Annette Volfing, Oriel College, Oxford

Disrupting the Communal Life: Margaretha Ebner Between *imitatio Christi* and Bridal Mysticism

The Revelations of the fourteenth-century Dominican nun Margaretha Ebner from the convent of Maria Medingen in Bavaria provide a first-hand account of a spiritual life constructed around chronic illness.[1] As with all medieval spiritual lives, there is fundamental uncertainty as to the truth-value of the document: on the one hand, the text is clearly a literary document composed according to particular literary conventions,[2] but it also presents itself 'autobiographically' as the lived experience of the author.[3] There is an unusually high level of specificity in the accounts, not only of the narrator's medical symptoms, but also of the

[1] *Offenbarungen der Margaretha Ebner*, in *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*, ed. by Philipp Strauch, Freiburg im Breisgau / Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1882; reprinted Amsterdam: Schippers, 1966, pp. 1-166. The translations provided in this article are my own. For critical discussion of this text, see Manfred Weitlauff, 'Ebner, Margaretha', in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalter: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd edn., ed. by Kurt Ruh et al., vol. 2, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980, col. 303-306; Claudia Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle. Möglichkeiten weiblichen Literatentums im Mittelalter*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002 (Tradition – Reform – Innovation 5), pp. 182-197; Rebecca Garber, *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers 1100-1375*, New York / London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 109-126; Susanne Bürkle, 'Die Offenbarungen der Margareta Ebner: Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit und der autobiographische Pakt', in: *Weibliche Rede – Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit. Studien zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Geschlechterdifferenz*, ed. by Doerte Bischoff and Martina Wagner, Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2003 (Rombach Wissenschaften: Reihe Litterae 98), pp. 79-102; Bruno Quast, *'drücken und schriben*. Passionsmystische Frömmigkeit in den Offenbarugen der Margaretha Ebner', in: *Gewalt im Mittelalter. Realitäten – Imagination*, ed. by Manuel Braun and Cornelia Herberichs, Munich: Fink, 2005, pp. 293-305; Barbara Koch, 'Margaret Ebner', in: *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010 (Brepols Essays in European Culture), pp. 393-410; Simone Kügeler-Race, *Frauenmystik im europäischen Kontext: "The Book of Margery Kempe" und die deutschsprachige Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, Cologne / Vienna: Böhlau, 2019 (Forschungen zu Kunst, Geschichte und Literatur des Mittelalters 2), pp. 269-296. For the relationship – and possible collaboration – between Margaretha Ebner and her confessor Heinrich von Nördlingen, see Manfred Weitlauff, '"*dein got redender munt machet mich redenlosz*": Margareta Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen', in: *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, ed. by Peter Dinzelbacher nad Dieter R. Bauer, Cologne / Vienna: Böhlau, 1988, pp. 303-352; Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum. Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988 (Hermaea N. F. 56), pp. 142-155; Johannes Janota, 'Freundschaft auf Erden und im Himmel. Die Mystikerin Margareta Ebner und der Gottesfreund Heinrich von Nördlingen', in: *Impulse und Resonanzen: Tübinger mediävistische Beiträge zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Haug*, ed. by Gisela Vollmann-Profe et al., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007, pp. 275-300. For the correspondence between Ebner and her confessor, see Urban Federer, *Mystische Erfahrung im literarischen Dialog. Die Briefe Heinrichs von Nördlingen an Margaretha Ebner*, Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2011 (Scrinium Friburgense 25).

[2] For a fundamental affirmation of the constructed nature of mystical writing, see Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung*, esp. pp. 189-194. Note also Quast's insistence ('*drücken*', p. 294, note 6) that in Ebner's Revelations, the only experiences that are accessible to us are those of the narrator, not of the author: "Wenn im Folgenden von 'Erfahrungen' oder vom 'Erleben' der Medinger Nonne die Rede ist, sind damit die verschriftlichten Erfahrungen gemeint. Es gibt m.E. kein Zurück hinter die Schrift in einen wie auch immer zu denkenden vorschriftlich-lebenweltlichen Erfahrungsraum." This article will follow Quast's approach, referring to the narrator as 'Margaretha' and to the historical author as 'Ebner'.

[3] On the extent to which Ebner's Revelations create an autobiographical pact with the reader, see Bürkle, 'Die Offenbarungen'. She concludes that "Im behaupteten Gestus einer Offenbarungsschrift partizipieren sie [Die Offenbarungen] zugleich an hagiographischen wie autobiographischen Schreibweisen." (p. 101).

arrangements put in place by the convent for dealing with her illness.[4] As Susanne Bürkle puts it, "Margaretha Ebner avanciert von der typischen Mystikerin zur singulären Patientin."[5]

The aim of this article is examine the textual presentation of Margaretha's illness in the context of the two main medieval paradigms for mystical *unio*: *imitatio Christi* and bridal mysticism.[6] Although many mystics find ways of combining these paradigms, the two are fundamentally at odds with each other.[7] Whilst the model of *imitatio Christi* directs the religious subject towards radical identification with Christ, bridal mysticism operates with a fundamental opposition between Christ and the self – an opposition which can only be partially overcome through the metaphor of erotic union. Although Amy Hollywood has foregrounded the importance of *imitatio Christi* for Margaretha Ebner,[8] this article will argue that bridal mysticism provides an equally, if not more, compelling model for understanding the central role of illness within her life. Furthermore, it will be shown that Margaretha's illness should be interpreted, not only by reference to bridal mysticism in general, but specifically by reference to the Daughter Zion allegory, a personification narrative in which the notions of wounding and lovesickness are of central importance in setting out a paradigm of how the (feminised) religious subject ought to relate to God.[9] This narrative is particularly apposite in that it focuses not only on the predicament of the bridal soul, but also on the impact that her lovesickness has on her attendants. In other words, the allegory presents illness within a communal setting that bears some resemblance to a medieval convent.

