), a Dominican nun at the convent of Töss. Born to a patrician family in Zürich, Stagel was one of the many highly educated noblewomen who populated Dominican convents in this region.[443] She likely met Suso in c.1336 during a routine pastoral visitation to Töss, just 25 miles from Constance. According to the *Vita*, the two developed a relationship of spiritual direction and theological enquiry which spanned the rest of Suso's life, much of which was contained in a surviving body of letters.[444] Stagel is understood in historical scholarship as an author in her own right, contributing a number of biographies to the *Tösser Schwesternbuch.*[445] Whether her nominal status as official 'author'

[442] *Seuses Lebens* in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 7-195; *The Life of the Servant*, ed. and trans. James Midgley Clark (London, 1952).
[443] On Stagel's life and work, see Gertrud Jaron Lewis, Frank Willaert and Marie-José Govers (eds.), *Bibliographie zur deutschen Frauenmystik des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1989), pp. 304-10; Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto, 1996), pp. 21-6; Alois Marie Haas, 'Stagel, Elsbeth, OP.', in Kurt Ruh (ed.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon, Vol. 9* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 219-25; On Stagel as author, see Klaus Grubmüller, 'Die Viten der Schwestern von Töss und Elsbeth Stagel', *ZfdA*, 98 (1969), pp. 171-204; Albrecht Classen, 'From Nonnenbuch to Epistolarity: Elsbeth Stagel as a Late Medieval Woman Writer', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Medieval German Studies. Proceedings from the 23rd International Conference, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo* (Kalamazoo, 1989), pp. 147-69.
[444] For letters, see Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel, *The Sister's Guide: The Letters of Henry Suso to his Spiritual Daughters*, trans. Kathleen Goldmann (Springfield, 1955).
[445] Elsbeth Stagel and Johannes Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin, 1906).

of the *Schwesternbuch* is historical fact or hagiographical construction has been a matter of debate.[446]

The *Vita* was previously interpreted largely as biographical. It reports that the protagonist's early years were marked by extreme ascetic practices and extensive self-mortification. It recounts how he experienced his first mystical encounter at eighteen, in which the figure of Eternal Wisdom (*Ewigú Wisheit*) introduced him to a deeper form of religious life. He was spiritually converted and replaced his physical extremes with the internal suffering of affective contemplation. His various writings testify to an intense devotion to Eternal Wisdom as a facet of Christ which came to define much of the rest of his life.

However, Suso's use of the character of 'the Servant' indicates detachment of this constructed figure from the author himself, or indeed, any verifiable historical figure. The Servant's spiritual identity is constructed through performative self-design and can only be approached as a literary model. Indeed, Suso is unnamed in the text, and is linked to it only through its attribution to him. Nevertheless, there are enough markers of reality that connect the Servant with the authorial personality and Suso's historical world to allow for a biographical interpretation to have developed over the course of its reception history.[447] As a result, an awareness of the constructed persona of 'the Servant' and knowledge of the historical figure of Henry Suso need not be understood as mutually exclusive. Indeed, as Jeffrey Hamburger points out, to Suso and his audience, 'this debate would have been largely irrelevant, if not

[446] Grubmüller, 'Die Viten der Schwestern von Töss'.
[447] On this interpretational development, see Stephanie Altrock and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, 'Vom 'diener der ewigen wisheit' zum Autor Heinrich Seuse. Autorschaft und Medienwandel in den illustrierten Handschriften und Drucken von Heinrich Seuses *Exemplar*', in Ursula Peters (ed.), *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150-1450* (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 150-81.

meaningless.'[448] Susanne Bernhardt's examination of this relationship between literary text and historical life emphasises the constructions at play and their influence on how the content was received. Her study highlights the constructed nature of 'mystical experience' texts, and how this serves their functional use for directing reception, presenting 'a perspective that does not ask for biographical authenticity of experience, but rather for the narrative techniques that develop an exemplary structured life as a model.'[449] She argues that the literary characters of the Servant as spiritual mentor and Stagel as spiritual daughter are carriers of religious concepts and models, constituted only within and through their narrative-performative enactment in the text. The historical references to the verifiable world of Suso and Stagel lend these figures additional authority and create the potential for individualising the teachings and experiences in the process of appropriating the text as a devotional model.

Questions of authorship and authority in the *Vita*, and the gendered dynamics therein, are complex. The *Vita* might be better conceptualised as quasi-autohagiographical, as it is putatively jointly written by Suso's alter ego, the Servant, and Elsbeth Stagel in her role as his spiritual disciple.[450] The 'spiritual daughter' is rendered as an idealised recipient and imitator of the example of 'the Servant' constructed by Suso, serving as disciple, collaborator, and patron. Indeed, the narrative voice of the *Vita* attributes full authorial credit to the spiritual daughter, an iteration of Stagel. The image of the holy woman and her male confessor was an

[448] Jeffrey Hamburger, 'Medieval Self-Fashioning: Authorship, Authority, and Autobiography in Seuse's Exemplar', in Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph Peter Wawrykow (eds.), *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers* (Notre Dame, 1998), pp. 435.
[449] Susanne Bernhardt, *Figur im Vollzug. Narrative Strukturen im religiösen Selbstentwurf der Vita Heinrich Seuses* (Tübingen, 2016), p. 11.
[450] On autohagiography, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984); On the development of this genre particularly in women's devotional writing, see Kate Greenspan, 'Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography', in Jane Change (ed.), *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Gainesville, 1996), pp. 216-36; On Suso and Stagel, see David F. Tinsley, 'The Spiritual Friendship of Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel', in David F. Tinsley (ed.), *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 477-99; Frank Tobin, 'Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel: Was the Vita a Cooperative Effort?', in Catherine M. Mooney (ed.), *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 118-35.

established *topos* in hagiography and didactic literature, and the figure of Stagel in the *Vita* is likely hagiographical, if not autohagiographical.[451] The spiritual relationship presented in the *Vita* appears to have gained popular status, particularly among reformers interested in the spiritual dynamics of the *cura monialium*. Indeed, the Dominican reformer Johannes Meyer elevated them as exemplars of the possibilities of a fruitful spiritual relationship.[452] Meyer's edition of the Töss *Schwesternbuch* included an additional life of Stagel, and the prologue recommended the *Vita* for biographical reference. Klaus Grubmüller's investigation of Stagel's role in the *Schwesternbuch* concluded that it had been considerably exaggerated, casting doubt on her position in relation to the *Vita* as well, as both works were edited, translated, and circulated within similar reform-minded circles.[453] Therefore, we can say with some certainty that a blend of auto-hagiographical and hagiographical intervention was at play, although we cannot say exactly what forms it took. However, that is not to assume that this is not situated within a record of a real relationship between Suso and Stagel. Frank Tobin's reassessment of the text reiterated Karl Bihlmeyer's earlier explanation that Stagel likely contributed material which was then edited by Suso and assimilated into his own writing.[454] Although not an author in any traditional sense of the word, Stagel's impact on the text is felt in its form and content, and her place as both idealised and factual character therein.

[451] Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum. Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmysticher Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1988).
[452] Meri Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ: Gender and Body in Later Medieval German Mysticism* (Turku, 2007), p. 254.
[453] Grubmüller, 'Die Viten der Schwestern von Töß'.
[454] Tobin, 'Was the Vita a Cooperative Effort', p. 133; Karl Bihlmeyer, 'Einleitung', in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 132-6.

Context: educational environment, 'academic' career, and regional politics

Suso's formative years of education were shaped not just by the curricula and masters of the German Dominican schools, but also by an atmosphere of tension between mendicant, clerical, and civic groups. Not only were these an intellectual issue to be grappled with, but a practical consideration that disrupted the very core of the Dominican mission. Suso's personal experience of these regional tensions is an important backdrop to his later work. In order to make an appraisal of any aspect of these works, it is therefore important to consider the full context of his formal education.

Suso's career was shaped by extensive education at some of the greatest contemporary centres for learning in northern Europe. The fourteenth-century Dominican schools were a well-developed, sophisticated network, facilitating the flexible exchange of people and ideas throughout Europe. The institutions of Dominican education prepared the brothers for the weighty task 'that we might be useful to the souls of our neighbours' (*ut proximorum animabus possimus utiles esse*).[455] The order had been founded with the express purpose of actively opposing and correcting what the church labelled heretical through the preaching of the doctrines and morals of Christian faith, and this education system was intrinsic to their apostolic mission. Indeed, much Dominican scholastic literature in this period was produced in the context of the *studia*, and its discourses were shaped by the concerns and practical and spiritual challenges of the world beyond the institution.[456] Preaching outside the convent required individuals to be at least twenty-five, and to have completed four years of study at a *studium generale.* A brother entering public preaching had, therefore, studied for around eight

[455] *Constitutiones antiquae Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum (1215-1237)*, ed. A.H. Thomas (Louvain, 1965), p. 15.
[456] M. Michèle Mulchahey, *'First the Bow is Bent in Study…': Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto, 1998), p. 130; A.B. Cobban, *The Medieval Universities: Their Development and Organisation* (London, 1975).

years – three of initial study, two of which focused on philosophy and one on basic study, canon law and history of the Church, followed by a further four years of theological study.[457] These measures ensured that the future preachers were those with the right qualities and ideas to serve the order's aims and purposes.[458] Suso's education was the product of this intensive, innovative system, and its importance in shaping his theology and work cannot be overstated.

According to official records, Suso was admitted to the novitiate at Constance at the age of thirteen and undertook his preparatory philosophical and theological studies there. The city thrived on its reputation as a seat of both religious and secular power, and its monopoly on regional trade and communications. It was a key spiritual centre, with a quarter of the population claiming clerical rights to tax exemption during the late Middle Ages.[459] The Dominican monastery, situated on Lake Constance just outside the main city, was established in 1236 by Prince-Bishop Heinrich von Tanne (c.1190-1249; r.1233-1248). It was a focal point for the religious lives of local nobility, from whom it drew the majority of its brothers.[460] Born Heinrich von Berg, a son of the ruling family of Swabia, Suso shared this prestigious social background.

Suso undertook further studies at Strasbourg and then Cologne, both major political and mercantile centres in the Rhineland during the later Middle Ages and home to prestigious Dominican schools. These cities were also sites of significant tension and open conflict between secular and ecclesiastical authorities, often resulting in papal interdicts which

[457] Andreas Rüther, 'Educational Communities in German Convents of the Franciscan and Dominican Provinces before 1350', Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski (eds.), *Medieval Education* (New York, 2009), pp. 123-5.
[458] Burkhard Hasebrink, 'Latinität als Bildungsfundament: Spuren subsidiärer Grammatikunterweisung im Dominikanerorden', in Burkhard Hasebrink, *Schulliteratur im späten Mittelalter* (München, 2000), pp. 49-76.
[459] Gert Zang, *Kleine Geschichte der Stadt Konstanz* (Lauingen, 2010); Helmut Maurer, *Geschichte der Stadt Konstanz: Konstanz im Mittelalter* (Konstanz, 1996).
[460] On Dominicans in Constance, see M.B. Hilberling, *Das Dominikanerkloster St. Nikolaus auf der Insel von Konstanz: Geschichte und Bedeutung* (Sigmaringen, 1969).

threatened the Dominican mission and placed the brothers in danger. These factional tensions shaped Suso's life and career and are an important backdrop to his work, as the following section will establish.

Suso attended the *studia* in Strasbourg from c.1319 to c.1321. Established in 1224, the Dominican convent was one of the oldest and most important in the province of Teutonia. The community was renowned as a long-standing centre for learning, noted for fostering new schools of thought and famous masters.[461] He then attended the Cologne *studium generale* from 1324 to 1327. Cologne was another key centre for Dominican education, standing at the axis of a 'capillary network' of other provincial and convent schools, exerting powerful Dominican influence over German intellectual life in the later-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.[462] The *studium generale* was founded in 1248 by Albertus Magnus, and fundamentally changed the composition of the city, as its reputation for excellence attracted students and masters from across Europe. Like Strasbourg, Cologne was *alma mater* to influential Dominican intellectuals like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Heinrich von Lübeck (d. c.1336), Dietrich von Freiberg (c.1250-c.1310) and Nikolaus von Straßburg (14thC.) all spent time there in the fourteenth century.[463] Fostered by masters such as Dietrich von Freiberg, Meister Eckhart (d.1328), and Berthold of Moosburg (d. post-1361), intellectual life at Cologne cultivated new strands of thought, such as the 'Cologne tradition' of neo-platonic thought.[464] This built on the syllabi

[461] Alessandro Palazzo, 'Philosophy and Theology in the German Dominican *scholae* in the Late Middle Ages: The Cases of Ulrich of Strasbourg and Berthold of Wimpfen', in K. Emery Jr., W.J. Courtenay and S.M. Metzger (eds.), *Philosophy and Theology in the 'Studia' of the Religious Orders and at Papal and Royal Courts* (Turnhout, 2012), p. 81.
[462] Palazzo, 'Philosophy and Theology', p. 78.
[463] On fourteenth-century Dominican intellectuals associated with Cologne, see Gabriel Löhr, *Die Kölner Dominikanerschule vom 14. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert: Mit einer Übersicht oder die Gesamtenwicklung* (Cologne, 1948).
[464] Niklaus Largier, 'Die 'deutsche Dominikanerschule'. Zur Problematik eines historiographischen Konzepts', in J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer (eds.), *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2000), pp. 202-13; Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought* (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 315-69; Loris Sturlese, 'Albert der Grosse und die Deutsche philosophische Kultur des Mittelalters', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 28 (1981), pp. 133-47.

established by Albertus Magnus which taught classical philosophy and natural sciences alongside more traditional elements.[465] Like other Dominican scholars educated in this environment, Suso learned how to present scholarly concepts and complex theology to lay audiences outside of his own educational and religious sphere. This would be clearly borne out in his preaching and writings. As a product of these schools, Suso was well-connected among the institutional circles that taught and studied there and was an active participating member of these scholastic communities, familiar with their expectations and understandings.

While historians have paid attention to the influences of intellectual environment and individual theologians on Suso's work, similar thought has yet to be given to the influence of tensions between mendicant communities, local clergymen, and civic authorities which played out in these cities during the fourteenth century. This was a period in which metropolitan Dominicans repeatedly grappled with the challenges and peculiarities of carrying on their mission while under interdict or in exile. Even Dominican women's communities were under growing pressure from local populations to allow them entry to their convents to share in the liturgy administered there while their own city churches were under interdict.

Within Strasbourg, social tension and anti-Dominican sentiment was exacerbated as their wealth, intellectual prestige, and pastoral esteem allowed the Dominicans to dominate many areas of secular and spiritual life. The city was home to a large concentration of mendicant schools, and their presence encroached on the financial and spiritual jurisdiction of the regular clergy, visually manifested in grand building projects across the city as each competed for

[465] Palazzo, 'Philosophy and Theology', p. 77; Johann Beukes, 'Neoplatonism in the Cologne tradition of the later Middle Ages: Berthold of Moosburg (ca. 1300-1361) as case study,' *HTS Theological Studies* 77/4 (2021), pp. 62-81.

spiritual and social dominance.[466] Indeed, tensions between cathedral and order played out in contest for access to urban property, and local clergymen and civic leaders often converged to further their mutual cause against the Dominicans. Discord between the brothers and the city of Strasbourg during the mid to late 1280s culminated in their expulsion from the city, a resultant interdict, and the spread of such tensions to neighbouring towns.[467] The ramifications of papal interdict in the late 1280s were keenly felt by both Dominicans and townspeople. The documentation of disciplinary infractions found in the letters of the German provincial Hermann von Minden (1286-90) shows repeated attempts to circumvent its limitations.[468] For example, in early 1289 the prior of Colmar was instructed to punish two brothers, Erbonus and Humbertus, for entering the convent of St Agnes in Strasbourg, likely for the purposes of illicitly administering confession to the nuns during the interdict.[469] The local abbess is also reprimanded for allowing this visit, perhaps even inviting it.[470] Some of the Dominican women's communities attempted to receive sacramental ministration where they could, with Hermann expressing disapproval of local Franciscans, who had remained on reasonable terms with the city magistrates and remained *in situ*, being invited into Dominican convents.[471] These anti-fraternal undercurrents persisted throughout the fourteenth century, visible in cases brought against the brethren and uneasy factional alliances between involved parties. Matters came to a head in 1370 when complaints of corruption and sexual depravity made by Dominican nuns against their male counterparts were taken at face value and amplified in

[466] Charlotte A. Stanford, 'Architectural Rivalry as Civic Mirror: The Dominican Church and the Cathedral in Fourteenth-Century Strasbourg', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 64/2 (2005), pp. 186-203.
[467] Andreas Rüther, *Bettelorden in Stadt und Land: Die Straßburger Mendikantenkonvente und das Elsass im Spätmittelalter* (Berlin, 1997); Sandrine Turck, *Les Dominicaines à Strasbourg, entre prêche, prière et mendicité (1224-1420)* (Strasbourg, 2002), pp. 39-45.
[468] For more on the register of Hermann's letters in this context, see Guy Geltner, *The Making of Antifraternalism: Polemic, Violence, Deviance, and Remembrance* (Oxford, 2012), p. 90.
[469] Heinrich Finke (ed.), *Ungedruckte Dominikanerbriefe des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1891), p. 132, no. 110.
[470] Finke, *Ungedruckte Dominikanerbriefe*, p. 133, no. 112.
[471] Finke, *Ungedruckte Dominikanerbriefe*, p. 153, no. 140.

attack against the order, causing further constraints on their access to public space in Strasbourg.[472]

Suso's years at Cologne and Constance were marked by tensions similar to those in Strasbourg. His repeated movement between convents reflects large-scale political tensions impacting the Dominicans in Cologne as well as Constance. Like Strasbourg, where the city had rejected the effective, although not theoretical, overlordship of its bishop in 1262, Cologne was a place of civic tensions and site of a number of political battles between the archbishop and the city. The archbishop was not only the ecclesiastical leader of the region, but also its secular ruler. Attempts to further civic autonomy in the fourteenth century escalated into military confrontation between the archbishop and other regional rulers. Further unrest was stirred by the conflict between Pope John XXII (1244-1334, r.1316-1334) and Louis of Bavaria (1282-1347) when the pontiff refused to recognise Louis' self-election as Holy Roman Emperor.[473] This conflict escalated until Louis crowned himself Emperor in Rome in January 1328, and deposed the Pope in favour of an antipope, Nicholas de Corvaro.[474] Although Louis had defeated his rival candidate, Frederick of Habsburg, at Mühldorf in 1322, the Archbishop of Cologne continued to support Frederick's claim and crowned him emperor. The *city* of Cologne, along with many of the German princes, placed their support with Louis. John

[472] Andreas Rüther, *Bettelorden in Stadt und Land*, pp. 434-5.; Michael Tönsing, *Johannes Malkaw aus Preußen (ca.1360-1416): Ein Kleriker im Spannungsfeld von Kanzel, Ketzerprozess und Kirchenspaltung* (Warendorf, 2004), pp. 142-3.
[473] On Pope John XXII, see Sebastian Zanke, *Johannes XXII., Avignon, und Europa: Das politische Papsttum im Spiegel der kurialen Register (1316-1334)* (Leiden, 2013); Patrick Nold, *Pope John XXII and his Franciscan Cardinal: Bertrand de la Tour and the Apostolic Poverty Controversy* (Oxford, 2003); James Heft, *Pope John XXII and Papal Teaching Authority* (New York, 1986); On Louis IV of Bavaria, see A. Schütz, 'Ludwig der Bayer', in *Neue deutsche Biographie*, 15 (Berlin, 1987), pp. 334-47; H. Thomas, *Ludwig der Bayer (1282-1347). Kaiser und Ketzer* (Regensburg, 1993).
[474] On this conflict, and historical overview of German imperial elections, see Michael Frassetto, 'Medieval Germany: History of the Emperors and Empire, c.750-c.1350', in Francis Gentry (ed.), *A Companion to Middle High German Literature to the 14th Century* (2002), pp. 1-25, esp. p. 22.

excommunicated Louis in January 1324, and his followers shortly thereafter, placing the citizens of Cologne under interdict.

The Dominicans of Cologne were directly involved in this conflict, and in a perilous position shared by mendicant communities throughout the region. Their role in ministering to a significant proportion of the civic population gave them reach and influence among the laity. The archbishop charged the Dominicans of Cologne with announcing the excommunications to the public on pain of excommunication themselves.[475] This delegation illustrates the double-edged sword of their position. They served as diplomatic representatives between Cathedral and City, bridging the gap between religious and secular institutions and allegiances. However, the threat of excommunication suggests that they were also considered an influential political body to be publicly brought into line with episcopal allegiances in order to prevent further disruption. The tension between city, archbishop, and Dominicans in Cologne cannot be understated, as overlapping and often conflicting authorities and allegiances played out across the fourteenth century. It is difficult to imagine that Suso would not have been influenced by, perhaps personally involved in, the various political currents of the city during his time there.

These factional conflicts continued to shape Suso's life and career after his return to the Constance community. Like mendicants in many imperial cities, overlapping papal and imperial interdicts placed the Constance community in an untenable position.[476] The political power of the Prince-Bishops of Constance was limited in practice, and their holdings had been reduced to a small zone around the cathedral since the twelfth century.[477] However, they held

[475] Walter Senner, 'Meister Eckhart's Life, Training, Career, and Trial', in Jeremiah Hackett (ed.), *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Turnhout, 2012), p. 42.
[476] Alphons Lhotsky, *Geschichte Österreichs seit der Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts (1281-1358)* (Vienna, 1967), pp. 287-93.
[477] On the Prince-Bishopric of Constance, see Jeff J. Tyler, *Lord of the Sacred City: The Episcopus exclusus in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 39-76.

a political stake in both the papal-imperial struggle and the regional conflicts which arose between the Emperor Louis and the rival dynastic houses of Luxembourg and Habsburg. This conflict and its ramifications for Dominican communities shaped the circumstances in which Suso wrote and offers important interpretive context for the discourses in which he engaged.

In order to recognise its influence in Suso's work, we must address the political atmosphere of Constance and the southwest of Germany more broadly. The early fourteenth-century conflict between pontiff and emperor was the culmination of centuries of tensions between the two. It drew on old political rivalries in imperial Italy and Germany, and ongoing spiritual controversies within the church.[478] The relocation of the papal court to Avignon during the 'Babylonian Captivity' (1309-1367) prompted wide criticism of the increasingly worldly nature of the church.[479] Louis' self-election in opposition to papal ruling brought matters to a head. After his excommunication in 1324, Louis' lands were placed under interdict.[480] Following his coronation in 1328, Louis answered John's sanctions with the *Sachsenhausen Appellation*, announcing that the emperor was divinely appointed and did not require papal approval.[481] Against an already divisive backdrop, this claim to self-authorising legitimacy fractured strained loyalties. The church in the German empire was split between factional supporters and opponents of Louis whose legitimacy was denied for the next two decades by Popes John XXII (1316-1334), Benedict XII (1334-1342) and Clement VI (1342-1352).

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[478] Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of the Church and State, 1050-1300.* 2nd edn (Toronto, 1988), pp. 193-209; Hilary S. Offler, 'Empire and Papacy: The Last Struggle', in Anthony I. Doyle (ed.), *Church and Crown in the Fourteenth Century: Studies in European History and Political Thought* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 21-47.
[479] Jean Favier, *Les papes d'Avignon* (Paris, 2006).; Howard Kaminsky, 'The Great Schism', in Michael Jones (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, c. 1300-1415* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 674-96; Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy-Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), pp. 75-172.
[480] Georg Modestin, 'The Making of a Heretic: Pope John XXII's Campaign against Louis of Bavaria', in Michael D. Bailey and Sean L. Field (eds.), *Late Medieval Heresy: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 76-95.
[481] 'The 1338 *Sachsenhausen Appellation*', in O. Thatcher (ed.), *A Sourcebook for Medieval History* (New York, 1905), pp. 279-80.

Constance was caught up in early clashes between Louis and John.[482] In 1318, priests who upheld the papal ban on providing sacraments were exiled from the city. The chronicler and canon of the Constance Cathedral chapter, Henry of Diessenhofen, although a staunch papal supporter, was critical of John who 'troubled Germany in his proceedings against Louis, which, however, were pointless.'[483] By the mid-1330s the Imperial Cities were increasingly in favour of recognising Louis' crown to secure peace. When Louis appeared before the Frankfurt Diet in 1338 to make a statement of principle on his accession to the imperial throne, the German cities and most of the ecclesiastical lords were united in support of his claim. Rudolph von Montfort, Prince-Bishop of Constance (1322-1334), initially sided with John, but defected to the emperor in 1332. The Prince-Bishop was an important ally. Louis brought troops to the western edge of Lake Constance, pursuing and besieging the next papal candidate for Prince-Bishop, Nicholas of Frauenfeld, in an attempt to prevent the loss of Constance to papal supporters. Nicholas was ultimately successful, presiding from 1334-44, and renewing the city's official allegiance to the pontificate.[484]

Suso and his community were directly impacted by these events. Severing imperial allegiance placed Constance in a precarious position, subject both to imperial hostility and internal divisions between the Cathedral and civilians.[485] Benedict XII renewed interdicts on the city for its continued support of Louis despite the papal loyalties of its Cathedral and Prince-Bishop,

[482] For overview of Constance in this conflict, see Edi Joos, 'Die Unruhen der Stadt Konstanz 1300-1450', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 116 (1968), pp. 31-58.
[483] Alfons Huber, *Heinricus de Diessenhofen und andere Geschichtsquellen Deutschlands im späteren Mittelalter, hg. aus dem Nachlasse Johann Friedrich Böhmers* (Stuttgart, 1868), p. 16.
[484] Tyler, *Lord of the Sacred City*, p. 53.
[485] On the Dominican community caught up in this struggle, see Andreas Bihrer, 'Einzug, Weihe und erste Messe. Symbolische Interaktion zwischen Bischof, Hof und Stadt im spätmittelalterlichen Konstanz. Zugleich einige methodische Ergänzungen zu den Ergebnissen der aktuellen Adventusforschung', in Gerrit Deutschländer, Marc von der Höh and Andreas Ranft (eds.), *Symbolische Interaktion in der Residenzstadt der Spätmittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2013), p. 77.

who extensively petitioned for the sanctions to be lifted.[486] Under the interdict, the Dominicans were unable to minister the sacraments, perhaps unable even to celebrate the Eucharist themselves, as seen in Strasbourg. Having upheld the interdict out of loyalty to the papacy, local clergy resumed worship in the city in January 1339, forced by the imperially loyal citizens.[487] Facing the enmity of the citizens for continuing in their papal loyalty, it became impossible for the Dominicans to remain in the city, and the community entered exile. Suso and a group of brothers travelled between Dominican convents in the region, preaching and carrying out the duties of the *cura monialium.* Suso settled for the longest period at Diessenhofen and is known to have visited Stagel at Töss.

Suso did not return to Constance with the rest of the community in 1346. Instead, he joined the Dominican community at Ulm in late-1347/early-1348, where he remained until his death in 1366. Ulm had held the status of Free Imperial City since 1155 and was home to a well-established and prosperous community of traders and craftsmen, less afflicted by the internal conflict of the cities from which Suso had come. The Dominican convent there was founded in 1281, and had experienced its own period of exile, returning to the city in the same year that Suso arrived. It appears to have gone relatively undisturbed thereafter. Although it was a comparatively smaller, less prestigious centre, the Dominican *studium* at Ulm became one of the largest in the area by the mid-fourteenth century.[488] There is no evidence for quasi-hagiographical claims that Suso moved there to escape false accusations of fathering a child, or a second heresy trial – these have long been discounted in academic scholarship.[489] It is more

[486] On the Bishop, Cathedral, and city relations under these sanctions, see Brigitte Hotz, *Päpstliche Stellenvergabe am Konstanzer Domkapitel. Die avignonesische Periode (1316-1378) und die Domherrengemeinschaft beim Übergang zum Schisma (1378)* (Berlin, 2005), p. 672.
[487] Georg Modestin, "Facta est magna strages'. Der Konstanzer Domherr Heinrich von Diessenhofen und die zeitgenössische Historiographie des Laupenkriegeg', *Freiburger Geschichtsblätter*, 85 (2008), p. 33-4.
[488] David Scheffler, *Schools and Schooling in Late Medieval Germany: Regensburg, 1250-1500* (Brill, 2008), p. 167.
[489] H.C. Graef, 'Blessed Henry Suso', *Blackfriars*, 22/256 (1941), p. 354.

likely that Ulm was a 'retirement', somewhere he could write his autobiography, edit his works, oversee their production, and correct mistakes and inconsistencies in those already in circulation.

Thus, Suso's life was shaped by turbulent political divisions played out in the fractured ecclesiastical and civic loyalties of imperial cities. His formative years of education were informed not just by the curricula and masters of the great Dominican schools, but also by tensions between mendicant, clerical, and civic groups. Not only were these an intellectual issue to be grappled with, but a practical consideration that disrupted the very core of the Dominican mission. These conflicts afflicted Dominicans across the region and were a challenge Suso personally contended with as prior of Constance. They are an essential background to his works, particularly those written as tensions reached boiling point and he and his community entered exile.

While political turbulences thus shaped his thinking, it is equally important to understand his place within scholarly institutions and Dominican intellectual communities. The role of the contentious reception of his first public engagement with scholastic discourse in shaping his later work is underexamined. Suso has been situated within the scholastic community in which he was educated, particularly his interactions with other key figures of German mystical writing and theology, notably Eckhart and Tauler.[490] Within the continuum of these German mystics in the integration of personal experience and theological mysticism, Suso's mystical teaching stands out in its deeply affective character, Eucharistic elements, and exemplarity.[491] It is

[490] Hamburger, 'Medieval Self–Fashioning'; Charlotte C. Radler, 'Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Henry Suso', in Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 340-56.
[491] On Eucharistic elements, see Volker Leppin, 'Mystische Frömmigkeit und sakramentale Heilsvermittlung im späten Mittelalter', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 112 (2001), pp. 195-6; Burkhard Hasebrink, 'Diesseits? Eucharistie bei Meister Eckhart im Kontext der Debatten um 'Präsenzkultur'', in Christian Kiening (ed.), *Mediale Gegenwärtigkeit* (Zürich, 2007), pp. 193-205; Hamburger, 'Medieval Self–Fashioning'.

characterised by a particularly affective focus on suffering as a path to divine union, presenting a close relationship between the ideal of *leiden/tribulatio* and the passion of Christ. The relationship with God is often depicted in highly emotional, sometimes even sensual terms, which positions his work within the tradition of bridal mysticism, as seen in the writings of other German mystics like Mechthild of Magdeburg. However, the personal nuances and tensions of Suso's scholarly career which certainly influenced his work have received less attention.[492] Most significant to the present study are the implications of Suso's initial foray into scholarly discourse, *Büchlein der Wahrheit (Little Book of Truth)*, and its outcomes for his later return to the same audience, the *Horologium*.[493] Written in defence of Meister Eckhart's heretical articles of teaching, *BdW* changed the course of Suso's scholarly career, and this personal context is of vital consideration when examining his next scholarly work, the *Horologium*, raising new possibilities for the authorial concerns that shaped it.

Much historical study of Suso has been dominated by interest in his relationship with Eckhart, who spent some years teaching at Cologne, arriving there a year before Suso. Although the nature of Eckhart's position in the *studium* has been widely debated, he was certainly considered an important teacher and star attraction.[494] From the *Vita*, we can infer that Suso learned from Eckhart and that he approached him for spiritual advice. This is elaborated upon in version contained in the *Exemplar*, where he reports that Eckhart delivered him from an 'excessive fear' of damnation and assuaged his suffering.[495] While presenting Suso as a 'disciple of Eckhart' is misleading, specific concepts and linguistic expressions in his work

[492] See Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany. The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism, Vol. IV* (New York, 2005), pp. 213-17; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik. Die Mystik des Deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (München, 1996), pp. 439-40.
[493] Henry Suso, *Büchlein der Wahrheit*, in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), pp. 326-59.
[494] On Eckhart at Cologne, see Walter Senner, 'Eckhart's Life', pp. 38-9.
[495] Henry Suso, *The Exemplar*, in *The Exemplar; with Two German Sermons*, ed. and trans. Frank Tobin (New York, 1984), p. 105.

draw from a shared thought-culture shaped by the environment of the Dominican *studium generale.* Theirs was a theology marked by emphasis on the unknown and hidden nature of God. Eckhart preached of 'the hidden darkness of the eternal divinity, and it is unknown, and it never was known, and it never will be known. God remains there within himself unknown.'[496] This apophatic theology attempts to reach a degree of understanding of divine nature by defining what God is not.[497] Suso also takes this apophatic approach, concluding in the *Vita* that the divine is 'the nameless Nothingness itself, because we can say nothing about what it is or how it is.'[498] They share a particular emphasis on extreme detachment, and both contributed to the development of a rich vernacular theological vocabulary in the German schools for the direction of spiritual practices which would lead to unity with God.[499] Their practices and ideas all point to a developing devotional and theological piety which focused on the interior and the personal aspects of spirituality and the journey to God.

Although the exact nature of their relationship remains unknown, Eckhart was influential for Suso in more ways than one. While his writing was shaped by a shared intellectual culture, he was also profoundly influenced by the heresy proceedings against Eckhart's teachings. Suso returned to Constance in 1327 to take up the position of lector. In February of that same year Eckhart faced heresy charges brought against him in 1326 by the Archbishop of Cologne,

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[496] Meister Eckhart, 'Sermon 22, 'Ave gratia plena'', in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence*, ed. and trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York, 1981), pp. 375-89.
[497] Denys Turner, 'The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism', *Modern Theology*, 14/4 (2002), pp. 473-88.; Markus Enders, 'Meister Eckhart's Understanding of God', in Jeremiah Hackett (ed.), *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 359-87.
[498] *Life of the Servant*, p. 313; On Suso's apophatic theology, see Joseph Straubhaar-Jones, 'Understanding the Visuality of a Medieval Visionary: Fourteenth-Century Dominican Henry Suso's Interwoven Concepts of Divine Image, Gendered Identity, and Epistemology' (PhD Thesis, University of North Carolina, 2015), pp. 65-8, 96-104.
[499] Bernard McGinn, 'Mystical Language in Meister Eckhart and his Disciples', *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 21 (2012), pp. 214-32; Susanne Bernhardt, 'Die implizite Pragmatik der Gelassenheit in der *Vita* Heinrich Seuses', in Burkhard Hasebrink, Susanne Bernhardt and Imke Früh (eds.), *Semantik der Gelassenheit. Generierung, Etablierung, Transformation* (Göttingen, 2012), pp.115-42.

Henry of Virneburg. Eckhart appealed that only the Pope could investigate a Master of Theology at the University of Paris, and the case moved to Avignon in 1327. The terms of the Avignon case were softened, becoming an investigation of twenty-eight doctrinal statements drawn from his Latin and German works, which he was to renounce if they were judged heretical, rather than his personal orthodoxy. Eckhart died in 1328 before the trial could reach a conclusion. Pope John XXII, presiding over the trial, relied heavily on the support of the archbishop of Cologne against the self-appointed Emperor Louis, who had crowned himself in that same year. On March 27 1329, undoubtedly under archiepiscopal pressure, the pope issued the bull *In agro dominico* which condemned seventeen of the articles as heretical, and the remaining eleven as suspect.[500]

The bull concluded that 'the aforesaid Eckhart…professed the Catholic faith at the end of his life and revoked and also deplored the twenty-six articles which he admitted that he had preached.'[501] However, although the bull formally exonerated Eckhart, his character was attacked in the preface, calling him someone who 'wished to know more than he should' and was 'led astray by the Father of lies.'[502] The main body of the bull insinuated that he was not unquestionably orthodox – that 'he sowed thorns and obstacles contrary to the very clear truth of faith in the field of the Church and worked to produce harmful thistles and poisonous thornbushes.'[503] The bull is particularly condemnatory of 'things which he put forth especially before the uneducated crowds in his sermons', belying concerns that he had preached complex, perhaps unorthodox ideas to the laity who were ill-equipped to interpret them in a doctrinally orthodox way.[504] The ambiguity of the ruling on Eckhart certainly did little to prevent

[500] 'March 27, 1329: 'In agro dominico'', in *Essential Sermons*, pp. 77-81.
[501] 'In agro,' p. 81.
[502] 'In agro,' p. 77.
[503] 'In agro,' p. 77.
[504] 'In agro,' p. 77.

widespread condemnation of his work and teaching despite its continued circulation. For example, William of Ockham (1287-1347) declared Eckhart's theology to be symptomatic of insanity, and Jan van Leeuwen (1300-1377), a devoted disciple of Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), declared him to be 'an enormous Antichrist' who knew as much of doctrine as a mushroom.[505]

Suso's own response would do substantial damage to his institutional reputation. While his association with Eckhart may have cast aspersions on his position, his public defence of Eckhart's teachings in the *Büchlein der Wahrheit* brought him into the institutional spotlight. Composed between the publication of *In agro dominico* and the 1330 provincial chapter in Maastricht, *BdW* was a short defence of Eckhart's teachings.[506] It focused on five main areas for clarification to correct what Suso saw as erroneous interpretations and condemnations made by the papal authorities. Suso attempted to use this as a means of legitimising aspects of his own theology which were closely linked with Eckhart's while actively distancing himself from articles that he was unable to reinterpret, demonstrating a great deal of scholarly prowess in explaining and/or neutralising many articles. He leant extensively on the authoritative doctrinal position of the recently canonised Thomas Aquinas (1323) and, less frequently, Bernard, quoting at length from their works to temper, explain, and moderate Eckhart's condemned

[505] Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart, Philosopher of Christianity*, (London, 2015), p. 237; Satoshi Kikuchi, 'Jan van Leeuwen's Criticism of Meister Eckhart: An Aspect of the Impact from the Papal Bull *In agro dominico* in Fourteenth-Century Brabant', *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 21/2 (2012), p. 186.
[506] Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik, Vol. 3, Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik: Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (Münster, 1996), pp. 423-4; Kurt Ruh, 'Eine kritische Beobachtung zu Seuses 'Büchlein der Wahrheit', in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 124 (1995), pp. 72-5; McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, p. 200.; Fiorella Retucci, 'On a Dangerous Trail: Suso and Eckhart's Condemnation', in Jeremiah Hackett (ed.), *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden 2013), pp. 587-605; Georg Steer 'Ist das Buch der Wahrheit Heinrich Seuses in Konstanz geschrieben?', in *Heinrich Seuse Jahrbuch*, 2 (2009), pp. 33-65.

articles.[507] Indeed, much of what Suso does is provide room for interpretation, and present instances of palpably similar interpretation made by authoritative theologians.

While Suso defied papal ruling to defend Eckhart's teachings, he clearly harboured his own doubts about them. The *BdW* demonstrates independent doctrinal interpretation and active disagreement with some teachings. Indeed, Suso distanced himself from Eckhartian doctrines that were difficult to neutralise or reinterpret. *BdW* is perhaps best understood as Suso championing Eckhart from a doctrinal distance, defending certain articles while also carefully demonstrating his own doctrinal orthodoxy in relation to them. *BdW* was also focused entirely on theory, with no sense of didactic purpose, and it is likely this distinction which protected Suso from formal condemnation at his own trial in 1330. Importantly, *BdW* demonstrates that Suso was still actively engaged in intellectual discourse after departing Cologne, and that he was likely a notable voice among scholars given the boldness of his first publication and its official, very public, response.

While clearly intending to distance himself from the heretical, Suso nonetheless faced repercussions for challenging the papal ruling in such a public manner. He was accused of writing 'false teachings that were soiling the whole country with their heretical garbage'.[508] This judgement was not without foundation. *In agro dominico* explicitly stated that 'if anyone should presume to defend or approve the same articles in an obstinate manner, we desire and order a process of heresy against those who would so defend or approve the fifteen articles and the two last, or any of them.'[509] Suso's *BdW* knowingly violated the papal sanctions. In the text, Eckhart is referred to as saintly multiple times, named as 'der selig meister Eghart', 'dem

[507] Retucci, 'On a Dangerous Trail'; Fiorella Retucci, 'Heinrich Seuse, Thomas von Aquin und die *Summa Theologiae Deutsch*', *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*, 77 (2010), pp. 283-98.
[508] *Life of the Servant*, p. 109.
[509] 'In agro,' p. 81.

heiligen meister Egghart' and 'dez heiligen maister Eghards'.[510] This suggests that he was writing after Eckhart's death and elevated him in defiance of the trial conclusions. Suso also directly quoted *In agro*, confirming that *BdW* was written after its publication and in clear response to the heresy ruling and the bull itself.[511]

Suso was summoned for interrogation on these grounds and travelled to the Dominican General Chapter at Maastricht in 1330 to formally defend himself. The exact outcome of this defence is unknown, and although he was not personally condemned, he was removed from the office of lector at Constance.[512] It is clear from his own account of these events that Suso experienced this as a great personal loss. The *Vita* complains that 'he was harshly and severely reprimanded, and he was threatened with heavy punishment, though God and the world knew that he was guiltless in the matter.'[513] Despite the personal humiliation, there appear to have been no further practical consequences. He was elected prior of Constance soon after until 1334, completing the regular term of this office, and perhaps a second, although there is no conclusive evidence of this.[514] However, *BdW* was the last Latin work Suso wrote for nearly ten years, and this incident seems to have halted Suso's scholastic career, whether through choice or exclusion cannot be known. This context is important in considering his next work in Latin, the *Horologium Sapientiae*, which reintroduced Suso to this same intellectual milieu. It raises questions of what it might signify in terms of Suso's relationship to the scholarly institution and his intention for its reception, which in turn nuances questions that might be asked of its content.

