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‘Pese dowble wordis þat ben hard to vndirstonde’:  
Exploring the Mutability of Medieval Devotional Language  
through the Theological Concept of Despair

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the mutability of medieval devotional language by focusing on the complex and paradoxical concept of spiritual despair. It looks at how writer, translator, interpreter, and ultimate audience might bring different agendas to bear on their own readings. Part one examines a range of Latin texts in which the first chapter examines thirteenth and fourteenth-century pastoral manuals for how their stance on despair alters according to the writers' purpose, intended audience, and the creative readings of intermediaries. Chapter two considers despair from the perspective of eleventh and twelfth-century *vita contemplativa* monastic writing. It explores the effects language might have on an enclosed community and how authors sometimes altered their approach as a result. The second half of this thesis explores these concepts further through fourteenth-century vernacular devotional writing aimed at the spiritually interested laity. By looking at Middle English, Latin, and Modern English translations of Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, in comparison with Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, it reflects on how language is never fixed but always full of several different, sometimes paradoxical, meanings which therefore allow for a range of devotional practices.

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 Abbreviations and commonly-used reference sources

<i>Anglo-Norman Dictionary</i>	< <a href="https://www.anglo-norman.net/entry">https://www.anglo-norman.net/entry</a> >
<i>Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle</i> , Frédéric Godefroy, 1880-1895. < <a href="http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy">http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy</a> >
<i>DIMEV</i>	<i>The Digital Index of Middle English Verse</i> < <a href="http://www.dimev.net">www.dimev.net</a> >
<i>DMLBS</i>	<i>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i> < <a href="https://logeion.uchicago.edu">https://logeion.uchicago.edu</a> >
<i>Douay-Rheims</i>	<i>The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version</i> < <a href="http://www.drbo.org">http://www.drbo.org</a> >
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>Historical Thesaurus of English</i>	< <a href="https://ht.ac.uk">https://ht.ac.uk</a> >
<i>Lewis Short</i>	<i>Lewis Short Latin Dictionary</i> < <a href="https://logeion.uchicago.edu">https://logeion.uchicago.edu</a> >
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
<i>MLGB</i>	<i>Medieval Libraries of Great Britain</i> < <a href="http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk">http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk</a> >
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina Database</i> < <a href="http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk">http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk</a> >

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## Thesis Introduction

Thanne comth drede to bigynne to werke anye goode werkes. For certes, he that is enclyned to synne, hym thynketh it is so greet an emprise for to undertake to doon werkes of goodnesse, and casteth in his herte that the circumstaunces of goodnesse been so grevouse and so chargeaunt for to suffre, that he dar nat undertake to do werkes of goodnesse as seith St Gregory. Now comth wanhope, that is despeir of the mercy of God, that comth somtyme of to muche outrageous sorwe, and sometyme of to much drede, ymaginyng that he hath doon so muche synne that it wol nat availen hym, though he wolde repenten hym and forsake synne, thurgh which despeir or drede he abaundoneth al his herte to every maner synne as seith Seint Augustin...This horrible synne is so perilous that he that is despeired, ther nys no felonye ne no synne that he douteth for to do...Certes, ther is noon so horrible synne of man that it ne may in his lyf be destroyed by penitence, thurgh vertu of the passion and of the deeth of Crist. Allas, what nedeth man thanne to been despeired, sith that his mercy so redy is and large? Axe and have.

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parson's Tale*<sup>1</sup>

Nevyrthelesse she was schrevyn many tymes and oftyn, and dede hir penawns whatsoevyr hir confessowr wold injoyne hir to do, and was governed aftyr the rewelys of the Chirch. That grace God yafe this creatur, blyssyd mot he be, but he wythdrowe not hir temptacyon but rather incresyd it, as hir thowt. And therefore wend sche that he had forsakyn hir and durst not trostyn to hys mercy, but was labowrd (troubled) wyth horrybyl temptacyons of lettherye and of dyspeyr ny al the next yer folwyng, save owyr Lord of hys mercy, as sche seyde hirself, yaf hir ech day for the most party too owerys of compuncyon for hir synnys, wyth many byttyr teerys. And sythen sche was labowrd wyth temptacyons of dyspeyr as sche was befor, and was as for fro felyng grace as thei that nevyr felt noon. And that mygth sche not beryn, and therfor alwey sche dyspeyrd. Safe for the tyme that sche felt grace, hir labowrs (pains/sufferings) wer so wondyrful (dreadful) that sche cowd evel far wyth hem (with difficulty cope with them), but evyr mornyn (grieving) and sorwyn as thow God had forsakyn hir.

*The Book of Margery Kempe*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Parson's Tale' in *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. by F. N. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd ed., 2008), pp. 311-2.