The text provides a detailed account of physical suffering: Margaretha is bed-ridden for more than half of the time covered by the Revelations and experiences a wide range of intermittent, yet debilitating, symptoms, the pattern of which is tied to the liturgical cycle.[10] The illness affects her breathing and her ability to eat. She suffers from severe sweating (p. 3), cramping (p. 118), toothache and headaches (p. 16). At times, she is unable to nod her head (p. 16) or to make a fist (p. 118). She cannot bear people to touch her (p. 59). Other symptoms include 'swelling up' like a pregnant woman (pp. 119-121),[11] and a vague and

---

[4] Cf. the discussion by Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, pp. 120-125.

[5] Bürkle, 'Die Offenbarungen', p. 87.

[6] The opposition between *imitatio Christi* and bridal mysticism is broadly equivalent to the one proposed by Haug between "Unio über Dialektik von Wort und Körper" (exemplified by the writing of Elsbeth von Oye) and "Unio in metaphorischer Körperlichkeit" (exemplified by the writing of Mechthild von Magdeburg): Walter Haug, 'Innerlichkeit, Körperlichkeit und Sprache in der spätmittelalterlichen Frauenmystik', in Walter Haug, *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion. Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen: Niemyer, 2003, pp. 480-492.

[7] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', in: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 119-150, here p. 131, treats eroticism (i.e. bridal mysticism) as a subset of *imitatio*: "Both in fact and in imagery the *imitatio*, the fusion, was achieved in two ways: through asceticism and through eroticism." This statement, however, conflates *imitatio* with fusion. It seems more logical to say that fusion (or *unio*) was achieved in two ways: through literal and imaginary asceticism (*imitatio*) and through eroticism (bridal mysticism).

[8] Amy Hollywood, 'Acute Melacholia', *Harvard Theological Review* 99:4 (2006), 381-406. Similarly Janota, 'Freundschaft', p. 275 draws on Haug's opposition (cf. footnote 6 above) to identify the "Leidensmystikerin" Margareta Ebner as standing "eindeutig innerhalb der durch Elsbeth von Oye bezeichneten Traditionslinie".

[9] For an overview of the different versions of this allegory, see Annette Volfing, *The Daughter Zion Allegory in Medieval German Religious Writing*, Abingdon / New York: Routledge, 2017.

[10] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century', in: *The Vernacular Spirit. Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinki et al., New York: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 209-238, here p. 224 notes that the connection to the liturgy makes it easier for Margaretha and her community to view her symptoms as a "reenactment of Christ's suffering."

[11] As well as swelling up, Margaretha experiences the equivalent to labour pains; cf. Bürkle, 'Die Offenbarungen', pp. 96-98. The text also creates a striking maternal / mariological role for Margaretha in the account of her Jesus doll that comes to life and is suckled by her (p. 87). On this aspect of the Revelations, see

general form of paralysis. Most striking, however, is a pattern of linguistic impairment running throughout the text: here, enforced silence (presented as a specific paralysis of the tongue) alternates with uncontrollable laughter and shouting.

Although references to illness feature in the lives of many medieval German religious women, it is unusual to find a mystical text in which the topic is accorded quite such a central importance. Margaretha had already been a nun for some years before the onset of her illness on 6 February 1312, but her real spiritual vocation coincides with this moment in time, to the extent that her previous, 'healthy' life becomes meaningless:

> Do man zalt von Cristus geburt driuzehen hundert jar und in dem zwelften jar, do erzaiget mir got sin grozz vätterlich triu an dem tag Vedasti et Amandi vor vaznaht und gab mir grozzen siechtagen und unkunden. . . wie aber ich vor lebte wol zwainczig jar, daz kan ich nih geschriben, wan ich min selbs niht war nam. . . (p. 1)
>
> [In the year 1312 after the birth of Christ, God showed me his great fatherly commitment on the day of St. Vedast and St. Amand before Shrove Tuesday and granted me great days of sickness and discomfort . . . I cannot write anything about how I had previously lived for around twenty years, for I was not fully conscious of myself then. . .]

Margaretha initially seeks medical advice, but to no avail (p. 2); however, she soon embraces her illness and builds a new identity around it. Already by page four of the Revelations, she states that she would happily have been sick for longer; and she resists any attempts to alleviate her condition - for example, she objects when people attempt to make her more comfortable by placing a cushion under her (p. 80).

Experiences of, and attitudes to, pain are widely discussed within Medieval Studies. In general, it is assumed that the Middle Ages viewed bodily pain much more positively than is normally the case now. Esther Cohen has coined the term "philopassianic", arguing that that medieval Christians generally valued pain for its positive contritbution, not only to spirituality, but also to education, general morality and the maintenance of law and order.[12] Mitchell Merback argues for a slightly more nuanced view. Rather than presuming an absolute celebration of pain, he suggests that medieval Christians