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[510] 'the blessed Meister Eckhart,' *Life of the Servant*, p. 30; *Seuses Leben*, p. 22; 'the saintly Meister Eckhart,' *Life of the Servant*, p. 65; *Seuses Leben*, p. 63; 'the saintly Meister Eckhart,' *Life of the Servant*, p. 100; *Seuses Leben*, p. 99.
[511] Retucci, 'On a Dangerous Trail', p. 591-2.
[512] See Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, p. 418.
[513] *Life of the Servant*, p. 107.
[514] *The Exemplar*, p. 23.

The *Horologium Sapientiae* was written between 1334-37, at the end of or shortly after Suso's term as Prior of Constance. It is a redacted Latin translation of Suso's first vernacular text, the devotional guide *Das Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit*, with considerable additions to the content. It was one of the most popular works of medieval devotional literature, second only to Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ.* Over 400 Latin manuscripts survive, as well as over 200 in contemporary translations, including Dutch, French, Italian, Swedish, English and Czech. Many early printings also survive, including a full text of its English translation, *The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Love and Everlastynge Wisdame*, printed in William Caxton's 1491 compilation, *The Book of divers ghostly matters.*[515]

The *Horologium* is significant for its demonstration of Suso's aforementioned devotional mobility as he moves between audiences, repurposing and reworking material to cater to different readerships and serve different purposes accordingly. The main body of the text consists of a heavily edited Latin translation of the seven main chapters of *BdEW*, with additional material bringing the text to a total of twenty-four chapters. Heavy addition of scriptural and scholastic reference indicates an audience of a similar institutional and educational background to Suso himself. Indeed, the teaching in this work is distinct from that of its vernacular predecessor, as will be explored later in this chapter. Notably, the dedicated section of detailed meditative guidance is removed from the *Horologium*, suggesting that its didactic purpose was not so much practical devotion as interior conversion. The text is both devotional guide and institutional commentary, an aspect of its function that is relatively unexplored. A number of the chapters that are newly inserted or significantly expanded from

[515] Dirk Schultze, 'Wisdom in the Margins: Text and Paratext in the Seven Points of True Love and Everlasting Wisdom', *Klincksieck*, 66/3 (2013), pp. 341-56; Sarah James, 'Rereading Henry Suso and Eucharistic Theology in Fifteenth-Century England', *The Review of English Studies*, 63/262 (2012), p. 733.

their earlier iterations in *BdEW* present a concerted criticism of educational institutions, the clergy, the Holy Roman Emperor, and papal-imperial conflict.

Although authorial intent is difficult to establish for any work, there are a number of clues. The use of Latin and wide reception pattern could be taken to indicate intention for the text to be received into scholarly circles, particularly among institutional elites and intellectuals. The *Horologium* was dedicated to Hugo de Vaucemain, Master General of the Dominican Order (r.1333-1341). This dedication, as well as many references to Dominican liturgy, particularly parts that deal with monastic decay and spiritual reform, and instructions on incorporating the content into preaching, have led scholars to suggest a primary intended audience of a Dominican environment.[516] Against the context of the earlier misdemeanour of *BdW*, the dedication to the Master General was also a bold assertion of confidence in the doctrinal orthodoxy of the text. It is suggestive of interest in reintegration with the institutional communities that had rejected *BdW* and removed Suso from formal teaching at Constance. This does not mean that the audience was entirely confined to Dominicans, indeed, much of the content was embedded in wider concerns that clearly drew the attention of many different groups, with reception diffused across a range of religious orders, as well as secular clerics and lay readers.[517] A primary audience within the Dominican scholarly institution is therefore likely, with a wider conceptualised reception of interested, largely clerical, parties beyond that.

Attack on imperial and clerical bodies participating in the Papal-Imperial conflict, both actively and in related scholarly discourses, in defence of the Dominicans also reflects Suso's personal circumstances. It suggests that the text was intended to be part of a wider advocation in this

[516] See especially chapters I.5, I.12, II.1, II.3 and II.6 in *HS*; See Pius Künzle, 'Einführung', in *Heinrich Seuses Horologium sapientiae* (Freiburg, 1977).
[517] See Künzle's survey of reception witnesses in *Heinrich Seuses Horologium Sapientiae*, pp. 214-19.

specific context, as the coming analysis of these aspects will demonstrate. His critique of the present state of academic institutions and theology, particularly in relation to his own devotional guidance, also engaged with wider patterns of debate.

The main source text for the *Horologium*, *BdEW*, had a vastly different audience, and its shape and content reflect this. *BdEW* was Suso's first vernacular text, written between 1328-1330. A semi-autobiographical account of his mystical experiences laid out in a didactic form, this was the first essential representation of Suso's own theology and experience. Suso recounts a mystical relationship between Eternal Wisdom and the soul, culminating in their betrothal and its consummation. Presented in the form of a dialogue between Eternal Wisdom and her 'Servant', the work advises on the most effective contemplative practice and spiritual journey to achieve similar union, stressing the importance of embracing suffering as a way of loving Christ, with an emphasis on interior experience. The text is comprised of three parts: firstly, mystical insights gained by Suso in his meditations on the Passion, secondly, a Passion narrative which draws inspiration from visionary experience, and thirdly, the *Hundert Betrachtungen und Begehrungen (Hundred Articles of the Passion).* These articles provide a form of 'script' for meditational devotion to further the spiritual journey. *HBB* was exemplary of this kind of devotional guide and was widely translated and circulated as a separate text, with at least twelve versions surviving in both Latin and vernacular. Written in Middle High German, *BdEW* was intended to include a non-Latinate audience. No specific recipient is indicated in the body of the text, however, given Suso's responsibility for the *cura monialium*, relationship with Stagel, and dedication of later vernacular work to Stagel and the Töss

community, *BdEW* was likely intended for a primary readership of Dominican nuns in Suso's region.[518]

This audience was a privileged, socially influential, and well-educated class of women. These communities were especially well-placed to engage in active discourse with Suso's teaching and to offer their own understanding of devotion and mystical experience. Female houses in southern Germany were centres of education and intellectual culture. Nuns were drawn from the families of nobility and civic elites, and the connection was expected to enhance wealth, dynastic ties, and education.[519] Stagel's community at Töss, for example, was dominated by local and international aristocracy, including Elizabeth of Hungary (1292-1338), the last member of the dynastic house of Árpád. This socially elite demographic appears to have been common to many Dominican convents in the region. According to Christian Folini, 56-75% of postulants to the nearby convent of St Katharinental at Diessenhofen, another community to host Suso, were members of the local nobility and land-owning gentry.[520] The wide communication networks of these nuns, which included their families, civic councils, laity and clergy, other convents, and representatives of the diocesan cathedral, required linguistic competence and ability.

[518] Sandra Fenten (ed), *Stundenbuch der Weisheit: das 'Horologium Sapientiae'* (Würzburg, 2007), p. xv; Sandra Fenten, *Mystik und Körperlichkeit: eine komplementär-vergleichende Lektüre von Heinrich Seuses geistlichen Schriften* (Würzburg, 2007), p. 2, 77-79; *Deutsche Schriften*, p. 103.
[519] For more on the social and familial connections of women's houses in southern Germany, see Sigrid Hirbondian, 'Dominikanerinnenreform und Familienpolitik. Die Einführung der Observanz im Kontext städtischer Sozialgeschichte', in Stephen Mossman, Nigel F. Palmer and Felix Heinzer (eds.), *Schreiben und Lesen in der Stadt. Literaturbetrieb im spätmittelalterlichen Straßburg* (Tübingen, 2013), pp. 1-16; Eva Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung: Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 2004).; Henrike Lähnemann and Eva Schlotheuber, *Unerhörte Frauen. Die Netzwerke der Nonnen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2023), pp. 75-102.
[520] Christian Folini, *Katharinental und Töss: Zwei mystische Zentren in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Zurich, 2007), p. 65.

These communities shared literature together in a 'bilingual' environment of mixed Latin and vernacular reading and writing abilities. Female houses in the German-speaking lands continued to read and write Latin alongside the growing vernacular well into the fourteenth century, and Latin and vernacular literacy existed on a spectrum within each community.[521] Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner's comprehensive study of education among Southern German Dominican women notes an expectation of Latinity adequate for engagement with liturgical material such as reading the psalter upon entry to novitiate.[522] However, this did not necessarily imply nuanced comprehension, but instead accurate recitation and perhaps the ability to address liturgical Latin.[523] As Claire Taylor Jones points out, 'liturgical literacy and accuracy was an essential component of the order; reading theological treatises (for women) was not.'[524] Vernacularity represented an extension and supplementation of Latinate culture in these communities.[525] Texts by women for women in southern Germany, produced both individually and collaboratively, were largely vernacular by the fourteenth century.[526] This literary environment was reflected in their large collections of German-language texts and participation in networks of vernacular literary production and exchange, including inter-library loaning, gift book exchange, and collaborative manuscript production in southern German convents.[527]

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[521] Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*.; Simone Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen um 1500: Scriptorium und Bibliothek des Dominikanerinnenklosters St Katharina St. Gallen* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 73-4; Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, *Die Bildung der Dominikanerinnen in Süddeutschland vom 13. bis 15. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2004), p. 127.
[522] Ehrenschwendtner, *Bildung*, pp. 86-7.
[523] Ehrenschwendtner, *Bildung*, pp. 86-7; For more, see Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, 'Das Bildungswesen in Frauenklöstern des Spätmittelalters. Beispiel: Dominikanerinnen', in Max Liedtke (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte des bayerischen Bildungswesens, I* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 332-48; Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, '*Puellae Litteratae*: The Use of the Vernacular in the Dominican Convents of Southern Germany', in Diane Watt (ed.), *Medieval Women in Their Communities* (Toronto, 1997), pp. 59-71.
[524] Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit: Women, Liturgy, and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia, 2017), p. 5; For overview of this ongoing debate, see Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*, pp. 6-8.
[525] Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, pp. 272-96.
[526] Lewis, *By Women, For Women*; Rebecca Garber, *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers* (London, 2003); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2004).
[527] On German-language devotional material in south-German convents and their networks, see Simone Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen um 1500: Scriptorium und Bibliothek des Dominikanerinnenklosters St Katharina St. Gallen* (Berlin, 2013); Antje Willing, *Die Bibliothek des Klosters St. Katharina zu Nürnberg: Synoptische Darstellung der Bücherverzeichnisse* (Berlin, 2012); Johanna Thali, *Beten, Schreiben, Lesen: Literarisches*

Indeed, of the illustrated manuscripts attributed to the Dominican convent of St Nikolaus in undis, Strasbourg, 56% are German (prayerbooks, vitae, sermons, tracts, and miscellanies) and 44% Latin (usually processionals, collectars, breviaries, and lectionaries).[528] These southern communities, with whom Suso associated, were comprised of highly educated members with a proficiency in and preference for the vernacular, alongside Latinate members who could interpret and produce Latin work.[529] They were able to work independently with texts beyond passive understanding, equipped by extensive theological training and reading.

Suso was embedded within a network of convents particularly noted for their original literary production in the form of *Schwesternbücher* chronicling the holy lives and mystical experiences of members during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These hagiographical records were highly valued as didactic texts and were widely distributed in the fifteenth century under the direction of the Dominican reformer Johannes Meyer.[530] Meyer's redactions to conform the *Schwesternbücher* to reformist notions present their own challenges to reconstructing the historical 'reality' of their content, production and communities.[531] They nevertheless evidence the existence of a distinct group of convents which cultivated a particular

Leben und Marienspiritualität im Kloster Engelthal (Tübingen, 2003), pp. 243-85; Andreas Rüther, 'Schreibbetrieb, Bücheraustausch und Briefwechsel: Der Konvent St. Katharina in St. Gallen während der Reform', in Franz J. Felten and Nikolas Jaspert (eds.), *Vita religiosa im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1999), pp. 653-77; Arnold Schromm, *Die Bibliothek des ehemaligen Zisterzienserinnenklosters Kirchheim am Ries: Buchpflege und geistiges Leben in einem schwäbischen Frauenstift* (Tübingen, 1998); Thomas Lentes, 'Gebetbuch und Gebärde. Religiöses Ausdrucksverhalten in Gebetbüchern aus dem Dominikanerinnen-Kloster St. Nikolaus in undis zu Straßburg (1350-1550)' (PhD Thesis, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 1996); Andreas Rüther and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Die Predigthandschrieften des Straßburger Dominikanerinnenklosters St. Nikolaus in undis: Historischer Bestand, Geschichte, Vergleich', in Volker Merten and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (eds.), *Die deutsche Predigt im Mittelalter: Internationales Symposium am Fachbereich Germanistik der Freien Universität Berlin vom 3.-6. Oktober 1989* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 169-93.

[528] Anne Winston-Allen, 'Networking in Medieval Strasbourg. Cross-Order Collaboration in Book Illustation among Women's Reformed Convents', in Stephen Mossman, Nigel Palmer and Felix Heinzer (eds.), *Schreiben und Lesen in der Stadt: Literaturbetrieb im spätmittelalterlichen Straßburg* (Berlin, 2013), p. 197.

[529] On Latinity in southern German communities, see Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*, pp. 57-85.

[530] On Johannes Meyer, see Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*, pp. 127-60.

[531] On Meyer's redactions and use of the *schwesternbücher*, see Claire Taylor Jones, 'Writings History to Make History: Johannes Meyer's Chronicles of Reform', in Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, A.B. Kraebel and Margot E. Fassler (eds.), *Medieval Cantors and their Craft: Music, Liturgy and the Shaping of History, 800-1500* (York, 2017), pp. 340-56.

social, educational and literary culture. *Schwesternbücher*-producing convents were located in southern Germany and north-eastern Switzerland. Adelhausen, Kirchberg (Gotteszell), and Weiler lie within the modern German state of Baden-Württemberg. The convent of Unterlinden in Colmar lies in Alsace, and Engelthal and Maria-Medingen in modern-day Bavaria. Töss in Winterthur, Katherinental in Diessenhofen, and Ötenbach in Zürich fall within the present-day canton of Zürich. With the exception of Engelthal and Maria-Medingen, the *Schwesternbücher*-producing convents were within c.50-170km of Suso's community at Constance. At roughly 40, 50 and 70km from Constance, Ötenbach, Töss and Weiler are geographically closest. Suso remained in proximity to this convent network during his time at Strasbourg, where Adelhausen and Unterlinden were no more than 80km away. In the final decade of his life at Ulm, Suso took up a geographically central position in this network, having moved between these houses as a convent preacher both through regular duties of *cura monialium* and during exile. Suso's choice of the vernacular for his own didactic text reflects the preference of such communities, with seven of the sister-books written in vernacular, and two originally in Latin later translated for accessibility.

The association of Suso's teaching with these convents is particularly notable at Katharinental and Töss, the community of Elsbeth Stagel. Indeed, the sister-books of Töss and Katharinental appear alongside Suso's works in Überlingen, Leopold-Sophien-Bibliothek MS 22, a compilation for the community at Zoffingen in Constance created in c.1505 by Dominican nuns. The German-language codex consists of devotional poems and prose dialogue copied by the sisters, along with Suso's *Exemplar*, fifteen of his letters, the sister-books, legends of Elizabeth of Hungary, Margaret of Hungary and Louis of Toulouse, and the foundation story

of Katherinental.[532] Suso's interaction with these communities, and compilations of his work with theirs, suggests that he was participating in, shaping, and shaped by, the same intellectual and spiritual culture as the women he served in *cura monialium.*

Monasteries and convents were not just religious centres, but local social and economic centres. Comprised of social elites, holding considerable wealth, and serving as literary and educational hubs, the German Dominican female communities were significant geopolitical and intellectual powers. The individual education levels and privileged social background of these women, furthered by prestigious and well-equipped learning traditions, enabled far-reaching and influential participation in intellectual and social culture. The women of convents associated with Suso were able to meet him, and his work, with intellectual authority.[533] It can also be assumed that Suso anticipated that his writing for one individual or community would be widely received among others in the region, both male and female, secular and religious.

Examining the alterations and additions made in the redaction and adaptation of *BdEW* into the Latin material of the *Horologium* sheds light on authorial/editorial choices in the context of their production. Patterns of change, preservation and addition highlight the features which were considered most fitting or appealing to various audiences. They offer an insight into areas of overlap and difference, particularly in aspects that have often been approached in scholarship as distinctly gendered. Most importantly, they reveal a conscious shaping of the texts to suit new audiences and authorial concerns that offer a concerted response to different contexts and purposes beyond the devotional. This not only nuances how we might read these texts but also situates Suso and his works more firmly in their historical context.

[532] Überlingen, Leopold-Sophien-Bibliothek, MS. 22; On the significance of the German South-West, especially the Dominicans, see Nigel Palmer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Literarische Topographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im 14. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 122 (2003), pp. 178-202.
[533] Hamburger, 'Medieval self-fashioning'.

Engagement in institutional discourse

The content of *Horologium* deviates most extensively from *BdEW* in the introduction of specific critiques of the ecclesiastical institution, academic establishments, and ongoing papal-imperial conflicts. These aspects are an addition intended specifically for the Latinate audience of the text, who participated in the institutions and conflicts which were discussed in the first part of this chapter. This shift to enter into a more scholastic reception environment is evident from the outset in the titular change to *Horologium Sapientiae*. The 'horologium' in question is found in the prologue, where Suso likens his vision to a beautiful clock, decorated with roses and ringing with heavenly bells. The text is also reorganised into twenty-four chapters to reflect the hours of the day; a significant undertaking which suggests that this use of the horological metaphor was an important aspect of the redesign of the text.

The clock was cutting-edge technology at this time, and its use as the titular metaphor appealed to modern innovations and contemporary fashions. By the mid-fourteenth century they were an increasingly common feature in European urban architecture, often in cathedrals.[534] Drawing on this new, and gradually more familiar, technology, the clock was increasingly popular in sermons as an allegory for the regulation of man's body and soul.[535] Its use by Suso to 'repackage' the content of *BdEW* suggests an engagement with trends in religious intellectual culture. This further suggests an intended immediate readership of members of intellectual and ecclesiastical institutions, for whom this imagery would place the text within the latest literary and didactic fashions.

[534] Christian Moevs, 'Miraculous Syllogisms: Clocks, Faith and Reason in Paradiso 10 and 24', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 117 (1999), pp. 60-1.
[535] Cora Lutz, 'The Clock of Eternal Wisdom', *Yale University Library Gazette*, 53/2 (1978), p. 81.

The most extensive additions in the Latin text are found on the theme of reform for various institutions. Suso did not question the legitimacy of the church institution, but instead the moral state of its members. Chapter 1.5 is dedicated to outlining the ills of the church. As Steven Vanderputten points out, 'reform, in addition to being a historical reality, also functioned as a literary theme, to which notions such as decline, renewal, and reconciliation were central.'[536] The concept of the decay of the church was a well-established *topos* in reformist discourses which did not necessarily reflect a linear decline in reality. This notion of decline was particularly strong during the fourteenth century due to environmental crises, political divisions, and internal doctrinal challenges.[537] Suso's more direct engagement with this theme can be taken as indicating a readership to some extent comprised of those who belonged to church and monastic institutions, in keeping with the dedication of the text to the Dominican Master General.

Contemporary commentary on the church was often couched in terms of a world 'growing old', allegorised as a ruined city in contrast to a mythic golden age of the early church. Suso follows this tradition, imagining Christianity as a *civitas ruinae*, 'weakened and devastated by earthquakes', plagued by moral corruption, and attacked and oppressed by enemies of the faith.[538] He asks his readers to 'take to heart the overthrow of the holy city, the waning, that is, of the fervour of the ancient religious life, and to shed tears of pity for it'.[539] This chapter is a significant expansion of its predecessor, *BdEW* 1.6. The brief vernacular lamentation is a more generalised accusation of decline in moral standards and religious teaching and practice – 'the good will and beginnings of some men are perverted by the words and bad examples of

[536] Steven Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900-1100* (New York, 2017), p. 30.
[537] Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 159-62.
[538] *WW*, p. 102; 'infirmata est et concussionibus vastata', *HS*, p. 405.
[539] *WW*, p. 108; 'excidium civitatis sanctae, defectum videlicet fervoris primitivae religionis, te cupio ad cor ponere, et pie deflere', *HS*, p. 411.

others.'[540] The *Horologium* chapter is much weightier and more direct and signifies a shift in tone which points the reader to engage with the issues at hand.

Although expressed in generic terms, Suso's attack is a targeted commentary which focuses primarily on the ecclesiastical establishment. He shames 'sons of holy religion and those who profess it who have dared to rise up against their superiors with such lawlessness', specifying that 'armed with philosophical niceties and with the frivolous appeals to the law that they interpose, they will under no circumstances submit to anyone seeking to put them right.'[541] He complains of the decay of virtues, focusing primarily on those most prized in the Dominican life: poverty, charity, and love. Suso identifies the 'bad religious' (*malus religiosus*) as the most sinister symptom of this critical decline, a concept already established as a harbinger of the apocalypse. Suso makes conventional accusations of their lack of devotional zeal and their piety compromised by entanglements in worldly affairs. The tribulations that the church and God's elect endure at their hands are presented as key signs of spiritual deterioration in the world. He girds his readers with a series of questions, chief among them 'O most holy Mother Church, how great will your tribulation then be? Who is there who arise and restrain the angered Judge?'[542] Suso begs the bad religious to 'return back from their errors and return to unity and peace, so that we all may serve you in the bosom of our holy mother, the Catholic Church.'[543] Wisdom's lamentation, a *planctus Ecclesiae,* calls on the audience of scholars, officials, and clerics to recognise themselves in the characters and errors of this chapter.

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[540] *LBEW*, p. 65; 'daz etlicher menschen gůte wille und anvang von der andren reten und bősem bilde wirt verkeret', *BdEW*, p. 219.
[541] *WW*, p. 102; 'sanctae religionis filii ac professores in tantam proterviam contra suos superiores prorumpere ausi sunt', *HS*, p. 405; *WW*, p. 102; 'Armati enim subtilitatibus philosophicis ac allegationibus iuris superfluis in medium adductis, manus corrigentis nequaquam admittunt', *HS*, p. 405.
[542] *WW*, p. 109; 'O sacrosancta mater ecclesia, quanta erit tunc tribulatio tua? Quis est qui surgat et teneat iudicem iratum?', *HS*, p. 412.
[543] *WW*, p. 114; 'ut ab erroribus suis resipiscant et ad unitatem et pacem redeant, ut tibi omnes in gremio sanctae matris ecclesiae catholicae unanimiter serviamus', *HS*, p. 416.

The theme of spiritual decay permeates the text. Such instances are usually unique to the *Horologium* or significantly expanded from where they appear in *BdEW*. Suso's attacks fall into three main themes: spiritually dry scholastic debates, pursuits of worldly privilege, and bad secular and ecclesiastical leadership. He particularly targets the religious hypocrisy of those who hide their moral decay with displays of decency. The inhabitants of the *civitas ruinae* are described as monsters *in effigie humana*. Suso derides scholarly church leaders who 'roll out their abstractive terms and their spiritual demonstrations, but their lives are all concrete and carnal.'[544] He preaches against this group throughout *Horologium*, joining many contemporary treatises in emphasising that outer works were only beneficial when performed with the right inner intention (*recta intentio*). Suso reminds his readership of the importance of leaders in providing a devout example, 'to remain humbly within himself and to fear, and to teach others to stoop down to their suffering neighbours.'[545]

This kind of attack on the church was relatively conventional, and in keeping with ongoing discourses. Its addition in *Horologium* is indicative of a change in intention for the text, taking on a secondary purpose as a discourse on church reform, and expecting reception into the scholarly circles participating in such debates. However, with proper contextualisation against Suso's personal circumstances at the time of writing, some aspects of these critiques can be linked to more specific regional issues, the implications of which have not been fully explored in scholarship of Suso's writing thus far.

The most case-specific instance of critique in the *Horologium* takes the form of an allegorical commentary on current events that pertain directly to Suso's personal context, writing in exile

[544] *WW*, p. 105; 'verba abstractiva et documenta spiritualia proferunt, sed concretive et carnaliter vivunt', *HS*, p. 408.
[545] *WW*, p.197; 'humiliter in se ipso consistere ac timere, et quod proximo patienti condescendere doceat', *HS*, p. 489.

and caught between papal and imperial interdicts. Suso presents a veiled polemic against enemies of the Dominican Order and the papacy, calling for the punishment of bad leaders and praising the endurance of the pious under their rule. He portrays the *tribulatio* of a city district tyrannised by a ruler depicted as a ram wearing an iron crown. While most of the citizens have surrendered, a small group of the elect resist the ram and his army of monstrous beasts until God intervenes on their behalf. Suso writes that

> 'the leader of the sons of God, the supreme governor of that place, a man indeed praiseworthy and magnanimous in all things, zealous for justice, came to their help. And there were various others who fled from the evils, joined themselves to them, and were a support to them. So the ram was seen to attack with his horns the leader of these people, and to try in every way he could to overthrow him. But still the leader stood fast, in no way to be vanquished.'[546]

This is recognisable as an allegory of Louis of Bavaria in conflict with John XXII.[547] He writes that 'the ram and some of his crew went to the prince of them all, and stirred him up against the man who was leading his people, filling his innocent and unsuspecting ears with their deceitful slanders, and so the ram seized power over the people.'[548] Here he directly references the defection of the Prince-Bishop of Constance, Rudolph von Montfort, to Louis in 1322, a few years before Suso began the *Horologium.* This new material was thus written as this conflict forced the Dominicans of Constance into exile along with the communities of other imperial cities. The material included in, or specifically written for, the *Horologium* was clearly

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[546] *WW*, p. 111; 'Quibus in adiutorium fuit dux filiorum Dei, loci eiusdem supremus gubernator, vir utique per omnia laudabilis et magnanimus, iustitiaeque zelator. Diversi quoque, qui fugiebant mala, additi sunt ad eos, et facti sunt eis in firmamentum. Igitur aries visus est cornibus suis impetere ducem gentis suae, eumque modis quibus poterat deicere nitebatur. At vero dux invictissime stabat', *HS*, pp. 413-4.

[547] Bihlmeyer, *Deutsche Schriften*, pp. 127-30; Walter Senner, 'Heinrich Seuse und der Dominikanerorden', in R. Blumrich and P. Kaiser (eds.), *Heinrich Seuses Philosophia spiritualis: Quellen, Konzept, Formen und Rezeption* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 10-12.

[548] *WW*, p. 111; 'aries cum quibusdam de suis ad principem totius multitudinis se transtulit, ac ipsum contra ducem populi sui interpellabat, dolosisque suggestionibus aures eius innocentes nec fraudis conscias impulsans, principatum sumpsit in populo suo.', *HS*, p. 414.

shaped by Suso's circumstances in the fraught environment of south-west Germany where both bodily and spiritual wellbeing were at risk. It consciously participates in broader discourses on regional and institutional politics, augmenting the spiritual didactic content of *BdEW* with targeted political commentary reflective of specific personal complaint.

This shaping force of Suso's personal circumstances on the specific critiques presented in the *Horologium* can also be seen in his criticism of scholastic institutions. In the general complaints against ecclesiastical institutions found in the *civitas ruinae*, Suso denounces the academic ambitions and professional machinations of the bad religious who 'seek with their whole heart for the worldly glory of authority.'[549] Using the established contrast of worldly institutional learning and spiritual wisdom, Suso engages with general critique of the threat of the secularised sphere of academic influence to the authority and spiritual health of the church. However, as seen in the allegorical attack on papal-imperial conflict, in the context of his own experience with the institutions in questions, Suso's allegorical contribution to this discourse takes on a more personal aspect. Situated against the backdrop of his apparent rejection from 'academic' circles following his defence of Eckhart's articles, this critique can be understood to some extent as a personal response fitting for his first Latin work since the condemned defence in question.

In it, Suso draws on the established metaphor of the *studium Sapientiae* (School of Wisdom). This allegorical school would have been familiar to scholarly readers from its earlier use by Bernard of Clairvaux to attack the early scholastic community and cathedral schools in a similar way, reprimanding them to 'Learn, Christian, from Christ, how to love Christ'.[550]

[549] *WW*, p. 109; 'dum gloriam in praelationibus quaerunt tam sollicite temporalem', *HS*, p. 412.
[550] Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermon 20' in *Songs I*, p. 149.

Drawing on this imagery, Suso recounts the Disciple's vision of the School of Wisdom as a *studium generale* and critiques the schools and scholars encountered there. Theologians are ridiculed for fighting for possession of a precious silver ball (*pila argentae*) representing Sacred Scripture.[551] The sin and stupidity of the men is described as they quarrel amongst themselves:

'when one outstanding teacher had it in his hand, and through his fame resounded through the whole world…now they threw sharp darts at him, and now hard and strong, but it did not help them, for they were inflicting astonishing hurts on themselves and wounding themselves with their own darts.'[552]

Suso is most critical of their misrepresentation of the 'silver ball', saying that 'they offered no explanations of what it was, but they wrapped it up in their own implications…some of them mocked the others, and they wore themselves out with wordy warfare, and attacked each other and sparred like fighting bantams.'[553] Suso describes how this 'produced great boredom and distaste' in those who saw it, and was compared to 'some sporting event or stupid show'.[554] This reflected growing contemporary criticism of the universities, with several of the Avignon popes taking pains to defend traditional scholastic theology against nominalism. Suso's satire participated in wider attempts to protect the established balance of theology and philosophy threatened by 'new opinions.' This steering away from intellectualism towards more 'fruitful' forms of devotion was typical of theologians of piety in reaction to a 'crisis of rationality'.[555]

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[551] *WW*, p. 236; *HS*, p. 522.
[552] *WW*, p. 236; 'Hanc dum quidam inter ceteros et super ceteros doctor egregius in manu haberet, et ex hoc per totum mundum sonaret…et nunc sagittas acutas, nunc lapides duros iacientes, nihil proficiebant, sed mirum in modum in se ipsis affligebantur et propriis sagittis percutiebantur.', *HS*, p. 522.
[553] *WW*, p. 237; 'eamque non tam explicabant, quam quibusdam implicationibus involvebant…Quidam autem eos sic circa pugnas verborum languentes et se mutuo invadentes ac tamquam gallos compugnantes deridebant.', *HS*, p. 522.
[554] *WW*, p. 237; 'haec autem taedium magnum ac displicentiam', *HS*, p. 522; *WW*, p. 237; 'quam gymnasio vel spectaculo vano se interesse dolebant.', *HS*, p. 522.
[555] Berndt Hamm, 'Was ist Frommigkeitstheologie? Überlegungen zum 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert', in H. Nieden and M. Nieden (eds.), *Praxis Pietatis. Beiträge zu Theologie und Frömmigkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit. Festschrift für Wolfgang Sommer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 9-10.

Suso's prescription of specific solutions to the issues identified moves the text from a generic critique to a more targeted discourse, and locates the audience as certainly educated within, and likely still engaged with, the institutions in question. The dialogue of the schoolhouse allegory advocates for specific didactic reforms reflective of Suso's 'superior' spiritual philosophy comprised of unity of life and learning with Christ as teacher. Wisdom announces to the Disciple that 'my teaching will itself be your life', and it is this Christological, lived wisdom that Suso hoped would galvanise reform of the schools and Christendom at large.[556] This understanding reflects a long tradition of monastic theology exemplified by Bernard's *philosophia*: 'one more refined and interior, to know Jesus and him crucified.'[557] However, Suso's combination of intellectual theory and practical application offers a fresh formulation of Christian life itself, based partly on the Desert Fathers, 'which in times past, when religious life was strong and devotion flourished, were in constant use'.[558] A mystical visitor reads to the narrator from the works of Arsenius (350-450), one of the most highly regarded Desert Fathers. For Suso, his 'rediscovery' of the Desert Fathers was part of his conversion to this spiritual journey. Indeed, the *Horologium* serves as a 'textbook' of Suso's *philosophia spiritualis*, for which the teachings of Arsenius were a key inspiration. Such references would have been recognisable to a readership of a similar educational background engaging in similar theological and philosophical discourses. It fits with broader changes in tone and frame of scriptural and exegetical reference for reception into the scholastic environment which it critiqued and allows us to infer a specific intention for Suso's writing.

These new allegories are representative of a change in purpose to the *Horologium* which was shaped by Suso's personal context. The subjects of the papal-imperial conflict and the nature

[556] *WW*, p. 24; 'doctrina mea, ipsa erit vita tua.', *HS*, p. 526.
[557] Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermon 43', in *Song of Songs II*, ed. and trans. Kilian Walsh (Piscataway, 2010), p. 223.
[558] *WW*, p. 238; 'qui olim vigente religione et florente devotione in usu erant', *HS*, p. 523.

of the scholastic institution both resonate with his circumstances writing in exile from Constance and outcast by academe. This timing, along with changes to content which render the text more scholastic in tone and to engage with popular scholarly discourses, suggests that Suso intended for it to be received as a part of such discourses and to reintroduce his work into scholastic circles. Understood in this light, the 'politicisation' was a key aspect of Suso's construction of the *Horologium.*

Tone and practical purpose

There is further evidence of this change in audience and purpose throughout the text. The change in tone between Suso and his intended audience is reflected in the pronounced change in tone of discourse between the Servant/Disciple and Eternal Wisdom.[559] In *BdEW* the dialogue is more free flowing, taking the form of relatively informal inquiry and answer, evoking the intimate discussion of personal spiritual direction. This contrasts with the formality of the *Horologium*, which takes the tone of a teacher imparting knowledge to a student. Emotion remains intense and liberally expressed, but tempered by a more prescriptive, formal style of dialogue. Indeed, much of Eternal Wisdom's speech is delivered in monologues similar to a sermon or lecture.

This change in dynamic can also be seen in the forms of address used by the Disciple/Servant and Eternal Wisdom. In *BdEW* discourse between the two is marked by extravagant praise and affectionate terms. Questions are prefixed with laudatory exaltations, such as 'Ah, sweet Love of mine! Ah, tender Lord elect!', and reverently phrased, for example, 'I would gladly of Your

[559] The characters of *BdEW* are the Servant and Eternal Wisdom, the characters of *Horologium* are the Disciple and Eternal Wisdom.

grace hear something about this from Your sweet mouth.'[560] This intimacy is reduced in the *Horologium*. Change can be seen from the outset in the Disciple's preface to requesting instruction: 'I beseech you, my Lord, let your servant speak a word in your ears, and do not be angry with your servant, for you are my Lord, and I am your servant.'[561] Thus iterated, the terms of their relationship take on a particular formality which leaves little room for the familiarity of *BdEW*. This convention reflects a new allegorical setting, in which the Disciple approaches Wisdom for correction as a teacher in the spiritual *studium*. He intends to 'hasten with fervent desire to the school of virtues and to study there with zeal' and takes part in its 'regular exercises'.[562] This allegory places the dialogue of the Disciple and Eternal Wisdom into an educational setting that would have been familiar to a scholastic audience and reflect Suso's own personal experience. This change is indicative of a broader shaping of the text to respond more closely to the expectations and preferences of an audience whose educational, social and intellectual background was similar to Suso's own.

A similar change in dynamic between the Disciple and Eternal Wisdom is found in sacramental teaching, which also appears to respond to an audience whose understanding of and use for such teaching was informed by a clerical or scholastic background. In *BdEW*, conversation is shaped and led by the Servant's inquiries. Explanation of transubstantiation in 2.23 is directed by questions, such as 'now tell me what is the greatest and most lovely token of love that You did ever reveal in Your adopted humanity', and 'Ah, beloved Lord, but are Your Yourself really present there?'[563] The chapter's final section, concerning the manner in which to prepare for

[560] *LBEW*, p. 138; 'so wȍlt ich gerne von dinen gnaden etwaz da von us dinem sȕzen munde hȍren.', *BdEW*, p. 291.
[561] *WW*, p. 267; 'Oro domine mi, loquatur servus tuus verbum in auribus tuis, et ne irascaris famulo tuo. Tu es enim dominus meus, et ego servus tuus.', *HS*, p. 549.
[562] *WW*, p. 266; 'ad virtutum scholas…ferventi desiderio properare ac sedula mente eis intendere doctrinae tuae utilitas', *HS*, p. 548; 'actuali exercitio propria', *HS*, p. 548.
[563] *LBEW*, p. 137; 'nu sag mir, weles ist daz grȍste und daz lieplichest minnezeichen, so du ie in diner angenomnen menscheit', *BdEW*, pp. 290-1; *LBEW*, p. 138; Owe, minneklicher herre, und bist du aber selb selber eigenlichen da?', *BdEW*, p. 291.

and receive the sacrament, is also dialogic: a script between spiritual guide and spiritually guided. Eternal Wisdom responds to the questions succinctly, in simple terms and conversational tone.[564] This dynamic is likely indicative of Suso's own approach to spiritual direction. Indeed, his letters to Stagel suggest that he favoured a more conversational, discursive form of learning in his pastoral relationships. The list of Eucharistic questions in *BdEW* seem to have been inspired by this correspondence, and a similar style of question-answer dialogue on the topic can also be seen in the *Vita*, where Suso's guidance of Stagel was recounted for the edification of others. They encapsulate the main areas of basic instruction that Stagel and her community required, and those which Suso, as a source of religious authority, most wished to be understood and practiced in an orthodox way.

The same eucharistic questions appear in *Horologium*, however, Eternal Wisdom's answers are longer and more detailed, calibrated to a level of learning more suited to a clerical audience. For example, the etymology of 'Mass' is explained without prompt.[565] Wisdom is also more critical of the Disciple for needing the reiteration of basic sacramental understanding. Teaching on how long the sacrament remains after ministration is prefaced by 'you have it clearly stated in the sayings of the fathers', in clear expectation that the reader would be familiar with these texts or would have access to them.[566] This tone of chastising schoolmaster reflects a change to an audience who should already be familiar with these Eucharistic questions, and who were expected to be able to interact with complex theology and scriptural text. This reduction in intimate expressions in the more practical, informative areas of the text indicates intention of a different kind of teaching suited to a different audience who would implement Suso's instructions in a different context.

[564] *LBEW*, pp. 147-8; *BdEW*, pp. 301-2.
[565] *WW*, p. 291; *HS*, p. 571.
[566] *WW*, p. 291; 'habes manifeste patrum sententias', *HS*, p. 571.

This change is seen most clearly in the inclusion of directions for the *Horologium*'s incorporation into clerical ministrations. These take the form of a new chapter, 2.6 – 'A guide for incorporating these matters into sermons and conferences'. Here the Disciple asks Wisdom to 'show me how I shall be able easily to turn this same teaching to the profit of my neighbours and spread it abundantly'.[567] Elsewhere, Suso makes numerous directions on aspects of the liturgical year. For example, recommending prayers for Wisdom on 'the first day laid down by the Church for the reading of Wisdom's books, that is, the first Sunday in the month of August, and before the vigil of the Nativity, when the antiphon *O Sapientia* begins vespers, and on the days following'.[568] Similarly, Suso lists three days of particular observance for those who wish to be united with God: the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, Quinquagesima Sunday, and the first day of May. With these details, Suso fits his teaching to a specific routine of worship within the liturgical calendar for an audience already governed by its ministration and performance. It guides their use of his text for their own teaching, and outlines how they might lead their own lives, congregations, and dependents according to its instructions. This is the clearest evidence that Suso had a new clerical audience in mind for this work, and much broader intentions for the reception of his teaching.

These changes in tone and expectations for the practical uses of the text are indicative of Suso's intentions for the reception of *BdEW* and *Horologium* by two distinct audiences. These features reflect different contexts of teaching, one the intimate spiritual direction of the *cura monialium*, and the other a more formal academic, clerical setting, responding to the environments into

[567] *WW*, p. 307; 'qualiter ad proximorum utilitatem hanc eandem doctrinam faciliter convertere et copiose valeam dilatare.', *HS*, p. 584.
[568] *WW*, p. 324; 'prima die ab ecclesia instituta pro historia Sapientiae cantanda, videlicet prima dominica mensis Augusti, et ante vigiliam nativitatis, quando inchoatur ad vesperas antiphona *O Sapientia*, et diebus sequentibus', *HS*, p. 599.

which the respective works would be received. This 'code-switching' matches wider patterns of change found throughout the *Horologium* which respond to the expectations of a Latin didactic text received into a scholarly environment, reframing and expanding the content of *BdEW* in metaphors and allegorical dynamics which more closely align with scholastic culture. This change in audience also sees a change in purpose: that Suso's teachings might be integrated into the readers' own. It is likely that this change in purpose compounded the need for Suso to render the text more recognisably scholarly in tone and content so that it might be received as representative of intellectual authority.

Expression of love and spiritual marriage

Both texts are literary constructions of experience, and the form of this construction reflects the tone and purpose deemed most suitable for each audience by the author. The scholastic 'professionalisation' of the content of *Horologium* can be clearly seen in expressions of intense emotion, which are changed to draw upon the precedents of traditional religious canon or dialled up or down according to the expectations and needs of the audience. For example, the expression of love proliferates more consistently throughout *BdEW* than *Horologium.* In *BdEW* it is often lyrical in style, with a more distinct 'flow' than in *Horologium.* Middle High German as a vernacular was not bound by the same terminological constraints as Latin and allowed greater scope to utilise form and language in original ways. The Latin text instead fits more closely to scriptural and exegetical precedents, responding not only to the limitations of language, but also shaping the text within the frameworks of scholarly canon.

Suso's presentation of the journey to loving union follows the traditional components of love set out by Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141), whose mystical theology, spiritual treatises and

scientific writing were highly influential. In *De substantia dilectionis*, he outlines the stages of love as 'a pleasure of the heart directed to an object on account of that object'.[569] It is an *affectio* (an emotional response) which becomes *desiderium* (desire) when the subject is moved towards the object by it, and then becomes *gaudium* (joy) when the compulsion/longing is fulfilled, and the movement turns to *requiescens per gaudium* (resting with joy).[570] This was a well-known concept among scholars, quoted in other influential works such as the twelfth-century *De spiritu et anima*, attributed to Alcher of Clairvaux.[571] This equation of the stages of love with physical movements set a precedent for the expression of spiritual feeling in bodily metaphors.