<sup>2</sup> Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), ch. 4, p. 70.

Chaucer's Parson knows his audience well, focusing in on their natural human tendencies and spiritual insecurities. He is also aware of how the authorities and other vernacular literature such as the *Book of Vices and Virtues* treat despair, replicating its association with increasingly evil acts of sin alongside sorrow, fear, and lack of trust in God's mercy and forgiveness. For the Parson, spiritual despair has a straightforward genesis and simple resolution: if someone truly repents and carries out their allotted good works then even their worst sins will be forgiven. This promise that asking for mercy will be exchanged for forgiveness acknowledges the pull of despair for ordinary people, but the seemingly simple solution does not address how continual a presence this loss of trust in God can be, it does not take into account any of the psychological ramifications of being close to despair, and nor does it consider that despair might be a necessary element of spiritual life. In contrast, Margery Kempe's experience illustrates how ineffectual confession and repentance could be. While they provided her with two hours of God-given tearful remorse each day, any connection with God – which she constantly craved – quickly fell away until her temptations of despair not only returned but were increased.

For the Parson's imagined audience, despair is directly connected with sin and damnation which can nevertheless be mitigated and converted to salvation through the sacrament of confession. For others, like Margery, being shriven does not provide any long-term cleansing or healing, occasionally causes further damage, and can be complicated by a yearning desire for a personal connection with the divine, to fully experience His grace and mercy. When such a strong spiritual inclination is present, there is a danger that the ensuing sorrow from God's apparent and repeated withdrawal

will overwhelm someone to the point of crippling despair.<sup>3</sup> But as Emily Huber has demonstrated, Margery illustrates the possibility of a spiritually beneficial ‘parfit sorrow’ which exists between the spirit's ability to reach the divine, and complete despair that leads to hell.<sup>4</sup>

These examples show how approaches to despair vary according to the writer, purpose and intended audience, but they also reveal how the authority figure of Chaucer’s Parson and spiritual laity represented by Margery interacted with the reality of despair, what it is and what it can do, in quite different ways. Margery’s cyclical relationship with despair might appear to drive her further away from God, increasing her temptations to sin as the Parson warns, but her doubts in God’s grace play a more complicated role in Margery’s spiritual life than the Parson allows, ultimately taking her closer towards an acceptance of, and trust in God, alongside her continual tribulations. Despair is therefore at the heart of the medieval spiritual economy but there are divergent views and experiences on whether it can have a positive as well as a negative purpose. Because of this, despair is an ideal concept for exploring the ways in which medieval devotional language is slippery and unstable, how writer and reader alike can use it to alter or expand the range of available meanings of a concept, sometimes in the opposite direction to the seemingly obvious. While some vernacular medieval devotional texts address the issue of despair directly, acknowledging its possibility and providing advice on how to deal with it, others evade talking overtly about it at all. The issue then

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these and other differences between Margery Kempe and the Parson see Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Rebekah Huber, “‘For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y’: Melancholy, Despair, and Pathology in Middle English Literature’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester, New York, 2008), pp. 14-5. See also Emily Rebekah Huber, ‘Langland’s Confessional Dissonance: Wanhope in Piers Plowman B’, *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, vol. 27 (2013), pp. 79-101 in which wanhope, the Middle English word for despair, is shown as an impediment to effective pastoral care through confession.

arises as to whether and how these more evasive texts might obliquely point to the concept of despair by association. This thesis is about how the language in medieval devotional texts is not always fixed, how its instability can lead to creative responses unimagined by the writer, and how readers and translators can imbue words with particular connotations depending on their own experiences, understandings, and beliefs. It will explore the ways ideas of despair are made manifest in the texts, often shifting in meaning, weight, and utility according to a range of factors including the author's or translator's understanding of the concept itself, their grasp of the language of any source material, and their anticipated audience. Meaning is also shaped by the belief systems and purpose of all involved: author, translator, reader, interpreter, and the textual communities which frame the ways in which works are received. This thesis is about despair itself as well as the shifting meanings available within devotional language: word and concept are inextricably intertwined, with each providing a lens to examine the other.

In order to provide some background for the rest of this thesis the following section will review how understandings of despair have been conceived and developed from early Christianity onwards, and consider the ways in which modern scholars of medieval devotional literature have engaged with spiritual despair as their central theme. I will then explain the structure of this thesis and the premise on which it is based.