---

Rosemary Drage Hale**,** 'Rocking the Cradle: Margaretha Ebner (Be)Holds the Divine', in: *Performance and Transformation. New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, ed. by Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, pp. 211-39; Ulinka Rublack, 'Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents', *Gender and History* 6 (1994), 37-57. On spiritual pregnancy more generally, see Annette Volfing, 'Ever-Growing Desire: Spiritual Pregnancy in Hadewijch and in Middle High German Mystics', in: *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati et al., London: Legenda, 2012, pp. 45-57. Medieval spirituality also operates with a more general connection between eucharistic devotion and spiritual pregnancy; cf. Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics', p. 146: "*Imitatio* is incorporation of flesh into flesh. Both priest and recipient are literally pregnant with Christ." There are also examples of medieval religious writing which stop short of suggesting spiritual pregnancy, whilst still presenting the religious subject as suffering physcially as a result of the pressure of the spirit of God inside them. Cf. Nigel F. Palmer, 'Herzeliebe, weltlich und geistlich. Zur Metaphorik vom 'Einwohnen im Herzen' bei Wolfram von Eschenbach, Juliana von Cornillon, Hugo von Langenstein und Gertrud von Helfta', in: *Innenräume in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters. XIX. Anglo-German Colloquium Oxford 2005*, ed. by Burkhard Hasebrink et al, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008, pp. 197-224, here pp. 204-208.

[12] Esther Cohen, 'Towards a History of European Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages', *Science in Context* 8.1 (1995), 47-74. Cf. also Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture*, Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

> appear to have approached pain as any other other stratified cultural group would do: they attended to it, worked to alleviate its excesses, and furnished certain members with codes for conceptualizing and communicating what would otherwise be a wholly subjective, internal experience. Such codes and norms translated into more or less conventionalized "scripts" for pain behavior.[13]

Physical and mental suffering are of particular relevance to Christian spirituality. The Gospels focus not only on Christ's physical torments during the Passion, but also on his mental anguish and moments of feeling forsaken by God the Father. In the lives of the early Christian martyrs, graphic accounts of torture and execution allow narrators to present these protagonists as engaging in *imitatio Christi* and thereby also serving as worthy role-models for other Christians. In the Middle Ages, when religious persecution was no longer an issue for most Christians, ascetic practices become increasingly important,[14] combined with the ideal of an inner or imaginary *imitatio Christi*, whereby the religious subject would meditate on the suffering of Christ in a stance of *com-passio*, such reflections being frequently accompanied by an overwhelming sense of the subject's own worthlessness, sinfulness and separation from God.

In Margaretha's case, the divinely imposed illness means that she has no need to take active steps to achieve bodily suffering; and so there are no references in her Revelations to the more severe ascetic practices, such as self-flagellation, or even self-crucifixion, which feature in other religious lives in the period.[15] Whilst not going so far as to inflict actual pain on herself, she does, however, insist on the abnegation of bodily pleasures, to an extent that can only have exacerbated her medical condition. She vows to live off bread and water for the rest of her life (p. 63),[16] and prides herself on the fact that:

> ich bin gewesen wol xxx jar, daz ich nit wins getrunken han und auch in kain bat nie komen bin und wasser noch laug an minen lip noch an min haup nie komen ist in den selben xxx jaren (p. 79)
>
> [It has been around thirty years that I have not drunk any wine and have not been in a bath and neither water nor a towel has touched my body nor my head in the same thirty years.]

Her meditative practices also have physical consequences,[17] particularly around the time of the Passion. For example, on Good Friday, she is *vol herzeklichs laidez und senliches jamers*

---

[13] Mitchell Merback, 'Pain and Memory in the Formation of the Early Modern Habitus', *Representations* 146.1 (2019), 59-90, here 60.

[14] Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics', p. 145 points out that "by the late twelfth century, *imitatio* had moved far beyond the Cistercian notion of affective meditation . . . Indeed, some male descriptions of holy women explicitly stress that *imitatio* is fact, not memory or imagination." In support of this statement concerning the intertwining physical and mental *imitatio*, she adduces the self-flagellation of Margaret of Ypres, noting that although the *vita* termed this practice *recordatio* (remembrance), "the very meaning of the word "remember" had changed."

[15] The practices of Elsbeth von Oye constitute the most striking example ascetic severity within medieval German religious writing. See Wolfram Schneider-Lastin, 'Leben und Offenbarungen der Elsbeth von Oye: Textkritische Edition der Vita aus dem 'Ötenbacher Schwesternbuch", in: *Kulturtopographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im späteren Mittelalter: Studien und Texte*. Kulturtopographie des alemannischen Raums 1, ed. by Barbara Fleith and René Wetzel, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 395-467.

[16] For the relationship of religious women with food, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

[17] Bürkle, 'Die Offenbarungen', p. 96 comments on Margaretha's use of physical objects (e.g. crucifices), images and texts within her devotional practice.

[p. 132: filled with heart-felt sorrow and yearning lamenting] on account of Christ's suffering *daz mir denne as gegenwertig ist, as ob ichz vor minen ougen sehe* [p. 132: which is as present to me as though I see it before my eyes]. However, her stance as a compassionate, though separate, witness is soon superseded by a fuller participation in Christ's experience: as the meditation deepens, she feels such a seering pain in her hands, head, back, side and other limbs that she is brought in *den jungsten todesnöten* [p. 133: to the very point of death].