In both *BdEW* and *Horologium* love is described in terms of great intensity regardless of whether it is being given or received, or whether it is in reference to the human or the divine. Changes are predominantly found in areas where scriptural and exegetical precedent have been added in *Horologium*, 'scholasticising' the original text of *BdEW*. As previously discussed, there is extensive evidence of contemporary theological collections in convent libraries, and high level of education among Dominican nuns in the south-west German region. Indeed, the thirteenth-century writings of the nuns at Helfta directly referenced the ideas of Hugh of St Victor.[572] The increase in motifs from scholarly and monastic writings in *Horologium* was therefore an integration of the spiritual experiences into a pre-existing tradition which may have lent the work greater authority in a scholarly setting, with little view to catering to educational limitations like those among the vernacular audience of *BdEW*.

[569] 'delectatio cordis alicuius ad aliquid propter aliquid', Hugh of St Victor, *De substantia dilectionis*, in *Six opuscules spirituels*, ed. R. Baron (Paris, 1969), p. 83.
[570] *De substantia dilectionis*, pp. 82-6.
[571] *De spiritu et anima* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, *Vol 40*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1845), pp. 779-832; Constant Mews, 'Debating the Authority of Pseudo-Augustine's 'De spiritu et anima'', *Przegląd Tomistyczny*, 24 (2018), pp. 321-48.
[572] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Collaborative Literacy and the Spiritual Education of Nuns at Helfta', in Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara and Patricia Stoop (eds.), *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue* (Turnhout, 2015), p. 45.

This adjustment of imagery as the text moves between languages, audiences, and nuances of purpose is seen most clearly in the allegory of spiritual marriage, presented by Suso as the ultimate goal of those who follow his teachings. The presentation of spousal love in the *Horologium* sees a continuation of the broader trend of shaping the text to move into a scholastic frame of reference, and to be useful to a different audience's purposes. Contextualised against Suso's intended audience and circumstances of writing, these changes reflect the purposeful shift to a more scholastic tone in *Horologium*, offering some insight into what was expected of the spiritual journeys and educational frames of reference for these respective communities.

Suso draws on biblical and exegetical precedent for the allegory of spiritual marriage in both works, rooting the vision accounts in a long-established tradition of allegorised spiritual feeling in the style of the Song of Songs. The interpretation of the bride and bridegroom of the Song as the soul and God emerged most clearly in the twelfth century, and its emotional, sensuous language became an established reference for descriptions of the relationship between God and the soul.[573] Allusions to Song of Songs in Suso's work made use of an interpretation framework for sensory language in a spiritual setting that was shared by both audiences through liturgical and scriptural engagement.[574] This shared frame of reference means that where interventions are made to nuance interpretation of expression of physical feeling we are able to see areas of difference between the spiritual lives and expectations of the respective audiences. They demonstrate Suso's sensitivity as a teacher and offer insight into how a similar spiritual journey

[573] For the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages, see: Urban Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten: Volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 1985).; Ann Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1990); Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved. The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1992); Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, 1995); Rachel Fulton, 'Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs', *Viator*, 27 (1996), pp. 85-116.
[574] Roland Murphy, 'Patristic and Medieval Exegesis - Help or Hindrance?', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 43/4 (1981), p. 514.

might have differently nuanced approaches and goals for a predominantly male, clerical audience as opposed to a female religious (and perhaps wider lay vernacular) audience.

In *BdEW* certain references are accompanied by directions to relevant scripture or exegesis to prompt further learning. These prompts are removed in the *Horologium*, whose intended audience were better placed to follow references independently. For example, in *Horologium* the Disciple complains of intense grief at the absence of the lover from the marital bed. He laments that 'as my beloved departed when I was not aware and was overcome by sweet slumber, I would weep and say: 'Alas, whither is my beloved gone? Alas, where shall I seek him?'[575] This echoes the scriptural scenario of the Song: 'By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I didn't find him…I will seek him whom my soul loves.'[576] This same allegory of absence appears in *BdEW*, but quoted from Bernard, rather than as part of the Servant's nuptial experience. Suso writes 'Blessed be you, too, among all doctors, sweet St Bernard, when your loving soul thus spoke: '…I do not seek, as does the bride, where He rests at noon, He whom I embrace in the depths of my heart.'[577] In the context of Suso's spiritual direction, this is indicative of his familiarity with the education and resources of female convent communities, expecting familiarity with Bernard which there almost certainly was at Töss. The *vita* of Margaret Finkin in the Töss *schwesternbuch* opens with a Latin quotation of Bernard, followed by its vernacular translation.[578] This shows that some Latinate sisters were reading and translating Bernard for the use of non-Latinate sisters. Indeed,

[575] *WW*, p. 139; 'ut dum dilectus meus me inscio ac dulci sopore oppresso abiisset, ego flens dicebam: Heu quo abiit dilectus meus? Heu ubi requiram illum?', *HS*, p. 439.
[576] Song of Songs 3: 2-3.
[577] *LBEW*, p. 101; 'Gesegnet siest du o͛ch under allen lerern, su͛zer herr sant Bernhart…do din minnendú sel sprache:…Ich ensu͛che nit als dú gemahel, wa er umb den mitten tag ru͛we, den ich enmitten in minem herzen umbevahe.', *BdEW*, p. 254.
[578] *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töß. Beschrieben von Elsbet Stagel samt der Vorrede von Bruder Johannes Meier und dem Leben der Prinzessin Elisabet von Ungarn*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin 1906), p. 33 (hereafter *TSB*); Erika Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters: Monastic Women and Spirituality in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia, 2014), p. 180.

Margaret's *vita* records that her main role in the community was 'teaching Latin and writing'.[579] The absence of this reference in the *Horologium* redaction could suggest two things. Firstly, that Suso aligned the mystical experience more closely to the authorial voice rather than deferring to exegetical precedent, perhaps to draw greater authority from it. Secondly, that the need for quantification or signposting for further learning was not necessary for the Latinate, clerical audience, who already shared Suso's own frameworks of scholarly interpretation.

This is also seen in Suso's interpretive guidance for physical touch and resulting pleasure. Such instances appear more frequently in *Horologium* and lack the caveats which accompany them in *BdEW.* The Disciple describes how he 'shall run swiftly to our meeting, with the arms of my desires most lovingly stretched out, I shall enfold the beloved of my wishes in my fondest embrace, whilst I utter words of greeting.'[580] This anticipated embrace is redolent of a similar embrace between Bride and Bridegroom in the Song: 'His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me.'[581] This same motif in *BdEW* is carefully caveated as an experience of the soul. Eternal Wisdom promises to embrace 'the soul that wishes to feel me interiorly in the recesses of a secluded life.'[582] Reiteration of the spiritual nature of these interactions are seen in most instances of such physical sensation. For example, the Bridegroom is 'so tender for the loving soul to kiss…'[583] The Servant, seeking similar experience, stipulates that he wishes for a 'spiritual kiss of Your true presence'.[584] This guidance of interpretation in *BdEW* does not appear to have been necessary in *Horologium*.

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[579] 'Latin leren ald schriben', *TSB*, p. 34.
[580] *WW*, p. 140; 'in occursum eius festinantur accurram, et brachiis desideriorum meorum affectuosissime extentis, dilectum votorum meorum inter salutationis verba intimo amplexu constringam.', *HS*, p. 440.
[581] Song of Songs 2:6.
[582] *LBEW*, p. 143; 'Dú sele, dú min in der heinlichen kluse eins abgescheidenen lebens inrlich enphinden', *BdEW*, p. 296.
[583] *LBEW*, p. 73; 'so zartlich der reinen minnenden sele ze kússenne', *BdEW*, p. 225.
[584] *LBEW*, p. 141; 'der geistlich kuss diner waren gegenwúrtikeit', *BdEW*, p. 294.

The balance of intense emotion with instruction on how to share the protagonist's experience of this relationship is a key site of difference between the texts. The *Horologium* explicitly invites the reader to share in the nuptial relationship. Chapter 2.7 – 'How many of the faithful may be wedded to Divine Wisdom and should renew themselves constantly in Wisdom's love through certain easy exercises' – establishes it as an attainable goal for *Horologium* readers. Suso addresses his work to 'whoever desires to become a loveable disciple of Eternal Wisdom, whatever may be his condition or state or sex or order or even his religious life'.[585] The Disciple celebrates that, 'the great King and divine emperor has joined me to him, Eternal Wisdom, his only beloved, as his spouse, he has made a marriage bond with me, and has in some way made me his son-in-law.'[586] The divine marriage, and the sharing in Wisdom's intimate teachings in the allegorical marriage bed, is the culmination of Suso's instruction – a metaphorical 'end goal' for the individual reader. However, the consummation of divine union and the Disciple's marital title, 'Friar Amandus', is not found in *BdEW*. This indicates that Suso had perhaps been careful to limit the nuptial relationship in *BdEW* to avoid content which might not be so safely interpreted within the educational frameworks and materials available to readers. The identification of an authorial figure outside of the anonymous 'soul' in the person of 'Friar Amandus' would perhaps have blurred the line of well-precedented allegory.

Intensification of the Disciple's nuptial bliss for emulation in the *Horologium* does not reflect perceived differences in the spiritual capabilities or aspirations of the respective audiences, but Suso's consideration of their educational contexts and the practical uses of his text. The more carefully guided interpretation of intimate, sensory emotion in *BdEW*, and intention that it be

[585] *WW*, p. 319; 'quicumque desiderat aeternae sapientiae amabilis fieri discipulus, cuiuscumque condicionis sit vel status aut sexus seu ordinis aut etiam religionis', *HS*, p. 595.
[586] *WW*, p. 315; 'ipse rex summus ac imperator divinus suam mihi unicam ac dilectam, aeternam scilicet sapientiam in sponsam copulavit, sponsalia contraxit et me quodam modo suum generum fecit.', *HS*, p. 590.

read alongside 'reference texts' available in Dominican convents, reflects Suso's intention that *BdEW* be received into a broader scheme of learning. This is fitting for the context in which he wrote, drawing on spiritual direction of Stagel and directing the *cura monialium* of the Constance Dominican community. Explicitly offering the nuptial relationship as an 'end goal' for *Horologium* readers suggests confidence in their allegorical interpretation of his work, sharing the same scholarly context that had informed it. The centring of the mystical experience in the authorial voice creates a more sustained sense of first-person experience, which was perhaps intended to add greater weight of authority to the text by linking Suso with this narrator and their divine attainments.

A similar change can be seen in developments to the language of sweetness in *Horologium*, resulting from an increase in scriptural and theological reference which locates the work more firmly in the register of scholastic canon.[587] It appears in both *Horologium* and *BdEW* to express the pleasure of intellectual and emotional divine knowledge. In *BdEW* it is the most frequent form of affectionate address: 'Sweet Lord/Wisdom'. It is also used to describe the pleasures of learning by the direct teaching of mystical interaction. For example, the vision of Christ 'stood sweetly before him', and later the Servant celebrated hearing 'Your sweet living, loving words'.[588] The love of God is described as 'sweet love' fourteen times. The Servant exhorts his audience to partake in learning 'this sweet doctrine', accepts 'Your sweet words and Your loving doctrine', and praises those 'who follow[s] sweet counsel'.[589]

[587] On the semantics of 'sweetness', see Friedrich Ohly, *Süße Nägel der Passion: ein Beitrag zur theologischen Semantik* (Berlin, 1989); Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 80-135; Annette Gerok-Reiter, '*Süeze* (er-)zählen im *Fließenden Licht der Gottheit.* Historische Semantik zwischen Annotation, Hermeneutik und Performativität', in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Germanistenverbandes*, 69/1 (2022), pp. 45-64.
[588] *LBEW*, p. 45; 'Und do er also minneklich vor im stůnt', *BdEW*, p. 199; *LBEW*, p. 74; 'sůzen lebenden minnendú wort', *BdEW*, p. 227.
[589] *LBEW*, p. 46; 'diser sůzen ler nah ilen', *BdEW*, p. 200; *LBEW*, p. 136; 'dinen sůzen worten und mit diner zarten minneklichen lere dar zů', *BdEW*, p. 290; *LBEW*, p. 134; 'der dem sůzen rate volget', *BdEW*, p. 287.

Such instances of sweetness are generally directly translated in the Latin; however, the metaphor of honey sees distinct elaboration. In both texts, the Virgin Mary is praised in honeyed terms: 'in my mouth your memory grows sweeter than honey and the honeycomb' (*Horologium*), and 'so does your name dissolve in my mouth like honey from the comb' (*BdEW*).[590] Descriptions of spiritual marriage are similarly expressed: 'this delectable state, which is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb' (*Horologium*) and 'My spirit is sweet above honey and the honeycomb' (*BdEW*).[591] The equivalence of divine sweetness with honey was a common trope of religious literature, often used for the arrangement and learning of knowledge.[592]

As with the use of Bernard in *BdEW* reflecting the educational and literary environment of the convent at Töss, the motif of sweetness is similarly represented in the sisters' own work. Both the Töss author(s) and Catherine of Unterlinden, author of the Unterlinden sister-book, refer to Augustine in scriptural interpretation and were likely familiar with his work.[593] The Dominican sister-books frequently make use of the language of sweetness to describe the words of God spoken through mystical experience. For example, at Töss, Anna of Klingnau 'practically flowed with sweet words', and the lay sister Mezzi Sidwibrin was praised for her 'mouth overflowed with sweet words'.[594] Suso's use of the language of sweetness in similar contexts reflected this familiar canon of spiritual expression.

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[590] WW, p. 223; 'memoria tua super mel et favum in ore meo indulcoratur', *HS*, p. 511; *LBEW*, p. 111; 'so zervlúzet din nam in miner sel als ein honigsein', *BdEW*, p. 264.
[591] *WW*, p. 204; 'hunc delectabilem et dulciorem super mel et favum', *HS*, p. 495; *LBEW*, p. 71; 'min erbe úber honig und honigsein.', *BdEW*, p. 223.
[592] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 192; Frequent use of the metaphor of honey in the bible, especially in the Sapiential books, made it particularly fitting for knowledge of divine origin. This was drawn upon by the Patristic Fathers, such as Cassiodorus. Medieval theologians in turn consolidated this tradition, most notably Augustine and Bernard.
[593] Catherine of Unterlinden, 'Les 'Vitae Sororum' d'Unterlinden. Edition critique du ms. 508 de la bibliothèque de Colmar,' ed. Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moven âge*, 3 (1930), p. 432, 442; *TSB*, p. 65.
[594] *TSB*, p. 37; *TSB*, p. 29.

Additions to this spiritual sensation in the *Horologium* appear in the context of teaching, particularly in the repeated use of the honey metaphor, informed by the Augustinian understanding of honey as the taste of divine wisdom. The motif is used in the vision account of the *studium Sapientiae*, where 'the honeyed words proceeding from Wisdom's mouth were turned in theirs to a bitter liquid.'[595] This metaphor also appears in chapter 2.6 ('A guide for incorporating these matters into sermons and conferences'), intending 'that out of the honeycomb's broken cells I shall be able to draw honey.'[596] Wisdom asks, 'do not now both your mouth and the lips of your heart, which it moistens, taste this sweetest honeycomb richly trickling down?', echoing the Song of Songs: 'your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb.'[597] These honeyed additions are made to express the divine origin and reward of knowledge contained in the *Horologium* itself. This use of prescriptive, scriptural description lends authority to Suso's teaching and locates it in the tradition of scriptural and theological writings. The increased use of sweetness in *Horologium* does not reflect a difference in the emotional register of the two texts. Indeed, a common knowledge based on similar theological understandings is expected of both the convent and clerical communities. Instead, its expansion gives authority to Suso's work and eases its reception into the same canon of scriptural and theological tradition that it echoes.

Motifs and metaphors

Suso draws on metaphors and allegorical motifs from other forms of literary influence to assist his readers in conceptualising the spiritual journey and the relationship between the soul and

[595] *WW*, p 278; 'Liquorem balsamiticum, mellitum, deliciosum ac suavissimum in ore habui', *HS*, p. 559.
[596] *WW*, p. 307; 'ut sic de obstrusis favorum cellulis mel producere', *HS*, p. 585.
[597] *WW*, p. 202; 'nonne iam et os tuum et labia cordis tui perfusa, favum hunc dulcissimum sentiunt ubertim distillare?', *HS*, p. 494.

the divine. These appear consistently in both *BdEW* and *Horologium*. This commonality suggests that beyond considerations of gender or institutional status a shared frame of reference in terms of the context of social background and milieu of popular culture was also significant in informing Suso's authorial decisions.

In Suso's work, lovesickness features repeatedly, described by the traditional symptoms.[598] This sickness was typically understood to be provoked most often through the thwarting of the journey to true love by obstructions such as unrequited love, forced separation, cuckolding or jealousy. It appears in both *BdEW* and *Horologium* in relation to abandonment and forced separation. The Disciple tells Wisdom that his 'sick body languishes, longing with all his powers for you, the one and only joy of his heart,' and that,

'suddenly the wretched soul is changed and is made as it were languid and declining. Then a lassitude of the body follows, and a hardness of the heart and a sadness of the spirit is felt. A certain noxious weariness fills every part of me, so that my soul is weary of my life. Everything that is seen or heard, even if it were good, at that time evokes only a nausea of the spirit.'[599]

The Servant expresses similar sentiments in *BdEW*, saying that 'when I am in a state of spiritual detachment, my soul is like a sick man to whom nothing tastes good, to whom everything is repugnant; my body is weary; my mind is heavy; inwardly there is hardness, outwardly

[598] These symptoms were typically sighing, turning pale, fever, sleeplessness, lack of appetite, melancholy, and loss of interest in anything other than the lover. See Peter Toohey, 'Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholia', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 17/2 (1992), pp. 265-86; Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 31-50.
[599] *WW*, p. 137; 'corpus infirmum languescit, te solum unicum cordis gaudium totis cupiens visceribus', *HS*, p. 437; *WW*, p. 143; 'anima misera subito immutatur et velut languida et tabescens efficitur. Lassitudo exinde corporis subsequitur, et cordis duritia ac spiritus tristitia sentitur. Taedium quoddam virulentum occupat fines meos, ita ut taedeat animam meam vitae meae.', *HS*, p. 443.

sorrow.'[600] Suso casts the soul in the role of the lovesick hero: an emotionality recognisable from a myriad of other literary interactions, such as courtly romance.

A similar borrowing is seen in conventions used to illustrate the relationship between the Servant/Disciple and Eternal Wisdom. In *BdEW*, Wisdom analogises the gospels as a holy communication between a lover and their beloved *in absentia,* telling the Servant that 'every word of the Sacred Scriptures written by Me is a sweet love-letter.'[601] This epistolary metaphor is also found in *Horologium*, where Wisdom instructs the Disciple to 'let the soul be satisfied by Sacred Scripture…Let it take every page as a love letter, as a solace of love that I have sent to it'.[602] This motif of religious literature as love letter is common to Suso's teaching. It features in Suso's personal advice to Stagel that 'good prayer, good speech, and good little German books are the love letters of your godly love.'[603] In courtly romance, love letters are used to express deep affection and longing between characters. They often convey the pain of separation, usually through hardship or secrecy, and the joys of reunion, encapsulating the ideals of courtly love. The letters often reflect the inner turmoil and emotional struggle of the characters, highlighting the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. Suso's allegorising of scripture in this way draws on literary culture of courtly narrative, suggesting that both audiences were expected to understand such inferences.

Suso uses multiple frames of reference for the expression of the loving relationship that were expected to be familiar and appealing to both audiences. This is indicative of a shared social

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[600] *LBEW*, p. 81; 'swenne ich stan in gelassenheit, so ist min sele als ein sieche mensch, dem nút wol smaket, dem ellú ding unlustig sint; der lib ist trege, der mů̊t ist swere, inwendigú hertikeit und uswendigú trurikeit. Mich verdrúzet denne alles, daz ich sihe und hő̊re und weis', *BdEW*, p. 233.
[601] *LBEW*, p. 79; 'ein ieklich wort der heiligen schrift, daz von mir geschriben ist, ein sů̊zer minnebrief', *BdEW*, p. 231.
[602] *WW*, p. 137; 'saltem de sacra scriptura contenta sit…Quamlibet paginam pro littera amorosa, tamquam in amoris solatium per me sibi transmissam suscipiat', *HS*, p. 437.
[603] 'Gůte gebet, gůt sprúch und gůt tútsche búchlin sind dines götlichen liebes liebbrieff', *Das grosse Briefbuch* in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart, 1907; repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1961), p. 484.

background and cultural milieu informing their interpretation by both audiences. Suso and his audiences were shaped by a literary culture in which religious and secular understandings borrowed from and shaped one another, were produced, and were exchanged in overlapping social and intellectual environments.[604] According to surviving collections, the main sources of patronage for secular vernacular literature such as *minnesang* were the same as those of vernacular religious literature; church dignitaries, nobles, and urban elites.[605] Given the aforementioned aristocratic social environment and educated literary culture of the communities of Dominican women with whom Suso interacted, they were likely drawn from similar social circles and literary networks as many of the clerical, Latinate readers of the *Horologium.* The *BdEW* and *Horologium* can be understood as participating in the same cultural and religious thought-scape conditioned by the literary participation of aristocratic, urban elite, and ecclesiastical circles who shared similar intellectual interests.

The generally minimal alteration to allegorical motifs in the redaction process highlights a sense of audience commonalities. This therefore means that where we encounter differences in the use of metaphors, they can be used to identify areas of perceived difference between the respective audiences, or the intent of the works. This perception of difference is most clear in Suso's use of the motif of knighthood to encourage readers to consider themselves *milites Christi* (knights of Christ).

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[604] On interactions between Christian teaching, religious literature, and courtly romance, see Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (eds.), *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* (London, 2010).

[605] On *Minnesang* tradition, see Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture, Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages,* trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley, 1991); Albrecht Classen, 'Courtly Love Lyric', in Francis Gentry (ed.), *A Companion to Middle High German Literature to the 14th Century* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 117-50; Nigel Palmer, 'The High and Later Middle Ages (1100-1450)', in H. Watanabe-O'Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of German Literature* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 40-91; Olive Sayce, *The Medieval German Lyric, 1150-1300: the development of its themes and forms in their European context* (Oxford, 1982).

Suso's use of knighthood has been the subject of extensive exploration in prior scholarship, particularly in its implications for the 'approved' spiritual and ascetic journey for religious men and women. 'Knighthood' here is not a socially specific term, but part of a construction of gender norms in piety. Meri Heinonen's examination of the knighthood motif in Suso's *Vita* interpreted a binary framework in which gender served as a limiting factor on who could aspire to be a spiritual knight. She argues that 'rather than seeing extreme manifestations of piety and intense identification with Christ as intrinsically female or feminine experiences, we need to consider the possibility that the reason these activities were often deemed problematic for women is because it led them to transgress gender norms and display masculine qualities – something which they, as women, should not have been capable of achieving. The clear message which Suso's *Leben* gives to its readers is that only men could be true knights of God.'[606] Stephanie Altrock identifies a similar rigid gender binary as possible explanation for the knighthood motif, interpreting its use in the *Vita* as an equivalence of Stagel's feminine suffering of frailty and illness with Suso's masculine suffering of tribulations in the world.[607] However, Jacob Randolph's reappraisal of the area provides perhaps the most balanced interpretation, arguing for a gender dualism in which 'Suso's chivalric discourse invited religious women to imaginatively don the spiritual persona of a Christian knight.'[608] This interpretation of Suso's understanding of spiritual knighthood is certainly most fitting for its use in *Horologium* and *BdEW*.

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[606] Meri Heinonen, 'Henry Suso and the Divine Knighthood', in P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds.), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 88.
[607] Stephanie Altrock, "…*got will, daz du nu riter siest*.' Geistliche und weltliche Ritterschaft in Text und Bild der *Vita* Heinrich Seuses', in *Höfische Literatur & Klerikerkultur: Wissen – Bildung – Gesellschaft. Xth Triennial Conference der Internationalen Gesellschaft für höfische Literatur (ICLS) vom 28. Juli bis 3. August 2001 in Tübingen* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 120-1.
[608] Jacob Randolph, 'Gender, Knighthood, and Spiritual Imagination in Henry Suso's *Life of the Servant*', *Church History*, 91 (2002), p. 3.

The metaphor is more prevalent in the *Horologium*, appearing more frequently throughout the text. Wisdom chastises the Disciple for resisting suffering, telling him that 'you are a fragile soldier, to fear hardships so much…Are you not a man?' and that 'a dauntless warrior, to exert and prove himself, desires to experience tribulation and find misery.'[609] This reflects established allegories of clerical and monastic life. The role of male religious, in particular monks and mendicant friars, was frequently conceptualised as that of a soldier or knight of Christ, militarising their 'battle' for the salvation of themselves and others.[610] This motif is also found in the loving relationship between Eternal Wisdom and the Disciple in the *Horologium* where 'it has been decreed by God's deliberations that no one will receive this most worthy bride unless first he has fought most valiantly for her in the vanguard and has endured many hardships.'[611] Suso's use of this allegory in *Horologium* models a knightly spirituality which allowed traditional masculine ideals and identities to be integrated into an intimate personal relationship with Christ.[612]

This metaphor is used less frequently and with different emphasis where it appears in *BdEW*, suggesting a perceived difference in how the female community might interact with it in their spiritual practice. This is particularly notable in changes to the Passion narrative. His instructions to partake in the Passion through spiritual exercises and exterior asceticism use knightly metaphors. The knight of *BdEW* is a knight errant completing deeds of daring. Wisdom exhorts the Servant to 'enter the lists of knightly courage, where I am…I will clothe

[609] *WW*, p. 152; 'Delicatus miles es, qui adversa tantum formidas…Nonne vir tu es?', *HS*, p. 451; *WW*, p. 152; 'bellator invictus, ad exercendum se et probandum tribulationem et miseriam invenire desiderat.', *HS*, p. 451.
[610] Heinonen, *Brides and Knights*; Barbara Rosenwein and Lester K. Little, 'Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities', *Past & Present*, 63 (1974), p. 13.
[611] *WW*, p. 318; siquidem consilio divino decretum est, quod nullus hanc dignissimam sponsam accipit, nisi prius strenuissime in acie propter ipsam militaverit et adversa sustinuerit multa.', *HS*, p. 593.
[612] Walter Blank, 'Henrich Seuses 'Vita'. Literarische Gestaltung und pastorale Funktion seines Schrifttums', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 122 (1993), pp. 299-307; Gisela Baldus, 'Die Gestalt des 'diener' im Werke Heinrich Seuses' (PhD Dissertation, Universität zu Köln, 1966) pp. 87-8.

you with My armour…make yourself bold.'[613] Suso's invitation of his female audience to imagine themselves as knights reflected an established metaphor of women doing spiritual battle.[614] Indeed, in his letters Suso encouraged female mentees to pursue chivalric values in their spiritual endeavours. Letter 17 of the *Briefbuch* features the allegory of a brave squire, in which Suso exhorts his spiritual daughter 'Now, noble hero, show what you are capable of today. Be bold and defend yourself keenly. Don't lose heart like a coward. It is better to die with honour than to live in dishonour. Once the first contest has been gotten through, it gets easier.'[615] While militant aspects of chivalry were masculine in practice, that did not prevent them from being conceptually useful to women as they were, like monks, debarred from military activities.

While the language of spiritual warfare drew on a highly gendered context of military imagery, Suso was part of a tradition of monastic writers who used masculine militancy to guide spiritual warfare for women, including Jerome's spiritual direction of Laeta, Gregory of Tours' life of Monegund, and the hagiography of Katherine of Alexandria.[616] Indeed, as Randolph points out, 'the transgression of social boundaries that would provoke deeper imagination are present on a number of levels that are obscured when one distils the complexity of the metaphor down to a rigid gendered dichotomy.'[617] The call on the female reader to imagine themselves in the masculinised role of knight is not dissimilar to the leap asked of a monk to imagine themselves a lovesick soldier in a similar paradigm.

[613] *LBEW*, p. 52; 'tritte zů mir in den ring ritterlicher vestekeit, wan dem kneht gezimt nit wol zartheit, da der herre stat in stritberlicher kůnheit.', *BdEW*, p. 205.
[614] Randolph, 'Gender, Knighthood and Spiritual Imagination', p. 7.
[615] 'neina, zier helt, tů húte als ein frumer man und gebar kechlich und strit frilich! Las dir din hertze nút enpfallen: es ist besser erlich sterben, den unerlich leben. So der erste just übertruket wirt, so wirt es lihter', *Grosse Briefbuch*, p. 459.
[616] For overview of these examples, see Randolph, 'Gender, Knighthood, and Spiritual Imagination', p. 8.
[617] Randolph, 'Gender, Knighthood, and Spiritual Imagination', p. 11.

In the *Horologium*, Suso introduces scriptural imagery into the knightly narrative. The warriors of King David in Chronicles 11:10-47 are used for instruction on the *imitatio Christi*. Wisdom advises the Disciple to 'stand steadfastly with me in the front line of the battle…Look with your mind's eye on David's band of strong men, and if you want to be enlisted as a soldier of the eternal King…put on as a giant the dress of war; take to yourself my armour.'[618] This particular reference presents a hierarchical, masculine relationship, in which the reader serves as knightly vassal to the divine lord. As seen in other areas, the hierarchical relationship between the devotee and the divine was more pronounced in *Horologium*, reflecting the normative standards of the establishment it addressed. Thus, the different iterations of chivalric knighthood in Suso's work show how he considered the metaphor might work best for his different audiences. It is also demonstrative of the wider trend of the insertion of scriptural precedent into *Horologium*, here specifying the biblical knights of David. Indeed, changes to the use of knighthood can be interpreted as part of the 'scholasticisation' of *Horologium*, and the broader pattern of integration of scriptural example and hierarchical relationships seen elsewhere.

Heinonen's interpretation of Suso's representation of spiritual knighthood as an exclusively masculine premise is undermined by invitations to the female readership of *BdEW* to arm themselves for participation on the spiritual battlefield in much the same way as they appear in *Horologium*. It seems that different presentation occurs in an effort to make the imagery appeal more to the specific social contexts and sensibilities of the readers, which, although linked to gender, are not an aspect of spiritual knighthood deemed more or less appropriate on that basis. Indeed, as in other aspects of courtly motifs, both audiences were presented with the same

[618] *WW*, p. 82; 'in acie fortiter mecum consiste…Respice oculo mentali numerum fortium David; inter quos si spiritualiter aeterno regi militaturus annumerari desideras…Induere sicut gigas stola bellica. Accipe armaturam meam.', *HS*, pp. 388-9.

imagery in anticipation of a shared socio-cultural and vernacular literary background. It suggests that women reading in the vernacular engaged in an overlapping culture of piety without particular spiritual expectations.

Passion narratives – suffering and devotional practice

Among the richest areas of emotional expression are Suso's Passion narratives. These narratives depict the suffering of Christ's Passion in intense detail in order that the reader might participate in the devotional practice of compassionate meditation. Changes to the emotional expression and register of these narratives in the redaction from *BdEW* to *Horologium* highlights concerns and considerations in how this practice might be guided or made most spiritually beneficial to the respective audiences. This offers insight into expectations of similarity or difference in the devotional practice and spiritual journey of both.

Expressions of suffering were central to the emotional currency of salvation presented by Suso. He closely links *tribulatio* and *leiden* (holy suffering endured on earth by God's elect) with the Passion of Christ, and his mysticism is defined by intense Christocentric devotional practice not seen in Rhineland contemporaries.[619] Ronald Rittgers offers 'Passion piety' as a more precise term for Suso's particular devotion.[620] This corresponded with broader late medieval cultural shifts which saw new ways of engaging with the *do ut des* relationship with the divine, and greater focus on the relationship of the individual worshipper with God, particularly among more educated social groups. A wide range of devotional media responded enthusiastically to

[619] Peter Ulrich, 'Zur Bedeutung des Leidens in der Konzeption der *philosophia spiritualis* Heinrich Seuses', in R. Blumrich and P. Kaiser (eds.), *Heinrich Seuses Philosophia spiritualis. Quellen, Konzept, Formen und Rezeption* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 124-38; McGinn, *Harvest of German Mysticism*, pp. 203, 213-17; Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, pp. 439-40.
[620] Ronald Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 63-83.

the 'christocentric turn' of the high Middle Ages, increasingly focused on Christ's humanity and the role of his suffering as an expression of it.[621]

Suso's Passion accounts resemble much of contemporary passion literature and 'Lives of Christ', with a similar emphasis on detail in recounting Christ's passion and death, drawing on Old Testament texts and apocrypha for specific 'information' on events.[622] Although Suso's narratives are in line with contemporary trends, his accounts are moderate in comparison to some of the most popular treatises.[623] Similarly, although his work reflects broader trends, it does not feature the tendency of late medieval passion literature to quantify aspects of the passion.[624] This was perhaps part of his wider rejection of outer works in favour of inner fervour. Kurt Ruh argues that Suso stands apart from contemporaries in placing *imitatio* above *compassio* in the *Horologium* narrative.[625] However, this stance can be nuanced by Suso's emphasis on interior suffering, and repeated assertions that the depths of the wounds of love are unquantifiable. Indeed, direct instruction is given in *Horologium* that 'The recollection of my Passion should be (…) done with mature and careful and heartfelt recollection, and with a certain mournful compassion.'[626] This study would posit that the balance of *imitatio* and *compassio* in Suso's passion-related guidance is instead linked to the dual purpose of

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[621] See Kurt Ruh, 'Zur Theologie des mittelalterlichen Passionstraktats', *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 6 (1950), pp. 17-38; Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, 1996); Petra Seegets, *Passionstheologie und Passionsfrömmigkeit im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Der Nürnberger Franziskaner Stephan Fridolin (gest. 1498) zwischen Kloster und Stadt* (Tübingen, 1998); Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (eds.), *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ's Life* (Leiden, 2015); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York, 1996); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe* (New Jersey, 2020).
[622] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 27-31.
[623] Alois Maria Haas, 'Sinn und Tragweite von Heinrich Seuses Passionsmystik', in Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (eds.), *Die Passion Christi in der Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 94-112.
[624] On the trend of quantification in late medieval passion literature, see Arnold Angenendt, Thomas Braucks, Rolf Busch, Thomas Lentes and Hubertus Lutterbach (eds.), *Gezählte Frömmigkeit* (Berlin, 1995), pp. 61-3.
[625] Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, pp. 439-40.
[626] *WW*, p. 203.; 'Memoria passionis meae debet fieri…sed cum matura et morosa ac praecordiali rememoratione et flebili quadam compassione.' *HS*, pp. 494-5.

presenting Christ's suffering as both subject for contemplation and meditative compassion and as a model for the spiritual lives of readers.

Suso's Passion narratives were an assimilation of a number of intellectual theories and canonical traditions. In particular, Suso draws on a range of rhetorical techniques to elicit emotional response. As shown by Mary Carruthers, and specifically linked with Christian emotional lives by others, the rhetorical traditions of this period were strongly informed by *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (86-82 BC).[627] *Rhetorica* emphasised the use of vividness in the art of memory, influencing medieval scholarly traditions of devising arresting memory images for preaching and meditation. This was manifested most notably in the literature of affective piety which urged audiences to develop a highly sensory, emotional identification with the sufferings of Christ. *Rhetorica* taught the importance of clarity and precision, and of distinctive, novel, or salient images when describing a scene. In this vein, Passion narratives used intense depictions of physical and emotional suffering to create memorable images for the audience to contemplate and imitate.[628] Bonaventure theorised this aspect of composition, asserting that imagination 'functions cognitively to assist in the translation of sensory into intellectual apprehension.'[629] Thus, by visualising the scene, the individual created a mental image of Christ, through which Christ himself could mediate.[630]

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[627] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. H. Caplan (Cambridge, 1989); Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 70-1; Peter Parshall, 'The Art of Memory and the Passion', *The Art Bulletin*, 81 (1999), pp. 456-72; Christine Gottler, *Last Things: Art and Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 64-7; Kimberly Rivers, *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice: Memory, Images, and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 314-20.

[627] Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 9.

[628] James Marrow, 'Inventing the Passion in the Late Middle Ages', in Marcia Kupfer (ed.), *The Passion Story: From Visual Representation to Social Drama* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 23-52; Herman Roodenburg, 'Empathy in the Making: Crafting the Believer's Emotions in the Late Medieval Low Countries', *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 129/2 (2014), pp. 42-62.

[629] Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2011), p. 139.

[630] Ibid. p. 139.

The form, language, and images used by Suso in his Passion narratives were, therefore, carefully considered for their effect on the audience, to render accessible through imagination and affect, 'precisely that knowledge of and union with God that the more prestigious theology of the monasteries and universities also sought.'[631] Differences in how audiences were guided through the events and emotions of these narratives therefore speak to specific contexts of the author and audience, and the dynamic between them.

The Passion narrative of *Horologium* is a reworking of its vernacular predecessor; indeed, much is an almost direct redaction. Both the Latin and vernacular versions express the same basic teaching on the nature of Christ's sacrifice and the compassionate meditation required of the audience. However, contrary to assumptions that female audiences were more emotive and particularly well-suited to affective practices, Suso expanded and elaborated his emotive treatment of the Passion when writing for a Latinate, clerical readership.

Anticipation of different audiences, reception, and use of the Passion narratives is made particularly clear by the third section of *BdEW*, the *HBB*, which provides meditations on the preceding Passion narrative. These meditations are removed entirely from *Horologium* 'for the sake of brevity', according to the prologue.[632] Indeed, Suso refers his Latinate reader to *BdEW* as a reference work should they wish to examine his revelation in full. The absence of *HBB* fundamentally changes the nature of the text. Its position at the close of the text is replaced by a set of detailed instructions on how to use the teachings of Eternal Wisdom in sermons. While *BdEW* provided a practical introductory exercise to Passion meditation for the individual worshipper, *Horologium* focused on broader themes and understandings, and how they might

[631] Michelle Karnes, 'The 'school of devotion': Imagination and cognition in medieval meditation on Christ' (Phd Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2004), p. 7.
[632] *WW*, p. 57; 'hic causa brevitatis', *HS*, p. 369.

best be incorporated into the pastoral duties of its clerical readership. This removal corresponds with additional instructions on how to use the content of *Horologium* in the readers' own teaching elsewhere in the text.

The language of suffering dominates much of the emotional register in the Passions of both *BdEW* and *Horologium*. In order to aid affective response, both texts appeal to the senses. Wisdom describes Christ's fleshly torment in terms of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell, creating a 'full-body' experience. For example, in both texts Wisdom describes how 'my eyes, which once beamed bright, grew dark, my divine ears were filled with mockery, my sense of smell was afflicted with an evil stench, my sweetest mouth was made bitter with a draft of gall. They struck me, they wounded me.'[633] However, suffering in *Horologium* often elaborates on the original in *BdEW*. For example, 'My heavy body sank down', becomes 'my sagging body dragged upon the nails that held it fast, so that the anguish of my wounds increased', and 'my whole frame was bruised, wounded and cut through and through', becomes 'they overwhelmed me with savage wounds and bitter pains from the soles of my feet to the top of my head'.[634] This embellishment of Christ's physical suffering enables the audience to better visualise the scene and comprehend the magnitude of torment undertaken for their salvation. Following the larger pattern of changes to the *Horologium* to appeal to the literary tastes and expectations of the Latinate, clerical audience, this elaboration offers some insight into the preferences of this audience, and their engagement with graphic, affective literature.

[633] *WW*, p. 86; 'oculi mei luciferi fuerunt contenebrati, aures divinae derisionibus repletae, olfactus propter malum odorem afflictus, os meum dulcissimum felleo potu amaricatum. Percusserunt me, vulneraverunt me', *HS*, p. 392.
[634] *LBEW*, p. 58; 'min swere lib ein nidirsigen', *BdEW*, p. 210; *WW*, p. 88; 'corpus ponderosum clavibus confixum deorsum sua mole trahebatur, et inde dolor vulnerum meorum augebatur.', *HS*, p. 394; *LBEW*, p. 58; 'alle min lip waz durwunt und durseret', *BdEW*, p. 210; *WW*, p. 88; 'A planta pedis usque ad verticem saevissimus vulneribus et amarissimis doloribus repleverunt me.', *HS*, p. 394.

This increase in visceral imagery also corresponds to Ruh's argument that Suso's *Horologium* goes beyond the emphasis on *imitatio* in *BdEW*, inciting compassion and emotional engagement through these elaborations to the extent that it seeks *conformitas* with the suffering Christ through the concept of *adversitas* or *tribulatio.*[635] This is supported by an increase in directions to clarify the nature of the emotional response intended, for example the added line: 'I tell you that floods of tears as plentiful as the rivers in a torrent would not be so acceptable to me as are the tears of a loving heart, moved by a feeling of compassion, for they are dear and welcome to God.'[636] This correction to a 'right' kind of compassion in the Latin version redirects the physical expression to internal experience. Similarly, 'You will suffer many reproaches and unjust judgements from many, you will have detraction from the envious, and your head will be crowned as if with thorns when your spiritual endeavours are frustrated by the goading of envy,' in *Horologium* lacks the final line of the same passage in *BdEW*: 'Your untried body will be scourged by a harsh and severe way of life.'[637] This corresponds with Suso's stance against extreme self-mortification practices in *Horologium*, in keeping with the moralising patterns of other critical literature.[638] It is the inner attitude of Christ that the reader is encouraged to imitate, not the physical experience. More extreme physical descriptions of the Passion for Latinate, clerical readership indicate a demand for this kind of literature, and a more intense emotional register for the practice of interior *conformitas*, clearly separated from exterior practices.