## **1. A short history of despair**

Ideas of despair first appear in texts by the Eastern Christian desert fathers where they describe it as a consequence of the noonday demon *acedia* (sloth) and its companion *tristitia* (sorrow). Both the Greek monk Evagrius Ponticus (345-399 AD) and

John Cassian (c. 355/65-435) were concerned with despair's debilitating effects.<sup>5</sup> Cassian's *Institutes* describes *tristitia* and *accidia* as two separate temptations towards despair, with the first a forgetting of God's mercy, and the second a 'listlessness and weariness of heart' which leads to 'dissatisfaction and sloth'.<sup>6</sup> Gregory the Great (d. 604) combined the two to form *accidiatristitia* which were evident as *malitia* (malice), *rancor* (bitterness), *pusillanimatus* (lack of courage), *desperatio*, *torpor circa precepta* (lethargy about rules), and *evagatio mentis* (mind wandering).<sup>7</sup> These examples demonstrate the polysemous and fragmented nature always present in the language of spiritual despair. It is at once full of too much meaning and so impoverished that even though many different words are used to describe it, definitions of despair always elude complete clarity.

These ideas, developed between the fourth and seventh centuries, continued to be expressed within medieval literature with the occasional revision in emphasis. According to Sachs, Aelfric was the first to translate *acedia* as sloth in his sermon on the Nativity around 996/7 AD, and in the *Ancrene Riwe*, despair is described as the 'deadliest cub of the bear of sloth'.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas averred slightly, holding the view that although *acedia* 'may spring from physical weariness' it is really 'an aversion against God himself...It is the opposite of the joy in the divine good that [we] should experience'.<sup>9</sup> He saw it as the progenitor of increasingly more serious sins, opposed it with charity,

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<sup>5</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Arieh Sachs, 'Religious Despair in Medieval Literature and Art', *Medieval Studies*, vol. 26 (1964), 231–256 (p. 234).

<sup>7</sup> Sachs, 'Religious Despair', p. 235; Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. by Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 8, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Sachs, 'Religious Despair', p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), p. 21.

and made the case that it could affect people outside the monastery as well as those within it, as they should also ‘live in relationship with God’, and implied that it affects those ‘who already have charity’.<sup>10</sup> So from early on, despair was seen as something which particularly affected those chosen by God, or were particularly intent on leading spiritual lives, which could include the laity as well as the professed religious.<sup>11</sup> But Aquinas also coincides with later psychological views of *acedia* being partly voluntary, calling it a state involving ‘reason’s consent’ to a lack of joy’.<sup>12</sup>

Emily Huber notes three historical stages of despair connected with the power structures of the time: that of the desert fathers affecting the spirit; melancholy based on the body's physiology; and depression which can be treated with modern medicine.<sup>13</sup> In the Renaissance, Petrarch ‘secularised’ the ‘monastic sickness’ of *acedia*, so that it became known as ‘a nameless melancholy and a metaphysical discontent’.<sup>14</sup> This melancholia is associated with the humour of black bile and with someone who is ‘sad, envious, malevolent, avid, fraudulent, cowardly and earthly.’<sup>15</sup> Amy Hollywood notes that ‘mania, sorrow, despair and langour’ are closely linked to melancholic lovesickness and were applied to mystical love ‘of the soul for God, but also the love of Christ for humanity’ in the twelfth century.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Kondydyk De Young, ‘Aquinas on Acedia’, *The Thomist*, vol. 68, no. 2 (2004), 173 - 204 (pp. 176, 183).

<sup>11</sup> See part two of this thesis for a discussion of how Julian is writing for an audience whose testing by God is a demonstration of his love.

<sup>12</sup> Kondydyk De Young, 2004, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Huber, “For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y”, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Agamben, *Stanzas*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Hollywood, ‘Acute Melancholia’, *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 99, no. 4 (2006), 381-406 (p. 387).

In an examination of modern depression and medieval *acedia*, Robert W. Daly decides that both may be seen to ‘include the exercise of the sufferer’s capacity to author his own actions among the potential causes [...] as well as its amelioration’.<sup>17</sup> A basic premise of modern treatment is that a person has to think a goal is achievable in order to fight against the sense of despair.<sup>18</sup> While modern despair and depression are generally seen as separate conditions, it has been acknowledged that the first can lead to the second, particularly if people feel isolated in some way, and even if they have a strong religious faith, which might ‘give [them] hope for eternity’ but ‘doesn’t give [them] hope for here’.<sup>19</sup> There is therefore no simple, timeless, language of despair. Its meanings, nuances, and connection to other states of being are inherently complex, resistant to clear definition, and often in a state of flux.

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### 1.1. Despair and society

John Cassian brought monastic living to the West, including the association of *acedia* with not taking part in the spiritual life of the community.<sup>20</sup> Huber applies Judith Butler’s work on the subordination of the self within community power structures ‘to medieval confessional practice, to show that an initial recognition and simultaneous repudiation of the self begins to occur in the late Middle Ages, as private subjects develop tools for analyzing the moral structures of their own consciences’.<sup>21</sup> Like

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<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Daly, ‘Before Depression: The Medieval Vice of Acedia’, *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, vol. 70, no. 1 (2007), 30-51 (p. 46).