Some modern historians and literature specialists have sought to use trauma theory to describe the nature of imaginative *imitatio Christi*. Hollywood, for example, writes that:

> Late medieval meditational practices . . . attempt to inculcate traumatic or bodily memory – or something very like it – by rendering involuntary, vivid and inescapable the central catastrophic event of Christian history so that the individual believer might relive and share in that trauma . . . One might argue that through meditation on the life and death of Christ, the believer destroys all other narrative frameworks for his or her life, and induces strong emotion that can then be redeployed toward the imaginative constitution of a new Christian narrative of suffering and redemption.[18]

Bridal mysticism, however, configures the relationship with the divine somewhat differently and therefore provides a different script for spiritual trauma. Whilst Hollywood is right to highlight the *imitatio*-discourses in the Revelations, this is not the whole picture. In particular, the narrative model of the medieval Daughter Zion allegory is at least as relevant for understanding the relationship between spiritual lovesickenss and Margaretha's various physical symptoms.[19]

Within bridal mysticism, the relationship between the religious subject and God is expressed metaphorically as one of erotic union between a bride and bridegroom. Here, the Song of Songs provides the key model, suggesting as it does both the delights and the anguish that can result from such a union: in particular, the fact that the bride in the Song of Songs describes herself as having been abandoned by the bridegroom means that this book of the Bible provides a framework for exploring religious despair.[20] The rejection of the bride constitutes a form of trauma which is very different from the one suggested by Hollywood in the passage quoted above. In Hollywood's model, the religious subject identifies with Christ and internalises the trauma of the crucifixion to such an extent that it becomes his or her own experience. In the model of bridal mysticisim, the bridegroom Christ is positioned as the Other, rather than as the (would-be) Self – and ultimately it is he who inflicts the trauma. The

---

[18] Hollywood, 'Acute Melacholia', 397.

[19] Alhtough the notion of lovesickness originally arose from the pathologisation of secular love, it was readily appropriated into medieval religious discourses. Cf. Mary E. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, esp. pp. 3-30.

[20] For the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages, see Friedrich Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des Abendlandes bis zum 1200*. Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1958 (Geisteswissenschaftliche Reihe 1); Urban Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten: Volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert*, Düsseldorf: Droste, 1985; Ann Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990; E. A. Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995; Rachel Fulton, 'Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs', *Viator* 27 (1996), 85-116; Hildegard Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*, trans. Maria Sherwood-Smith, Leuven: Peeters, 2000. On bridal mysticism, see also Simone Kügeler-Race, 'Carnal Manifestations of Divine Love in the Mystical Writings of Elsbeth of Oye, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Margery Kempe', *Neophilologus* 102 (2018), 39-58.

"central catastrophic event" is thus no longer something that is done to Christ, but rather something that he does to the bridal soul. Accordingly, whereas a mystic committed to *imitatio Christi* wishes to participate in Christ's suffering,[21] the bridal soul is typically passive with respect to pain: it is something which is inflicted on her, often as a complete surprise.

One aspect of the nuptial trauma is the initial triggering of desire, sometimes evoked through the image of the soul being pierced by a sharp weapon.[22] More important, however, is that fact that Christ then compounds the anguish of the wounded soul by withholding his presence from her. *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit* by Mechthild von Magdeburg provides a striking example of Christ in this two-fold aggressor role:

> Helig engel Gabriel, gedenk min.
> Miner gerunge botschaft bevilhe ich dir:
> Sage minem lieben herren Jhesu Christo,
> wie minnensiech ich sie nach ime.
> Sol ich iemer me genesen,
> so mu^{o}s er selber min arzat wesen.
> Du maht ime in trúwen sagen,
> die wunden, die er mir selber hat gesclagen,
> die mag ich nit langer ungesalbet tragen und ungebunden.
> Er hat mich gewundet untz in den tot.[23]
>
> [Holy angel Gabriel, remember me. I entrust the message of my desire to you. Tell my beloved Lord Jesus Christ how lovesick I am for him. If I am ever to recover, he himself must be my physician. You may honestly tell him that I can no longer leave those wounds that he himself inflicted on me untreated and unbound. He has wounded me unto death.]

Whereas the trauma in Mechthild's passage is related entirely to frustrated desire rather than to compassionate grief, Ebner's Revelations explicitly links the erotic wounding of Margaretha to her preoccupation with the events of the Passion:[24]

> und dar nach do ich entschlief, do waht mich das minneklich liden mins herren mit ainem geswinden schucz (sagitta acuta) siner minnstral in min herze mit ainem grozzen smerzen. (p. 131)

---

[21] There are of course a wide spectrum regarding the enthusiasm of mystics when it comes to pursuing pain. Elsbeth von Oye, for example, perseveres with her harsh practices primarily because she views them as an obligation imposed on her by God. Nonetheless, her obedience is a matter of choice; the pain is not inflicted on her by an external agent. Cf. Schneider-Lastin, 'Elsberth', esp. pp. 435-436 (XXII. *Von grosser edelkeit des leidens* [Concerning the great nobility of suffering]).

[22] For the topos of *amor vulnerans*, see Siegfried Ringler, *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien*, Munich: Artemis, 1980 (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen 72), pp. 249-251. The *amor vulnerans* combines notions drawn from the domain of secular love (sexual penetration; wounding by Cupid's arrow) with the spiritual notion of *compunctio cordis*, or piercing of the heart that had hardened in resistance to God.

[23] Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. by Gisela Vollmann-Profe, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2003 (Bibliothek des Mittelalters 19), p. 646 (VII.58) Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, p. 138.

[24] Margaretha links this experience to the precise hour . . . *do sich mins aller liebsten herren liden an fieng uf dem berg in dem gebet, do er swiczet den bluotigen swaizze*. [p. 131: . . . when the suffering of my dearest Lord started on the mountain during the prayer when he sweated blood.]

> [and when I then fell asleep afterwards, the loving agony of my Lord woke me with a swift shooting of his love-arrow (sagitta acuta) into my heart, causing great pain.]

This passage go some way towards bridging the structural opposition between bridal mysticism and *imitatio Christi*: as Hollywood notes, "language from the Song of Songs comes together with reflections on Longinus' spear".[25] The question of agency is, however, even more important. Like in the Mechthild passage just quoted, Christ is construed as as an erotic aggressor, penetrating the religious subject as she lies in passive sleep. At the same time, the reference to his *minneklich liden* [loving agony] introduces an inversion of subject and object, of active and passive modes: Christ wounds precisely by being wounded.