[635] Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, p. 440.
[636] *WW*, p. 86; 'Dico tibi quod nec tot lacrimarum imbres, quot aquarum sunt gurgites, coram me essent tam acceptabiles, quamvis etiam piae lacrimae ex affectu compassionis procedentes, amabiles et gratae coram Deo existant.', *HS*, p. 393.
[637] *WW*, pp. 82-3; 'Reprehensiones et iudicia iniusta a multis patieris; detractiones multas ab aemulis habebis, et quasi spinis caput tuum coronabitur, cum spiritualia exercita tua invidiae stimulis supprimentur.', *HS*, p. 389; *LBEW*, p. 52; 'Din ungeúbter lip wirt gegeiselt mit dem herten strengen lebenne.', *BdEW*, p. 205
[638] See Arnold Angenendt, Thomas Braucks, Rolf Busch Thomas Lentes and Hubertus Lutterbach (ed.), *Gezählte Frömmigkeit* (Berlin, 1995), pp. 40-71, esp. 60-61.

Planctus Mariae – a gendered model?

Both texts contain a lament of the Virgin Mary – a *Planctus Mariae* – providing an alternative angle for meditation on Christ's suffering after the Passion narrative. While the respective *planctus* are extensive and highly emotive, the longer, more intimate *planctus* of *BdEW* indicates expectation that the Marian narrative might be of greater significance to the female audience. That is not to say that Suso was enforcing a Marian model on them – both works include a Passion narrative as well. However, the reduction of the *planctus* in *Horologium*, like the removal of *HBB*, reflects a change in focus from providing meditational exercises for female 'beginners', to a dual purpose of spiritual conversion and scholarly political debate.

Mary's unique role as witness and participant in the suffering of Christ through the reflection of his pain in her own humanity made her an ideal figure for the teaching of compassionate contemplation. The increase in Christological devotion in this period saw a corresponding growth in Marian devotion. Mary's role in the Incarnation and Nativity, her special maternal relationship with Christ, and her status as Queen of Heaven and Mediatrix all garnered fresh interest and creativity in devotional forms.[639] While commentators and theologians had previously struggled to reconcile Mary's natural sorrow as a mother with the traditional interpretation of excessive expressions of grief as vanity or lack of faith in salvation, developing understandings of intense emotion as a method of cultivating the interior spiritual life saw Mary's grief as a spiritual asset.[640] Mary's grief was increasingly portrayed in devotional media. In literature, following the formative *planctus* attributed to Bernard, *planctus*

[639] Bynum, '…And Women His Humanity'.
[640] On this development, see Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. Joseph Berrigan (London, 1988), pp. 20-33; Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London, 2009), pp. 45-6.

narratives grew in popularity and diversity.[641] These texts were laden with pathos and graphic description, often taking an antithetical style, in order to deliver an emotional impact that would inspire audiences to share in Mary's suffering and achieve spiritual union with both mother and Son by proxy.[642] Suso's Marian accounts reflect this rich canon, using Mary as an access point for the drama and emotion of the Passion scenes to prompt profound personal engagement in these pivotal moments of humanity and salvation.

While scholars have noted the value of the *BdEW planctus* as a script for female devotion, comparison with its redaction in the *Horologium* reveals new insight into how these Marian narratives reflect changes in gender and socio-cultural background of the intended audience. Changes to the *Horologium* account highlight how the intensely emotional *planctus* in *BdEW* was carefully designed as a script for meditative emulation by Suso's female audience. The use of the first person, better suited to compassionate identification with Mary herself, is consistent throughout the *planctus* in *BdEW*, but only intermittent in *Horologium.* This anticipates that the audience of *BdEW* might interact with the *planctus Mariae* as an equivalent to Christ-focused contemplation rather than as a supplementary aid for it. This meditational purpose is furthered by repetition of images of Mary's suffering from the perspective of the Servant as witness. For example, in one of the few instances of first-person voice in *Horologium*, Mary's fainting at the foot of the cross is recounted as 'all my strength failed, my senses left me, and vast disaster overcame me…I failed for sorrow, I sank down for grief.'[643] In *BdEW* this same instance, 'fully overcome by grief, I sank down under the Cross many times, and lost my powers of speech', is then repeated by the Servant: 'her feeble body has collapsed from

[641] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de planctu beatae Mariae virginis* (Cologne, 1470).
[642] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 53-4; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Age* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 247-57.
[643] *WW*, p. 226; 'Virtus omnis evanuit, sensus a me recessit, et calamitas me oppressit immensa…Defeci prae dolore, corrui prae maerore.', *HS*, pp. 514-5.

grief'.[644] Similarly, the Servant's witnessing lament that 'alas, I see her gentle heart pierced as if a thousand knives were thrust into it', is not made by the Disciple.[645] The Servant's echoing provides a first-person, eye-witness account of Mary's experience, building a dynamic image and heightening the emotive register for the audience. Its absence in *Horologium* indicates a change in the meditative preferences of Suso's audience, or his response to normative standards of these materials for Latinate men.

Both the Latin and vernacular accounts of Marian suffering crescendo at the common focal motifs of the *planctus Mariae* tradition. Reindert Falkenburg explains that 'in late medieval devotional literature these motifs – selected not for their theological profundity but more for the graphic portrayals of suffering – crystallised to become part of the 'historical' narrative of the Passion itself.'[646] Just as Suso drew on an established narrative and rhetorical formulae for the Passion, he lent on traditional imagery and patterns of expression associated with Mary's experience of it. Foremost is the allegorical fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy to Mary that 'a sword will pierce your own soul too.'[647] The sword was a well-established motif, appearing in the works of patristic fathers, such as Basil the Great (d.379) and Ambrose, for whom it represented the Word of God, and John of Damascus (c.675/6-c.749), for whom, like Suso, it represented Mary's grief.[648] In *Horologium*, Wisdom laments 'how then the sword of sorrow pierced the inmost heart of my sweetest mother, how too the sword of grief transfixed the whole heart of her Son as he hung.'[649] This is prefigured in *BdEW*, in the voice of Mary: 'these words

[644] *LBEW*, p. 116; 'und von rechtem úberwundem herzleide do seig ich nider under dem krúze neiswie dik und geleit die sprache', *BdEW*, p. 270; *LBEW*, pp. 116-7; 'ir kranker lip ist da nider von leide gesigen', *BdEW*, p. 271.
[645] *LBEW*, p. 116; 'ach, so sihe ich daz zart herze durwunt, als ob tusent messer dar in stecken', *BdEW*, p. 271.
[646] Reindert Falkenburg, 'The Decorum of Grief: Notes on the Representation of Mary at the Cross in Late Medieval Netherlandish Literature and Painting', in M. Knapas and T. Ringbom (eds.), *Icon to Cartoon: A Tribute to Sixten Ringbom* (Helsinki, 1995), p. 65.
[647] Luke 2:34-35.
[648] Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (San Francisco, 1999), p. 147.
[649] *WW*, p. 228; 'Qualiter tunc gladius doloris viscera penetraverit dulcissimae matris, qualiter etiam maeroris gladius interiora omnia Filii pendentis repleverit', *HS*, p. 500.

were so painfully and so penetratingly thrust into my heart that they pierced my heart and soul like a sharp sword.'[650]

While the voice of Mary becomes a vehicle for the readers, the Marian laments also foreground her acts of touching and kissing Christ's blood – the latter unusual and indicative of a heightened blood piety in Suso's texts. Blood piety grew in popularity from the thirteenth century, reaching its height in the fifteenth century. This included blood as a feature of mystic visions and experiences, such as Catherine of Siena's experience of blood in or overflowing from her mouth when receiving the host, and of miracles such as Eucharistic elements and paraphernalia seen to bleed, inspiring 'blood pilgrimages' to the sites.[651] Visual depiction of Christ's blood grew in popularity from the early 1400s, which saw the traditional posture of the *imago pietatis* as a dead figure displaying his wounds replaced with a living figure from whose wounds blood flowed.[652] Beyond this wider devotional environment, Suso spent time in an established atmosphere of blood piety at Cologne, where the Dominicans had their own blood relic. This relic had drawn the community into wider debates that the suggestion that aspects of Christ's holy body might remain on earth was troubling. Indeed, in 1280 the abbot, Hermann of Weingarten, commissioned Gerhard of Cologne to write a *Tractatus de sacratissimo sanguine domini*, a defence of the relic in both theological and historical terms.[653] This enthusiasm for Christ's blood as a conduit of divine grace can be clearly seen in Suso's depiction of Mary's own 'blood piety'.

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[650] *LBEW*, p. 116; 'dú wort wurden so jemerlich und so besŏftklich in min herze gestecket, daz sú durchschniten min herz und sel als ein spitziges swert', *BdEW*, p. 270.
[651] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007), p. 4, 52-67.
[652] Gerhard Lutz, 'The Drop of Blood: Image and Piety in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 4/1 (2015), pp. 37-51.
[653] Klaus Berg, 'Der Traktat des Gerhard von Köln über das kostbarste Blut Christi aus dem Jahre 1280', in Norbert Kruse and Hans Ulrich Rudolph (eds.), *900 Jahre Heilig-Blut-Verehrung in Weingarten 1094-1994. Festschrift* (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp. 435-7.

Suso's emphasis on Mary's blood adoration intensifies the traditional motifs of Mary kissing and/or cradling Christ's body by having her kissing the blood itself in potent detail. Marian blood piety can be found in devotional literature from the eleventh century onwards. The earliest example, the *Vita rhythmica*, described Mary embracing and kissing the bloody base of the cross.[654] The theme appeared early in German vernacular literature. For example, *Rheinisches Marienlob*, a late thirteenth-century Marian poem written near Cologne, was an early example of the description of Mary's clothing as red with the blood of her Son.[655] This reflected the association of Marian relics with blood adoration. Her bloodied veil was particularly popular, and some considered her the first 'collector' of Christ's relics. Suso's depictions build on this tradition. For example, in *Horologium* Mary recounts how 'I greedily kissed the hot blood dropping from my Son's wounds upon the earth, so that his mother's face grew bloody with the gore of her slaughtered child,' and in *BdEW* 'I kissed the blood that flowed down from His wounds, so that my pallid cheeks and lips were quite reddened.'[656] The Servant again repeats this in a statement of witnessing: 'her fair face is streaked with the blood of her dying Son.'[657] In this Marian blood adoration, Suso presents his audiences with popular devotional material, intensified in equal measure in both texts, suggesting that Suso anticipated that both audiences would appreciate and benefit from participating in this form of piety.

In *BdEW* Mary's maternal role is presented as a means by which the reader might draw closer to Christ. In *Horologium*, Eternal Wisdom states that 'it is fitting to suffer with such a mother

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[654] 'Amplexa tamen stipitem crucis cruentatam,/ Et nati sui sanguine totam rubricatam,/ Osculatur sanguinem Jesu defluentem/ De suis vulneribus ad terramque currentem', *Vita beate virginis Marie et salvatoris rhythmica*, ed. Adolf Vögtlin (Tübingen, 1888), p. 169.
[655] Roswitha Wisniewski, 'Das Niederrheinische Marienlob: Verfasserschaft - geistige Haltung -Beziehungen zum Minnesang', in Herbert Anton, Bernhard Gajek and Peter Pfaff (eds.), *Geist und Zeichen: Festschrift für Arthur Henkel zu seinem sechzigsten Geburtstag* (Heidelberg, 1977), pp. 469-82.
[656] *WW*, p. 227; 'sanguinem fumantem et ex vulneribus Filii ad terram usque stillantem nimia cum aviditate deosculabar in tantum, ut facies matris de cruore Filii occisi sanguinolenta redderetur.', *HS*, p. 515; *LBEW*, p. 116; 'so kuste ich daz blůt, daz von sinen wunden da nider flos, also daz min erbleichtú wangen und mund gar blůtvar wurden.', *BdEW*, p. 270.
[657] *LBEW*, p. 117; 'ir schœnes antlút mit dem ertœten blůt bestrichen', *BdEW*, p. 271.

standing by the cross…and in some way, more special and more particular, to endure with her all that our innermost hearts can feel.'[658] However, this contrasts with the Servant's declaration: 'Oh, pure, tender Lady, I ask you to offer me your tender Child, as He appeared in death, to sit on the lap of my soul, that I may share according to my power, spiritually and by meditation, in that which was yours at that time physically.'[659] This appeal to take on the role of Mary in spirit presents a mode of spiritual experience not found in *Horologium*. Mary's gender and motherhood are presented as the means of a more intense form of Christological suffering. The Servant laments 'Alas, for the gentle womanly soul! How could your maternal heart ever have borne this immense grief at all?', reflecting understandings that the disposition of the female sex was better lent to great suffering.[660] The Servant even calls on those who share in Mary's maternal station, exhorting 'Alas, for all mothers, let the sad story of her grief be told to you!'[661] Suso perhaps anticipated that there were mothers among Suso's audience, and this Marian aspect provided particularly pertinent material for compassionate meditation.

This maternal identification is found elsewhere in *BdEW*. Mary is praised particularly as 'mother of all compassion'. Eternal Wisdom instructs the Servant to 'see how the mother of mercy has turned her eyes, compassionate, towards you and all sinners.'[662] The Servant is exuberant in his praise, exalting that 'you are called the mother, the Queen of Mercies, ah, tender mother, ah, gentle mother of compassion!'[663] This moniker emphasises not just Mary's

[658] *WW*, p. 224; 'convenit tantae matri iuxta crucem stanti…specialius quodam modo ac peculiarius compati ex medullis cordium nostrorum.', *HS*, p. 513.
[659] *LBEW*, p. 122; 'Owe, reinú zartú frŏwe, nu beger ich, daz du mir din zartes kint in der tŏtlichen angesiht bietest uf die schoze miner sele, daz mir nach minem vermugenne geistlich und in betrahtunge werde, daz dir do wart liplich.', *BdEW*, p. 276.
[660] *LBEW*, p. 117; 'dez zarten vrŏwlichen mŭtes! Wie mohte dis unmessig liden din mŭterliches herze alles ie getragen?', *BdEW*, p. 271.
[661] *LBEW*, p. 117; 'Owe alle mŭtren, lant úch daz leid geklegt sin!', *BdEW*, p. 271.
[662] *LBEW*, p. 91; 'und lŭg, wie dú mŭter der erbarmherzikeit dú ŏgen, dú milten erbarmherzigen ŏgen hat so milteklich gekeret gegen dir und gegen allen súndern', *BdEW*, p. 243.
[663] *LBEW*, p. 111; 'du heisset doch dú mŭter, du kúnginne der erbarmherzkeit; eya, zartú mŭter, eya, miltú kúnigin der grundlosen erbarmherzkeit!', *BdEW*, p. 264-5.

salvific role, but also her gendered role as mother. The significant modification in this theme in *Horologium* reflects Suso's attention to his respective audiences. Marian devotion was not necessarily less 'appropriate' for the male audience, but perhaps he considered it was not so accessible to them. The emphasis on the maternal role in *BdEW* is one of the few distinctively gendered differences between the two.

The use of Mary to serve the different spiritual and experiential positions of a female audience can also be seen in the Incarnational theology of *BdEW*. Praise of Mary serves as a site for instruction on the Incarnation and her intercessory role. For example, the Servant asks 'What has made you, the Mother of God, the casket in which Eternal Wisdom has sweetly reposed? Lady, the sins of us poor men brought it about!'[664] Mary is here presented as a representation of humanity, not of women specifically. However, direct reference to Mary's redemption of the female sex is given in response: 'ah, sweet Queen, how fitting it is that womankind should glory in you! We do not now say: 'Cursed be Eve for eating the fruit!' No, blessed be Eve, that she has brough us the sweet heavenly fruit!'[665] This specifically female redemption is not found in *Horologium*. It suggests that Suso intended his text not only to teach an audience who were likely less expert in theological nuances, but also to appeal to them by tailoring it to their gender.

As seen elsewhere, the most substantial alteration to *Horologium*'s Marian chapter is the addition of scriptural references, rendering the text more 'scholastic' in tone. This is indicative of a larger pattern of tonal change reflecting the scholarly religious canon familiar to the

[664] *LBEW*, p. 110; 'Waz hat dich gemachet ein můter gottes, einen schrin, in dem die Ewig Wisheit sůzeklich gerůwet hat? Vrowe, daz hein únser armen menschen súnde.', *BdEW*, p. 264.
[665] *LBEW*, p. 111; 'Ach, sůzú kúnigin, wie mag sich din so billich vrǒwlicher nam gesten! Wa nu: verflůchet si Eva, daz si der vrucht ie enbeiz? Gesegnet si Eva, daz si uns die sůzen himelschen vruht ie brahte!', *BdEW*, p. 265.

Latinate audience, and perhaps more useful to their devotional reading practices. The Sapiential Books were especially associated with Mary, as they were read on Marian feasts in the liturgical calendar. Accordingly, the majority of Suso's additions come from the Song. Praise of Mary draws heavily on natural imagery and figurative physicality. For example, she is praised in this imagery for her salvific role: 'for it is over your plenteousness and your richest fecundity that the dwellers in heaven and on earth rejoice, and they are restored by your sweet fruits. They are like two young twin roes, which feed among the lilies, till the day breaks and the shadows retreat.'[666] This echoes Song of Songs: 'Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies. Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away.'[667] Through such obvious reference, Suso situated his text within a tradition of Sapiential inspiration and exegesis. This responds to the specific masculine, scholastic frame of reference into which the Latin text moved.

The *planctus Mariae* of Suso's texts, and alterations to their content, tone, and emotional register, demonstrate gendered aspects to Suso's work. Gender, and socio-cultural contexts which interacted with gender, were certainly a consideration in making the texts appealing and practical for meditative compassionate devotion. In Suso's view, what was appealing and helpful to Dominican nuns was not necessarily so accessible for the clerical men produced by the narrow education system that Suso himself criticised. Aspects of his work which have been used to label Suso as 'feminised' instead show flexibility and a desire to make a not dissimilar set of ideas more resonant for different groups on the basis of assumed education and socio-cultural context. The change in audience and purpose in *Horologium* put greater emphasis on the text demonstrating scholarly credentials and legitimation by grounding it in scriptural and

[666] *WW*, p. 219; 'Haec velut hinnuli capreae gemelli, qui pascuntur in liliis, donec aspiret dies et inclinentur umbrae.', *HS*, p. 508.
[667] Song of Songs 4:5.

theological reference. This demonstrates again the normative framework of scholarly religious literature for which the content of *BdEW* was reshaped. Thus, the devotional needs and cultural and intellectual contexts of the audiences are imposed on the respective texts. The manifestations of these understandings are fundamentally shaped by Suso's purpose in converting the material from *BdEW* to a text which might appeal to, guide, and castigate scholarly, clerical readers.

Suffering and ascetic practice

Details of suffering outside the chapters of the Passion narrative and *planctus Mariae* are more prevalent in *Horologium*, particularly in relation to the Disciple himself. *Horologium* 1.9 ('Why Divine Wisdom permits those dear to her to be afflicted in so many ways') is a significant expansion of its equivalent in *BdEW* 1.10. The *Horologium* presents a more evocative lament on the tribulations of those who are beloved of God. The most striking difference is in the self-representation of the Disciple. The *Horologium* more vividly represents the suffering author. The Servant's compassion for his fellow man is expressed as a simple aside: 'alas, I must say it with deep sorrow and heartfelt tears.'[668] This same sentiment is elaborated in *Horologium*: 'For you alone see my toil and my sorrow, and you know that these words full of sadness have not come from any levity of spirit, but out of the fullness of the bitterness of my spirit, words interspersed with so many groanings, and my tears as they flow, hindering my pen as I write.'[669] This call on Wisdom to 'see' his sufferings are also a call on

[668] *LBEW*, pp. 84-5; 'owe, und daz ich mit herzklichen leid und mit bitterlichen trehnen mins herzen mů̊s sprechen', *BdEW*, p. 236.
[669] *WW*, p. 152; 'Tu enim solus laborem et dolorem consideras, et scis quoniam non ex animi levitate sed ex plenitudine amaritudinis animae meae verba haec dolore plena processerunt, quae gemitibus tantis intercipiuntur; sed et lacrimae decurrentes praeoccupant stilum scribentis.', *HS*, p. 450-1.

the reader to bear witness to them – those same readers for whom the 'Disciple' suffers. This contributes to the broader construction of an authorial character.

These motifs of groaning and weeping are repeated throughout the chapter in relation to the Disciple's suffering as the beloved of God. As he tells Wisdom, 'This is what I am lamenting, this is what I bewail, why I am groaning and sighing from the bottom of my heart', and 'Alas for me, pitiable and unhappy as I am! This is what has driven me, woe is me, to weep many times, now and since long ago, most bitter tears, and it has piled sorrow upon sorrow for me.'[670] The depths of his unhappiness reflect the heights of his elevated spiritual position, consolidating the author's privileged position and perhaps an implicit accusation of clerical detractors of his previous work: perpetrators of his holy suffering.

Suso urged his Latinate, male audience to share in the bodily suffering of Christ and take inspiration from Suso's own ascetic practices. Such focus is conspicuously absent from *BdEW*. Wisdom teaches on the benefit of bodily practice, instructing that he 'who always bears in his body the marks, that is, the works of the cross, humbly following along in my footsteps, so that he treads worldly joys underfoot and has no fear of ill fortune,' is most beloved.[671] Eternal Wisdom's instructions on the best preparation for meditation on the Passion of Christ also contain a more physical element in *Horologium.* The reader is instructed to seek 'inwards recollection and with not less bodily labour, 'exercising yourself into godliness,' by directing your hands or your eyes up towards the crucifix, by striking your breast or devoutly bending

[670] *WW*, p. 154; 'hoc est, quod defleo, hoc est, quod ploro, et propter quod ex intimis ingemisco et suspiro.', *HS*, p. 452; *WW*, p. 154; 'Heu me flebilem et infelicem; hoc est, quod me proh dolor et nunc et pridem multotiens amarissimis lacrimis flere compulit, et tristitiam mihi super tristitiam adduxit', *HS*, p. 452.
[671] *WW*, p. 87; 'quam qui non verbis solum, sed et factis ipsam prosequitur, qui stigmata, id est crucis opera iugiter in suo portat corpore, se meis humiliter conformando vestigiis, prospera videlicet calcans, adversa non formidans', *HS*, p. 393.

your knees…persisting till there comes a plenteous flow of tears…'[672] In *BdEW,* rather than using bodily suffering as an aid, Wisdom instructs the Servant that 'if you have no liking to meditate on My Passion with weeping eyes, because of the bitter agony I suffered, then you ought to meditate on it with a laughing heart, because of the joyous benefit you will find in it.'[673]

In the penultimate chapter of the *Horologium*, Suso includes a vivid account of his own youthful extremes and self-scarification, in which 'he stabbed the bare flesh above his heart where he could see the vital pulse throbbing most strongly, piercing himself so forcefully that every stab was followed by waves of blood that ran from his chest and dripped down drop by drop.'[674] Although he caveats that, 'not, indeed, that they [other devout men] should do as he had done, and so rashly expose themselves to dangers.'[675] This scarification likely reflects the growing cult of the Holy Name which was gaining popularity at that time.[676] The carving of 'IHC' into Suso's chest, and his counsel to 'always carry that saving name upon them,' was certainly in keeping with that devotional focus.[677]

This episode was adapted from the vernacular account of the *Vita* and added for the benefit of the later audience. This raises the question of why it was included in one vernacular work and

[672] *WW*, pp. 203-4; 'interiori videlicet recordatione et corporali nihilominus labore, te ipsum exercens ad pietatem per extensionem manuum seu oculorum ad crucifixum sublevationem vel pectoris tensionem aut genuflexiones devotas vel…continuando, donec egrediantur aquae lacrimarum largissime', *HS*, p. 495.
[673] *LBEW*, p. 103; 'Macht du min liden nit von der bitterlichen not, die ich leid, mit weinenden ǒgen übertrahten, so solt du es aber mit lachendem herzen übergan von dem vrǒlichen gůt, daz du dar inne vindest.', *BdEW*, p. 257.
[674] *WW*, p. 321; 'extrahens arrepto ferro acuto super nuda praecordia pectoris sui, in ea parte, ubi cordis vitalis pulsus praecipue videtur vigere, praedictum ferrum carni suae infixit tam valide, ut singulis ictibus cruor sanguineus erumpens sequeretur ictus ferientis, et sanguinis undae desuper praecordiis deorsum defluentes decurrerent minutatim.', *HS*, p. 596.
[675] *WW*, p. 321; 'Non quidem, ut idipsum facerent et se periculo inconsulte committerent', *HS*, p. 597.
[676] Rob Lutton, 'Devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus in the Medieval West', in Jane Beal (ed.), *Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 142-7.
[677] *WW*, p. 322; 'illud nomen salutiferum qualitercumque formatum vel conscriptum', *HS*, p. 597.

not the other. The links between the *Vita* and the community of women at Töss, particularly the role of Stagel, suggests that this physical extreme was not considered inappropriate for a female audience in that context. Indeed, in writings advising women such as the *Vita*, the *Exemplar*, and his letters, Suso encourages the practice of devotion the Holy Name and makes mention of his own ascetic practice in relation to it.[678] This is particularly interesting in the context of the autohagiographical nature of the *Vita* rendering it a model for emulation. However, this account is presented as part of a journey from extreme ascetic devotion to a better path to Wisdom which focuses on the interior. Indeed, the intervention of a divine messenger calls the Servant to leave his self-imposed physical suffering for the pursuit of spiritual knighthood. It is therefore made clear that the desirable element for emulation is the interior struggle rather than the external self-abnegation. The *BdEW* did not serve as an autohagiographical model in the same vein as the *Vita*, and places greater emphasis on precise guidance for devotional practice rather than broader 'life' narrative of the spiritual journey. The violent description of ascetic extremity did not serve the purpose of *BdEW*, as it presented an exemplar that was at odds with the 'correct' teaching of interior suffering.

Extremes of ascetic suffering among women were clearly of concern to Suso, whose *cura monialium* warranted guidance on this matter for communities of Dominican women. Indeed, the question of the level of physical suffering appropriate for *imitatio Christi* began the epistolary relationship between Suso and Stagel. While saints famed for their bodily practices, particularly holy women, were increasingly popular among religious women, there was also a concerted move to reduce radical practices.[679] Suso, like many church representatives in

[678] Hamburger, *The Visual and Visionary,* p. 270.
[679] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy,* pp. 79-98; Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 214.

Germany, discouraged extreme asceticism among religious women. The *Vita* recounts such an admonishment:

'Dear daughter, if you intend to order your spiritual life according to my teachings, as you requested of me, then put aside such exaggerated severity because it is out of keeping with your weakness as a woman and your physical well-being. Dear Christ did not say, 'Take up my cross.' He said, 'Everyone should take up his own cross.'[680]

It is therefore not surprising that his own physical extremes were omitted in *BdEW*, and interior practices emphasised. The comparative lack of caution in this area in *Horologium* indicates different expectations for devotional practices inspired by the text. The continued development of affective piety among European elites glorified the literal manifestation of Christ's suffering on the body of the devotee. Stigmata and self-castigation were indicators of the holiness of an individual, particularly in mystic accounts. In the *Vita*, Suso interpreted his physical extremes as an important stage of contemplative conversion in his spiritual journey.

Their inclusion in *Horologium* and omission in *BdEW* indicates that while Suso considered the spiritual abilities and mystical potential of women to be equal, he may have thought the character and phases of their religious life to be different. In the context of the *Horologium* as Suso's re-integration into scholastic discourse and clerical readership, this engagement with the Holy Name, and demonstration of both the personal extremes of ascetic, affective devotion and the corrective understanding of moderation, interacted with ongoing debates and 'trends' in religious practice.

[680] *The Exemplar*, pp. 139-40.

Conclusions

Fundamentally a product of Suso's educational and social position, changes to the texts reflect the changing circumstances of Suso's own life and their respective purposes in that context. Contextualisation of the redaction of *BdEW* into *Horologium* against the backdrop of Suso's personal circumstances reveals developments in the intention of the Latin text which respond to contemporary challenges facing both the Dominican institution and Suso himself. It also offers nuance to understandings of factors influencing the expression of divine experience and spiritual guidance as it moved from a meditational and educational aid for religious female devotees to a practical guide, teaching tool, and institutional critique for scholarly, clerical readers.

Consideration of *Horologium* within its proper context extends Suso's scholarly, 'institutional' career beyond its primary location of his years in scholastic education, culminating in the publication of *BdW*. As his first Latin work since acquittal for heresy in 1330, the *Horologium* represents a re-entry into scholarly discourse. Its dedication to Vaucemain speaks of ambition for an influential reception, and represents a purposeful, tactical approach to re-introducing his voice into institutional dialogues. The addition of material pertaining to the papal-imperial conflict and significant expansion and specification of critiques of academic institution suggest that these were the driving factors behind the redaction and the main institutional discourses with which Suso intended to engage. Attention to Suso's personal context reveals how far the expanded critique in the Latin text responded to local conflicts and contemporary institutional debates. Shaped by the exile of Suso's community from Constance, and earlier experience of similar disruptions in Cologne and the surrounding area, the *Horologium* takes on a far more immediate 'political' tone.

The redaction demonstrates a careful alteration of the text to take on a more recognisably scholastic aspect, designed to appeal to a Latinate, scholarly audience which is indicative of this wider purpose of recognisable integration into the literary environment. This audience is also acknowledged in the removal of *HBB* and insertion of instructions on how to incorporate Suso's guidance into pastoral teaching, indicating a more public-facing usage by a clerical audience. Many additions to emotional motifs and elaborated emotional expression are a result of making fuller use of a framework of imagery and language recognisable from the religious literary canon. This renders the work more 'scholarly' in tone, and points to a predominantly male, clerical readership who would be familiar with this framework, and for whom such additions might augment the appeal and usefulness of the text.

The texts offer important insight into areas of overlap between the two audiences. It sees male and female audiences shaped by similar literary, cultural, and devotional currents, to which they responded in both similar and different ways. This appears to have been broadly defined by individual ability to engage with intellectual culture. Thus, we see German Dominican intellectuals and German Dominican women united by a spirituality shaped by the same literary culture, dependent on social status and educational access. Against this understanding of similarity, a more nuanced understanding of differences and what they signify, particularly in relation to gendered considerations, is possible.

The emotional intensity and intimate, personal journey of Suso's work was clearly appealing to readers regardless of gender, religious status, vernacularity or Latin literacy. The respective audiences are largely presented with the same theological and spiritual material couched in similar motifs. Where difference between the emotional expression in the two texts is found is

largely in response to considerations of differing educational needs and intellectual frames of reference. This arose for the most part where audiences without formal scholastic education might struggle to engage fully or appropriately with certain motifs without more concerted personal guidance. Interpretation of physical intimacy in *BdEW* is carefully guided within the text itself, with the intention that it be read alongside reference texts in the convent setting. *Horologium* instead offers a more explicit sensuality and encouragement to share in divine nuptial consummation, reflecting Suso's confidence in his Latinate readers, informed by the same scholarly background, to recognise the parameters of the allegorical framework. This is not an issue with 'appropriate' emotional intensity, but instead with guiding interpretation.

Indeed, there is little indication that either audience was considered more or less intellectually or spiritually capable, or that their emotional experience might or ought to be different, but rather that their spiritual journey might take different forms and be aided by different means. This is most notable in the more prominent position and emotional intensity of the *planctus Mariae* in *BdEW*, which foregrounds a female Passion perspective as more useful to Suso's female audience than his male readers. Similarly, the absence of extremes of physical asceticism in *BdEW* is in keeping with Suso's wider teaching that, although not appropriate for men or women, they were particularly dangerous to female practice. Correspondingly, the heightened emotional register of suffering in *Horologium* challenges interpretation of female audiences as more emotive and indicates that intense affective practice was an aspirational aspect of Latinate, clerical devotional culture. Thus, we see that both texts drew on an intellectual milieu characterised by the exchange of ideas and traditions between secular, religious, and quasi-religious communities, and were received by communities of shared spiritual and devotional interests. The difference in how the spiritual journey is set out for the two audiences does not reflect a gendered difference in spiritual capability or emotionality, but

instead subtle but significant differences in how the same spiritual journey should be navigated and experienced.

Chapter 3: Mechthild (of Magdeburg)

Little is known of Mechthild beyond what can be ascertained from the details of her book and its prologues. Indeed, we are unable to say much with certainty beyond that there was a woman named Mechthild who received visions and they were recorded along with other writings compiled into *FL*.[681] The text uses first person voice yet addresses others in order to instruct them. This has much in common with Cistercian hagiographical traditions, and it is certainly possible, if not likely, that it depicts more of a 'generic' holy life than a reality.[682] We know that there are multiple hands involved in the production of the original text in the only surviving complete manuscript of *FL*. This complete copy is preserved in the Einsiedeln manuscript, representing an adaptation or indeed translation into Alemannic, speaking to an ongoing process of alteration from the original as it circulated in various iterations. The content was reshaped again in its Latin translation to reflect a more typical holy life and holy text, as will be explored in this chapter. Indeed, in *FL* we have a text which was not signed by any author, surviving only in later translations of copies made long after the completion of the original. Translation here includes the texts of both *FL* and *LD* as the vernacular version and other extracts survive to us already translated from one regional dialect to another. This relative anonymity is certainly not unusual, indeed, the importance attributed to authorial identity is a relatively modern phenomenon. The *FL* does not mention Mechthild's, and attributes authorship to God in the prologues.

[681] Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch vom Ich zum Autor. Zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 125-35, p. 214f.
[682] Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmysticher Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1988), pp. 56-7, 120-1.

Textual reception

Contrary to the perception in literary studies that the *FL* is unique and without precedent or later reception, the reception of the text was broad, enabled by its translation into Latin and circulation among extensive literary religious networks that flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The surviving textual evidence and reception witnesses allow us to trace an enthusiastic reception through Central Germany and south into Basel and its locality.

The only known complete copy of *FL*, a Middle High German, specifically Alemannic, translation made shortly after the middle of the fourteenth century, is preserved in the aforementioned Codex 277 of the library of the Benedictine monastery in Einsiedeln (E).[683] In this version Books I-V contain an 'index rerum', followed by the more cohesive Book VI and VII.[684] As well as this complete version, fragments discovered in Moscow (Mo) are understood to have been written in c.1300 in the region south of the Eastphalian border, closest in assumed time and place to the original. Recent work on the provenance of Mo connects it to Halberstadt, just southwest of Magdeburg. This indicates exchange of the compiled work within the archdiocese at an early stage, perhaps between Cistercian convents connected as daughter houses of St Jacobi in Halberstadt.[685] While the library of St Jacobi does not survive, several

[683] For dating of the manuscript, see Karin Schneider, *Gotische Schriften. Die oberdeutschen Handschriften von 1300 bis 1350, 2 Vols* (Wiesbaden, 2009), p. 150. Previous scholarship had assumed the manuscript to be later, placing it in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, see Gisela Vollmann-Profe, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Walther Killy (ed.), *Literaturlexikon, Bd. 8* (Gütersloh, 1990), p. 42; Helen Webster, 'German Mysticism in Fourteenth-Century Basel: Gender and Genre in Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek MS 277' (DPhil Thesis, Oxford, 2005), pp. 28-41; Wybren Scheepsma, 'Überregionale Beziehungen zwischen dem Rheinland und Brabant in der mystischen Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Laurent Cesalli (ed.) *University, council, city. Intellectual Culture on the Rhine (1300-1550)* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 263.
[684] *LD*, p. xvii.
[685] Balázs J. Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum: Die Moskauer Fragmente und andere Handschriftenfunde zur Rezeption des Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit und seiner lateinischen Übersetzung', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 142/2 (2013), p. 179; Natalija Ganina and Catherine Squires, 'Ein Textzeuge des 'Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit' von Mechthild von Magdeburg aus dem 13. Jahrhundert: Moskau, Bibl. der Lomonossow-Universität, Dokumentensammlung Gustav Schmidt, Fonds 40/1, Nr. 47', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 139 (2010), pp. 64-86.

women's houses could have been recipients of Mechthild's work through its patronage, including the convents of St Jacobia and Burchardi, as well as beguine communities.[686] Nemes notes in his study of Mechthildian manuscripts that the nuns at Helfta had close contact with mendicants in the region, and may have shared or donated books to them. He draws particular attention to the library of the filial house in Hedersleben founded in 1253 and settled in 1262.[687]

The other manuscript to contain extracts from East Central Germany, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. theol. lat. oct. 89 (Be1), known as the Berlin manuscript, can be traced back to the Alemannic translation of *FL.*[688] These Alemannic manuscripts were likely produced in Basel between 1343-1345 by Dominican circles around the secular priest Heinrich von Nördlingen.[689] Heinrich certainly worked with *FL* extensively during his time in exile in Basel (1339-1347), and was significantly involved in its Alemannic translation, at least from 1343 onwards.[690] This translation speaks of an intent to make *FL* accessible to wider religious literary networks flourishing in fourteenth-century Germany and the Low Countries. It was likely made initially for the benefit of Margaretha Ebner, a mystic under his spiritual direction. He writes to her that,

'I send you a book that is called *The Light of the Godhead.* The living light of the ardent love of Christ compels me to do so, for it is to me the most delightful in German and the most inwardly stirring arrow of love I ever read in the German tongue.'[691]

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[686] Ganina and Squires, 'Ein Textzeuge des 'Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit'', p. 86.
[687] Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum', p. 178.
[688] Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. theol. lat. oct. 89, fol. 63v-65r, 269r-278r.
[689] For the role of Heinrich von Nördlingen in the reception of *FL*, see Urban Federer, *Mystische Erfahrung im literarischen Dialog. Die Briefe Heinrichs von Nördlingen an Margaretha Ebner* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 173-77; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Der involvierte Leser. Immersive Lektürepraktiken in der spätmittelalterlichen Mystik-Rezeption', in Hartmut Bleumer and Susanne Kaplan (eds.), *Immersion im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2012), pp. 38-62.
[690] Federer, *Mystische Erfahrung*, p. 119. For examination of evidence of influence of ongoing *FL* translation on Heinrich's writing, see pp. 140-143.
[691] 'Ich send euch ain buch das haisst Das liecht der gothait. dar zu zwinget mich das lebend liecht der hitzigen mine Christi, wan es mir das lustigistz tützsch ist und das innerlichst rürend minenschosz, das ich in tützscher

Other letters between the two include quotations, notes, and metaphors from *FL*.[692] Other than Ms E, *FL* exists only as text excerpts in other manuscripts and the Berlin manuscript.[693] The most extensive of these are the Colmar manuscript, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 2137 (C), Würzburg, Franziskanerkloster, HS 1 110 (W), Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Cod. Germ. 38 (B), and Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. theol. lat. oct. 89 (Be1). The Alemannic tradition dates from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and is spatially focused in the High German speaking region. Therefore, apart from the Moscow fragments and the Berlin manuscript, the greatest production and reception of *FL* was distanced from the time and place of its original composition and circulation.

LD was mostly likely a product of the Dominican communities of Erfurt. [694] Sections of it appear in Dietrich of Apolda's *Vita S. Dominici* which was completed in 1296-98, dating *LD* to before then at the latest.[695] Marginalia in the Göttingen manuscript of the *Vita S. Dominici*, written in Central Germany in the early fourteenth century, explicitly attribute the excerpts to Mechthild, suggesting perhaps a growing value of the text and its 'author' as it grew in visibility.[696]

The text of *LD* contains Books I-VI of the *FL*. The absence of Book VII raises several possibilities for the translation and reception branches of the work. The Latin text does not describe the shape of its German source text or make any explanation of editorial interventions,

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sprach ie gelas', 'Brief XLIII', in Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik* (Amsterdam, 1966), p. 246.
[692] For an exposition of this use of *FL* in the letters, see Federer, *Mystiche Erfahrung*, pp. 111-70.
[693] A list of sources (other than the Berlin manuscript) can be found in Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, p. 487.
[694] Previous assumptions that it was produced at Halle have been corrected by Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 208-37; Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum', p. 164.
[695] Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, p. xviii.
[696] Göttingen, Niedersächisische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 8° Cod. Ms. Theol. 109b, fol. 1ra-32rb.

so we can only made inferences from the information at hand.[697] It was based on a version that included Books I-VI in a form that differs from that represented in manuscript E, but does not contain Book VII, which was created in the 1280s/1290s and may therefore have been written during or after the start of the Latin translation. However, it is just as likely that the seventh book may have been available, but simply not included in the source manuscript that informed the original *LD* translation.[698] Thus, the Latin tradition does not necessarily reflect the extant material, but instead the material in a particular iteration of the *FL* compilations circulating at the time, layered with the edits and redactions of the editors of the Latin.

Like *FL*, *LD* survives in copies only. The only complete text dates from the mid-fourteenth century, found in Basel University Library Cod. B IX II, fol.51r-91va (Rb).[699] An extensive excerpt from the fifteenth century can be found in another Basel manuscript, Basel University Library Cod. A VIII 6, fol.101v-154v, 159r-195v and 209v (Ra), likely related to Rb.[700] Other extracts since uncovered, many in the process of preparation for the latest critical edition of *LD* by Ernst Hellgardt, Balázs J. Nemes and Elke Senne, allow for cross-referencing to trace broader patterns of transmission.[701] This most recent research overturns previous assumptions of a narrow transmission, and enables an understanding that despite the sole complete manuscript of *FL*, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century reception must have been considerably more widespread than this would suggest.[702]

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[697] On the translation source for *LD*, see Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 114-25.
[698] Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, pp. xvii-xviii.
[699] For details and provenance, see Emmelius/Nemes/Senne, pp. xxxii-xxxvi.
[700] For details and provenance, see Emmelius/Nemes/Senne, pp. xliii-xliv.
[701] For complete list of new manuscript discoveries, see Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, p. xxii. On previous scholarly understandings, see Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, pp. xx-xxi.
[702] On prior understandings of narrow transmission, see Kurt Ruh, 'Gottesliebe bei Hadewijch, Mechthild von Magdeburg und Marguerite Porete', in Angel San Miguel (ed.), *Romanische Literaturbeziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift F. Rauhut* (Tübingen, 1985), p. 249; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik, Vol. 2* (München, 1993), p. 253.

The recent work of Hellgardt, Nemes and Senne has identified a number of textual references and attested manuscripts that do not survive which add further layers to the picture.[703] The catalogue of the Erfurt Charterhouse library (*Registrum librariae fratrum Carthusiensium apud Erffordiam*) compiled by Jakob Volradi in the 1470s contains a long excerpt from as well as references to *LD*. Volradi's marginalia in two other manuscripts also refer to *LD*, suggesting that it was well known in the Charterhouse.[704] Another library catalogue, Johann Jacob Witter's 1746 *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum in bibliotheca sacri ordinis Hierosolimitani Argentorati asservatorum*, contains a number of reception witnesses, including full manuscripts.[705]

The textual evidence indicates that *LD* was received extensively within Dominican and Carthusian circles. Apart from three manuscripts of Benedictine origin, which contain a prayer and extracts of *LD* in the work of the Franciscan Dietrich von Arneveld, the rest of the tradition is Dominican and Carthusian.[706] The early reception by Dietrich von Apolda and readers from Central Germany, as well as Johannes Meyer and Johannes Lindner from Pirna, suggests Dominican provenance.[707] Carthusian textual witnesses present a network of exchange between Charterhouses in the Central German region and around Basel. Three surviving manuscripts (Ba, Br and Ra) were produced in St Margarethental Charterhouse in Basel, and it

[703] Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, pp. xvii-xxvi.
[704] Weimar, Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek, Oct. 64, fol. 77v; Eisleben, Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten/Luthers Geburtshaus, H 546, fol. 68r; On the identification of Volradi as author of this marginalia, see Matthias Eifler, "Ich habe sehr neugierig gesucht und gelesen und fast alle Bücher der Bibliothek unseres Hauses durch gelesen.' Beobachtungen zur Lektüre-und Studienpraxis in der Erfurter Kartause am Beispiel der Sammelhandschrift des Bruders N.', in *Mitteilungen des Vereins für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde von Erfurt*, 73 (2012), pp. 103-32.
[705] Johann Jacob Witter, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum in bibliotheca sacri ordinis Hierosolymitani Argentorati asservatorum* (Straßburg, 1746), p. 21, 25, 35.
[706] Benedictine manuscripts: Augsburg, Staats-und Stadtbibliothek, Oct. Cod 17, fol.242r-243v (Au), from St Ulrich and Afra in Augsburg; Prague, Bibliothek des Strahov-Klosters, DB IV 2, fol.3r-5r (Pr), from Erfurt St Peterkloster; Weimar, Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek, Oct 54, fol.107v-109v (We1), from Erfurt St Peterkloster; For more on these manuscripts and their provenance, see Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne.
[707] Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, p. xxv.

is possible that this was the site of the translation of *LD* into the Alemannic *Light of the Deity* which survives in Luzern Zentralbibliothek, Cod. 175, Deposit of the Library of Romero in Lucerne, fol. II-VI and 1r-220r (Rw).[708] The Berlin manuscript is associated with the Maria Saal Charterhouse in Buxheim. The St Salvatorberg Charterhouse in Erfurt offers the late-fifteenth-century manuscripts Be2 (1481-1486), We2 (early-fifteenth century), We3 (1454/74-1491), and Vä (c.1460).[709]

The Latin interacts with the Alemannic tradition in various textual witnesses, indeed, the two seem to serve the same purpose of making a text available to individuals and communities whose interactions with it would be limited by its regional dialect. The manuscript evidence of the three Basel Charterhouse manuscripts (Ba, Br and Ra), as well as the translation of both *LD* into Alemannic in Rw and *FL* into Alemannic in E, is indicative of a specific translation culture with the main purpose of sharing *FL* among an audience with varied linguistic capabilities.[710]

The German and Latin versions circulated at the same time.[711] Hellgardt, Nemes and Senne argue that the Latin tradition was intended to be supplementary to *FL*. Marginal entries in Rb suggest that it was possible to read the Latin translation in the Basel Dominican church alongside a German text, primarily for the purposes of correction and supplementation.[712] This contemporaneous reception of *LD* and *FL* within the Basel circles can also be traced elsewhere.

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[708] For the three surviving manuscripts, see Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. A VII 68, fol. 272r-274r (Ba); Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. A 82, fol. 71r-76v and fol. 78v (Br); Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. A VIII 6 (Ra); For the Alemmanic *Light of Deity* see Lucerne Central Manuscript Library, Cod. 175. Deposit of the Library of Romero in Lucerne, fol. II-VI and 1r-220r.
[709] Staatsbibliothek Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. theol. lat. oct. 89 (Be2); Weimar, Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek, Oct 58 (We2); Weimar, Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek, Q 51 (We3); Växjö/Sweden, Stadsbiblioteket, Ms. qu. 401 (Vä).
[710] See Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, pp. xxv-xxvi.
[711] For more on German and Latin versions circulating at the same time, see Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 362-70.
[712] Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

In his letter accompanying a copy of *FL*, Heinrich von Nördlingen requests that Margaretha Ebner 'send me also the book *Lucem divinitatis* if it has come to you from Kaisheim, and if you have had enough of it.'[713] This request for a Latin copy alongside his own Alemannic translation and access to an earlier edition of *FL* suggests that the Latin was supplementary to the vernacular in Basel circles. Indeed, Webster points out that *FL* doesn't have a framework for reference use like the chapters of the Latin translation.[714] This is not entirely true, as the index and rubrics in the Einsiedeln manuscript suggest that that copy at least was intended for some form of reference use. However, this purpose is not embedded in the text itself in the same way as is seen in the *LD*. This means by which the Latin reader might refer to the original vernacular suggests that it had an auxiliary function as secondary to the original vernacular. This concept of the Latin as a somewhat supplementary tradition is bolstered by the Berlin manuscript, which contains chapters of *LD* alongside the longer extracts of *FL*. Indeed, in light of this, the Alemannic translation of *LD* extant in Rw could be understood as a translation aid for increasingly vernacular literary circles in much the same way that the Latin of *LD* had been used in previous centuries.[715]

References to Mechthild in didactic compilations from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries evidence the spread of the work attributed to her, and the growth of her own reputation by association. Most notable is an entry entitled 'Mechtildis propheta' in Matthias Flacius Illyricus' *Catalogus testium Veritatis* in 1556, which served as a template for the entry on 'S.

[713] 'send mir auch Lucem divinitatis das buch, sei es euch worden von Keiszheim und habent irs genugt.', 'Brief XLIV,' Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen*, p. 248; On the identification of this as a reference to the *LD* as opposed to *FL* as older scholarship had assumed, see Hellgardt/Nemes/Senne, p. 490.
[714] Webster, 'German Mysticism', p. 123.
[715] Gisela Vollmann-Profe, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg: Deutsch und lateinisch', in Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (eds.), *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte; Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen 1998* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 133-56.

Mechtildis Eine heilige Jungfraw' in the 1631 work *Die lobwürdige Gesellschafft der gelehrten Weiber* published under the pseudonym Johann Frauenlob.[716]

The wide reception of *FL* and its textual footprint in both Latin and vernacular shows that 'even centuries after its translation into the international language of the Church, the *Flowing Light* remained a work in the German-Latin borderland.'[717] While the appeal of the text appears to have been taken up by some of the 'universal' audience that its writer intended, the translation into Latin opened the text to a specific audience of Latinate, predominantly religious male readers.

The historical Mechthild

When approaching questions of authorship, among other things, we are faced with the problem of working with only a single known surviving copy of *FL* in another language and from another region of Germany. This copy, contained in the fourteenth-century Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex 277 (E), is a translation of an earlier version, likely in East-Central German, more precisely a predominantly Eastphalian or Elbian-eastphalian' dialect, from a

[716] Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Catalogus testium Veritatis qui ante nostrum aetatem reclamarunt Papae* (Basel, 1556), p. 936; On the reception of Mechthild in Flacius see Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, p. 229 and 338-40; Elisabeth Gössman, 'Johann Frauenlob >Die lobwürddige Gesellschaft der Gelehrten Weiber< (1631/33)', in Elisabeth Gössman (ed.), *Eva – Gottes Meisterwerk* (München, 1985), p. 74; On Mechthild in Frauenlob, see Elke Senne, 'Probleme der Autorschaft und Authentizität in der Überlieferung des Fließenden Lichtes Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Thomas Bein (ed.), *Autor – Autorisation – Authentizität: Beiträge der Internationalen Fachtagung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Germanistische Edition in Verbindung mit der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Philosophischer Editionen und der Fachgruppe Freie Forschungsinstitute in der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Aachen, 20. bis 23. Februar 2002* (Tübingen, 2004), p. 141; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Ein wieder aufgefundenes Exzerpt aus Mechthilds von Magdeburg >Lux Divinitatis<', in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 137 (2008), p. 357; Entry identified as Mechthild by Margot Schmidt in '*die spilende minnevluot.* Der Eros als Sein und Wirkkraft in der Trinität bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Margot Schmidt and Dieter R. Bauer (eds.), *'Eine Höhe, über die nichts geht'. Spezielle Glaubenserfahrung in der Frauenmystik?* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1986), p. 82.

[717] Christa Ortmann, 'Das Buch der Minne: Methodologischer Versuch zur deutsch-lateinischen Gegebenheit des 'Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit' Mechtilds von Magdeburg', in Gerhard Hahn (ed.), *Grundlagen des Verstehens mittelalterlicher Literatur: literarische Texte und ihr historischer Erkenntniswert* (Kröner, 1992), p. 159.

central German-speaking region of Southern Eastphalia and Northern Thuringia, into Alemannic, a Middle High German dialect from the southwest German-speaking regions.[718] The authorial hand of the woman named Mechthild is faint (if present at all). The medieval meaning of translation is closer to a process of adaptation, often indicative of some kind of cultural transfer.[719] This form of translation-adaptation leaves us with uncertainty as to the proximity of the Alemannic/Upper German translation to the original (although the recent research discussed previously has offered new insights).

We cannot establish what the text might or might not have looked like prior to the Einsiedeln version, beyond the Latin adaption and the traces in the fragments which suggest that there were differing versions very early on in the transmission. However, these differing versions give reason to believe that the text of *FL* was likely edited and shaped by multiple individuals, most probably members of monastic and medicant communities who were involved in its publication and transmission. This raises the interesting issue that even at this early stage, this 'female-authored' text was a product of many hands, most of which were male. We also cannot account for the level of intervention of the Cistercian sisters at Helfta, but the text states that members of the community served as scribes for Mechthild, whose eyesight was failing. Book VII of *FL* then, if not more of the compilation, was mediated through these cloistered scribes and editors. We finally come to encounter the hands which compiled and translated the surviving Middle High German version of *FL* and all those which had come before and since, as well as the Latin translators. Locating a firm outline of 'Mechthild' becomes increasingly impossible.

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[718] On the language of the earliest fragments, see Catherine Squires, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg: Ein handschriftlicher Neufund aus dem elbostfälischen Sprachraum', *Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch*, 133 (2010), pp. 9-44.

[719] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991); For the varying significance of translation for medieval German literary history as a whole, see the essays collected in *Wolfram-Studien*, 14 (1996).

There were certainly different iterations of the text at different stages as it spread, and particularly as it moved between languages, as will be explored later. The presence of scribes, editors, and translators at various stages, repeatedly dipping into the text over time, leaves us with the rough shape of Mechthild's intended writings and an unquantifiable amount of interference. Indeed, the multiple hands at work in the manuscripts and fragments that survive to us mean that traditional philological approaches do not work. It can certainly be surmised that the woman on whose visionary experiences and record the text is based was a real person, but her exact location and voice remain a mystery, although we can attempt reasonable suppositions.[720]

Alastair Minnis identified that the medieval theory of authorship was not uncomplicated and narrowly monolithic.[721] Aspects such as authorship in Latin scholastic writing, manuscript transmission, and vernacular authorship have been the subject of concerted scholarly attention since the end of the twentieth century.[722] The complexities of authorship in *FL* speak to this layered understanding of meaning and form in medieval authorship more broadly. The Latin prologue of the Alemannic version of *FL* states that 'this book was revealed in German by the Lord through grace to a certain beguine', establishing divine authorship by proxy.[723] God is

[720] For summary of historical evidence, see Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 125-56; Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum'.
[721] Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 2.
[722] On authorship in Latin scholastic writing see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*; Jan-Dirk Müller, 'Auctor-Actor-Author: Einige Anmerkungen zum Verständnis vom Autor in lateinischen Schriften des frühen und hohen Mittelalters', in Felix Philipp Ingold and Werner Wunderlich (eds.), *Der Autor im Dialog: Beiträge zur Autorität von Autorschaft* (St Gallen, 1995), pp. 17-31; For the function of authorship in manuscript transmission, see Thomas Bein, *"Mit fremden Pegasusen pflügen': Untersuchungen zu Authentizitätsproblemen in mittelhochdeutscher Lyrik und Lyrikphilologie* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 193-233; On the circumstances of vernacular authorial activity, see Joachim Bumke, 'Autor und Werk: Beobachtungen und Überlegungen zur höfischen Epik (ausgehend von der Donaueschingen Parzivalhandschrift G)', *ZfdPh*, 116 (1997), pp. 87-114; On German, Latin and vernacular works, see Elizabeth Andersen, Jens Haustein, Anne Simon and Peter Strohschneider (eds.), *Autor und Autorschaft im Mittelalter: Kolloquium Meißen 1995* (Tübingen, 1998); Sebastian Coxon, *The Presentation of Authorship in Medieval German Literature 1220-1290* (Oxford, 2001).
[723] *FL*, p. 35.; 'liber iste fuit teutonice cuidam begine', *DfL*, p. 1

also identified as the true author of the book within the text, in which the voice of Mechthild states this conviction multiple times, that it is, 'out of God's heart and mouth', and that it comes 'lovingly from God and does not have its origins in human thought.'[724] In the Latin Middle Ages, the meaning of *auctor* as originator of a text was secondary to the meaning of *auctor* as the authority with jurisdictional responsibility for the text.[725] In mystical texts in particular this was a powerful distinction, as the mystic writer representing the authorship of the holy spirit was able to claim an authority both outside and above ecclesiastical institutions.[726] Therefore, Mechthild as author and God as author were not incompatible, and neither were the figure of Mechthild as author and the multiple other hands that formed the text.

Sara Poor interprets Mechthild's lack of authorial identification as a sign of female authorship in itself, serving as a tactic to deflect anxieties about a female writer giving spiritual instruction. She argues that 'medieval female authorship in this case thus seems to be characterised by an absence rather than an assertion of authority.'[727] However, such strategies of humility and self-assurance, of annihilation of the authorial self through the ultimate authority of God, were widespread, particularly in religious and devotional works, and are not a distinctly female form of composition. Indeed, the work of the contemporary lyric poet Konrad von Würzburg (1220-1287) uses similar techniques in his eulogy of the Virgin Mary. Contrary to Poor's assertion of Mechthild's need for anonymity, attribution of a text to a recognised earthly *auctor* often served to authenticate said text in an institutional context, or to lend a particular significance or weight to it. Indeed, claims to authorship were a subject of thirteenth-century scholastic controversies

[724] *FL*, p. 144.; 'hies us gottes herzen und munt'; 'dis bůch minnenklich von gotte hark omen und ist us menschlichen sinnen nit genomen,' *DfL*, p. 114.
[725] Marie-Dominique Chenu, 'Auctor, actor, autor', *Bulletin du Cange*, 3 (1927), pp. 81-6; Müller, 'Auctor-Actor-Author'.
[726] Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 3
[727] Sara Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia, 2004), p. 3.

in which individuals denounced their opponents for claiming the status of *auctores* for themselves.[728] The naming of Mechthild as author by the writers of the prologues speaks to a significance attached to her, whether it be her reputation in the locality, her place among the women of Helfta, or her gender and religious status which lent itself well to hagiographical traditions, perhaps all three.

Scholars like Poor continue to actively search for a distinctive and definite female authorial voice in such a manner that detailed analysis is undermined by the obvious gaps left by not addressing this issue. Indeed, the assertion of a female voice by the creators of the text in itself speaks to an intention that the text be received in a particular gendered light. If we follow a strict separation of literary and historical realities, most female-authored (and many male-authored) medieval texts are rendered useless to historians, and the re-writing of historical narratives to integrate written women's voices is impossible without anachronism. This overlooks the myriad ways in which such texts offer insight into the historical reality which shaped them and their legacies. The present study is not concerned with untangling the balance of fictive and historical details in *FL*, as the reality of the mystical experience and holy life does not change the reality that it was written in a particular time and place in response to particular circumstances.

While the literary construction of Mechthild as author is distinct from the 'real' Mechthild, the content of *FL* offers us some glimpses of Mechthild the historical individual. Contemporary or near-contemporary mentions of Mechthild augment this information to present us with a shape of Mechthild and her life.

[728] Müller, 'Auctor-Actor-Author', p. 29.

While scholarship based on the information of the texts and their prologues can sketch a rough journey from family to beguine life to residence at Helfta, and can provide some historical context of Helfta, context for secular life is far more difficult to ascertain. Social contexts are generally more unclear, as they usually leave fewer direct material traces, relying on what can be induced from apparent familiarity with certain texts or discourses.[729] Poetic elements linked with *minnesang* have been posited as evidence of Mechthild's courtly origins. Early scholarship focusing on the literary nature of *FL* placed particular emphasis on these elements.[730] The Moscow fragments indicate that the poeticism of *FL* is not a later embellishment of the later Upper German textual tradition but a stylistic feature of the original.[731] The poetic elements of *FL* have long been contextualised against the culture of *minnesang* and interpreted as an adoption of *minnesang* tradition. Morel linked the lyricism of *FL* with minstrelsy and the *minnesang* genre, and this has remained a default in Mechthildian scholarship.[732] This is despite longstanding reasons to doubt the assumption of this proximity. For example, Julius Schwietering described the language form found in *FL* as 'hymnic' and distinct from *minnesang*, taking inspiration instead from traditions of religious song.[733] Mohr's reading of *FL* as strictly biographical placed it under a lens of stereotyped gender analysis, identifying the influence of 'naïve' fairy tales and folk literature, rather than the 'masculine' *minnesang* genre.[734]

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[729] On the challenges of accessing court and court culture, see Jan-Dirk Müller, *Höfische Kompromisse. Acht Kapitel zur höfischen Epik* (Tübingen, 2007), pp. 6-45.
[730] Heinz Tillmann, *Studien zum Dialog bei Mecthild von Magdeburg* (Marburg, 1933), pp. 5-16; Ulrike Wiethaus, *Ecstatic Transformation. Transpersonal Psychology in the Work of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York, 1996), pp. 26-7.
[731] Natalija Ganina, "Das Sprechen Gottes'. Eine vergleichende Stilanalyse der bisher nicht nachgewiesenen Textstellen des Moskauer Fragments mit dem 'Fließenden Licht der Gottheit',' in Ganina (ed), pp. 139-164.
[732] Morel.; Carl Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Predigerorden (von 1250-1350)* (Freiburg, 1861), p. 216; Stierling offers the first summary sketch of the courtly elements in Mechthild's language, pp. 27-34; Grete Lüers, *Die Sprache der deutschen Mystik des Mittelalters im Werke der Mechthild von Magdeburg.* (Munich, 1926; repr. Darmstadt, 1966), p. 29.
[733] Julius Schiwetering, *Deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters* (Potsdam, 1940), p. 304, 376.
[734] Wolfgang Mohr, 'Darbietungsformen der Mystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg,' p. 375.

However, Almut Suerbaum convincingly dispels this linkage with *minnesang* as a fundamentally circular argument. She observes that seemingly courtly aspects of *FL* traditionally associated with *minnesang* instead reflect the established concept of spiritual soldiers and knights found elsewhere in religious literature.[735] A more fitting approach is instead to nuance this view to consider the more general understanding of 'song', rather than the specific genre of *minnesang. FL* certainly contains songs, which are identified as such by chapter titles, and which contain clear rhyme schemes. However, as Suerbaum points out, although there are stanza-like structures, these 'songs' lack the regularity of secular poetry that could be associated with *minnesang.* Indeed, to categorise the genre of *minnesang* itself as a form of poetry is a generalisation which has been cautioned against.[736] Equating the text with *minnesang* prevents a nuanced view and handling of the song-like forms in *FL.* Indeed, the rhymes of the prose found in the Moscow fragments reflect a stylistic tradition of monastic literature seen in Bernard of Clairvaux and also used by Beatrice of Nazareth.[737] It is, therefore, possible that the structure of 'songs' drawn upon in *FL* are just as likely inspired by religious literature as by any popular or secular source – and there is also no reason not to suppose that it could draw upon both.

Turning to other indicators of background, the content of the text suggests that Mechthild was most likely of lower noble status. *FL* tells us that in around 1230 a young noblewoman left her home and travelled to the city to lead a life dedication to worship and contemplation. The use

[735] Suerbaum, Mechthild und Minnesang?, pp. 217-219.
[736] Hartmut Bleumer, 'Minnesang als Lyrik? Desiderate der Unmittelbarkeit bei Heinrich von Morungen, Ulrich von Liechtenstein und Johannes Hadlaub,' *Wolfram-Studien* 21, 2013, pp. 165-201.
[737] Nigel F. Palmer, 'Ein Zeugnis deutscher Kunstprosa aus dem späten 13. Jahrhundert. Zu den sonst nicht nachgewiesenen Textabschnitten der Moskauer Mechthild-Überlieferung,' in Ganina (ed), pp. 97-137; Caroline Emmelius, 'Mechthilds Klangpoetik. Zu den Kolonreimen im 'Fließenden Licht der Gottheit,' in Elizabeth Andersen (ed), *Lierarischer Stil. Mittelalterliche Dichtung zwischen Konvention und Innovation. 22. Anglo-German Colloquium Düsseldorf* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 263-286; Caroline Emmelius, 'Rhyming prose – bridal songs of the soul – sound metaphors: Dimensions of musicality in Mechthild's 'Fließendes Licht der Gottheit',' in René Wetzel, Laurence Wuidar (eds), *Mystique, langage, musique. Exprimer l'indicible* (Fribourg, 2019).

of courtly language and familiarity with the ideals, concepts, hierarchies, and practices of courtly society, as well as concern with local politics in the early parts of her book makes it probable that Mechthild had been raised in an environment of lower or middle nobility.[738] This would also match an education level reflected in certain textual references present in the text, namely the Song of Songs and the Latin Psalter, which indicate some familiarity with the Latin Psalter, for which there is certainly evidence of ownership in southwest Germany in the thirteenth century.[739] There is also scope to suggest that she lived within networks which included noble individuals and interaction with courtly culture before her arrival among the predominantly noble community at Helfta. Mechthild's social network of readers and correspondents mentioned in the body of *FL* included 'a lady [who] had retreated from the world and yet still wanted to serve at court'.[740] This was perhaps a contemporary within the beguine community who had previously sought her advice on the matter or could suggest a link with a court in her own youth. It certainly indicates interaction with individuals connected to local court(s) and overlap between courtly life and the religious communities they joined.

The Magdeburg Question

The text recounts Mechthild's experience of her first visions, in which she was visited by the Holy Spirit daily until she gave up her wealth and status to pursue independent religious life in the city. This was clearly intended to be a firm severance from her previous life, and she claims to have known only one person in the city and hoped that such isolation would bring her closer to God. This city has been traditionally assumed to be Magdeburg based on references to

[738] Tobin, 'Introduction', in *FL* (New York, 1997), p. 4; Elizabeth Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (New York, 2000), pp. 59-2.
[739] Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg*, pp.149-51.
[740] 'Ein vrowe hette sich begeben und wolte dennoch ze hove dienen,' *DfL,* p. 131; *FL,* p. 159; *LD* interprets 'retreated from the world' as becoming a beguine.

Magdeburg in the text, and Mechthild is called 'von Magdeburg' on the same basis. This identification was perhaps also necessary to distinguish Mechthild from the better-known Mechthild of Hackeborn.[741]

The location of Mechthild in Magdeburg has come under increasing criticism since the early 2000s.[742] Discovery of the earliest known manuscript fragments of *FL*, dating from c.1300 and referred to as the Moscow manuscript (Mo), has raised new questions about the geographical origins of the text. Whereas earlier scholars had assumed the original to have been written in Low German, Balázs J. Nemes and Catherine Squires establish that the writing dialect of the fragment is an Eastphalian dialect common to Saxony's south-western borderlands.[743] They make the crucial observation that the predominant writing language may have differed from the prevailing spoken variant. Therefore, while Magdeburg may be within a Low-German speaking area, it is possible that the writing dialect of the region used Central German with Low German elements.[744] The Eastphalian/Central German linguistic profile of the Moscow

[741] Linus Ubl, *Konstruktion und Manifestation von 'Frauenmystik': Rezeptionsdynamiken in der oberdeutschen Überlieferung des* Liber specialis gratiae (Berlin, 2023), p. 130.
[742] Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg in ihrer Zeit', in *Studies in Spirituality*, 14 (2004), pp, 153-70, p. 157f; Jörg Voigt, 'Rezension über Hildegund Keul: Verschwiegene Gottesrede. Die Mystik der Begine Mechthild von Magdeburg. Innsbruck/Wien 2004', in *Sachsen und Anhalt. Jahrbuch der historischen Kommission für Sachsen-Anhalt*, 25 (2007), p. 384; Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, p. 3f.; Ernst Hellgardt, '>Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit< Mechthilds von Magdeburg und ihr Buch', in Michael Schilling (ed.), *Literatur in der Stadt. Magdeburg in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Heidelberg, 2012), pp. 106-8; Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes, 'Mechthild und das >Fließende Licht der Gottheit< im Kontext: Einleitende Spurensuchen', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das >Fließende Licht der Gottheit< im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 11-15.
[743] For overview, see Sara Poor, 'Transmission and Impact: Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit*', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon (eds.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Boston, 2014), p. 79; For Eastphalian classification, see Catherine Squires, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg: Ein handschriftlicher Neufund aus dem elbostfälischen Sprachraum', *Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch*, 133 (2010), pp. 9-44; Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum'; On the linguistic profile of Mo, see: Ganina and Squires, 'Ein Textzeuge des Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit', p. 84.
[744] Squires, 'Ein handschriftlicher Neufund', pp. 9-44; On the linguistic geography of the region, see Nigel F. Palmer and Hans Jochen Schiewer, 'Literarische Topographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im 14. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 122 (2003), pp. 178-202.

fragments offers up a number of other possible locations for Mechthild's uncloistered years, including Halle, Halberstadt, Mühlhausen, Nordhausen, Jena, and, most compellingly, Erfurt.

Identification of Mechthild as 'von Magdeburg' requires some evidence of connection to that place within the text, as well as reason to believe that the city had the necessary conditions to be the setting for aspects of Mechthild's life that we know of. The first consideration hangs upon evidence from within the text itself pertaining to communications with a Canon of Magdeburg Cathedral, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The second consideration rests on how likely it was that a young noblewoman pursuing an independent religious life in that city would have come under the pastoral care of Dominicans. *FL* names Mechthild's confessor as one Heinrich of Halle, the Dominican community 57km east of Magdeburg. Although mendicants had been active in the city from the mid-1220s, there is little surviving evidence on the nature of Dominican pastoral care for the cloistered and non-cloistered women of Magdeburg due to extensive destruction of Magdeburg City archives during the Thirty Years War.[745] However, the largely Dominican context of Mechthild's pastoral care can be traced not only through the identification of a Dominican confessor, but also some indicative evidence for Dominican care of non-cloistered women in Magdeburg more generally. This can be found in the aforementioned Cistercian monastery of St Agnes, which enclosed a community of independent religious women in 1230. The community maintained extensive contact with Dominicans in and around Magdeburg, perhaps continuing pre-existing pastoral relationships. Emmelius and Nemes also note that there is a strong chance that Dominicans were involved in

[745] For the current understanding in this area, see Stefan Pätzold, 'Von der Domschule zu den Studia der Bettelorden. Bildung und Wissenschaft im mittelalterlichen Magdeburg', in *Bibel, Bildung, Bettelorden. Sechs Kapitel aus Magdeburgs Kirchengeschichte im Mittelalter* (Halle, 2001), pp. 121-37; Stefan Pätzold, 'Magdeburg', in Martin J. Schubert (ed.) *Schreiborte des Mittelalters: Skriptorien, Werke, Mäzene* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 329-46; Thomas Ertl, 'Netzwerke des Wissens. Die Bettelorden, ihre Mobilität und ihre Schulen', in Matthias Puhle (ed.) *Aufbruch in die Gotik. Der Magdeburger Dom und die späte Stauferzeit. Landesausstellung Sachsen-Anhalt aus Anlass des 800. Domjubiläums* (Mainz, 2009), pp. 312-23.

the transfer of property to female houses in the area, based on their appearance in documentary record as witnesses to official documents.[746] There is therefore a strong likelihood that Magdeburg fostered an environment of social, cultural, and spiritual exchange between Dominican and female communities, which could be fitting for the circumstances of our Mechthild.

As difficult as it is to prove Magdeburg as the location in question, it is equally – if not more – difficult to present evidence for any viable alternatives. The present study cannot provide any new insight to the Magdeburg question and stands with Emmelius and Nemes in their suggestion that it be given a 'clear question mark'.[747] Indeed, locating *FL* within a network of communication that spans the broader linguistic area outlined by possible alternative locations gives perhaps a more accurate representation of its development and reception.

'Women who live neither in the world nor out of it'

The attributed persona of *FL* produced the majority of the writing while pursuing an independent religious life. Beguine communities allowed women to pursue a religious life without the enclosure of a convent and monastic vows. In 1274, Friar Gilbert of Tournai described these individuals in Liège as 'women whom we have no idea whether to call lay women or nuns, because they live neither in the world nor out of it.'[748] These women withdrew from the material world to pursue a life of prayer and contemplation while adhering to the ideals of chastity, poverty and labour. While they were understood to lead religious lives, their

[746] Emmelius and Nemes, 'Mechthild und das >Fließende Licht der Gottheit<,' p. 14, 20.
[747] Emmelius and Nemes, 'Mechthild und das >Fließende Licht der Gottheit<,' p. 13.
[748] 'Et apud nos mulieres aliae, de quibus nescimus, utrum debeamus eas vel saeculares vel moniales appellare, partim enim utuntur ritu saeculari, partim etiam regulari.', Gilbert of Tournai, *Collectio de Scandalis Ecclesiae,* ed. Aubertus Stroick, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 24 (1931), p. 58.

lack of vows or regulation meant that they were still regarded as laypeople in Church law, existing between the religious and the secular. Indeed, Kaspar Elm's term 'semi-religious' remains the most useful way of describing them.[749] The term 'beguine' itself is misleading, in that it was contemporaneously used in both complimentary and pejorative contexts, referring to a large group of women practising diverse ways of life across a considerable geographical span.[750] The flexible social position and lack of unified leadership, foundational documents, or adherence to a specific rule or set of vows, has made beguines difficult to categorise – a challenge reflected in both contemporary writing and historiography.

Details of Mechthild's life as a beguine are relatively inaccessible. While beguines in the Low Countries and Belgium were established in large communities, those of central/southwestern Germany were usually smaller, numbering from around three to twenty members.[751] Their work consisted primarily of charitable works, and sometimes offering religious guidance. Mechthild appears to have been part of a community of religious women, likely in a senior position based on the complaint in *FL* that 'in my community there is a religious person who causes me much distress because of contrary disposition. This person is not willing to obey me in regard to anything.'[752] It is not clear when or for how long she was in such a position. She was engaged in discourse with other beguines of various lifestyles. Within the body of *FL* Mechthild offers advice to beguines, and prayers for 'the purgatory of a beguine', widely interpreted as a companion in Magdeburg.[753] She also criticises a beguine who remains

[749] Kaspar Elm, '*Vita Regularis sine regula.* The Meaning, Legal Status and Self-Understanding of Late-Medieval and Early-Modern Semi-Religious Life', in *Religious Life Between Jerusalem, the Desert, and the World: Selected Essays by Kaspar Elm,* trans. James Mixson (Leiden, 2016), pp. 277-361.
[750] Helen Rolfson, 'The Low Countries, the Beguines, and John Ruusbroec', in Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Hoboken, 2013), p. 330.
[751] Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 51.
[752] *FL*, p. 233.; 'In miner geselleschaft ist ein geistlich mensch, von dem lide ich manig not dur sine bœsen sitten, also das mir der mensche an keinen dingen volgen wil.' *DfL*, p. 213.
[753] *FL*, p. 184.; 'von einer beginen vegefúr,' *DfL*, p. 159.

attached to court and cannot reap the spiritual benefits of religious life in such a worldly environment.[754] This places her within a network of independent religious women, both individual and communal, among whom she was recognised as an authority on devotional practice.

Beguines were certainly divisive for contemporary religious authorities. New varieties of corporate religious life generally pursuing the *vita apostolica*, both monastic and non-monastic, emerged in the mid-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries. Ecclesiastical officials, and councils were increasingly concerned by these groups, asserting the necessity to separate the acceptable from the heretical, and then integrating or outlawing them accordingly.[755] The 1215 Fourth Lateran Council decreed that:

> 'Lest too great a variety of religious orders leads to grave confusion in God's church, we strictly forbid anyone henceforth to found a new religious order. Whoever wants to become a religious should enter one of the already approved orders. Likewise, whoever wishes to found a new religious house should take the rule and institutes from already approved religious orders.'[756]

Although worded as an absolute ban, the approval granted to the Franciscan and Dominican orders shortly after the decree suggests that the ruling was more nuanced than it might appear.[757] The Council certainly intended a systemisation of religious life, with centralised directives which would allow institutionalisation of the various forms of religious life. This was not, however, to prevent diversity but to allow for better accountability and regulation of

[754] *FL*, p. 159.
[755] Elm, '*Vita Regularis*', pp. 299-300.
[756] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol. 1: Nicaea I-Lateran V*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington, 1990) p. 242.
[757] Elizabeth Freeman, 'The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the Prohibition Against New Religious Orders, and Religious Women', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 44/1 (2018), pp. 1-23.

the theologies and devotional practices therein. It seems that the implementation of the rulings of 1215 was relatively flexible, and that these rulings held different significances for different communities.

Beguine communities continued to exist and to expand after 1215. At a time when perceived religious dissidence among the laity was a major concern for authorities, the beguines perhaps represented a model of piety and obedience which might offer a solution.[758] Indeed, following the successful petition of Jacques de Vitry, confessor and hagiographer of prominent beguine Marie d'Oignies, permission was granted for religious women to live communally in the diocese of Liège, the kingdom of France, and the Holy Roman Empire in 1216. This was legislatively confirmed in 1233 in *Gloriam virginalem* which granted papal protection to chaste virgins in the dioceses of Teutonia and Cambrai. Record of other petitions seeking papal protection for beguine communities suggests an assumption that they would be eligible for official protection.[759] Reforms implemented by the Council are best understood as attempts to regulate certain characteristics considered risky by authorities in this period rather than to remove alternative lifestyles completely, and they were willing to offer options for corporate religious life for women.

However, these female communities became increasingly contentious as the century wore on. The etymological flexibility of the term 'beguine' meant that it came to refer to both semi-cloistered laywomen and itinerant women. This was an important distinction, and rulings from regional authorities reflect a growing rejection of religious women living a mendicant lifestyle,

[758] Jo Ann McNamara, 'Rhetoric of orthodoxy. Clerical authority and female innovation in the struggle with heresy', in Ulrike Weithaus (ed.), *Maps of flesh and light. The experiences of medieval women mystics* (New York, 1993), pp. 9-27; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 2004), pp. 47-84.
[759] Freeman, 'Fourth Lateran Council', p. 16.

and approval of those who sought a near-cloistered communal life in a beguine house (a beguinage). For example, the 1287 Synod of Liège denied women not living in a beguinage the right to wear beguine robes or the same protection afforded beguinage members. The Dominican Master General, Humbert of Romans, condemned female mendicants, but praised 'beguines, happy and worthy of all praise…following a most holy life in the midst of a perverse nation'.[760] Tolerance of beguines was increasingly linked to how recognisably 'semi-monastic' they were. Indeed, under Dominican *cura monialium* many beguine houses became Dominican convents. Across Germany episcopal officials worked with mendicants to provide for enclosure of beguine communities.[761] The Cistercian monastery of St Agnes in Magdeburg was one such enclosure, founded in 1230 from a community of non-cloistered religious women.

Mechthild's time as a beguine from the 1230s to the late 1260s therefore spanned a period in which beguines received sanction and pastoral provisions but were also subject to increasing suspicion and tighter regulation. Of particular significance is the 1261 diocesan synod held in Magdeburg which ruled that beguines must obey their parish priests or face excommunication, suggesting that there was notable tension between beguine communities and the diocesan clergy there. This may have had particular implications for Mechthild, who complained in writings from around that time that local churchmen opposed her work.

Mechthild joined the community at Helfta in c.1270.[762] It is feasible that this was in response to this regional tightening of regulations on beguines. Remaining a beguine may have meant

[760] Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum libri duo 2; De modo prompte cudendi ser mones circa omne genus hominum* (Paris, 1607), pp. 201-2.
[761] Sigrid Hirbodian, 'Religious Women: Secular Canonesses and Beguines', in Bernice M. Kaczynski and Thomas Sullivan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism* (Oxford, 2020), p. 290.
[762] For approaches to the dating of Mechthild's arrival at Helfta, see Balázs J. Nemes, '*ut earundem testimonio conprobatur.* 'Schwester Mechthild' in der Offenbarungsliteratur von Helfta (mit einem Textabdruck aus der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827)', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), p. 111.

becoming isolated from the preferred spiritual guidance of her Dominican confessor, Heinrich of Halle, in favour of a member of the parish clergy to whom she owed obedience under the 1261 rulings. Heinrich was significant not just as a spiritual advisor, but also as an important conduit for her writings, and is almost certainly one of the authorial voices at play in the text. Given the hostile response to her work by some, obedience to the local clergy would likely have meant being forced to abandon her writing, or at least being more heavily regulated. Helfta maintained close ties with the Dominican community at Halle, offering a means of legitimising and maintaining Mechthild's continued relationship with the individuals who supported her visionary experiences and enabled ongoing writing and publication.

The second reason for seeking the support of the cloistered community was Mechthild's ill-health. Local Dominicans placing vulnerable women in cloistered communities to benefit from the greater practical support those communities could offer was relatively common. Indeed, the holy recluse Margaret the Lame was transferred to the Cistercian convent of St Agnes in Magdeburg by her confessor, the Dominican Johannes of Magdeburg, who later wrote her *vita.*[763] Multiple references are made in *FL* to Mechthild's failing health, in particular her failing eyesight.[764] The nuns at Helfta were highly educated and ran a prestigious scriptorium. Here Mechthild could draw on their support to serve as scribes, just as other mystics in the community did.[765] They were perhaps also better equipped to provide physical support in her

[763] Paul Gerhard Schmidt, 'Margareta contracta. Eine Magdeburger Mystikerin des 13. Jahrhunderts', *Hagiographica*, 15 (2008), pp. 177-96.
[764] On evidence of Mechthild's ill health in content and linguistic features of *FL*, see Sandra Linden, "*Du solt si erlúhten und leren* (FL VII,8).' Zur Wechselwirkung von Alterssignatur und Autorität im siebten Buch des 'Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019) pp. 201-3.
[765] For information on the Helfta Scriptorium, see Racha Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical in Late Medieval Piety. The Vernacular Transmission of Gertrude of Helfta's Visions* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 12-32; On the scribal relationship between Gertrude of Helfta and Sister N, see Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical*, p. 17; Kurt Ruh, 'Gertrud von Helfta: Ein neues Gertrud-Bild', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 121 (1992), pp. 1-20; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik, Bd. 2* (München, 1993), p. 316.; Balázs J. Nemes and Almuth Märker, 'Hunc tercium conscripsi cum maximo labore occultandi.

old age than a smaller independent community was able to offer. Retirement to Helfta may have been just that – a form of retirement to a sheltered community.

Recording her enclosure, Mechthild says that 'on earth I was oppressively enclosed for love of you [God].'[766] Perhaps this enclosure 'for love of you' was a form of general suffering in *imitatio Christi*, deepening her rejection of the world. However, it is clear that Mechthild considered her independence to be central to her life and work. Perhaps she feared that becoming an institutional Bride of Christ would sever the dynamic visionary bond that had sprung from an individual loving relationship with God, in which her soul became his literal bride. This is best evidenced by the fact that she never took vows, despite spending more than a decade as an esteemed member of the community at Helfta.

Helfta

The convent was founded in 1229 in Thal-Mansfeld in the diocese of Halberstadt. It later moved to Helfta in 1257 where basic amenities were in better supply.[767] The convent was a powerful geopolitical entity in the region.[768] Early land donations by local nobility, such as the families of Hackeborn, Querfurt, and Schraplau, made it economically significant from the outset. As a noble foundation, the nuns were predominantly drawn from the local elite – 15 of

Schwester N von Helfta und ihre 'Sonderausgabe' des Legatus divinae pietatis Gertruds von Helfta in der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 137 (2015), pp. 248-96.

[766] *FL*, p. 112; 'Ich was in ertrich dur dine liebi mit nȏten bevangen', *DfL*, p. 84.

[767] Cornelia Oefelein, *Das Nonnenkloster St. Jacobi und seine Tochterklöster im Bistum Halberstadt* (Berlin, 2004), pp. 123-4.

[768] Kaspar Elm, 'Frömmigkeit und Ordensleben in deutschen Frauenklöstern des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts', *Ons geestelijk erf*, 66 (1992), p. 39.

the 18 abbesses from its foundation to its closure in 1545 were from the local nobility. Indeed, Mechthild's entry into this community might be indicative of her own noble lineage.[769]

Mechthild was welcomed by the sisters at Helfta, led by the abbess Gertrude the Great (c.1256-1301). The convent produced some of the best examples of a distinctive genre that emerged in women's convents with outstanding theological education. The seventh book of *FL* was written there, and was posthumously attached to her previous writings, perhaps by the nuns themselves.[770] Mechthild is mentioned as 'Sister M.' in vision texts associated with two other 'Helfta mystics', the *Liber specialis gratiae (The Book of Special Grace)* of Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1299), and the *Legatus divinae pietatis (The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness)* of Gertrude the Great.[771] The three women lived together at the convent at least temporarily from c.1270-1300.