The medieval Daughter Zion allegory represents an attempt, not only to narrativize the erotic dialogues of the Song of Songs, but also to create a story-line which creatively combines the idea of Christ as victim with that of the wounded bridal soul. This careful balancing act relies on the involvement of the personification Caritas; this figure, who is responsible for wounding both the bride and the bridegroom, is also on some levels identical with both. Whilst the wound to Christ's heart clearly connects to the events of the Passion, the wound to the bride's heart underscores the distance between her and Christ, and also his (temporary) indifference within the love-relationship.

This allegory combines the figure of the bride from the Song of Songs with that of Daughter Zion from other parts of the Hebrew Bible. In the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, Daughter Zion is a personification of the city of Jerusalem which periodically disobeys God and experiences his disfavour.[26] In a medieval Christian context, however, the name Zion has become partly dissociated from Jerusalem and instead represents the individual human soul with the potential to fulfil its role as a bride of Christ by embracing the religious life.

The Daughter Zion allegory exists is a range of Latin and vernacular versions, but the broad outline of the original narrative is as follows.[27] Daughter Zion yearns for love and sends her messenger Cognitio into the world to seek out a suitable partner for her. Cognitio returns, reporting that there is nothing in the transitory world worthy of her love. When Zion hears this bad news, it is as though she has been pierced by a javelin; as a result, she feels so ill that she can only lie in her bed. In other words, her psychological response to the news has physical consequences – and from then on, the metaphorical wound is discussed as though it had been an actual one. Her servants, a group of personified virtues including Spes, Fides and Sapientia, gather around her bedside, offering advice and debating what is to be done. Zion explains that she been wounded by love; although the actual cause of her indisposition was the bad news brought by Cognitio, rather than longing for any specific partner. However, once the diagnosis of lovesickness has been suggested, Sapientia recommends that another virtue, Caritas, be summoned, since the problem falls within her domain. Caritas arrives and takes responsibility for what has happened. She states that a faithful messenger must volunteer to go to heaven on Zion's behalf, since it would apparently be very wrong for Zion to attempt to approach God directly and without a mediator. Caritas and Oratio set off together on the celestial journey. Whilst Oratio faints at the gates of heaven, Caritas boldly enters the city and wounds the bridegroom in the heart, firing first one, and then a second, arrow. As the bridegroom feels the impact of the arrows, he speaks a verse from the Song of Songs (4:9 - *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea!* [You have wounded my heart, my sister!]) This violent intervention by Caritas solves the problem of Zion's lovesickness; the blood from

---

[25] Holywood, 'Acute Melancholia', 395.

[26] Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, pp. 2-3.

[27] Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, pp. 22-45.

the bridegroom's wound heals her and in some versions he comes down from heaven to join her in nuptial union.

The function of this allegory as a mirror for religious women is encoded in the naming of the bridal soul. The name 'Zion' was etymologized in various ways, all of them related to sight: it could refer to *speculatio*, the process of contemplating God intellectually; it could suggest a *speculum* or elevated vantage-point from which the intellectual comtemplation of God was facilitated; or it could signify an allegorical mirror, which the feminized religious subject could use to observe God, or herself in the bridal role.[28]

There is considerable evidence that medieval German religious women did construct their own religious experiences in accordance with the Daughter Zion allegory. Whilst the journey of Caritas and Oratio to heaven is arguably the most exciting section of this story-line, it generally lent itself less easily to appropriation that did the scenario of Daughter Zion prostrate on her sick-bed. The *Gnadenvita* of Christine Ebner, a fourteenth-century Dominican nun from the convent of Engelthal, constructs a scene in which the distinction between outer and inner collapses, and the bodily illness of the narrator is explained to her in terms of spiritual lovesickness. As Christine refers explicitly to Daughter Zion elsewhere in her writing, it seems reasonable to assume that the allegory is also being referenced in this passage:[29]

> Ich lag ze einem mal siech vff den slaffhuß. nün kom ein engl in eins iunglingz form, wol vmm achzehen iar, vnd nam ein gemalten prief in sin hend vnd sprach, “westü gernn in welcher ordnung dü pist?” vnd lett den vinger vff ein pildlin, an dem gemalt wz ein sel, dü lag von minnen siech, vnd sprach zü mir, “also ligest dü von minnen siech . . .”[30]
>
> [At one time I was lying sick in the dormitory. Then an angel came in the form of a youth of about eighteen years and took an illuminated letter in his hand and said, “Would you like to know what condition you are in?” And he placed his finger on a small picture on which was painted the image of a soul lying sick with love, and he said to me, “That is how you are lying, sick with love” . . .]

Margaretha is granted a similar self-defining vision that blurs the distinction between the somatic and the spiritual. Having first recognised the nuptial paradigm in the abstract (the soul), she then, in a moment of revelation, she grasps its relevance for herself (my soul):

> do sah ich ain schon gemalet tafelen und da was niht an, denn daz diu minnent sel lag und siechet. da war mir uz der barmherziket gotz geben, daz ez min sel wer. (p. 110)
>
> [There I saw a beautifully painted image and it showed nothing other than the loving soul lying sick. Then the mercy of God revealed to me that this was my soul.]

In the case of Margaretha, as with Daughter Zion, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the symptoms of the outer, literal body and of its inner, spiritual counterpart. The topos of the arrow piercing the heart of the bridal soul is normally understood metaphorically, even if the intensity of the experience is such that it can

---

[28] Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, pp. 5-14.