As an episcopal foundation, Helfta was officially answerable to the bishop rather than any order and thus exercised greater independence to pursue strategic alliances and personal preferences than other convents. Although Helfta was a Cistercian foundation, the nuns followed the Benedictine rule and were never fully incorporated into the Cistercian Order. The General Chapter of 1220 had officially ended Cistercian incorporation of women's convents, but many lived under the order's rule after that date.[772] The community at Helfta had possibly exercised

[769] Balázs J. Nemes, "Schwester Mechthild' in der Offenbarungsliteratur von Helfta (mit einem Textabdruck aus der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827)', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), p. 94.
[770] Nemes, *Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 289-97; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus divinae pietatis*', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon (ed.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2014), p. 114; Linden, '*Du solt si erlúhten und leren*', pp. 191-210.
[771] Mary Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens, 1991), p. 17; Mechthild of Hackeborn, *The Book of Special Grace*, trans. Barbara Newman (New York, 2017).; Gertrude the Great, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, trans. Alexandra Barratt (Kalamazoo, 1991-2020).
[772] Regina Dorothea Schiewer, 'Books in Texts - Texts in Books: The 'St. Georgener Predigten' as an Example of Nuns' Literacy in Late Medieval Germany', in Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara and Patricia Stoop (eds.),

considerable agency in remaining Benedictine. Indeed, their official Cistercian affiliation did not impact the convent's relative flexibility in forming spiritual networks with communities of several different orders. While the Charterhouse at Erfurt remained a key point of spiritual contact, the nuns at Helfta also established a prayer community with the Benedictine convent of St Peter in Erfurt and maintained close ties with the Dominicans at Halle.[773] Regardless of typicality, Helfta is a useful reminder that, like the diversity of lives and lifestyles under the category of 'beguine', a similar diversity existed under monastic labels, and religious life was not so strictly delineated by them in practice.

Mechthild was highly esteemed at Helfta. In Book VII she reports that Christ informed her of her role there: that she should 'illumine and teach them and should remain with them in great honour.'[774] Mechthild entered Helfta around the time that Mechthild of Hackeborn led the scriptorium, or at least held a senior position there in her role as *cantrix*.[775] Her younger sister Gertrude would have been undertaking her own education there. Either of these fellow mystics could have aided in transcribing Mechthild's work for her. Gertrude was certainly deeply affected by her interactions with Mechthild, writing of grief at her death, and praying for

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Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue (Turnhout, 2013), p. 224; On Cistercian nuns, see John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (eds.), *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women* (2 vols, Kalamazoo, 1995); Elizabeth Freeman, 'Cistercian Nuns in Medieval England: Unofficial Meets Official', *Studies in Church History*, 42 (2006), p. 111; Anne Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne* (New York, 2011); On Cistercian nuns in Germany, see Maren Kuhn-Rehfus, 'Cistercian Nuns in Germany in the Thirteenth Century', in John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (eds.), *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women* (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 135-58; Heike Reimann, 'Cistercian Nuns in the High Middle Ages: The Cistercians of Bergen in the Principality of Rügen (North Germany)', *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 55 (2004), pp. 233-8.

[773] On Benedictine prayer community, Cornelia Oefelein, 'Gründung und mittelalterliche Geschichte des Klosters St. Marien zu Helfta. Ein Überblick unter Berücksichtigung neuer Funde', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), p. 51; On Halle, see Hildegund Keul and Siegfried Ringler, 'In der Freiheit des lebendigen Geistes: Helfta als geohistorischer Ort der deutschen Mystik', in Siegfried Ringler (ed.), *Aufbruch zu neuer Gottesrede: Die Mystik der Gertrud von Helfta* (Ostfildern, 2008), pp. 21-35.

[774] *FL*, p. 283; 'Du solt si erlúhten und leren und solt mit inen bliben in grosser ere.' *DfL*, p. 264.

[775] Barbara Newman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg at Helfta: A Study in Literary Influence', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugys and John Van Engen (eds.), *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 385.

miracles that would legitimise her visions and overwhelm unbelievers. While preparing a new translation of Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber*, Barbara Newman noted that it echoes at least eighteen chapters of *FL* and allusions to *FL* can be found in around twenty-four chapters.[776] Indeed, Mechthild and her work appear in the revelations of other visionaries at Helfta. Gertrude records a vision in which Christ appeared to her bearing a copy of *FL* and told her that those who receive true divine knowledge and experience no longer require outward sign to legitimise their visions. This could indicate external challenge to *FL* which required answer, or perhaps that Mechthild was held in such esteem that her approval could legitimise otherwise challenged visions. In either case, her visions and her text were clearly of great significance to the community and their visionary heritage.

Later in Book VII, Mechthild complains that 'you [nuns] want to have instruction from me, but I myself am uneducated. What you are searching for you can find a thousand times better in your books.'[777] Among these learned women, Mechthild's respective ignorance was a spiritual virtue. The rhetorical figure of the 'unlearned' female mystic as an innocent recipient of divine knowledge was common in women's writing. They were presented as the sincerest vessels, unequipped to fabricate or impose intellectual interpretations on God's message.[778] Although the voice of the *FL* shows clear indications of being well-educated and the exact extent of her 'ignorance' is difficult to ascertain, Mechthild's ignorance of Latin fortified her visionary

[776] Ibid., p. 386; For further discussion of the intertextuality of the three texts, see Almuth Märker, 'Zeugnisse der Helfta-Rezeption aus dem frühen 14. Jahrhundert in Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das 'Fließende Licht der Gottheit' im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 125-156; Caroline Emmelius, 'Mäntel der Seele. Struktur und Medialität der Liturgie in Visionen des 'Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit' und des 'Liber specialis gratiae'', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das 'Fließende Licht der Gottheit' im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 157-90.

[777] *FL*, p. 292; 'Ir wellent lere haben von mir und ich selber ungeleret bin. Des ir ie gerent, das vindent ir tusentvalt in úweren bůchen.' *DfL*, p. 273.

[778] Marianne Heimbach, *'Der ungelehrte Mund' als Autorität: Mystische Erfahrung als Quelle kirchlich-prophetischer Rede im Werk Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Stuttgart, 1989).

authority. The inclusion of this detail, expressing humility that nevertheless presents lowliness as the pre-condition for being chosen as God's instrument, could be hagiographical, or auto-hagiographical, furthering the humility *topos* in her work. Regardless of their purpose, the details of educational discrepancy with the nuns hold truth. Precision is important here, as while Mechthild could consider herself 'unlearned', she was significantly more educated than the wider, especially female, laity. Indeed, Hildegard of Bingen had referred to herself as *indocta* despite writing her own visionary work in Latin. She similarly described Jutta, the anchoress at Disibondenberg who taught her to read and write, as 'unlearned', meaning that she was incapable of teaching her biblical interpretation and theology.[779] Mechthild, unlearned rather than illiterate, was educated but not in the scholastic mode of the women of Helfta.

Mechthild had entered a community renowned for its education and literary culture.[780] The sisters learned Latin from their arrival, running their own school and scriptorium. Regional nobility sent their daughters to be educated in the community's renowned facilities. Mechthild entered the convent during the 'heyday' of education there under Gertrude the Great. Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber* documents her sister's educational policy, including the purchase of

[779] *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, trans. Anna Silvas (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 70-3.; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Visionary Women* (Minneapolis, 2002), p. 6.

[780] On literary activities in Helfta, see Ernst Hellgardt, 'Latin and the Vernacular: Mechthild of Magdeburg – Mechthild of Hackeborn – Gertrud of Helfta', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon (eds.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 131-55; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's >Legatus divinae pietatis<', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon (eds.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 103-30; Almuth Märker and Balázs J. Nemes, '*Hunc tercium conscripsi cum maximo labore occultandi.* Schwester N von Helfta und ihre 'Sonderausgabe' des >Legatus divinae pietatis< Gertruds von Helfta in der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827', in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 137 (2015), pp. 248-96; Barbara Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship. Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', *Speculum*, 91 (2016), pp. 31-64; Balázs J. Nemes, 'L'activité littéraire à Helfta vers 1300 – Acteurs et œuvres', in Xavier Batllo (ed.), *Les liens de la miséricorde. L'enseignement de Sainte Gertrude d'Helfta sur la miséricorde replace dans ses contextes* (Paris, 2018), pp. 37-51; Balázs J. Nemes, 'Scenes of Writing, Figurations of Authorship. A Literature Historian's Reflections on the Veracity of the Passages Recounting the Textual Genesis of the Special Edition of Gertrude of Helfta's >Legatus divinae pietatis<', *Analecta Cisterciensia*, 69 (2019), pp. 145-60.

books and materials for copying them with the intention that greater education and scriptural understanding would aid the sisters in their devotions. It states that

'Whenever she could, she read the divine Scripture studiously and with wonderful delight, requiring her subordinated to love the sacred lessons and recite them from memory. She bought her church all the good books that she could, or else had the sisters copy them. She also zealously promoted education so the girls would acquire knowledge of the liberal arts. If zeal for learning were to perish, she used to say, once they no longer understood the divine Scripture, religious devotion would perish too. So she required the younger nuns who were less learned to study more, and she provided them with female teachers.'[781]

It details discussion of the scholarly works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Albertus Magnus among the sisters. The *Legatus* also records Gertrude's practice of writing down what she thought might aid the sisters, providing copies of as many useful books as possible, and encouraging them to undertake their own educational pursuits.[782] Both works also mention the practical tools of this internal education, such as wax tablets for copying.[783]

The next abbess, Sophia of Mansfeld (r.1291-98), encouraged written accounts of the revelations received by members of the community, written in Latin as the books of Mechthild of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great respectively. The nuns sought approval for these works from mendicant theologians, clearly cautious of the scrutiny of mystic texts, and well-prepared to enter the literary fray.[784] A later abbess, Sophia of Stolberg (r.1409-1459/63), referred to information from 'nostra cronica' in reports to the motherhouse of St Jacobi. The chronicle has

[781] *Book of Special Grace*, p. 204.
[782] *The Herald*, pp. 50-1.
[783] On this education system, see Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Collaborative Literacy and the Spiritual Education of Nuns at Helfta', in Virginia Blanton, Veronica M. O'Mara and Patricia Stoop (eds.), *Nuns' literacies in medieval Europe. The Kansas City dialogue: papers revised from a conference held at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, June 5-8, 2012* (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 32-3.
[784] Anna Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure is in this Book?' Writing, Reading, and Community at the Monastery of Helfta', *Viator*, 39 (2008), pp. 75-106.

been lost, but is used as a source, along with other convent documents, in local histories like the *Mansfelische Chronica* of Cyriacus Spangenberg (1528-1604). Although the circumstances in which the Helfta chronicle was produced are unknown, it demonstrates a high level of skill and knowledge in the undertaking of a communal hagiographical project.[785] Book VII of the *FL* records how the sisters assisted in the work, serving as scribes when Mechthild's eyesight began to fail. Its tone is decidedly more scholarly than the previous six. Perhaps this was the influence of scholarly education with the sisters and better access to scholarly work during her decade in the convent. Or perhaps it is the trace of the voice of the sister(s) who worked as her scribes. Given their work in recording, shaping, and publishing visionary writings outlined above, the interventions of the nuns in editing and shaping the text of *FL* may well have extended beyond the final book.

Active local readership

Although not as straightforward to conceive of as the practical hands at work in the text, one of the most compelling influences on *FL* is that of the contemporary audience itself. *FL* was received by an active local readership, both during and after Mechthild's lifetime, and its content demonstrates an ongoing discourse with local readers which shaped the text as it was written. The immediate audience can be inferred through references to places, events and individuals which speak to specific regional concerns. Although little can be said for certain, layering these details creates a crosshatch from which inferences can be drawn, and we are able to trace the contours of a network of communications of particular social, political, religious, and geographical dimensions.

[785] Racha Kirakosian, *From the Material to the Mystical in Late Medieval Piety* (Cambridge, 2021), p. 14; Oefelein, 'Gründung und mittelalterliche Geschichte', p. 4.

The Eastphalian dialect common to Saxony's south-western borderlands provides us with a range of possible places for Mechthild's exact location but does not necessarily narrow the scope to an immediate linguistic locality. As Squires posits, this could be a 'Schreibsprache' – a writing dialect which was used across a wider area than the spoken language.[786] Mechthild was likely familiar with Middle High German from her noble origins, and her Dominican confessor and publishers were certainly fluent in Latin. Therefore, this choice of dialect was conscious and purposeful, made to engage with a regional audience. While vernacular German was becoming more common by the mid-fourteenth century when manuscript E was produced, Mechthild was the first visionary to write her revelations in it. For much of the Middle Ages, Latin was the universal and sacred language of vision texts. The deviation from this in *FL* was clearly important to those who read and circulated the work, as the prologues of both *FL* and *LD* make note of it. The Latin and German prologues of MS E state that the contents were given in German, while the prologue to the Latin version tells us that they were 'written in a primitive tongue'.[787] Rather than the universal Latin of scripture and scholarship, it was the vernacular which served the text's understanding of the universal audience. It states that it is sent by God to 'all religious people, both the bad and the good', an understanding of a universal audience of all people regardless of religious status or 'professional' religiosity.[788] It perhaps served the mission of Mechthild's Dominican advisors and publishers in mendicant pastoral care.[789] Importantly, it indicates that the intended audience of 'all religious people' was not

[786] Catherine Squires, 'Mechthild-Neufunde der letzten Jahre und überlieferungsgeschichtliche Fragen aus linguistischer Sicht', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das "Fließende Licht der Gottheit" im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 339-56.
[787] 'liber iste fuit teutonice cuidam begine'/'dis buoch geoffent in túsche von gotte einer swester', *DfL*, p. 33-4; 'interpretaturus igitur barbara lingua conscriptum istum', *LD*, p. 18.
[788] *FL*, p. 39.; 'Dis bůch das sende ich nu ze botten allen geistlichen lúten beidú bo̊sen und gůten', *DfL*, p. 4.
[789] Poor, *Mechthild and her Book*, p. 18-19.

mere rhetoric, but a genuine intention for the work to be accessible for 'all religious people' perhaps not universally but within a particular familiar vicinity.

Condemnation of a local war 'in Saxony and Thuringia' places the text in this broad region.[790] Thirteenth-century Germany was an area of unrelenting territorial and political changes.[791] This was heightened by the imperial power vacuum resulting from the collapse of the Hohenstaufen duchy of Swabia, which held the Imperial lands from c.1138-1254. Attempts to reconstruct this political authority resulted in prolonged conflict across territorial principalities. The southwestern regions experienced particularly extreme fragmentation in the aftermath of the Hohenstaufen collapse, prompting the rise of new lordships and houses which engaged in intense struggles for power, destabilising the region.

The conflict Mechthild refers to is most likely the war between Albrecht II, Margrave of Meissen, Landgrave of Thuringia, and Count Palatine of Saxony (1240-1314), and his two eldest sons. Albrecht attempted to pass over his sons from his first marriage, Friedrich and Diezmann, in favour of Apitz, his son with his mistress and later second wife, Kunigunde of Eisenberg who had been implicated in the death of his first wife, Margaret of Sicily. This was resisted by the Thuringian nobility, who joined Friedrich and Diezmann in a series of violent clashes with their father in 1281. Conflicts continued until the death of Kunigunde (some time before May 1286) but remained tense until the death of Apitz in 1301. It was not until 1307 that Albrecht resigned his titles over Thuringia and Saxony to his eldest son Friedrich.[792] Margot Schmidt suggests that Mechthild writes specifically of the intervention of the King of

[790] *FL*, p. 298.; 'in Sahsen landen und Dúringen landen', *DfL*, p. 277.
[791] Michael Toch, 'Welfs, Hohenstaufen and Habsburgs', in David Abulafia (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume 5, c.1198-1300* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 375.
[792] Peter Herde, 'From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292-1347', in Michael Jones (ed.), *The Cambridge Medieval History, Volume 6, c.1300-c.1415* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 515-50; Malte Prietzel, *Das Heilige Römische Reich in Spätmittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2004), p. 41.

the Germans, Gustav Adolf of Nassau, in this conflict in the 1290s which exacerbated regional tensions and heightened the violence.[793] Schmidt's theory changes the date of Mechthild's death to post-1294 and remains debated.[794]

Other references to the locality are more concrete. Communications with a Canon of Magdeburg Cathedral in Book VI place her firmly in the vicinity.[795] She also mentions contemporary holy women in the local area. St Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231), also known as Elizabeth of Hungary, was wife to the Landgrave of Thuringia, residing at court in Eisenach (c.180km southwest of Magdeburg).[796] *FL* is the earliest source to mention Jutta of Sangerhausen (1220-1260/64) with knowledge of her mission to Prussia, most likely based on a local account from Sangerhausen itself, c.116km southwest of Magdeburg.[797] As discussed, details from *FL* and mention of Mechthild in the texts of other nuns place her at Helfta, c.86km south of Magdeburg.

From her youth to her final years in the cloister, Mechthild sustained a wide social network from all walks of religious life. Details from *FL* suggest that she was an integrated member of local society. Prayers for specific individuals are included in the body of the work, whose committal to writing suggests that they were not the routine prayers of her religious life but instead held particular significance. They are all for personal acquaintances. For example, she

[793] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit* (Einsiedeln, 1955), ed. Margot Schmidt, p. 397, n. 292.
[794] For more on this debate see Hans Neumann, 'Beiträge zur Textgeschichte des *Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit* und zur Lebensgeschichte Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Kurt Ruh (ed.), *Altdeutsche und Altniederländische Mystik* (Darmstadt, 1964), pp. 196-99; Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg*, p. 45.; Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 125-56; Schmidt, *Das fliessende Licht*, p. 397, n. 292.
[795] *FL*, p. 228.
[796] *FL*, p. 216; On Elizabeth of Hungary see: Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from Her Canonisation Hearings* (Oxford, 2011); *FL*, p. 195; On Jutta of Sangerhausen see: Balázs J. Nemes, 'Jutta von Sangerhausen (13. Jahrhundert) – eine 'neue Heilige' im Gefolge der heiligen Elisabeth von Thüringen?', *Zeitschrift für Thüringische Geschichte*, 63 (2009), p. 43-8.
[797] Poor, 'Transmission and Impact', p. 78.

offers prayers for ‘a lady [who] had retreated from the world and yet still wanted to serve at court’, perhaps a member at the court of her youth, a contemporary in Magdeburg, or a local beguine who had previously sought her advice on the matter.[798] She also prays for ‘the purgatory of a beguine’ widely interpreted as a companion in Magdeburg.[799] Through this we are offered a sense of the connected network of independent religious women in the diocese, through whom news was exchanged and advice sought. Mechthild also prays for the soul of Brother Albert of Minden, a friar at Halle or at Minden.[800] These personal prayers demonstrate that Mechthild and her writings were fundamentally outward-looking, serving as a form of personal communication deeply engrained in her life, experiences, and concerns.

Clerical/Institutional reception

Detail from the text suggests that sections of *FL* were widely read and responded to by members of the clergy and local religious establishments. The work is shaped by this discourse, defending her vision accounts and correcting reader interpretations. Many detailed teaching points appear to be part of a discourse with an individual, or individuals, with extensive scriptural and doctrinal knowledge, suggestive of a largely clerical contingent of participatory readers. Mechthild’s personal, epistolary tone on these theological debate points suggest that such sections answered questions put to her by readers in response to earlier writings. Many of these interactions indicate an active discourse with readers who sought her out to debate her visions and personal theology. For example, in VI.31 she refers to a reader’s own doctrinal interpretation, answering some kind of ongoing debate on a previous theological point in her

[798] *FL*, p. 159; ‘Ein vrŏwe hette sich begeben und wolte dennoch ze hove dienen’, *DfL*, p. 131; *LD* interprets ‘retreated from the world’ as becoming a beguine.
[799] *FL*, p. 184; ‘von einer beginen vegefúr’, *DfL*, p. 159.
[800] Minden was just over 200km from Magdeburg; *FL*, p. 208.

writing: 'You do not understand this and say: 'Everything that God has done with us is completely a matter of grace and not of nature.' You are right, but I am right, too.'[801]

Some of these interactions give the sense of a fractious relationship between Mechthild and some clerical readers. She complains of criticism and responds to individual detractors. Critical engagement can be seen in V.12, where she answers a certain Meister Heinrich who challenged the authenticity of her visions and her authority to write them. She tells him that,

'Meister Heinrich, you are surprised at some of the words that are written in this book. I am surprised that you can be surprised at this. Indeed, ever since I, sinful woman, have been required to write, it has been a matter of great distress to me in my heart that I am able to describe this authentic knowledge and these holy sublime contemplations to no one except through these words. They seem to me, compared to eternal truth, all too feeble.'[802]

Public rebuttals of her opponents evidence the spread of her work within the region, and of its consumption by readers who not only read but also responded to it.

One of the most vitriolic instances of such criticism is found in VI.36. This chapter responds to criticism of a vision of John the Baptist celebrating Mass which was recounted in Book II. Mechthild refers to her opponent as 'my Pharisee', suggestive of an individual who held some kind of institutional authority. Most of the criticism is based on the depiction of John the Baptist as a layman celebrating the Mass, thereby overturning the necessity of priestly ordination for

[801] *FL*, p. 62; 'Das verneme du nit und spreche: 'Alles, das got mit úns hat getan, das ist alles von gnaden und nit von nature.' 'Du hast war und ich han ŏch war'', *DfL*, p. 238.
[802] *FL*, p. 190; 'Meister Heinrich, úch wundert sumenlicher worten, die in disem bůche geschriben sint. Mich wundert, wie úch des wundern mag. Mer: mich jamert des von herzen sere sid dem male, das ich súndig wip schriben můs, das ich die ware bekantnisse und die heligen erlichen anschowunge nieman mag geschriben sunder disú wort alleine; si dunken mich gegen der ewigen warheit alzekleine', *DfL*, p. 166.

the ministration of sacraments. This was a particularly sensitive topic as it reflected ongoing tensions in the church as the jurisdiction of regular clergy was encroached upon by mendicants offering parochial ministrations. The sacramental duties of confession and Eucharist were particularly contentious. Mechthild condemns her critic, telling him that, 'your lies and your hate shall never be forgiven you without punishment.'[803] She argues that John the Baptist is a *de facto* priest, as God sanctioned him to perform the sacrament of baptism for Christ himself. She also argues that in his preaching he served in the priestly role of bringing the Christian faith to all people. This aspect of ministry was shared by the Dominican order, and in this exchange, we see the theological understandings represented in *FL* shaped by association with the order, perhaps even an editorial presence of Dominican origin. *FL* participated in the tense discourse between mendicant and clerical groups in the locality at this time. Importantly, Mechthild herself was on the institutional 'radar' as part of the local landscape of religious individuals, and the sections that comprise *FL* were widely read by local clergy and subject to censure by some of them.

This oppositional relationship appears to have been longstanding. Book VII offers some retrospective reflections. For example, VII.14 describes a vision of the purgatory of a 'good priest', noting not only that her prayers were powerless, but that in her youth 'he had also harmed me a bit.'[804] Among other possibilities, it may be that even clerics she considered good ministers had challenged her visions and/or opposed her uncloistered lifestyle.

Mechthild frequently refers to those who would seek to destroy her writings and silence her. In Book II she writes that,

[803] *FL*, p. 262; 'úwer luginen und úwer has wirt úch niemer vergeben ane pine!', *DfL*, p. 245.
[804] *FL*, p. 312; 'er hatte sich ŏch ein teil vergezen an mir', *DfL*, p. 289.

‘I was warned against writing this book.

People said:

If one did not watch out,

It could be burned.’[805]

It appears that the ongoing writing was considered a danger to both Mechthild and those who supported the endeavour. Mechthild repeatedly beseeches God that he might protect the work and that ‘no Pharisee may ever read it.’[806] In Book V these fears are reiterated, recalling how God warned ‘more than six years ago that religious people would hold me in great contempt. This they are still doing persistently and have done it viciously at times.’[807] Mechthild complains of her rejection by the local clergy, who have ‘cast me from their presence like a dead man who smells foul.’[808] She refers to them as ‘my Christian torturers’ and ‘your enemies.’[809] Consistent complaint of this antagonistic relationship, the escalating vitriol against critics and Mechthild’s apparent fear for her wellbeing suggest that some churchmen had their doubts as to the legitimacy of the text and the visions it reported. It is difficult to ascertain the scale of opposition to the writing, or the number of active critics who spoke against it. However, given the growing suspicion of the beguine lifestyle, including local efforts to bring beguines under clerical control in the diocese of Magdeburg, as well as tensions between clerical and mendicant jurisdictions, it is unsurprising that *FL* attracted detractors.

[805] *FL*, p. 96; ‘Ich wart vor disem bůche gewarnet, und wart von menschen also gesaget: wǒlt man es nit bewaren, da mǒhte ein brant úber varen’, *DfL*, p. 68.
[806] *FL*, p. 107; ‘das si niemer kein pharisei můsse gelesen,’ *DfL*, p. 79.
[807] *FL*, p. 124; ‘Du seitost mir ŏch vor úber sehs jar, mich solten geistliche lúte noch vil sere versmahen. Das tůnt si nu vlisseklich und hant es dikke arglich getan’, *DfL*, p. 97.
[808] *FL*, p. 195; ‘Darumbe habent mich dine viende verworfen von irem antlúze als einen toten, der da úbel smeket,’ *DfL*, p. 171.
[809] *FL*, p. 218; ‘vúr alle mine cristan benúwer’, *DfL*, p. 197.

This prominence certainly came with positive as well as negative audience reception. Sections addressed to certain individuals in Book VI indicate that Mechthild's reputation was such that she was sought out by individuals in the region for practical and spiritual advice. The opening of the book instructs that 'a sincere woman and a good man who after my death would have liked to talk with me but cannot should read this little book.'[810] It seems that by this time she was aware of an established audience of immediate recipients and was used to receiving responses and inquiries, as is evident in book VI. Most notable is Mechthild's exchange with Dietrich von Dobin, Canon of Magdeburg Cathedral (VI.2-3). The translators and editors of *LD* regularly entered additional ecclesiastical details to supplement those of *FL*, including the clarification that this section speaks of 'a venerable man elected dean by his fellow canons in accordance with the will of God.'[811] Official records document that Dietrich was elected dean of the Magdeburg cathedral chapter in c.1260/1, and attested between 1262 and 1269.[812] Book VI is dated to the mid-1260s on this basis, lining up with Dietrich's career as canon and an apparent crisis of the spiritual path encountered under the demands of his office. Mechthild addresses Dietrich's request that she might pray for an answer to his desire to return to 'a humble life.'[813] She tells him that 'he should remain right where he is', and presents him with a set of rules by which he might achieve the balance between *contemplatio* (personal devotion) and *actio* (the practical obligations of his office).[814] This exchange suggests that not only did her writings have a wide reach, but that Mechthild was held in a position of esteem among some local church officials. Her advice, indeed, her spiritual direction, had been sought out by

[810] *FL*, p. 228; 'Ein warhaftigú vrowe und ein gůt man der sol dis bůchelin lesen, der nach minem tode wolte gerne und mag mit mir nit reden', *DfL*, p. 206.
[811] 'Iste de quo loquor venerabilis vir secundum voluntatem dei electus est a concanonicis in decanum', *LD*, p. 182.
[812] Nemes, 'Mechthild im mitteldeutschen Raum', p. 139; On Dietrich, see Neumann, 'Beiträge zur Textgeschichte', p. 46; Gottfried Wentz and Berent Schwineköper, *Das Erzbistum Magdeburg, Volume 4*, (Magdeburg, 1972), p. 417.
[813] *FL*, p. 228; 'diemůtigem lebenne', *DfL*, p. 207; Canon Dietrich is conclusively identified in *LD* as *dominus Th. Venerabili magdeburgensis ecclesie decanus*', *LD*, p. 182.
[814] *FL*, p. 228; 'doch sol er rehte beliben da er ist,' *DfL*, p. 14.

an individual of significant standing. Secondly, this correspondence is testimony to the reach of her previous writings, and its positive reception among many readers. Indeed, showcasing this exchange with Dietrich may have been a way of seeking indirect sanction by citing his name and deference to her spiritual status.

Other instances of a voice constructed as a teacher whose advice is sought on spiritual matters can be seen throughout Book VI, which contains the majority of personal correspondence and response to audience questions. It presents advice to authorities in monastic communities which appears to have been part of a broader correspondence. VI.1 advises 'how a prior or prioress or other religious superiors should conduct themselves toward those under them.'[815] An intended recipient is not named, so it is not entirely clear where a request for advice on this topic came from. However, the instructions are addressed to 'liebe mo̊nsche', a form of address used elsewhere in *FL* in responses to specific queries.[816] Earlier in V.11, titled 'concerning the conduct of sisters', she addresses a response to a reader whom she calls 'liebú swester' on the main components of a good religious life – thinking, praying, and working.[817] This rapport with cloistered readers perhaps contributed to her warm reception into the community at Helfta and the previously mentioned deference the sisters show her in asking advice on spiritual matters. Overall, the content of Book VI constructs a speaker who confidently engages with criticism. It suggests that by the time that it was written in the mid-1260s, Mechthild's visionary status was well-regarded by many, and that the existence of any detractors did not dampen interest in her experiences and guidance.

[815] *FL*, p. 223; '*Wie ein prior oder ein priorinne oder ander prelate sich so̊llent halten Gegen iren undertan*', *DfL*, p. 200.
[816] *DfL*, p. 201; 'My dear friend', *FL*, p. 223.
[817] *DfL*, p. 165; 'dear sister', *FL*, p. 189.

The importance of the active local readership and personal relationships in shaping the text itself highlights its production as part of a discourse located in a particular geographical, social, and temporal context. Although we may get no closer to reaching a 'historical Mechthild' or an 'original text' we can form an appreciation of *FL* as a text reflective of personal, communal, and institutional concerns. This in turn can reveal much of the shape, priorities and cultures of communities and networks involved. The translation of *FL* presents us with further insight. Edits and redactions in the Latin text offer a window into how it might have been altered to meet the practical needs and cultural expectations of this particular group. While Nemes has undertaken extensive work on changes to the form and content of *FL* in its translation to *LD*, little attention has yet to be paid to alteration and nuancing of meanings in the translation process.[818]

Patterns in alteration and preservation highlight factors specific to the communities interacting with the text as intentions for and reception of *FL* shapes its journey. In particular, examining these changes in their wider temporal, geographical, and socio-political context allows for an appreciation of *FL* as an explicit commentary on the politics of both religious and secular institutions, and the appeal of these aspects to its editors, redactors, and readers, both Latin and vernacular. By approaching the text in this way, this study builds on the contextualising work of Nemes and other recent research, searching not for the historical texts and individuals at hand, but instead what their construction might reflect of wider communities and historical phenomena.

[818] Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch.*

FL as political commentary

Aspects of *FL* that interact with wider institutional politics have often been overlooked in Mechthildian studies. The significance of Mechthild's considerable political engagement and voice within her locality, and the dual purpose of her work as both devotional text and commentary on the church, religious life, and local politics has yet to be fully considered. From this perspective, Mechthild's textual interactions with clerical readers and condemnation of institutional unrest were of considerable value to Dominican purposes. Her work engaged with both the tensions of mendicant encroachment on the regular clergy, and their domination of seats in scholastic institutions. Indeed, this engagement with regional politics and broader institutional themes adds a different emphasis to the undertaking of a Latin translation of *FL* and presents multiple (certainly not incompatible) purposes and intentions. This aspect provides unique evidence for a collaborative, and well-connected literary environment functioning across the boundaries of categorisations such as 'monastic', 'beguine', 'lay' or 'religious', that often separate historical communities which were, in reality, participating in keen discourse.

The presentation of the Dominicans as God's chosen order underpins the important potential of *FL* as a Dominican manifesto. A vision of God praising them as the order most pleasing to him is recounted, detailing their virtues. He announces that 'my divine heart unceasingly smiles upon it [the Order]' for the holiness of their life and their great benefit to Christianity.[819] He then describes their pious practices, particularly 'their deep sighs, sincere weeping, intense longing, strict discipline, distressful exile, genuine humility, and joyous love,' and their performance 'with hymns of praise, with sincere preaching, with correct remission, by lovingly

[819] *FL*, p. 165; 'das inen min gǒtlich herze zů lachet ane underlas', *DfL*, p. 137.

consoling, with friendly help, by being models of holiness.'[820] The author also describes God's commendation of their founder. She is informed that 'I sent St Dominic as a messenger to unbelievers and as a teacher to the ignorant and as a comfort to the disturbed', and Chapter IV.20 – 'Of six virtues of St Dominic' – is dedicated to his praise.[821] These sanctions of the order in the voice of God Himself offered divine legitimation to the predominance of Dominicans over those who sought to limit their influence.

The voice of Mechthild is not entirely partisan. She also criticises the Dominicans, highlighting issues in their spiritual health, warning that they risk becoming like those same clerics they scorn. She complains 'Alas, how much of what they [the Dominicans] faithfully practiced has been lost! The more that is lost, the weaker the order becomes.'[822] The vision of the Final Order is perhaps best understood as the author's idea of the perfect, reformed mendicant life, underscoring shortcomings of contemporaneous orders. Indeed, it seems that contemporary readers of *LD* interpreted it as such. A marginal gloss next to the statement that 'men of a new religion will arise, who will excel these preachers in wisdom, power, poverty, and fervour of spirit' advises other readers to 'note the four things in which they will excel'.[823]

The traditional scholarly outline of Dominican history charts a period of thirteenth-century growth, followed by decay and decline in the fourteenth, then reform and resurgence in the fifteenth.[824] This matches what Barbara Rosenwein calls the 'extraordinarily tidy' historical

[820] *FL*, p. 165; 'crefteklichen súfzen, herzeklichen weinen, lebendige gerunge, herte twang, kumberlich ellende, getrúwú demůtekeit, vrǒlichú minne', *DfL*, p. 137; 'an lobelichem sange, mit warer predeunge, mit rehter losunge, mit minnenklicher trǒstunge, mit frúntlicher helfe, mit heligem bilde', *DfL*, p. 137.
[821] *FL*, p. 77; 'Sant Dominicum sante ich den ungelǒbigen ze botten und den tumben ze lere und den betrůbten ze troste', *DfL*, p. 194; *FL*, p. 215; *DfL*, p. 136.
[822] *FL*, p. 205; 'Owe, was des vil vergangen ist, des si getrúweliche pflagen!', *DfL*, p. 182.
[823] 'Tunc exurgent homines noue religionis, qui istos predicatores sapiencia, potencia, pauperie et feruore spiritus superabunt'; 'Nota quatuor in quibus excellent', *LD*, p. 198.
[824] For overview, see Michael Vargas, 'Introduction', in *Taming a Brood of Vipers* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 1-33, esp. 16-7.

'character arch' of medieval monasticism, following a pattern of rise, decline, and reform, which is increasingly challenged in historical scholarship.[825] Mechthild's harkening back to a lost age of Dominican virtue in the mid-thirteenth century is in keeping with more recent reassessments, such as that of Michael Vargas who argues that, 'we cannot blame all of the period [fourteenth century]'s disabilities on bad times. Many of the difficulties of the period were structural, and some of these structural deficits had precedents…'[826] The *FL*'s appraisal of the Dominicans as God's favoured order although straying from a 'golden age' of original virtues fits with a more realistic view of successes, obstacles, crises, and solutions coexisting, interacting, and recognised within the order at any one time.

Criticism of the clergy

Criticism of the Dominicans in *FL* pales by comparison with the condemnation of moral decline in church officials. The author laments that the institution has lost its spiritual zeal: 'Woe, Crown of the Holy Priesthood, how utterly have you disappeared. You have nothing left but your trappings; that is, ecclesiastical authority with which you war against God and his chosen intimates.'[827] This is likely a reference to both the perceived 'persecution' of Mechthild and her work by local clergy, and clerical hostility to mendicant encroachment on spiritual duties to the laity and uncloistered religious women. This antagonism culminates in VI.21, boldly titled 'How the unworthy priesthood should be humbled; [how only preachers should

[825] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Perennial Prayer at Agaune', in Sharon Farmer and Barbara Rosenwein (eds.) *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Spiritual Outcasts* (New York, 2000), p. 37; On reappraisals of this model, see Howard Kaminsky, 'From Lateness to Waning to Crisis: The Burden of the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 4 (2000), pp. 85–125; John Van Engen, 'The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), p. 539; Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 1979).
[826] Vargas, *Taming a Brood of Vipers*, p. 16.
[827] *FL*, p. 250; 'Owe crone der heligen pfafheit, wie bistu verswunden! Joch hastu nicht mere denne das umbeval din selbes, das ist pfaᵉffeliche gewalt, da mitte vihtestu uf got und sine userwelten vrúnde', *DfL*, p. 231.

preach and be bishops] and of the last brothers.'[828] When the bracketed phrase was added and by whom is uncertain, but it is a decisive indication of the use of *FL* for the Dominican cause. In this claim to episcopal power and exclusive jurisdiction over preaching, the *FL* takes an explicit stance in institutional conflict over the rights and powers of mendicants.

This condemnation is justified by descriptions of regular clergy as models of sinfulness. The reader is instructed that 'he who does not know the path to hell, let him look at the corrupt clergy, how their lives go straight to hell with women, children, and other public sins.'[829] They are accused of weaponising their authority in 'war against God and his chosen intimates'.[830] This attitude is found throughout *FL*, nostalgically recounting days when 'religious people were without duplicity and aflame with love'.[831] There is record of God denouncing them himself: 'God calls the cathedral canons billy goats because their flesh stinks of lust in eternal trust before his Holy Trinity,' and of witnessing their punishment: 'bishops, high officials, and great lords in long-lasting anguish with countless sufferings'.[832] This tirade against the clergy was, in essence, an attack on the legitimacy of clerical resistance to growing mendicant domination of both parochial duties and institutional offices. It is important to remember that Mechthild herself refused to formally take on an institutional religious status at any point, avoiding church officials and bureaucracies. These personal interests and those of the order coincide and are apparent in *FL*.

[828] *FL*, p. 249. The contents of the square brackets are believed to have been an edition by a later redactor.
[829] *FL*, p. 250; 'Swer den helleweg nit weis, der sehe an die verbǒsete pfafheit, wie rehte ir leben zů der helle gat mit wiben und mit kinden und mit andern offenbaren súnden', *DfL*, p. 232.
[830] *FL*, p. 250; 'vihtestu uf got und sine userwelten vrúnde', *DfL*, p. 231.
[831] *FL*, p. 311; 'geistliche lúte einvaltig und minnenvúrig', *DfL*, p. 289.
[832] *FL*, p. 230; 'Das got die tůmeherren heisset bǒke, das tůt er darumbe, das ir vleisch stinket von der unkúscheit in der ewigen warheit vor siner heligen drivaltekeit', *DfL*, p. 209; *FL*, p. 131; 'Da han ich gesehen bischove, vǒgte und grosse herren in langer not mit unzellicher sere', *DfL*, p. 103.

The visionary commentary of *FL* goes as far as addressing the Pope himself. It prophesises divine intervention at the apex of church authority, recounting how God warned Mechthild that, 'I shall touch the pope in Rome in his heart with great misery, and in this misery I shall tell him reproachfully that my shepherds of Jerusalem have become murderers and wolves.'[833] This is followed by a vision witnessing God address the pope in prayer: 'Son Pope, this is what you should bring about; then you shall be able to live a long life. The reason your predecessors did not live long is that they did not bring about the hidden intentions of my will.'[834] This advice alludes to the papal unrest of the later thirteenth-century papal unrest, particularly the period of 1276-1277 in which two popes died in quick succession.[835] Claiming to have been privy to communication between God and his chosen representative, and to make such communication public, was an audacious decision. It was a powerful statement of God's, and Mechthild's, displeasure with those who assumed the status of his authority on earth. To publicly issue warning against the pope himself, and claim knowledge of God's papal preferences, cut to the heart of church politics.

Such bold criticism of all church officials and elevation of the Dominicans tempered with notes for reform makes an intentional and purposeful engagement in institutional politics. Mechthild's writings collated in the *FL* address papal instability and tensions between mendicant and clerical authority, engaging with contemporary debates. The sanctioning of the Dominicans in the voice of God, and the denunciation of their opponents, likely contributed to the keen contemporary dissemination of the work. Translation of *FL* for wider circulation

[833] *FL*, p. 250; 'Ich wil dem babest von Rome sin herze růren mit grossem jamere, und in dem jamere wil ich ime zůsprechen und im klagen, das minú schafhirten von Jerusalem *mordere* und wolve sint worden', *DfL*, p. 231.
[834] *FL*, p. 250; 'Sun babest, dis soltu vollebringen, so mahtu din leben lengen; das nu din vorvaren also unlange lebent, das kumt da von, das si mines heimlichen willen nit vollebringent', *DfL*, p. 232.
[835] J.A. Watt, 'The Papacy,' in David Abulafia (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, *V, c.1198-1300* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 107.

among Latinate clerical, scholastic and monastic circles perhaps capitalised on its potential as a manifesto for defence of mendicant jurisdiction and influence against those who sought to limit it, and it was likely received and responded to as such by some contemporary readers.