[29] Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, p. 132.

[30] Christine Ebner, *Gnadenvita*, quoted from Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. theol. et philos. 2º 282, 91v. Cf. Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, p. 139.

reasonably be expected to cause both physical and psychological pain. However, as well as experiencing the impact of the nuptial *minnestral* on her spiritual body (p. 131 quoted above), Margaretha also, on a previous occasion, suffers shooting pains in her heart which seem to primarily physical in nature, even if they do occur in connection with her devotional practices:

> dar nach schiusset ez mir as ain geschosse in daz hertze mit ainer unkunder craft, und daz gaut mir denn uf in daz haupt und in elliu miniu lider und brichet diu kreftliklichen, und wirde ich denne mit der selben craft gezwungen, daz ich lut schrai und ruoft. und da bin ich min selbes ungewaltig und mag mich der rüeffe nit enziehen, biz daz ez mir von got benomen wirt. (p. 54)
>
> [then there is a shooting pain, as though I have been shot in the heart with incredible force, and it goes into my head and into all my limbs, and shatters them with its force, and I am then forced by the same power to scream out loud and shout. And I then have no control over myself and cannot separate myself from the shouting, until it is taken away from me by God.]

Margaretha's frequent bouts of paralysis similarly bridge the gap between the spiritual and the somatic. She makes frequent reference to the experience of being *gebunden* [bound] or *gefangen* [captured], and whilst this has may have spiritual dimension, the phrase also indicates a literal inability to move particular limbs.

The topos of *amor ligans* is used in mystical literature to suggest a process whereby either the bride or the bridegroom binds the other party metaphorically in order to prevent him or her from escaping.[31] When Christ draws on this topos in his words to Margaretha, he is using a metaphor in order to affirm the power that her love has over him: *din süezzer lust mich findet, din inderiu begirde mich zwinget, din brinnendiu minn mich bindet* . . . [p. 69: Your sweet desire finds me, your inner yearning forces me, your burning love binds me . . .] However, when she uses the same topos to celebrate his power over her, she invokes a specific physical symptom of the outer body : *der aller süessest und der aller clüegest binder Jhesus Cristus, der bant mich ze der selben zit as creftiklichen, daz mir die hende geswullen* . . . [p. 73: The very sweetest and the most skillful binder Jesus Christ, he bound me at this same time so powerfully that my hands swelled up . . .] From Christ's perspective, *amor ligans* is a figure of speech, but Margaretha experiences it as a literal constriction around the wrists.

The Daughter Zion allegory is likely to have been particularly appealing to women living in religious orders because it presents illness in a communal context. In particular, Daughter Zion's role as a *domina* or mistress surrounded by worried attendants aligns well with the situation of Margaretha, surrounded as she is by other female figures who, although not her servants, flock around her and tend to her needs. Her illness thus effectively raises her status to that of a *domina*.

There can be no doubt that Margaretha is a disruptive and attention-seeking figure in the convent. The intermittent paralysis her tongue not only alternates with ordinary speech, but also with its own extreme opposite, namely phases of prolonged and uncontrolled shouting, babbling and laughing. Typical formulations include *do kom diu gewonlich red* . . . *und dar nach komen die luten rüeffe* [p. 126: Then ordinary speech came . . . and afterwards came the loud shouting]. The pattern is so relentlessly repetitive that Margaretha cannot record every transition: *dar umb kürcz ich ez nu* [p. 127: therefore I will summarise it now]. The shouting can be protracted; one year, for example, she is noisy from Letare Sunday until

[31] For *amor ligans*, see Ringler, *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur*, pp. 249-251.

Palm Sunday, growing very hoarse in the process (pp. 108-109). During these bouts, she experiences her voice as something separate that nonetheless screams inside her (p. 151); she has no control over herself, but compares herself to a house on fire or to fermenting wine (p. 122).

The enforced silence and the uncontrolled shouting both underscore Margaretha's elect status: her chronic illness is construed as a form of divine favouritism, proving that God engages with her in a way that singles her out from the other nuns.[32] The literary lives of religious women commonly explore a tension between mystical individualism and the requirement to conform to the collective life within the convent: generally, the erotic bond between Christ and any particular nun is likely to dissociate her from the religious collective; typically, a nun will want to withdraw from the collective to descend into the metaphoral wine-cellar for private time with the bridegroom.[33] In the case of Margaretha, however, it is not so much the moment of *connubium*, but rather the divinely sanctioned chronic illness that separates her from the other nuns. Furthermore, she does not want to withdraw completely: the others may have been reduced to the roles of attendants in Margaretha's medical psychodrama, but they are fundamentally necessary, both to testify to her special status, and, on a more practical level, to enable her partial withdrawal from the collective, e.g. . . . *so müezzent mich creftiklichen dri frawn haben* . . . [p. 120: . . . and three women had to restrain me], or *aber ich was as crank, das man mich muost in die stuben tragen* . . . [p. 94: But I was so weak that one had to carry me into the sick-bay . . .] Here, there are clear parallels with the Revelations of Adelheid Langmann, another fourteenth-century nun from Engelthal, whose lovesick persona has a vision of being assisted onto the green couch from the Song of Songs 1:15 by the personifications Spes and Karitas from the Daughter Zion allegory.[34] Margaretha's fellow sisters may not be linked explicitly to the attendant personifications, but their function is fundamentally the same.

Unsurprisingly, the convent does a lot to mitigate Margaretha's potential for disruption. For example, when she finds a particular prescribed antiphon too powerful, a different one is read to her:

> so ich hör nennen daz hailig liden mins geminten herren, die selbe zit mag ich auch die tagzit nit gelesen, as man si liset in dem cor; man muos mir ie ander antiphen lesen denn die der cor hat, und muoz man mir menig ding endern an dem lesen, azo daz ich iz geliden mag und gehörn. (p. 64)
>
> [whenever I hear reference to the holy suffering of my beloved Lord, I am unable to read/sing the hours of the Office, as they are read/sung in the choir; one always has to read/sing to me a different antiphon from the one in the choir, and one has to alter many things for me in the singing, so that I may be able to bear it and listen.]

This is quite a striking accommodation of her special needs; as it goes against the normal liturgical order, it may even have caused some disciplinary problems for the convent.[35] The

---

[32] Bridal mysticism is inherently competitive, given that many brides have to share one bridegroom; cf. Annette Volfing, 'Dialog und Brautmystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in: *Dialoge: Sprachliche Kommunikation in und zwischen Texten im deutschen Mittelalter. XVI. Anglo-German Colloquium Hamburg 1999*, ed. by Nikolaus Henkel et al., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003, pp. 257-266.

[33] Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten*, p. 275; Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, pp. 48-49 (note 49).

[34] *Die Offenbarungen der Adelheid Langmann, Klosterfrau zu Engelthal*, ed. Philipp Strauch, Strasbourg: Trübner, 1878 (Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker 26), pp. 64-6; Volfing, *Daughter Zion*, pp. 150-151.

[35] Cf. Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, pp. 121-123.

text also contains other examples of how Margaretha's personal wishes and preferences are humoured, even when the link to her illness is more tenuous. For example, when she is late for communion, the priest initially does not want to allow her to participate, but then relents (p. 71). On another occasion, when she is unable to participate in the Mass, she asks to hear the Passion of Christ translated into German for her. The nun attending to her initially refuses, but then she too relents (p. 53).

Overall, Margaretha's illness is presented as a serious challenge to the orderliness of convent life. The fact that her symptoms are tied to the church year implicitly affirms the validity of the liturgical cycle, but at the same time the partial nature of her participation undercuts the cohesion of collective worship. Although her behaviours are, on one level, involuntary and not the result of insubordination to convent structures, her illness clearly empowers her spiritual vocation. The unique combination of silence and shouting not only results in bespoke and individualistic form of religious observance within the convent, but also provides the authority for the text's highly vocal and articulate narratorial voice. It could even be argued that the numerous symptoms render Margaretha Christ-like – not because of any direct parallels between her suffering and Christ's, but rather because of the way in which convent life increasingly revolves around her. The leniency and general attentiveness on the part of other member of the convent is even construed as a form of divine service on their part: . . . *wann si grossen ernst gen got erzaiget heten mit singen und mit lesen umb mich*. [p. 30: for they had displayed great seriousness towards God through their singing and reading to me.] The emphasis on the special arrangements put in place for Margaretha effectively shifts the spiritual focus of the convent from the chapel to the sick-room, placing Margaretha at the very centre of a new devotional space.

This article has explored the ways in which Margaretha's illness serves as a means of bridging the opposing paradigms of *imitatio Christi* and bridal mysticism. Her suffering has elements of *imitatio Christi*, not only because her physical symptoms are unpleasant in themselves, but also because they are triggered or exacerbated by imaginative engagement with the events of the Passion. This imitative dimension is enhanced by the connection between the symptoms and the liturgical calender. At the same time, the discourse of lovesickness and the echoes of the Song of Songs clearly place Margaretha in a bridal role, with Christ as the elusive Other. In particular, the figure of the lovesick, bed-ridden Daughter Zion provides a convenient object of identification for Margaretha. Finally, the impact of Margaretha's illness on convent life is such that she effectively displaces the focus of community from the chapel to the sickbed – and in that sense she might indeed be said to become a second Christ, or at least to substitute for Christ.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Ebner, Christine. *Gnadenvita*, quoted from Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. theol. et philos. 2° 282.

Ebner, Margaretha. *Offenbarungen der Margaretha Ebner*, in *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*. Ed. by Philipp Strauch, Freiburg im Breisgau / Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1882; reprinted Amsterdam: Schippers, 1966, pp. 1-166.

Langmann, Adelheid. *Die Offenbarungen der Adelheid Langmann, Klosterfrau zu Engelthal*. Ed. Philipp Strauch, Strasbourg: Trübner, 1878 (Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker 26).

Mechthild von Magdeburg. *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*. Ed. by Gisela Vollmann-Profe, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2003 (Bibliothek des Mittelalters 19).

Secondary Sources

Astell, Ann. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Bürkle, Susanne. 'Die Offenbarungen der Margareta Ebner: Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit und der autobiographische Pakt'. In: *Weibliche Rede – Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit. Studien zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Geschlechterdifferenz*. Ed. by Doerte Bischoff and Martina Wagner, Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2003 (Rombach Wissenschaften: Reihe Litterae 98), pp. 79-102.

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

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century'. In: Caroline Walker Bynum. *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 119-150.

Cohen, Esther. 'Towards a History of European Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages'. In: *Science in Context* 8.1 (1995), 47-74.

Cohen, Esther. *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Federer, Urban. *Mystische Erfahrung im literarischen Dialog. Die Briefe Heinrichs von Nördlingen an Margaretha Ebner*. Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2011 (Scrinium Friburgense 25).

Fulton, Rachel. 'Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs'. In: *Viator* 27 (1996), 85-116.

Garber, Rebecca. *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers 1100-1375*. New York / London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 109-126;

Hale, Rosemary Drage**.** 'Rocking the Cradle: Margaretha Ebner (Be)Holds the Divine'. In: *Performance and Transformation. New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*. Ed. by Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, pp. 211-39.