Mechthild's eschatology

The most explicit defence of the Dominicans, sent to fill a vacuum left by the spiritual 'decline' of regular clergy, are the eschatological chapters of *FL*. These were among the last to be written before Mechthild joined the community at Helfta. It is possible that this withdrawal may have partially been in response to backlash against these politicised writings. The importance of Mechthild's eschatology was largely overlooked before the 1990s, with earlier work discussing the apocalyptic prophecies often focusing on specific aspects in relation to Mechthild's worldview.[836] Research in the 1990s took new directions to situate the eschatology of *FL* in its contemporary context, most notably the work of Nigel Palmer, which analysed *FL* in its eschatological context, and Thomas Benjamin de Mayo, who disproved any conclusive linkage between *FL* and Joachim of Fiore.[837] More recently, Natalija Ganina has undertaken a concerted analysis of the motifs of medieval apocalypticism and situated the eschatology of *FL* within their developments and institutional context.[838] However, the significance of the

[836] Wilhelm Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter, Bd. 1* (Leipzig, 1874), pp. 91-112; Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Mechtilde de Magdebourg (1207-1282). Étude de psychologie religieuse* (Paris, 1926), pp. 272-99; Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Mechthilds kirchlicher Auftrag', in Margot Schmidt (ed.), *Mechthild von Magdeburg. Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (Zürich, 1955), pp. 19-45; Heimbach, *Der 'ungelehrte Mund'*.; See overview of literature in Bernard McGinn, "To the Scandal of Men, Women are Prophesying'. Female Seers of the High Middle Ages', in Christopher Kleinhenz and Fannie J. LeMoine (eds.), *Fearful Hope. Approaching the New Millenium* (Madison, 1999), p. 81.

[837] Nigel Palmer, 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Wolfgang Harms and Klaus Speckenbach (eds.), *Bildhafte Rede im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 229-32; Thomas Benjamin De Mayo, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg's mystical eschatology', *Journal of Medieval History*, 25 (1999), pp. 87-95; See also Maria Magdalena Witte, *Elias und Henoch als Exempel, typologische Figuren und apokalyptische Zeugen. Zur Verbindungen von Literatur und Theologie im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt, 1987), p. 174.

[838] Natalija Ganina, '*In fine mundi tempore Antichristi.* Zur Eschatologie im 'Fließenden Licht der Gottheit' Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Caroline Emmelius and Balázs J. Nemes (eds.), *Mechthild und das 'Fließende*

eschatological chapters of *FL* to the purposes of the text and its translation have not yet been fully considered. This contribution will further highlight the potential of this eschatology as pro-Dominican propaganda and consider the possible implications of this for the translation of the text.

Like many senior Dominicans, Mechthild believed that the friars were the answer to issues of reforming and regulating the clergy and clerical service to the laity. She complains that 'the Order of Preachers was under severe attack from false academics and, in addition, from many greedy sinners.'[839] This appears to reference attack by William Saint-Amour and the masters of the University of Paris in the 1250s, the so-called 'Mendicant Dispute'.[840] Mendicants were accused of failing to adhere to university statutes in their intrusion on the academic and pastoral authority of the secular masters. The clerical establishment was particularly hostile to friars intervening or presiding in minor political disagreements, and to their domination of new academic seats.[841]

The eschatological role of the mendicants was an established theme in scholarly discourse. In 1233, Gregory IX celebrated the friars as preachers against the Antichrist following their quashing of heresies in Italy. In 1234, *Fons Sapientiae*, the canonisation bull of St Dominic,

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Licht der Gottheit' im Kontext. Eine Spurensuche in religiösen Netzwerken und literarischen Diskursen im mitteldeutschen Raum des 13.-15. Jahrhunderts (Berlin, 2019), pp. 229-49.

[839] *FL*, p.170; 'Der predier orden wart sere angevohten von valschen meistern, dar zů von manigem girigem súnder', *DfL*, p. 142.

[840] Natalija Ganina, '*In fine mundi*', p. 234-5; Sita Steckel, "Ein brennendes Feuer in meiner Brust.' Prophetische Autorschaft und polemische Autorisierungsstrategien Guillaumes de Saint-Amour im Pariser Bettelordensstreit (1256)', in Christel Meier and Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (eds.), *Autorschaft und Prophetie. Charisma, Gefährdung und Heilsversprechen* (Berlin, 2014), pp. 129-168; Sita Steckel, 'Narratives of resistance: arguments against the mendicant works of Matthew Paris and William of Saint-Amour', in Janet Burton, Philipp Schofield and Björn Weiler (eds.), *Authority and Resistance in the Age of Magna Carta. Proceedings of the Aberystwyth and Lampeter Conference* (London, 2015), pp. 157-177; Sita Steckel, 'Rewriting the Rules: The Secular-Mendicant Controversy in France and its Impact on Dominican Legislation, c.1230-90', in Cornelia Linde (ed.), *Making and Breaking the Rules. Discussion, Implementation, and Consequences of Dominican Legislation* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 105-30.

[841] Jacques Verger, 'The Universities and Scholasticism', in David Abulafia (ed.), *The New Medieval Cambridge History, V, c.1198-1300* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 256-78.

identified the mendicants as one of the four chariots prophesied by Zacharia.[842] In 1245, led by Saint-Amour, secular theologians at Paris expanded their demands and grievances to challenge the Dominican claim to the *vita apostolica* itself. In his treatises, *Liber de Antichristo et eiusdem ministris* (1255) and *De periculis novissimorum temporum* (1256), Saint-Amour accused the friars of being false prophets and harbingers of the Antichrist. This inspired a polemical tradition in which certain by-products of the mendicant lifestyle were listed as identifying features of 'false apostles'.[843] For example, *De periculis* lists 'defying and enraging secular rulers', 'ministering to the congregations of parish priests', 'extorting goods under pretence of friendship', 'preaching without a summons' and 'living by begging rather than by their own labour'.[844] A number of contemporary scholars responded to *De periculis*, including Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, and Bonaventure, as well as authors viewed as more problematic by ecclesiastical authorities, like Joachimite theologian Gerardo of Borgo San Donnino.[845] Although Innocent IV's initial rescinding of mendicant privileges was reversed by Alexander IV just a few months later, the conflict in Paris began a contentious debate which never truly faded, and the Dominicans were subject to steady anti-fraternalism for the next three centuries.[846]

The eschatological chapters of *FL*, containing the most explicit defence of the Dominicans, were written at the height of the Parisian dispute. A marginal gloss in *LD* notes that the

[842] Frances Andrews, 'The Influence of Joachim in the Thirteenth Century', in Matthias Riedl (ed.), *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden, 2017), p. 222.
[843] C. H. Lawrence and Janet Burton, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2024), p. 234; William of Saint-Amour, *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, ed. and trans. Guy Geltner (Paris, 2008); James Doyne Dawson, 'William of Saint-Amour and the Apostolic Tradition', *Medieval Studies*, 40 (1978), pp. 223-38; Penn R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 2016).
[844] *De periculis*, pp. 76-85.
[845] Andrew Traver, 'The Forging of an Intellectual Defence of Mendicancy in the Medieval University', in Donald Prudlo (ed.), *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 157-96.
[846] Steckel, *Narratives of Resistance*; Guy Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism: Polemic, Violence, Deviance and Remembrance* (Oxford, 2012); Szittya, *Antifraternal Tradition*, pp. 11-122.

eschatological prophesy was written in *Anno domini M^{o}cc^{o}lvi* [1256], placing it in the midst of the Parisian dispute of 1254-1257.[847] Although we cannot know how aware Mechthild was of the details of this dispute, the chapters are certainly timely. The comparison of mendicant and clerical abilities in terms which reflect those of the scholarly debate suggest she had some knowledge of it, likely through her confessor, the wider Dominican community, and the lively religious and political culture of Magdeburg. Her eschatological themes echo those of Saint-Amour and others in this conflict which mirror the structures of Revelation 11 in the Gospel of John. Mechthild announces the beginning of the 'final agony' and introduces the Antichrist in 'his stern prohibition and intense severe oppression', 'unimaginable deceptive cunning', and 'great perverse wisdom.'[848] It is asserted that this account is informed by divine revelation and therefore superior to the conjecture of other theologians. This suggests that those responsible for the compilation of these sections were indeed familiar with the contemporary debate and intended to actively participate in the discourse in similarly apocalyptic terms. In this context, *FL* was perhaps even more politically loaded, as female voices are a rarity in this particular debate.

The chapters are unequivocally propagandist in tone, elevating the order above all other religious bodies. Mechthild describes a divinely appointed 'Final Order' who will lead the people against the Antichrist. She identifies the Dominicans as a precursor to that Final Order, who will assimilate with them and build upon the foundations they have laid. This Final Order is vividly described:

[847] *LD*, p. 198.
[848] *FL*, p. 174; 'der jungesten not,' *DfL*, p. 146; *FL*, p. 173; 'sin gros gebot und sweren twang', *DfL*, p. 146; *FL*, p. 173; 'grundeloser valscher list', *DfL*, p. 146; *FL*, p. 173; 'grosse valsche wisheit', *DfL*, p. 146.

‘They had no more than two garments; the undergarment is white and the outer garment red…Their hair and their beards were let to grow as long as they would…They all go barefoot…They are strangers in all places and suffer much distress. They have neither house nor home, and neither silver nor gold stored anywhere…when no one offers them bread, they should humbly ask for it and should eat and drink with the common people all the food that is given them with the exception of meat.’[849]

The apostolic and ascetic features of this lifestyle have much in common with the Dominican rule, differing only in terms of appearance. The most striking similarity is the emphasis on education and service to the laity. The Final Order ‘shall accept no one except those who are healthy and have had advanced studies. They must all be priests, confessors and sound, well-qualified masters.’[850] This is similar to the preparatory process Dominican friars were required to undertake before preaching to the laity.[851] The parallels between the Dominicans and this Final Order supports their elevated position of papal preference and pastoral monopoly.

This identification of a single Final Order is suggestive of a particularly Dominican-focused eschatology in *FL.* The concept of two final orders is a common feature of Joachimite thought and also of broader mendicant understanding. The 1255 encyclical of the two Mendicant Orders referred to the Franciscans and Dominicans as ‘two witnesses’, grounding them in an appointed apocalyptic role.[852] Joachimite eschatology often featured two future orders related with the mendicants. For example, Alexander Minorita (d. c.1271), whose work *Expositio in Apokalypsim* was part of the early reception of Joachim in Germany, spoke of two future orders,

[849] *FL*, p. 170-1; ‘si hant nit me denne zwŏi kleit; das nehste ist wis und das oberste rot…ir har und ir bart blibet inen also lang als es wirt…si gant alle barfůs…si sint in allen stetten geste und lident manigen kumber. Si enhant weder hus noch hof, silber noch golt niergen behalten...mere als man inen das brot nút bútet, so sŏnt si es diemůteklich bitten und sŏnt bi den gemeinen lúten essen und trinken alle die spise, die si inen gebent ane vleisch alleine’, *DfL*, pp. 143-4.
[850] *FL*, p. 172; ‘Si enpfant ŏch nieman, er si denne gesunt und habe ze hohe schůle gelernet, und si můssent alle priester, bihter und hohe userwelte lerer wesen’, *DfL*, p. 145.
[851] M. Michèle Mulchahey, *‘First the Bow is Bent in Study’: Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto, 1998).
[852] Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1998), p. 164.

foregrounding the importance of the Franciscans and their apostolic teachings.[853] In *FL* instead there is only a single Final Order, which is clearly related to the Dominicans. The eschatological chapters of *FL* are both a manifesto for the salvific significance of the Dominican Order, and a guide for contemporary Dominicans to perfect their role.

Mechthild's narrative mirrors Revelation 11:1-13, an apocalyptic passage of great scholarly interest. It recounts the judgement of the church: 'the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein'. God sends his 'two witnesses…clothed in sackcloth' to serve as prophets and lead the people, usually interpreted as Enoch and Elijah. They are killed by the Antichrist: 'the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them'. The people rejoice at their death, 'because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth' but after a time 'they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour there was an earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven'. The eschatology of *FL* follows this framework, with the addition of the Final Order as precursors and assistants to the 'two witnesses'.

Characteristic of eschatological literature, *FL* describes suffering and martyrdom of the faithful in great detail. This motif is used to attack anti-fraternalism, recounting the suffering of the laity and the Final Order in lurid, visceral detail. Messengers of the Antichrist 'stab the holy preacher with an iron pole…God's dear friend must hang there writhing in front of the children

[853] Dieter Berg, 'Alexander Minorita', in Wolfgang Stammler, Karl Langosch and Kurt Ruh (eds.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon, Vol 1.* (Berlin, 1978), p. 220; Alois Wachtel, 'Die weltgeschichtliche Apocalypse-Auslegung des Minoriten Alexander von Bremen', *Franziskanische Studien*, 24 (1937), pp. 201-59; Sabine Schmolinsky, *Der Apokalypsenkommentar des Alexander Minorita: Zur frühen Rezeption Joachims von Fiore in Deutschland* (Hanover, 1991).

of God.'[854] The laity who refuse to relinquish their faith 'are bound hand and foot and are thrown onto the griddles…then a pit filled with fire is made ready. The children and mothers are hurled into it, and firewood and straw are heaped upon them.'[855] Followers of Enoch and Elijah are 'clubbed to death like rabid dogs that one chases down on the street'.[856] The writer promises glory and 'the solace of the Holy Spirit' to these martyrs.[857] Those who enable the atrocities are identified by submission to the Antichrist: 'the secular princes by means of gold, [and] precious stones', and the 'spiritual powers' where 'he also discovers greed and brings such great perverse wisdom that very few bishops, priors, and priests withstand him'.[858] Mechthild perhaps understood her own 'oppressive enclosure' as spiritual martyrdom at the hands of those same 'spiritual powers'. Indeed, she appears to have conceived of herself and the Dominicans as victims of a corrupt institution, mirrored in the martyring of the Final Order and their associates by the same. These assertions veiled in eschatological allegory contribute to the literature of this debate. Indeed, they represent an interesting, perhaps unique, example of a female voice in this discourse.

Mechthild's interpretation of the 'two witnesses' is an interesting blend of traditional scriptural understandings and more controversial contemporaneous interpretations. Their identity had already generated considerable debate due to the implications of their resurrection before the rest of the faithful. Early exegetes such as Bede, Alcuin, and Ambrose, and the *Glossa Ordinaria* which served as standard medieval reference on the scriptures, equated them with

[854] *FL*, p. 173; 'durstechent allererste den heligen predier dur sine cristane lere mit einer isen stangen, da mûs der gottes trut an hangen und winden zů den armen gottes kinden', *DfL*, p. 146.
[855] *FL*, p. 175; 'So bindet man den mannen ir fůsse und hende und wirfet si in die pfannen…So machet man ein grůben vol vúres, da in wirfet man dú kint und die můtere sint und wirfet uf si fúrholtz und strŏwe', *DfL*, p. 148.
[856] *FL*, p. 242; 'Die werdent alle tot gesclagen ze glicher wis als man die tobenden hunde in der strasse', *DfL*, p. 223.
[857] *FL*, pp. 241-2; 'troste des heligen geistes', *DfL*, p. 222.
[858] *FL*, p. 173; 'der weltlichen fúrsten mit golde und mit dem edelen gesteine', *DfL*, p. 146; *FL*, p. 173; 'zů geistlicher gewalt! Da vindet er ŏch die gitekeit und bringet also grosse valsche wisheit, das er bischŏven und brŏbsten und der pfaffen alze cleine gestat', *DfL*, p. 146.

Enoch and Elijah but withheld from clarifying the nature of their resurrection. Later return to this question produced more abstract identifications. For example, Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093-1169) was unsure whether they were Elijah and Moses or Enoch, but concluded that it did not matter as they represented those who lived 'in the spirit of Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah', not literal individuals.[859] Rupert of Deutz (1075-1129) made a collective interpretation, calling them 'two distinguished orders' meaning two different groups, defined by the peacefulness or persecution of the time they lived in.[860]

This abstraction of the 'two witnesses' was taken to new lengths by Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), who introduced the idea of the *viri spirituales.* Joachim was an Italian theologian and the founder of the Order of San Giovanni in Fiore.[861] His theologies were deeply controversial and condemned as heretical at the Synod of Arles in 1263.[862] This did not diminish their influence, particularly among mendicant orders.[863] Several groups formed themselves around his teachings, such as the Joachimites, Amalricians, Dulcinians and the Spiritual Franciscans.[864] This association of heretical doctrine and theology with mendicant groups

[859] 'in spiritu Moysi et Eliae seu Enoch et Eliae', Gerhoh of Reichersberg, 'Libellus de ordine donorum sancti spiritus', in O. van den Eynde and P. Angelini Rijmersdael (eds), *Gerhohi praepositi Reichersbergensis Opera inedita I: Tractatus et Libelli. Accedunt Gerhohi epistolae tres quas vel primo integras* (Rome 1955), p. 162.
[860] 'duobus ordinibus distincti', Rupert of Deutz, *Commentarium in Apocalypsin Iohannis apostoli*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1854), p. 1022.
[861] Alfredo Gatto, 'The Life and Works of Joachim of Fiore – An Overview', in Matthias Riedl (ed.), *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 20-40; Julia Eva Wannenmacher (ed.), *Joachim of Fiore and the Influence of Inspiration. Essays in Memory of Marjorie E. Reeves (1905-2003)* (Oxford, 2013); Robert Lerner, 'Antichrists and Antichrist in Joachim of Fiore', *Speculum*, 60 (1985), pp. 553-70.
[862] Although his work was declared heretical, Joachim was never formally condemned himself. See Peter Gemeinhardt, 'Joachim the Theologian: Trinitarian Speculation and Doctrinal Debate', in Matthias Riedl (ed.), *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 41-87.
[863] Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachism* (New York, 1994); Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York, 1999); Robert Lerner, 'Joachim and the Scholastics', in Roberto Rusconi (ed.), *Gioacchino da Fiore tra Bernardino di Clairvaux e Innocenzo III* (Rome, 2001), pp. 251-64.
[864] Andrews, 'The Influence of Joachim'.

provided ample fodder for anti-fraternal attack. For centuries, institutional politics would be affected by these strong disagreements over Joachim's writings.[865]

With particular focus on John's Revelation, Joachim championed an unorthodox theological understanding of the Trinity and the period preceding Final Judgement.[866] He predicted that in that period church institution would be replaced by the Order of the Just, a concept similar to the *FL* eschatology. In his *De vita Sancti Benedicti* (1186/87), Joachim interpreted the witnesses as Moses and Elijah who were not to return themselves, but instead symbolised coming orders which would do their work.[867] He equated these orders with two iterations of the Cistercians, one contemplative and one preaching.[868] The iteration of Enoch and Elijah as literal figures, and the coming of the Final Order as a separate but parallel phenomenon in *FL*, represents a novel 'Mechthildian' blending of contemporary ideas drawn from a number of areas. Through her Dominican confessor and the various religious and intellectual communities of Magdeburg, Mechthild was well-placed to engage with current, even radical, religious literature and its debates.

Some historians have conflated Mechthild's apocalyptic visions, particularly her Final Order, with Joachimite spirituality, debating the nature of her personal orthodoxy and theological

[865] Sven Grosse, 'Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Critiques of Joachimist Topics from the Fourth Lateran Council to Dante', in Matthias Riedl (ed.), *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 144-289.
[866] *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Sovonarola*, ed. and trans. Bernard McGinn (New York, 1979), pp. 95-111.
[867] Joachim of Fiore, *De Vita Sancti Benedicti*, ed. C. Baraut, in 'Un Tratado inedito de Joaquin de Fiore', *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia*, 24 (Barcelona, 1951), pp. 33-122.
[868] S. Zimdars-Swartz, 'Joachim of Fiore and the Cistercian Order: A Study of the De Vita Sancti Benedicti', in J.R. Sommerfeldt (ed.), *Simplicity and Ordinariness. Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* (Kalamazoo, 1980), pp. 293-309; Bernard McGinn, 'Alter Moyses: The Role of Bernard of Clairvaux in the Thought of Joachim of Fiore', in J.R. Sommerfeldt (ed.), *Bernardus Magister: Papers Presented at the Nonacentenary Celebration of the Birth of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 429-48.

influence.[869] However, there is little substantive explanation for such a relationship beyond coincidental overlap.[870] Mechthild's work lacks any of the essential Joachimite elements, including the prolonged period of peace and prosperity before the Final Judgement that was his most notable break with convention.[871] She follows the customary apocalyptic chronology of orthodox, Dominican understandings. The traditional Antichrist and Final Judgement sequence was established in the writings of tenth-century Ottonian Abbot, Adso of Mentier-en-der. It spread widely in the *Compendium theologicae veritatis*, initially falsely attributed in modern scholarship to Albertus Magnus and later identified as the work of German Dominican Hugo Ripelin around 1260.[872] The apocalyptic commentary of *FL* matches the prescriptive sequences of the *Compendium theologicae veritatis* and other contemporary works like the German-authored *Passau Anonymous* (c.1260/66).[873] Features of Mechthild's eschatology show stylistic parallels to other contemporary texts, such as the Antichrist in the thirteenth-century Bavarian poem 'Von dem Antichriste' and Hugo von Langenstein's 'Martina', both of which drawn on the 'standard tradition' of medieval apocalypse interpretation.[874] Her eschatology reflects her Dominican guidance, and possibly her Dominican editors, rather than any other external influence. Indeed, this influence may have been quite active in shaping the eschatological chapters for reception as part of the literature of this institutional debate. Nigel Palmer demonstrates how the prologue to *LD* gives the revelations a theological justification using both Gregory the Great's understanding of prophecy, and the Aristotelian schema

[869] deMayo, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg's Mystical Eschatology'; Wilhelm Preger, *Geschichte der Deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter, vol. 3* (Leipzig, 1893), p. 94.; Herbert Grundmann, *Studien über Joachim von Floris* (Leipzig, 1927), pp. 176-77.; Neumann, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg', p. 264.
[870] deMayo, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg's Mystical Eschatology', p. 88; Schmolinsky, *Der Apokalypsenkommentar des Alexander Minorita*, pp. 6-7.
[871] McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality.*
[872] Georg Steer, 'Hugo Ripelin von Strassburg', in Kurt Ruh (ed.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon,* vol 4, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1983), pp. 252-66.
[873] Alexander Patschovsky, *Der Passauer Anonymus: Ein Sammelwerk über Ketzer, Juden, Antichrist aus der Mitte des 13. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1968), p. 1.
[874] Natalija Ganina, '*in fine mundi*', p. 238-9.

associated with developments at the University of Paris.[875] It is clear that the apocalyptic revelations were framed by the translators of *LD* as a part of the 'Mendicant Dispute' literature.

This facet of *FL* is fundamental to its circulation and translation. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for this is its relative disappearance by the end of the fifteenth century. Mechthild's orthodox personal doctrine and belief outlined in *FL* and foregrounded in *LD*, and her recommendation of temperance in ascetic devotional practices, were in line with ecclesiastical rulings. The only site of significant conflict with the church is her position on the priesthood and the role and limitations of mendicant orders. This engagement with ongoing conflicts rendered *FL* immediately relevant, and its stance was powerful for the context in which it was written. However, as these debates settled and found equilibrium or different expression in the fifteenth century, the value of *FL* as potent political literature was significantly diminished. Perhaps the simplest factor in the gradual disappearance of *FL* was that its vigorous engagement with the issues of its times meant that it did not sustain widespread interest beyond its immediate political context. To neglect this facet in any consideration of *FL* is to decontextualise both text and author to such an extent as to become ahistorical.

The dual purpose of *FL* as both didactic devotional text and visionary commentary on contemporary institutional politics is important in understanding its Latin translation. *LD* served not just to share the spiritual benefits of Mechthild's visionary experience but also to spread the institutional commentary in circles that it both attacked and defended. Indeed, writer, editors, translators, and publishers may not have differentiated between the two purposes. Changes to the text in the translation process reflect the concerns of these translators and editors to legitimise the message of *FL* and validate its place among other religious literature.

[875] Palmer, 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger', p. 231.

Changes to form

The most obvious change between *FL* and *LD* is the organisation of chapters. The Latin text is reordered to create a more comprehensive set of books, with more regularly sized chapters grouped according to subject. This indicates efforts to make *LD* easier to use as a reference text, and that this coherence and 'professionalisation' was a key editorial consideration. The changes streamline the text through thematic grouping. In *FL*, a number of dialogues between God and the soul, including laudatory monologues, are spread across Books I, II, and III. In *LD*, they are contained largely within Book IV. This reorganisation for a more cohesive thematic narrative can be seen throughout. Book I is the most miscellaneous, but broadly contains chapters which communicate Mechthild's orthodox understandings of the praises of God, the Incarnation, and the relationship between God and the soul. Book II deals mainly with the hierarchy of the kingdom of heaven and discussion of various holy individuals. Book III contains discourse on the church and the state of the clergy. Book V instructs on leading a holy life and how to conduct oneself in worship. Book VI contains Mechthild's eschatology and visions of hell. Although the reorganisation of *LD* was a practicality, it was done with a particular, Latinate, scholarly audience in mind, and represents a shift towards the expected format of scholastic writing and religious literature, indicative of what was 'important' in this audience's expectations and understanding of religious texts.

Emphasis on functionality is apparent in changes to rubrics. Unlike the long, descriptive titles of *FL*, those of the Latin edition are more concise and offer a shorter, often clearer, indication of what each chapter contains. For example, *FL* VI.16, 'How the soul of Our Lord dwells in the Trinity and what its task is; How it speaks for the sinner and concerning the task of Our

Lady', becomes *LD* I.23, 'Of the excellent soul of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour'.[876] Similarly, *FL* III.1, 'Of heaven and the nine choirs and who is supposed to fill the breach. Of the throne of the Apostles and St Mary on which Christ sits. Of the reward of preachers, martyrs, and virgins, and of the unbaptised children', becomes *LD* II.26 'The kingdom of heaven'.[877] In *LD*, lengthy chapters, especially those which contain sections on more than one topic, are given subheadings so that the reader may more easily grasp the direction of the text and its often sprawling vision narratives. These changes are all designed to make the text of *FL* functionally more 'digestible' and more 'professional' in appearance.

This anticipation of new expectations and standards as the text moved into an established canon can also be seen where restructuring foregrounds legitimating aspects. The positioning of miscellaneous chapters which evidence Mechthild's orthodox theology and doctrinal belief in Book I, at the cost of initial thematic coherence, indicates that this legitimation was of paramount concern to translators/editors. It asserts the authority of Mechthild and *FL*, perhaps reacting to prior criticism and/or anticipating challenge from an audience familiar with and likely involved in regulating theology and doctrine. This is especially pertinent if the work was indeed translated as a defence of the Dominican Order, which would need to match the intellectual standard and authority of the opposing literature produced in prestigious institutions across Europe. Should the *LD* be used in a pastoral, didactic context, this reordering would also allow for easier use as a reference text for clerics and friars. Its production within the religious networks of Erfurt represents a meeting of these two uses, as these communities

[876] *FL*, p. 244; 'Wie die sele únsers herren wonet in der drivaltekeit und von irme ambahte; wie si sprichet fúr den súnder und von dem ambahte únser vrowen.', *DfL*, p. 225; 'De excellentis animae domini nostri Jesu Christi, salvatoris nostri', *LD*, p. 84.
[877] *FL*, p. 101; 'Von dem himelriche und von den nún kǒren und wer den bruch sǒlle erfúllen. Von dem trone der apostelen und Sante Marien und da Christus inne sitzet. Von dem lone der predieren, martyreren und megden und von den ungetǒffeten kinden.', *DfL*, p. 72; 'De regno celorum', *LD*, p. 150.

both participated in literary networks of political discourse and also held pastoral and educational duties.

This is in keeping with more mundane reasons for editorial intervention in texts like *FL.* The translation of the rhyming prose of the Central/Low German version of *FL*, still detectable in the Alemannic translation in many places, into Latin was almost impossible. Editors of *LD* had to choose between preservation of form or of meaning. Latin, especially the prescriptive nature of ecclesiastical Latin, was ill-suited to the task of capturing the lyricism and flourish achieved by the vernacular which had developed alongside, and in response to, poetic literary forms. The poetic form also took up significantly more space on the page. Conversion to prose form could be a response to the expense of production and reduction of the volume size for ease of use and circulation. Given the intention that it be copied widely, beginning in the monastic scriptoria in and around Erfurt, a more compact text with a uniform layout would be significantly better suited to this task.

The second, striking difference is that while *FL* is notable for its fluid movement between prose, scripted dialogue, and lyric, *LD* is almost entirely prose. The transition to prose form in *LD* is therefore representative of a larger change taking place which fundamentally altered the nature of the text. It is particularly indicative of what constituted appropriate forms and genres for religious literature, particularly that which engaged with institutional issues, in the masculine, institutional environment. The originality of style and genre, drawing on the vernacular literary milieu that served as the setting for its production, is side-lined in favour of the legitimising gravitas that traditional forms lent to its message. This suggests that the spread of this message was the main editorial priority, rather than the elevation of Mechthild herself or the showcasing of *FL* as a literary phenomenon. That is not to say that either is obsolete, but

rather not necessarily as important, or controversial, in reality as they may have appeared to earlier scholars.

Secular literary features

FL is historically remarkable not just as a report of visions, but a fashioning of that account in dialogue with various literary modes. The Moscow fragments indicate that the poeticism of *FL* is not a later embellishment of the later Upper German textual tradition but a stylistic feature of the original.[878] As previously discussed, the contextualisation of the poetic elements of *FL* against the culture of *minnesang* and interpretation as an adoption of *minnesang* tradition is misleading and increasingly discredited. Indeed, it is difficult to provide any concrete proof of specific, textually mediated, referenceable traditions, even in the use of spiritual motifs.

However, how the disputedly 'courtly' imagery is translated in *LD* offers an indication that some of these aspects were considered perhaps too 'secular' by the Latin translators. While many aspects which echo secular literature are preserved in *LD*, certain features are notably removed, demarcating where the fluidity of Mechthild's genre was met with reserve in the Latinate environment. The format of allegorical dialogue between the Lady and her Lover, usually set out as a script, is used in various contexts in *FL*. Mechthild names her characters as the Soul and Lady Love, or God and the Soul. Book I opens on such a dialogue:

> 'The soul came to Love, greeted her with great deference, and said:

[878] Natalija Ganina, "Das Sprechen Gottes'. Eine vergleichende Stilanalyse der bisher nicht nachgewiesenen Textstellen des Moskauer Fragments mit dem 'Fließenden Licht der Gottheit'', in Natalija Ganina (ed.), *Deutsch-russische Arbeitsgespräche zu mittelalterlichen Handschriften und Drucken in russischen Bibliotheken: Beiträge zur Tagung des deutsch-russischen Arbeitskreises vom 14. bis 16. September 2011 an der Lomonossov-Universität Moskau aus Anlass des 300. Geburtstages des Universitätsgründers Michail Lomonossov* (Erfurt, 2014), pp. 139-64.

'God greet you, Lady Love.'

'May God reward you, Mistress and Queen.'

'Lady Love, you are indeed perfect.'

'Mistress and Queen, that is why I am above all things.'[879]

These dialogues are edited into verse form in *LD.* The lyric format of such sections makes it clear which individual is speaking, and in the Latin prose identifications of the speaker are added in order to preserve the conversational style. This type of alteration fundamentally changes the nature of the text, dampening its distinctive character and the rhythms and style in which the vernacular was intended to be read.

Allegorical features which are not scriptural in nature are often removed or replaced, reducing commonalities with popular literary themes. This is particularly clear in the translation of 'Lady Love' as 'Caritas' in the Latin. The personification of abstract emotion was a common feature of courtly romance, serving both to represent specific emotions and provide a script for their imitation. As Mary Flannery says, 'possessed of a body, the personified emotion exhibits the symptoms and performs the gestures associated with that particular emotional state, enabling readers to imagine the sensory experience and practice of that emotion.'[880] The personification of Christian virtues was also a common feature of religious writing. However, the courtly aspect of Love as a noble 'Lady', object of the adoration of her champion and lover, is removed

[879] *FL*, p. 39.
[880] Mary Flannery, 'Personification and Embodied Emotional Practice in Middle English Literature', in *Literature Compass*, 6/13 (2016), p. 358; On allegorical emotions in medieval literature, see Helen Cooper, 'The afterlife of personification', in Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper and Peter Holland (eds.), *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents* (2013), pp. 98-116; Helen Cooper, 'Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 5 (1991), pp. 31-48; Frank Robert Worth Jr., 'The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory', *ELH*, 20/4 (1953), pp. 237-50; James Paxson Jr., *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge, 1994).

in translation. Thus, the divine voice and object of devotion is removed from the secular setting and rendered a traditional iteration of Christian virtue in religious literature.

This change is indicative of a wider change to aspects of *FL* to fit a predominantly religious frame of literary reference throughout the text. Most notable are changes to Mechthild's description of the heavenly court. In I.4 Mechthild recounts her vision of heaven, seeing the celestial 'court' in which the angels and saints wait on the Persons of the Holy Trinity as their courtiers. She, the poor visitor, is overwhelmed by the glory of such a display. The Latin translation replaces 'court' with 'kingdom': 'when the needy soul comes to court' becomes 'when the soul loving God enters the kingdom of heaven.'[881] The positions of the heavenly court, God as Emperor, the Virgin Mary as Lady, Jesus as Imperial-Prince, and the angels and saints as knights and vassals, are replaced with scriptural praise. Although Suerbaum points out that this knightly imagery was part of an established canon in religious literature, this alteration in the translation suggests some discomfort with the association of divine subject matter with secular class or art-form. It shows concern for how it might be received by an ecclesiastical audience with less flexible expectations of religious literature or imaginings of the divine, or was perhaps a reflexive 'correction' of secular expressions by individuals working in a monastic context.

With a new audience of Latinate scholarly readers, the text took on a form more recognisably part of an established literary canon. Features which gave the voice of *FL* an immediacy and were well-suited to communicating emotional intensity are removed, better serving the context into which its particular pro-Dominican message was being received. The new audience was

[881] FL, p. 43; 'Swenne die arme sele kumet ze hove', *DfL*, p. 10; 'cum amans deum anima celi intrat regna', *LD*, p. 262.

likely familiar with both secular and religious literature, given their similar position in urban areas with fluid and collaborative literary environments. However, differentiating the content of *FL* from 'secular' literature to establish an orthodox understanding of the spiritual and heavenly hierarchy was clearly important. Creative flair is substituted for a more familiar, but perhaps less potent, terminology/imagery. This suggests that the reception of *LD* as part of a recognisably religious conceptual framework was prioritised over originality of form and style. Thus, changes respond to the gap between the 'uneducated' authorship of *FL* and the religious literary canon of its Latinate audience, in which prescriptive traditions were hallmarks of intellectual credibility and authorial legitimacy.

Monasticisation/'professionalisation' of the text

It is important to note that the content of *FL* was strongly shaped by religious literature and teaching. Indeed, while *FL* was part of the vernacular literary landscape, it was clearly heavily influenced by Latin phenomena, both in literary forms and in dealing with theological concepts. The influence of Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Hugh and Richard of St Victor are all apparent in *FL*. Bernard's own bridal mysticism, humility, and understanding of contemplation as a way of accessing the divine are clearly echoed. Richard of St Victor's exposition of the wounding love of God, and Hugh of St Victor's emphasis on contemplative mysticism as a method of divine union are also evident. Despite protestations of ignorance (likely serving to iterate vision-legitimising humility as much as communicating anything literal), Mechthild clearly drew on a considerable body of theological reference. Given her relationship with local Dominicans and her geographical and social position, she likely had access to such teachings through monastic, secular and mendicant communications. Where editorial intervention is

found, it builds on the religious precedents informing Mechthild's expression and interpretation.

A number of biblical references are added to *LD* in the 'professionalisation' of the text by its ecclesiastically/monastically educated, Latinate translators and editors. This is predominantly seen in the addition of scriptural details which root the text more firmly in such traditions. For example, in the list of prophets who illumine the text, Mechthild names David: 'King David is the second light in this book with his psalter, in which he instructs us'.[882] In *LD* he is identified with his emblem of the lyre: 'David the king and excellent psalmist is source of this book; which he teaches with his lyre', introducing the image by which he is symbolically defined.[883] Similarly, in God's praise of the Soul she is compared to a 'resplendent mountain' translated in the Latin as 'you are Zion'.[884] This specification of Mount Zion draws on more explicit biblical metaphor. Such details witness the influence of the monastically educated backgrounds of those creating *LD*, elaborating on Mechthild's meaning through a familiar, normative framework of religious details.

The influence of educational and literary contexts on *FL* can already be seen in the voice of Mechthild herself. Although Book VII was not translated in *LD*, the prologue's identification of Helfta as the final station of Mechthild's life provides context for the aspects of monastic environment suggested in the final book.[885] As Sandra Linden points out, the tone of Book VII is markedly different from the preceding books, shifting away from narratives of visionary union into more doctrinal and didactic forms.[886] As we see the text shaped by audience

[882] *FL*, p, 127; 'Kúnig David ist in disem bůche das ander lieht mit dem salter, da inne er úns leret', *DfL*, p. 99.
[883] 'David rex et psalmista egregius secundum huius libri iubar. Sua docet cithara', *LD*, p. 28.
[884] *FL*, p. 48; 'Du bist min spiegelberg', *DfL*, p. 15; 'Tu es Syon', *LD*, p. 236.
[885] Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch*, pp. 289-97; Nemes, 'Text Production and Authorship', p. 114; Linden, '*Du solt si erlúhten und leren*', pp. 191-210.
[886] Linden, '*Du solt si erlúhten und leren*', p. 192.

reception and discourse with readers elsewhere, perhaps this change resulted from Mechthild gaining a new direct audience in the nuns of Helfta. The chapters of Book VII include prayers and supplications, meditations, liturgical instructions, and monastic allegory. This collection of monastic texts appears to reflect Mechthild's new environment, and that of the audience for which it was intended. It demonstrates a fluidity to the development of the content in light of the immediate context of writer and audience.

Book VII reflects a greater engagement with Latinate intellectual culture, containing more direct scriptural references, Latin quotation, and liturgical detail than the earlier books written during Mechthild's independent religious life. This might have been the result of Mechthild furthering her own education in ecclesiastical and Latinate literature at Helfta, or perhaps arise from the interventions of monastically educated nuns who acted as scribes adding clarification or nuance from their own knowledge. Research has uncovered evidence of collective writing practices at Helfta in other mystical works produced within the community, particularly those attributed to Gertrude and Mechthild of Hackeborn.[887] These texts often were themselves an integral part of the women's routine devotional activities and reflect the intellectual and devotional culture of the community.[888] It is reasonable to assume that nuns at Helfta comprise some of the various voices at play in *FL.* Aspects of scholasticisation in *FL*, whether in response to new monastic educational opportunities or the more marked presence of monastically-

[887] Margarete Hubrath, *Schreiben und Erinnern: Zur 'memoria' im 'Liber specialis gratiae' Mechthilds von Hackeborn* (Paderborn, 1996); Margarete Hubrath, 'The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns', *Jahrbuch der Oswald-von-Wolkenstein-Gesellschaft*, 1 (1999), pp. 233-44; Claudia Kolletzki, "Über die Wahrheit dieses Buches': Die Entstehung des *Liber Specialis Gratiae* Mechthilds von Hackeborn zwischen Wirklichkeit und Fiktion', in Bangert and Keul (eds.), *'Vor die steht die leere Schale meiner Sehnsucht': Die Mystik der Frauen von Helfta* (Leipzig, 1998), pp. 156-79; Harrison, "Oh! What Treasure'.; Nemes, 'Scenes of Writing'.

[888] Freimut Löser, 'Schriftmystik: Schreibprozesse in Texten der deutschen Mystik', in Eckart Conrad Lutz (ed.), *Finden Gestalten Vermitteln: Schreibprozesse und ihre Brechungen in der mittelalterlichen Überlieferung; Freiburger Colloquium 2010* (Berlin, 2012), pp. 155-202; Nemes, 'Text Production and Authorship'.

educated hands in the text, reflect a context in which it was increasingly influenced and informed by the same source material and intellectual culture as its later editors and translators.

If the sisters were indeed serving as editors, it would be an important indication of monastically educated women making similar editorial choices to monastically educated men. This would suggest that the intellectual cultures of male and female German monastic communities were significantly similar. This would call for greater attention to education as a factor underpinning the shape of religious texts. Such texts are shaped by the ways in which their authors have been trained to think, write, and behave within normative gender frameworks. They are gendered or professionalised in as much as education is gendered or professionalised. But where education is similar, even equal or sharing in the most central components, the outcome is comparatively the same, suggesting that this may be a previously understated factor.

Mediating understanding of the loving relationship

The frequency, and for the most part the intensity, of the language of love and desire remains unchanged in the translation of *FL* to *LD*. However, while *what* was said in *FL* was appealing and highly valuable to the translators/editors, *how* it was said was a site of tension between the educational background, and thus literary and religious context, of the 'uneducated' authorial voice and the highly educated Latinate audience. In translation, phrases are often added to Mechthild's descriptions of the relationship between God and the soul which clarify theological understanding.

There are instances where the loving relationship and its rewards are altered to better express theological understanding of such a relationship. Divine teaching on the longing of the lover

changes from ‘your longings are the gift of my lavishness’, to ‘your longings are the gift of my mercy’.[889] This identification of God’s generosity as mercy follows the salvific, scripturally outlined understanding of this aspect of the relationship between God and humanity. For example, Ephesians 2:4-10 describes ‘God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us’.

The imagery of heavenly reward for the lover is similarly altered. The language of intense feeling is muted and replaced with pious rewards. For example, ‘who dies of love shall be buried in God’, is translated as ‘his life through Christ shall be laid up in God’.[890] This switch to eternal salvation attained through Christ rather than human love roots the teaching in the theology of salvation rather than looser reference to pious feeling, and significantly diminishes the voluntarist element. It also emphasises the position of Christ as salvific intercessor, as seen elsewhere in the text. For example, in loving praise of the Trinity, a correct understanding of salvation is shown in *LD* through emphasis on the nature of redemption. ‘Lord Jesus Christ, you are my body’, becomes ‘Lord Jesus Christ, you are the redeemer of my life’, and ‘Lord Holy Spirit, you are my breath’, is translated as ‘Lord, Holy Spirit, you are the sanctifier of my soul’.[891] This concern for correct theology is echoed in the addition of phrases clarifying the nature of the Incarnation. In an account of the nature of Christ and man, ‘were both in the flesh from a pure and untouched virgin, St Mary’ is translated as ‘born of the most pure virgin Mary at the predetermined time,’ clearly stating the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation as a predetermined phenomenon.[892] This foregrounding of theological orthodoxy shows

[889] *FL*, p. 41; ‘dine gerunge sint die miltekeit miner gabe’, *DfL*, p. 8; ‘desideria tua sunt pietatis mee donum’, *LD*, p. 260.
[890] *FL*, p. 43; ‘wer von minnen stirbet, den sol man in gotte begraben’, *DfL*, p. 10; ‘et uita eius cum Christo in deo absconditur’, *LD*, p. 264.
[891] *FL*, p. 186; ‘herre Jhesu Christe, du bist min lip’, *DfL*, p. 160; ‘domine Ihesu Christe, tu es redemptor uite mee’, *LD*, p. 250; *FL*, p. 186; ‘herre heliger geist, du bist min atem’, *DfL*, p. 160; ‘domine Sancte Spiritus, tu es sanctificator anime mee’, *LD*, p. 250.
[892] *FL*, p. 185; ‘geborn von einer lutern ganzen maget, Sante Marien, fleischlich’, *DfL*, p. 160; ‘natus de purissima Maria virgine tempore prefinito’, *LD*, p. 250.

consideration for the new audience whose clerical context made this aspect more important to how the text might be received as a convincing and legitimate voice in an institutional setting.

Preserving Mechthild's valuable political and religious meaning while re-shaping it into forms which legitimated her work not just as a divinely approved voice, but also an intellectually and institutionally recognisable one, curtailed lyrical emotion. The curbing of the imagination and flexibility of her work, and the assertion of clearer theological and scriptural foundations, demonstrations the enactment of recognisable orthodoxy in its alteration for new readers and their uses.

Love and Caritas

One of the most fundamental alterations to the text occurs in language used to describe love between the soul and the divine. It is not too much to say that in this aspect *FL* was transformed from a form of romance to a religious exposition.

The vernacular lacked a well-developed and codified vocabulary for the expression of divine feeling, and thus changes in translation emerge to some extent from the availability of Latinate norms to express contextual meaning. Since the translation of the Bible from Greek to Latin by Jerome and Paula, translation of loving vocabulary in religious contexts has been subject to heated debate. Passions were an integral part of medieval Christianity, but in order to strike balance between irrational carnality and stoic repression, passionate emotion was reframed in a combination of will and love. In his study of emotion in medieval mysticism, Niklaus Largier

describes religious writing on love as 'transformation in terms of a metamorphosis of the passions by means of a Christian rhetoric largely inspired by Song of Songs.'[893]

The Greek of the New Testament used the words *agape*, *eros*, and *philia* for love of and by the divine, with each used in distinct relational contexts.[894] Classical Latin was equipped with three main words for love in much the same balance as Greek. *Amor/amare* was the noun/verb for general love with carnal connotations, often used to denote uncontrolled emotional impulse towards the object of affection. *Diligere/dilectio* was used for situations conferring esteem, respect, and reverence. *Caritas* carried clearer spiritual connotations and was used to express love whose object was particularly dear, costly, or precious. While *caritas* has later come to be associated primarily with charity, its medieval meaning was rooted in an Augustinian understanding more focused on humanity's relationship with God. Indeed, this type of love could be understood as the nature of God itself: 1 John 4:16 'Deus caritas est' (God is love), and Augustine's notion that human virtue could be understood as 'rightly ordered love,' was a formative element of Christian doctrine.[895] This distinction was upheld in the scholarly writing of monastic and university communities throughout the Middle Ages.[896] Theologians such as Thomas Aquinas integrated *philia* and *eros* into *caritas*, calling them 'two names for the same thing', and declaring the Holy Spirit to be *caritas* itself.[897]

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[893] Niklaus Largier, 'Medieval Mysticism', in John Corrigan (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford, 2008), p. 366.
[894] Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, 2001), p. 105; Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 93-104; James Barr, 'Words for Love in Biblical Greek and in the Glory of Christ in the New Testament', in L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright (eds.), *Studies in Christology in Memory* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 13-18.
[895] Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London, 2004), pp. 63-6.
[896] R. Freyhan, 'The Evolution of the Caritas Figure in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11 (1948), pp. 73-4; Eliza Buhrer, 'From *Caritas* to Charity: How Loving God Became Giving Alms', in Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (eds.), *Poverty and Prosperity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 113-28.
[897] Thomas Aquinas, 'Book 9', in *De Trinitate*, ed. W.J. Mountain (Turnhout, 1968), p. 507.

From earliest scriptural translations and Patristic commentaries, the convention of translation was to prioritise clear interpretation. Changing words to direct proper interpretation in translation was established tradition. *Amor* was often passed over in favour of *diligere* and *caritas* to avoid connotations of irrationality or worldly feeling. Origen, writing in the third century, identified the most important task of the editor as ensuring that the reader makes the correct inference of a higher emotion. In his commentary on Song of Songs he undertook an explanation for the Greek and Latin words for love that appear therein. He wrote that 'it is of no concern whether in divine Scripture (the Word) is called *amor* or *caritas* or *dilectio*, except the name of *caritas* is so extolled that even God himself is called *caritas*.'[898] Thus, in translation of divine love, the direction of attention and interpretation to *caritas* was paramount, regardless of alternatives chosen by the original author.

As mentioned prior, the most striking change to Mechthild's language of love is the change from Lady Love to *Caritas* in addressing the divine speaker. The translation more clearly establishes the allegorical figure as a divine entity. This alteration also replaces a female figure with an abstraction, which might perhaps make this work more 'accessible' for the masculine audience. However, *Caritas* was understood as feminine in the figure of allegorical virtue, and thus the feminine position is preserved. The emphasis of this translation is on the sure identification of divine voice, establishing a clear dynamic between God and the soul.

This process of translating the *mine* of *FL* into the 'correct' hierarchy of loving emotion can be seen in the translation of almost all cases of the word *mine* as *caritas.* As the Middle Low German *mine* was used in relation to love towards and from God, it could be justifiably

[898] Origen, 'Homilies on the Song of Songs 2.20', *Origen, The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ed. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, 1957).

translated as *caritas* where it appeared in *LD.* Where love in *FL* occurred *not* in direct relation to the divine, *amor/amare* is most frequently used in the Latin, in keeping with its prescriptive usage for generic, unspecified love. The translation of *mine* as *caritas* in the context of the divine ensures that the emotional frame of reference for those reading *LD* was firmly spiritual and hierarchically correct in that context.

Prescriptive traditions of scriptural translation, with which the translators/editors of *LD* would be familiar, are the main informant of editorial decisions on this vocabulary. Assertion of the hierarchy of the loving relationship between human and divine reflects editorial recognition of the norms and boundaries of professional religious literature. To some extent these changes flatten the potential eroticisms of Mechthild's writing by emphasising the appropriate iteration of *caritas* and identifying the romantic figure with the abstract divine. This translation perhaps also lent Mechthild's voice greater authority by naming it as the teaching of *Caritas* – God himself. Given the potential of *LD* as a manifesto for Dominican politics, the foregrounding of this conventional, profound element was clearly prioritised over the preservation of aspects which may have made Mechthild's work appealing or impactful in the original.

Physical and spiritual feeling

FL was clearly influenced by Song of Songs. Mechthild is an early example of visionary women of the later medieval period acting as Brides of Christ in a more literal sense. The allegorised marital relationship is a key feature of *FL,* and the Latin translators use the Sapiential precedent and work of earlier theologians to guide their translation of Mechthild's experience. Alterations in this area indicate that while what Mechthild's vision account was championed by her translators, how she wrote it required some adjustment to be useful to its

new audience, and to avoid undermining its usefulness to the translators' politically-minded purpose.

Christian worship and understanding can be rooted in the sensory allegories of the scriptures, such as light for the eyes, words for hearing, bread for tasting, and various tactile experiences as touch.[899] Scriptural texts use homonyms, such as parts of the soul named as corresponding parts of the body, using the same language for the interior and exterior person. As previously discussed in this study, the patristics Origen and Gregory of Nyssa in their exegeses of the Song paved the way for favouring spiritual readings over literal and sensual readings by constructing higher, interior levels of sensation disconnected from everyday sensory experience. Perhaps most influential for Dominicans and the mystic women associated with the order was the theology of Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard argued that since God took human form in Christ, the body can be used to know and unite with God because it has a divine aspect which can achieve perfection (through God's will).[900] This idea informed the descriptions mystics gave of their lived experiences. Michelle Voss Roberts posits that, 'Mechthild's disciplined discernment closes the gap between the prohibitions of this life and the bliss of the next.'[901]

The nature of sensation in experiencing the divine is summarised by Largier as 'the place where inner touch and excessive emotion (*amor extaticus*, ecstatic love) converge, love being actually one with touch.'[902] Prayer and contemplation could be seen as the practice and 'exercise' of the ability to correctly interpret these spiritual and emotional sensations.[903] Contemplative

[899] For more information on the theory of physical and spiritual sensation in Christianity, see Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge, 2012); Bernard McGinn, 'The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism', *Spiritus*, 1 (2001), pp. 156-71.
[900] Gordon Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 2002), p. 5.
[901] Michelle Voss Roberts, "The Body Gains Its Share': The Asceticism of Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Thomas Cattoi and June McDaniel (eds.), *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body* (London, 2011), p. 170.
[902] Largier, 'Medieval Mysticism', p. 371.
[903] Largier, 'Medieval Mysticism', pp. 369-70.

prayer was as much for inner taste and touch as for inner vision. The living word of God was usually approached in religious literature in these mediums, most commonly *splendor*, *harmonia*, *fragrantia*, *dulcedo*, and *suavitas.*[904] The use of physical sensation in *FL*, and its treatment within wider scriptural tradition by translators in *LD*, is informed by this established framework of religious feeling and sensation.

The main body of intense emotion expressed in terms of physical sensation is found in sections of *FL* pertaining to the nuptial relationship between the soul and the divine. This is also the site of the most obvious parallels between *FL* and Song of Songs in the heavy use of bridal imagery. In Mechthild's visions, Christ and the Soul are frequently described in marital terms, such as 'my bridegroom by love', 'the bride of all delights', 'dear lady bride', and 'my dearest bridegroom'.[905] The translation for the most part honours this usage.

However, in I.44, which draws most heavily on the Song, marital titles are often removed, or descriptions reduced in length and intensity. Mechthild recounts a vision in which the Soul and Christ come together for the first time as bride and bridegroom to consummate their holy union. Mechthild describes how Christ is, 'my bridegroom by love/And I his bride since all eternity,' which in the Latin is reduced to simply 'the bridegroom is beloved/lovely'.[906] Emotional intensity is considerably diminished by the removal of the nuptial pairing, and the sense of everlasting union. Similarly, 'the bride of all delights goes to the Fairest of lovers', becomes, 'therefore the chosen one goes to the handsome figure.'[907] Here the identification of the soul as 'bride of all delights' is removed completely, as is the use of 'lover' as a descriptor of Christ.

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[904] Rudy, *Mystical Language*, pp. 61-4.
[905] *FL*, p. 61; 'min brútegŏm von minnen', *DfL*, p. 31; *FLI,* p. 61; 'so gat dú allerliebeste', *DfL*, p. 31; *FL*, p. 109; 'Liebú vro brut', *DfL*, p. 81; *FL*, p. 304; 'min allerliebster brútgŏm', *DfL*, p. 283.
[906] *FL*, p. 61; 'min brútgŏm von mine/Und ich sîn ane anegenge', *DfL*, p. 31; 'sponsus amabilis est', *LD*, p. 246.
[907] *FL*, p. 61; 'So gat dú allberliebeste zů dem allerschŏnesten', *DfL*, p. 31; 'procedit ergo predilecta ad speciosum forma.', *LD*, p. 246.

It seems that the Latin only preserves the bridal imagery in *FL* where it can be safely contained within the remits of biblical allegory. Any sense of overt erotic attraction, or intensity of emotion which borders on worldly passion rather than spiritual feeling, is tempered.

This does not indicate editorial reluctance to utilise nuptial elements of the Song. Indeed, there are instances where bridal imagery is added. The titles of bride and bridegroom are inserted to maintain the allegory and avoid Mechthild speaking of God himself. For example, 'you in yourself are a well-adorned God' is translated as 'you are a bridegroom adorned with glory.'[908] This reflects greater clerical sensitivity to the 'appropriate' relationship with God, and concern to safeguard *LD* against controversy which might undermine its spiritual benefit but also its usefulness to the purposes of the order. While the concept of the intense, sensual nuptial relationship was familiar, it required careful handling. This is not necessarily a judgement on Mechthild as bride, or deprecation of her visionary experience, but rather on what was useful or legitimate for certain categories of religious men represented in the Latinate audience for whom God should not be considered a 'lover'.

Intellectual developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a shift in attitudes towards the role of bodily senses in experience and knowledge of the divine. Scholarly circles began to adopt Aristotelian understandings of the inner senses as the source of physical sensation and the first step towards knowledge.[909] At the same time, Christological developments in theology and practice focused on the relationship between the human and the divine elements embodied in Christ, foregrounding the physicality of religious experience and devotion. The growth of affective piety, particularly penitential culture, Eucharistic devotion, and somatic mysticism

[908] *FL*, p. 62; 'du in dir selben ein wolgeziert got', *DfL*, p. 32; 'tu sponsus, decorus gloria', *LD*, p. 246.
[909] Martina Bagnoli, 'Longing to Experience', in Martina Bagnoli (ed.), *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe* (Baltimore, 2016), p. 33.

elevated the body as a means of accessing the spiritual. The experience of physical sensation in visionary experience was understood as a form of spiritual sensation.[910] However, visionary accounts reporting divine experience in terms of detailed physical sensation needed to make the lines between bodily and spiritual clear to avoid endangering the legitimacy of the experiences.[911] Translation of these aspects of *FL* would no doubt have been sensitive, particularly given that the authority granted by Mechthild's divine experience was being used to lend weight to the Dominican cause in relation to the eschatological visions.

Mechthild herself was aware of the challenge that communication of her interior sensory experience posed to the interpretation of her work. She is unable to adequately express her interior experience without reference to her body, externalising her interior state. The need to delineate between the spiritual and physical is addressed in the text: 'I do not know how to write, nor can I, unless I see with the eyes of my soul and hear with the ears of my eternal spirit and feel in all the parts of my body the power of the Holy Spirit.'[912] This clarified the sensations as received and felt spiritually, but also embodied in an understanding that body and soul could participate or be affected together in experience of the divine. Mechthild understands her physical feelings as originating in the soul and thus enacted by the divine rather than through any human agency of the body.

This assertion of embodied experience of the interior senses is reiterated elsewhere in response to challenges on this matter. Mechthild answers the doubts of her 'Pharisee', telling him that

[910] Rudy, *Mystical Language*, p. 6.
[911] On sensory language in medieval mystical writing, see Rudy, *Mystical Language*.; Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978); Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1991), pp. xi-xx, 265-343; Robert Sharf, 'Experience', in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 94-116.
[912] *FL*, p. 156; 'Ich enkan noch mag nit schriben, ich sehe es mit den ŏgen miner sele und hŏre es mit den oren mines ewigen geistes und bevinde in allen linden mines lichamen die kraft des heiligen geistes.', *DfL*, p. 127.

‘it was so spiritual that only the soul saw it, understood it, and enjoyed it. The body had nothing from it except what it could grasp in its human senses through the nobility of the soul.’[913] This defence shows that some clerical readers were suspicious of this ‘bodily mysticism’. Her words echo other mystic texts, such as the hagiographer of Beatrice of Nazareth’s explanation that

‘Even if she could not explain in words what and how much spiritual delight she received, or what she sensed and tasted in this melting, it was to some extent apparent outwardly by the fainting of her bodily senses.’[914]

Similarly, the revelations of Bridget of Sweden were subject to concerted clerical efforts to explain and legitimise the nature of her visions of various divine figures, some with her ‘corporeal eyes’.[915] Caveat of the sensory experience of visions, either by the author or an ‘orthodox’ interlocuter, was an established, necessary feature of such texts. This suggests anxiety on the part of ecclesiastical authorities to avoid misinterpretation of the interplay of physical sensation and spiritual emotion.

Importantly, while the discernment of Mechthild’s experiences as true visions was challenged, it was perfectly possible to justify and explain them within an accepted theological framework. As long as the hierarchy between divine lover and human soul is firmly iterated, the intense physicality of their relationship is preserved in *LD*. Sensuous description abounds in the Latin. For example, ‘untiringly enclosed’ is translated as ‘he is curled into my [arms] tirelessly.’[916]

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[913] *FL*, p. 261; ‘es was also geistlich, das die sele alleine beschowete, bekante und gebruchte; aber der licham hatte nit da von, dene er von der sele edelkeit in sinen menschlichen sinnen mohte begriffen’, *DfL*, p. 244.
[914] ‘In qua liquefactione quid, quantumve spiritualis iocunditatis acceperit, quid senserit, quid gustauerit, et-si verbis explicari non valeat: ex corporalium tamen defectione sensuum extrinsecus aliquantulum apparebat.’, *Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268*, trans. Roger De Ganck (Kalamazoo, 1991), pp. 238-9.
[915] Dyan Elliott, ‘The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality’, in Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis (eds.), *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (York, 1997), 164-6.
[916] *FL*, p. 74; ‘umbevangen unverdrossen’, *DfL*, p. 42; ‘eius in meam flectitur indefesse’, *LD*, p. 114.

Similarly, 'you are a passionate kiss for my mouth,' becomes 'the most passionate kiss of my mouth.'[917] In what appears to hold direct connotations of a sensual relationship, the soul proclaims that, 'your breast and mine are one, not caressed by any man but you alone,' translated as, 'your breast and mine and one, unembraced by any man except you alone.'[918]

The balancing of this intensity with assertion of appropriate hierarchy can be seen in the translation of forms of address in such passages. For example, 'she has both gazed upon and embraced her Lover in her arms', becomes 'for I saw my Lord, and I embraced him in my arms.'[919] While the first person heightens the intimacy, the divine is given a more formal title, perhaps reflective of the 'correct' dynamic between God and clerical reader, as opposed to God and Mechthild. The individualised lover of *FL*, while celebrated and authority-granting in Mechthild's context, changes as the work is adapted for reception in an institutional, 'professional' context. This suggests that what was accepted and laudable in Mechthild's experience was not embraced with the same enthusiasm among a masculine, institutional readership. While the message of Mechthild's experiences was valued, her lived experience was not considered attainable or perhaps appropriate for a male, clerical reader.

This regulation of Mechthild's spiritual sensation can be seen in its containment within scriptural precedent by translators. Passages with notable erotic capital are translated directly where they clearly echo the Sapiential model. For example, the sexually charged climax of divine union in II.23: 'He kisses her passionately with his divine mouth…he caresses her, as well he can, on the bed of love. Then she rises to the heights of bliss and to the most exquisite

[917] *FL*, p. 111; 'du bist ein kreftig kus mines mundes', *DfL*, p. 83; 'pectoris mei fortissimum osculum', *LD*, p. 254.
[918] *FL*, p. 96; 'din brust und min ist ein, ungedrukt, von allen mannen sunder dich alleine', *DfL*, p. 68; 'pectus tuum et meum est unum incompressum ab omnibus uiris preter te solum', *LD*, p. 232
[919] *FL*, p. 44; 'wan si hat beschŏwet unde mit armen umbevangen iren lieben alzemale.', *DfL*, p. 11; 'Vidi enim dominum meum, et ulnis meis circumplexa sum eum', *LD*, p. 232.

pain when she becomes truly intimate with him.'[920] The sensual connotations of this ecstasy directly echo Song of Songs and the concept of physical penetration found in 5:2-8, in lines such as 'open to me, my sister, my bride, my dove, my perfect one', and 'my beloved stretched his hand through the opening, and my feelings were moving for him'.[921] The familiar template is relied upon to indicate that the physical sensations Mechthild describes are spiritual feelings of the interior senses, and the text becomes more scriptural exegesis, not 'personal' experience.

Similarly, the scripturally familiar language of sweetness is used both to celebrate and to contain Mechthild's spiritual feeling. This vocabulary refers to the phenomenon of spiritual pleasure derived from knowledge of, and from, the divine, and was common in medieval religious literature.[922] As well as being preserved, the language of sweetness is also added to in *LD.* Divine praise is elaborated upon in this vocabulary, such as 'you could never give me a more soothing balsam' becomes 'you could not give a more sweet and delightful balm to me.'[923] Sweetness is also used to reframe statements which could carry problematic connotations. The Soul praises God that 'you have raised me up so high', which is translated as, 'so you have intoxicated me with this sweetness of yours.'[924] Replacing Mechthild's enjoyment of spiritual elevation with enjoyment of sweetness negates any heretical claim that Mechthild enjoyed divine reward before death. Deferral to a sensory phenomenon common to medieval religious literature guides correct meaning.

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[920] *FL*, p. 88; 'er durkússet si mit sinem gǒtlichen munde…Er trútet si mit voller maht in dem bette der minne. So kumt si in das hǒhste wol und in das minnenklicheste we, wirt si sin rehte inne.', *DfL*, p. 57; 'deosculatur speciosam oris sui osculo, contingit virginem tactu mundissimo in florido castitatis lectulo. Ibi prouehitur ad summum bonum et experitur amantissimum verum, cum coniuncta fuerit ei vere.', *LD*, pp. 220.
[921] Song of Songs, 5:2.; Song of Songs, 5:4.
[922] Mary Carruthers, 'Sweetness', *Speculum*, 81/4 (2006), pp. 999-1013; Rachel Fulton, 'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps. 33:9): The Flavour of God in the Monastic West', *The Journal of Religion*, 86/2 (2006), pp. 169-204.
[923] *FL*, p. 108; So mǒhtest du mir niemer so liebe salben gegeben', *DfL*, p. 79; 'Numquam vales suauius et dulcius michi vngentum adhibere', *LD*, p. 252.
[924] FL, p. 41; 'Herre, nu hast du mich hie so sere verzogen', *DfL*, p. 8; 'me hic tua dulcedine sic inebriasti', *LD*, p. 260.

Mechthild also writes that God 'gives her a greeting that the body cannot express,' which becomes, 'greets her with honey-flowing words, which human speech is unable to utter.'[925] The addition of 'mellifluo' reflects the established vocabulary used to describe divine speech in Latinate literature. As seen in Suso, the use of this honeyed vocabulary draws on both scriptural and theological precedent. The editing of *LD* echoes descriptions found in the Sapiential texts, such as 'they [the words of God] are sweeter than honey from the comb,' and 'your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb'.[926] Patristic fathers, such as Augustine and Cassiodorus, drew similar inspiration, as did medieval theologians like Bernard, the 'mellifluous doctor', who preached that 'Jesus is honey in the mouth' (*Iesus mel in ore*).[927] The addition of sweetness in *LD* is a prescriptive elaboration in keeping with the preservation and/or expansion of the traditional themes of religious literature elsewhere in the text. This editorial intervention represents a concerted shift in the tone which marks *LD* as intended for a scholarly audience, whose engagement with Latin religious literature would prepare them to anticipate or better appreciate this sensory vocabulary.

It is these sensory aspects which have most often drawn scholars to Mechthild's work as a source on female sexuality and religious eroticism. Rita Perintfalvi identifies Mechthild as fighting against 'the religiously motivated misogyny of clerics', and *FL* as a successor to the Song in encouraging women to 'activate their inner female power and to transgress their boundaries which are defined by social and religious expectations.'[928] However, the treatment

[925] *FL*, p. 44; 'und git ir einen grůs, den der licham nit sprechen můs', *DfL*, p. 11; 'salutans verbo mellifluo, quod eloqui non preualet humanus sermo', *LD*, p. 232.
[926] Song of Songs 4:11; Psalm 19:10.
[927] Henri Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol 1: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, 1998), p. 163; Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermon 15' in *Song of Songs I*, ed. Kilian Walsh (Piscataway, 2010), p. 110.
[928] Rita Pertinfalvi, 'Eroticism and Mysticism as a Transgression of Boundaries: the Song of Songs 5:2-8 and the Mystical Texts of Mechthild of Magdeburg', *Feminist Theology*, 22 (2014), pp. 229-31.

of this language in translation suggests that contemporary controversy has been overstated and overlooks their cultural context. The emotional immediacy and sensory experience of *FL* is highly impactful and appealing and is not so much censored as contained. The ecclesiastically/monastically educated readers of *LD*, informed by a similar scriptural and theological frame of reference as Mechthild and other hands at work in *FL*, would have been familiar with the interplay of spiritual experience and physical sensation. Editorial intervention does not repress themes considered too 'erotic' or 'feminised' but rather clarifies the inspiration to be taken from them by readers for whom the literal intensity and hierarchy-blurring of embodied experience was not encouraged. It also protected the orthodoxy of Mechthild's strictly spiritual experience so as to safeguard the legitimacy of her voice in its political capacity.

Suffering

Mechthild's language of suffering is for the most part translated accurately in *LD,* with some minor alterations to accommodate the change from verse to prose form. There is one notable area of change where additions in suffering are made in describing the nuptial relationship between God and Soul. In declarations of love made by the soul, words describing suffering are often duplicated. For example, 'that is the source of all her lament', becomes 'whence begins her pain and cries of lament,' and 'without you I cannot exist' becomes 'I languish and die in your absence.'[929] These duplications serve to signpost the intensity of emotion. This increase in intensity can be seen most clearly in the translation of 'our mutual love I sully' as

[929] *FL*, p. 95; 'da von hebet sich alle ir clage.', *DfL*, p. 66; 'Vnde dolor inchoat et querela plangit', *LD*, p. 230; *FL*, p. 48; 'ane dich mag ich nút wesen.', *DfL*, p. 15; 'langueo et deficio in abscencia tua', *LD*, p. 236.

'our mutual love, alas! I destroy it not a little and I weaken it,' which lays out a clear emotive script.[930]

This amplification and clearer signposting of emotional pain reflects theological influences and the devotional context of the period. The work of Richard of St Victor on the nature of divine love, *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* (1170), applied the literary and medical concept of lovesickness to the divine relationship, orientating wounding and suffering at the centre of love of and for God. Richard intended his work not simply as a theological treatise but also as a practical guide for affective practice, similar to the *FL.*[931] Victorine theology was popular in southern Germany and within the Dominican order and appears to have influenced the expression of this feeling in *FL.* Elaboration of suffering in *LD* deepened this association with Victorine tradition. Rather than adding new material or ideas, the translators of *FL* emphasised aspects that locate her work in a shared intellectual culture which shaped both her writing and the interpretation of her translators/editors and readers.

Suffering was also central to the exercise of affective piety in prayer and contemplation. Voaden posits that the rise of affective piety 'influenced their [women's] propensity for imaginative vision' and resulted in an increase in women receiving and writing about imaginative visions.[932] However, heightening of the language of suffering in the Latin text by its male translators for its predominantly male audience reflects the importance of interior suffering in the spiritual journey of men, as seen in both Suso and Rolle. This editorial

[930] *FL*, p. 56; 'únser zweiger minne die verderbe ich', *DfL*, p. 25; 'amorem nostrum mutuum, heu, destruo non modicum et infirmo', *LD*, p. 238.
[931] Ineke van't Spijker, 'Learning by Experience: Twelfth-Century Monastic Ideas', in J. Drijvers and A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 197-206; Ineke van't Spijker, 'Exegesis and Emotions: Richard of St Victor's *De Quator Gradibus Violentae Caritatis*', *Sacris Erudiri*, 36 (1996), pp. 147-60; Ineke van't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 129-84.
[932] Voaden, 'Mysticism and the Body', pp. 406-7.

signposting outlines the prescriptive emotions of a particularly masculine contemplative relationship with God. Suffering was perhaps a more appropriate focus for meditative devotional practice in religious men than love and pleasurable sensation. It reaffirms the dual purpose of *LD* as a devotional as well as political piece. While spiritual feeling is regulated elsewhere to avoid jeopardising the legitimacy of Mechthild's voice, it is heightened where it might garner appreciation from the male readers as both devotees and intellectuals.

Conclusions

FL was clearly considered attractive, forceful, unsettling, and worth reading. Its engaging political voice and appeal to vernacular audiences from a range of religious and social backgrounds is evident from its immediate reception and formative dialogue with early readers. Located in the context of time and place, its translation was intended to introduce Mechthild's divinely authorised voice into the political fray of pan-European scholarly discourse on behalf of the Dominican order. In this, the *LD* offers an important female voice in opposition to late thirteenth-century anti-fraternal polemic, an early German precursor to the use of female mystic voices in institutional politics elsewhere in the later Middle Ages.

Mechthild's voice offered much to both the political and spiritual needs and aspirations of its translator/editors. Contrary to narratives which have focused on the repression of Mechthild's work, it was also celebrated and considered highly valuable in the locale by both men and women. Indeed, its 'controversial' features brought it to the esteem of its translators. However, the scholarly context into which the Latin edition was received required mediation of *FL* to legitimate and authorise its voice, and perhaps to make it more appealing to new readers. The translation shows no issue with what was written, but instead with how it was written. For

Mechthild's political voice to be useful, it needed to be clearly legitimate and divine-authority-bearing. Indeed, *FL* is not necessarily 'de-feminised' in the Latin but instead imbued with the hallmarks of a scholarly piece which reflect the normative standards of the male, Latinate institution. Editorial intervention asserts a clear hierarchy between God and the soul, not undermining the potency of Mechthild's visions, but redirecting the dynamic therein in small but significant ways. Similarly, features which might be seen as 'secularising' the relationship, are removed at the cost of much of the stylistic originality.

Reworking of certain areas offers insight into the regulation of spiritual texts for certain groups of men, whose religious experience was guided by particular institutional parameters and bodies of literature. It shows what was expected of texts in the intellectual and social circles for which *LD* was intended, and therefore what might lend it authority. Translating Mechthild's work in keeping with scriptural precedents, firmly embedded in familiar theological interpretation and allegory, legitimated her voice by placing it into this canon. Some aspects of Mechthild's embodied experience are not entirely removed; they are reframed for the use of the male audience, for whom this embodied experience may not have been possible or appropriate. Paired with a heightening of suffering in the journey of divine love, this presents a slightly different focus and editorial expectation for the spiritual lives of the *LD* audience.

Importantly, Mechthild's *FL* and its translation demonstrate how the spiritual, literary, and intellectual lives of male and female communities, particularly monastic and mendicant groups, overlapped and collaborated. Mechthild was firmly embedded in a network of secular, religious, male, and female discourses, and ideas. Her writing thus reflected institutional concerns and literary themes recognisable and useful to the purposes and preferences of both her vernacular readers and her monastic translators. Placing the (perhaps constructed) figure of

Mechthild, her work, and those involved in its production and circulation into their historical context raises new questions about how female-authored religious literature may have been categorised in ways which overlook multiple purposes across multiple groups, and the impact of time and place on lived experience and legacy.

Conclusion

The three cases of this study demonstrate aspects of a dynamic historical reality that are easily overlooked under inadvertently segregating lenses of analysis and layers of inherited narrative and reputation which skew understanding. Re-contextualisation reveals how religious elements both responded to and expressed cultural and social factors and explicitly engaged with issues such as regional and institutional politics. These insights highlight how focus on mystical texts as a means of understanding religious setting risks segregating them from their historical reality as multifaceted pieces which are informed by and respond to their temporal, geographical, and socio-political vicinities, and the interwoven concerns of individuals and communities across an array of religious and lay settings.

The findings of this study draw attention to the often-overlooked question of not only how such texts were translated, but *why.* Moving beyond their value in conveying a mystical experience, multiple other facets of the works come to light, revealing various purposes and concerns reflecting the individual circumstances of those involved in their production and dissemination. The religious and mystical nature of the texts and figures in question does not separate them from the wider historical context in which they were written, and their content, purpose, and reception reflects many factors which do not immediately seem to fall within the remit of the history of 'mysticism'. It has been theoretically accepted in scholarship that religious texts, perhaps especially mystical texts which recorded divine voice and will, are embedded in, responded to, and served the socio-political contexts in which they existed. However, more fulsome contextualisation of such works, their production and dissemination is required in order to more fully appreciate what this interaction can tell us of the lived reality of individuals, texts, and communities in the medieval past.

Misyn's translation of the *Incendium* calls attention to the significance of individual translators, whose personal context has bearing on the text as they bring their own agendas, understandings, and purposes to the endeavour. Attention to Misyn and his translation aids in turn in the ongoing re-historicising of Rolle and his work. In light of Misyn's institutional standing, career in pastoral care and enforcement of orthodoxy, his handling of Rolle's mysticism in translation allows us to reassess the extent to which it drew meaningful controversy or was at odds with institutional parameters. It contributes to understanding of Rolle's reputation as an embattled outsider as a construct originating in his own work. Misyn's translation intentionally carried the physicality and emotional intensity of Rolle's descriptions of mystic experience, challenging understandings of this aspect as a site of controversy. Indeed, given that the text was associated with Misyn at a significant turning point his career, criticism of aspects found in the *Incendium* are not reflected in *The Fire*, which can be taken as more representative of official attitudes. Against this backdrop, we may see it as distinctive, holding appeal in its unusual content and forms of expression, but still situated in the same religious and cultural milieu as other devotional texts.

Considering the context of its reception by a patron who was embedded in social circles comprised of local ecclesiastical and secular elites, united by a shared interest in devotional culture and religious literature, it is possible to consider anticipation of a wider reception of the text or at least an awareness of its content and translator. This offers new possibilities for Misyn's own understanding of the commission. Orientating the translation in the chronology of Misyn's life, made very shortly before his career changed trajectory, lends possible significance to aspects of his self-presentation which are at odds not only with his earlier Rollean translation but also the general practice of Carmelite translators. This suggests an

awareness that this text might carry his reputation beyond the simple spiritual guidance of an anchorite. This raises questions about how such texts might serve 'professional' aims in the context of a burgeoning vernacular religious environment and the advantages that literary reputation might hold. In an institutional environment where spiritual guidance and education could be a means of career advancement, such texts could be an important part of this, serving both professional and spiritual goals.

When orientated in its specific temporal and geographical communities, the *FL* and its translation similarly take on a far more multifaceted life. Against the backdrop of institutional conflict, it is possible to appreciate many aspects of the text as explicit commentary on the politics of regional religious and secular institutions. Even more strikingly, its potential as a Dominican manifesto becomes evident, and offers further insight into how mystic texts could be viewed as tools of institutional politics as well as spiritual assets. In this, the *LD* offers an important female voice, a notable and thus far overlooked precursor to the use of female mystic voices in later institutional conflicts.

Attention to the respective audiences, chronology, and geography of Suso's work reveals similar intentional response to particular socio-political concerns and institutional politics. Scholarship on Suso has often noted his institutional critiques, but as this study has shown, orientating the translation of his mystical writings against the hostile reception of his earlier Latin work adds considerations of personal significance for the creation of the *HS* beyond spiritual edification. His work also offers particular insight into how the situational concerns of the author were manifested in changes which address regional geopolitics, an aspect which has been neglected in scholarship so far. The dual purposes of female mystics and their supporters in committing their revelations to writing, particularly in exerting authority in

institutional contexts, has been commented on extensively. The same questions are not routinely asked of male-authored texts as it is generally understood that their authors did not require a transcendental means of asserting authority in patriarchal hierarchies. However, this overlooks the nuances of individual circumstances, and the use of mystic texts as tools of individual and collective authority regardless of gender, as can be seen in Suso's work.

Indeed, while it has often been extremely fruitful in opening the field, the continued focus on gender in scholarly treatment of these subjects, particularly in Anglophone historiography, is in danger of obscuring new insights. The patterns outlined in the translation of these texts suggests that differences reflect several factors, which, although often reflective of gender as a societal construct and lived experience, are also distinct and linked with other aspects of life in the period. In particular, the findings suggest that for the most part, perceived difference in audiences usually approached in terms of gender lies instead in intellectual frames of reference, namely arising from discrepancies in education levels and social status, and perceptions of this difference by those who took on the job of mediating meaning in translation. This offers scope for new questions of how different religious groups related to one another according to social standing and background within those same groups.

The privileging of gender as a lens of analysis in the study of *FL* has significantly narrowed and distorted historical understanding, particularly in the historicization of the figure of Mechthild. The more recent German work on the *FL* has underlined the complex textuality of a work for which there is no single identifiable author figure, since the extant Alemannic work cannot be straightforwardly ascribed to an author called 'Mechthild'. This therefore requires a reassessment in which gender, while certainly present in the work and its treatment by its translators/editors, interacts with a number of other factors which interrelate and overlap in

nuanced and important ways. Indeed, taking into consideration the number of hands at work in the text, it is essential to allow for a plurality of functions, meanings, and powers in the *FL* which extend beyond the spiritual or gendered.

Consideration of the *FL* as representative of a politically engaged and participatory female voice calls for the study of medieval women beyond the bounds of their immediate communities, actively embedded in their wider temporal, geographical and socio-political vicinities. The content of the text indicates that Mechthild was firmly embedded in a network of religious, male, and female discourses and ideas. Its creation and translation show overlap and collaboration in the spiritual, literary and intellectual lives of male and female communities which offers a more dynamic view of the past. The reworking of a female-voiced text for a male audience in the form of the *LD* also offers insight into the regulation of spiritual texts and expectations for certain groups of men. This is a useful reminder that questions around reception and mediation of religious texts which have been routinely asked of female audiences are also useful in better understanding male readerships, moving away from normative understandings of masculine, institutional experiences.

Similarly, Suso's work reflects a more nuanced change between gendered audiences. As well as differences in expectations and spiritual regulation which reveal certain prescriptive gendered norms, they also reveal shared intellectual culture and spiritual aspirations. It sees male and female audiences shaped by similar literary, cultural, and devotional currents, to which they responded in both similar and different ways, largely informed by individual ability to engage with intellectual culture. Thus, the influence of social background, namely class and economic factors, and thus educational and cultural/literary environment, on how female religious communities interacted with male associates, and with their wider networks of

communication, is an under-evaluated factor. The religious and secular literary culture these highly educated female houses shared with their male counterparts suggests that they shared common institutional and intellectual interests and concerns. Orientating these women in their geographical and intellectual contexts with an understanding that they were as, if not sometimes more, equipped to interact and contribute casts a fresh light on their lives and work. The *Horologium* also offers insight into ways in which spiritual experience of male religious was understood as both similar and different to that of the women for whom they provided *cura monialium*. Suso's reframing of the text suggests expectation of similar spiritual capabilities and emotional experiences which disrupts understandings of oppression and subversion in hierarchical spiritual dynamics.

The possibility of a wider audience for Misyn's *Fire of Love* also complicates our understanding of the place of gender in the translation process. According to the dedications of the *Incendium* and *The Fire*, we see Latin with an unclear intended audience translated into the vernacular for a named female patron. However, given the possibility of a wider vernacular audience beyond Margaret of which Misyn seems to have been mindful, this might also be understood as a transition between two audiences comprising generically learned and generically unlearned (here meaning non-Latinate). Attention to the historical context of translations of such texts may reveal other instances in which a vernacular audience understood as representative of a female reception may also be understood as a lay/vernacular reception, prompting different questions and approaches.

Overall, the treatment of the texts in this study by translators/editors shows that there was often very little difficulty around *what* was being said, but instead with *how* it was being said for different readers. This indicates that ecclesiastical authority and its assertion of constructed

norms can be located in the mediation of similar messages in terms that were considered best suited to different audiences according to those involved in their mediation. This understanding could be subjective and context dependent. Working with texts and their translations in context has illuminated how attention to how people in the past envisaged their audiences facilitates the reconstruction of overlapping groups and their relations for further study.

While there remain further questions to be asked about female education and monastic settings which lie outside the constraints of this study, it has established the importance of social context, particularly educational background, as a factor informing these texts. Each of these case studies has raised further questions, pursuit of which would not only enrich their historical study, but the wider field of medieval religious history. The shared social background and literary culture of thirteenth and fourteenth-century German Dominican nuns and those clerics and mendicants who administered to them certainly demands greater attention. However, their wealth, education level, and regional standing offers a particularly elite perspective on the impact of social status. Study of a diversity of female educational and monastic settings would nuance the influence of social background and allow a better appreciation of its impact in religious settings.

The immediate contextualisation of these texts and individuals has been fruitful, and further contextualisation of their wider reception would continue to develop understandings. Intellectual networks such as the (so-called) *Gottesfreunde*, *Devotio Moderna* and the Arundel circle each offer their own particular insights into how religious, lay, male and female groups interacted and overlapped with religious literature and ideas. The fuller contextualisation of translation and transmission of texts within these groups may also reveal overlooked 'secular'

and case-specific agendas which enrich our historical understanding. Expanding the scope of these case studies chronologically, with emphasis on geopolitical contexts, would reveal much.

This study has highlighted the importance of orientating our subjects in their geographical, political, and cultural spaces. This gives us a better sense of the communities in which they were embedded, whether through direct communication and interaction or participation in and response to shared socio-economic, cultural, and political milieus. It is particularly useful in tethering the religious to elements of lived experience outside of the spiritual and encourages conceptions of religious life as embedded in multiple overlapping social groups and communities. This gives a better understanding of the medieval past as an integrated place rather than a series of interlocking categories. It helps us work towards a new understanding of 'religion' and aspects such as 'mysticism' that builds on several decades of conceptual critique. Instead of treating religion as a transhistorical continuity, we see the circumstantially distinct formation of individuals and communities in the past through the contextually resonant language and imagery of accounts of experience, at once both deeply personal and intentionally communal, written and translated across contexts. Prioritising the examination of 'religious' individuals and texts in their historical setting creates more scope for overlap and plurality in how we understand categories of analysis, bringing attention to circumstantial questions which have previously been overlooked.

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