Haug, Walter. 'Innerlichkeit, Körperlichkeit und Sprache in der spätmittelalterlichen Frauenmystik'. In: Walter Haug. *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion. Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*. Tübingen: Niemyer, 2003, pp. 480-492.

Hollywood, Amy. 'Acute Melacholia'. In: *Harvard Theological Review* 99:4 (2006), 381-406.

Janota, Johannes. 'Freundschaft auf Erden und im Himmel. Die Mystikerin Margareta Ebner und der Gottesfreund Heinrich von Nördlingen'. In: *Impulse und Resonanzen: Tübinger mediävistische Beiträge zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Haug*. Ed. by Gisela Vollmann-Profe et al., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007, pp. 275-300.

Keller, Hildegard Keller. *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*. Trans. Maria Sherwood-Smith, Leuven: Peeters, 2000

Koch, Barbara. 'Margaret Ebner'. In: *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*. Ed. by Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010 (Brepols Essays in European Culture), pp. 393-410.

Kügeler-Race, Simone. 'Carnal Manifestations of Divine Love in the Mystical Writings of Elsbeth of Oye, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Margery Kempe'. In: *Neophilologus* 102 (2018), 39-58.

Kügeler-Race, Simone. *Frauenmystik im europäischen Kontext: "The Book of Margery Kempe" und die deutschsprachige Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*. Cologne / Vienna: Böhlau, 2019 (Forschungen zu Kunst, Geschichte und Literatur des Mittelalters 2).

Küsters, Urban. *Der verschlossene Garten: Volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert*. Düsseldorf: Droste, 1985.

Matter, E. A. *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Merback, Mitchell. 'Pain and Memory in the Formation of the Early Modern Habitus'. In: *Representations* 146.1 (2019), 59-90.

Ohly, Friedrich. *Hohelied-Studien: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des Abendlandes bis zum 1200*. Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1958 (Geisteswissenschaftliche Reihe 1).

Palmer, Nigel F. 'Herzeliebe, weltlich und geistlich. Zur Metaphorik vom 'Einwohnen im Herzen' bei Wolfram von Eschenbach, Juliana von Cornillon, Hugo von Langenstein und Gertrud von Helfta'. In: *Innenräume in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters. XIX. Anglo-German Colloquium Oxford 2005*. Ed. by Burkhard Hasebrink et al, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008, pp. 197-224.

Peters, Ursula. *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum. Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988 (Hermaea N. F. 56).

Quast, Bruno. *'drücken und schriben*. Passionsmystische Frömmigkeit in den Offenbarugen der Margaretha Ebner'. In: *Gewalt im Mittelalter. Realitäten – Imagination*. Ed. by Manuel Braun and Cornelia Herberichs, Munich: Fink, 2005, pp. 293-305.

Ringler, Siegfried. *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien*. Munich: Artemis, 1980 (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen 72).

Rublack, Ulinka. 'Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents'. In: *Gender and History* 6 (1994), 37-57.

Schneider-Lastin, Wolfram. 'Leben und Offenbarungen der Elsbeth von Oye: Textkritische Edition der Vita aus dem 'Ötenbacher Schwesternbuch''. In: *Kulturtopographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im späteren Mittelalter: Studien und Texte*. Kulturtopographie des alemannischen Raums 1. Ed. by Barbara Fleith and René Wetzel, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 395-467.

Spanily, Claudia. *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle. Möglichkeiten weiblichen Literatentums im Mittelalter*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002 (Tradition – Reform – Innovation 5).

Turner, Denys. *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995.

Volfing, Annette. 'Dialog und Brautmystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg'. In: *Dialoge: Sprachliche Kommunikation in und zwischen Texten im deutschen Mittelalter. XVI. Anglo-German Colloquium Hamburg 1999*. Ed. by Nikolaus Henkel et al., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003, pp. 257-266.

Volfing, Annette. 'Ever-Growing Desire: Spiritual Pregnancy in Hadewijch and in Middle High German Mystics'. In: *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Manuele Gragnolati et al., London: Legenda, 2012, pp. 45-57.

Volfing, Annette. *The Daughter Zion Allegory in Medieval German Religious Writing*. Abingdon / New York: Routledge, 2017.

Wack, Mary E. *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Weitlauff, Manfred. "'*dein got redender munt machet mich redenlosz*": Margareta Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen'. In: *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*. Ed. by Peter Dinzelbacher nad Dieter R. Bauer, Cologne / Vienna: Böhlau, 1988, pp. 303-352.

Weitlauff, Manfred. 'Ebner, Margaretha' In: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalter: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd edn. Ed. by Kurt Ruh et al., vol. 2, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980, col. 303-306.

Ulrike Wiethaus. 'Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century'. In: *The Vernacular Spirit. Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*. Ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinki et al., New York: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 209-238.

Abstract

The article examines the way in which the Revelations of the Dominican nun Margaretha Ebner negotiates two opposing paradigms of mystical experience: *imitatio Christi* and bridal mysticism. To date, the Revelations have been read primarily in the context of imitatio Christi, partly because of the central importance accorded to illness and suffering in the text. This article highlights the nuptial elements in the text, arguing that the Daughter Zion allegory provides a useful parallel for the combination of illness (lovesickness) with erotic longing for Christ. The Daughter Zion allegory is also of particular relevance given its focus on illness within a communal setting.

Key words

Margaretha Ebner, *imitatio Christi*, bridal mysticism, illness, lovesickness, trauma, wounding, Daughter Zion