<sup>18</sup> Anne Boyajean, ‘Fighting Despair’, *The American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 78, no. 1 (Jan. 1978), 76-77.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Scroggs, Mona Shattell & William Richard Cowling, “‘An existential place of pain’: the essence of despair in women”, *Issues in mental health nursing*, vol. 31, no. 7 (2010), 477–482 (pp. 479-80).

<sup>20</sup> Kondydyk De Young, ‘Aquinas on Acedia’, p. 175; Jean-Charles Nault, ‘Acedia: Enemy of Joy’, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 31 (Summer 2004), 236–259 (p. 241).

<sup>21</sup> Huber, “For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y”, p. 27.

Freud's view that melancholia and sadness become 'pathological' when they lead the subject to 'disrupt public order and public relationships', Sachs is of the view that medieval despair denoted a lack of conformity and unreason, and was therefore associated with madness, whereas hope equated to conformity, to the divine order, and reason.<sup>22</sup> He also notes that 'no one could suffer damnation who had not despaired, for the abandonment of hope is the very condition of entrance into the devil's domain'.<sup>23</sup>

Despair is often depicted as being dangerous for the individual because it 'tears the soul to pieces', but it is also a problem for society because it means someone is not accepting the structures imposed upon them, and so breaks down the systems of authority.<sup>24</sup> According to Huber, texts like *Book of the Duchess*, *Pearl*, and *Mort d'Arthur* show a mirroring between the broken-minded man and the disruption of society.<sup>25</sup> A factor prominent in modern discussions is that individuals may find hope if communities, through 'immersion in the pain of others' try to 'be companions in pain and frustration and despair'.<sup>26</sup> But as *The Book of Margery Kempe* illustrates, overtly spiritual leanings displayed by a laywoman could be fraught with dangers and difficulties.

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## 1.2 The inner and outer self

Evagrius advised that to 'counter the demon of *acedia*' one has to 'with tears divide the soul in two. One is to encourage; the other is to be encouraged', and by doing

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<sup>22</sup> Huber, "For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y", p. 46; Sachs, 'Religious Despair', p. 252.

<sup>23</sup> Sachs, 'Religious Despair', pp. 252, 256.

<sup>24</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikus*, trans. by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. <[http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01\\_Prak/00a\\_start.htm](http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm)> [November 2015], ch. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Huber, "For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y", p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Enda McDonagh, 'A Shared Despair?', *The Furrow*, vol. 53, no. 5 (2002), 259–262 (p. 261).



so one should be able to reach a state of *apatheia*, ‘a blessed state of equilibrium, free from distraction or regret’ where ‘the spirit begins to see its own light, when it remains in a state of tranquility in the presence of the images it has during sleep, and when it maintains its calm as it beholds the affairs of life’.<sup>27</sup> He goes on to say that endurance and self-control are a sign of someone who is not at peace with what they encounter; they are vulnerable and puzzled and therefore experiencing internal tumult which they have to suppress for external appearances.<sup>28</sup> In later Middle English literature, a person’s relationship with God could be determined by their mental health, such that if someone was prone to wanhope they could also be identified as having ‘a decayed spiritual wellbeing’.<sup>29</sup> But as we have seen with Margery Kempe, the situation is much more complex than this.

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### 1.3 Despair as positive and negative

From Evagrius onwards (but perhaps not always evident in Medieval literature), *acedia* contains within it the light of hope, as he says ‘no other demon follows on immediately after this one but after its struggle the soul receives in turn a peaceful condition and unspeakable joy’ which happens when passions become memories without the associated emotions. This peaceful state of *apatheia* derives from on the one hand the ‘natural seeds’ of humility, compunction, tears and longing for God, and on the other the ‘withdrawal of the demons’, the attack from which will be countered best when a person has achieved some of the natural states of the first part’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Norris, *Acedia and Me*, pp. 278, 280, 281.

<sup>28</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikus*, ch. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Huber, “For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y”, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikus*, ch. 57.

So as well as *tristitia mortifera*, or deadly sorrow, there was also *tristitia salutifera* or saving sorrow which was the operator of salvation and the ‘golden goad of the soul’ and, as such ‘it should be counted not a vice but a virtue’.<sup>31</sup> Augustine and Alcuin endorsed this view, writing respectively that there are ‘two kinds of sorrow: one that works salvation, the other, evil; one that draws to penitence, the other that leads to desperation’ and ‘there are two kinds of sadness: one that brings salvation, one that brings plagues’.<sup>32</sup> In *Moralia in Job* Gregory says *tristitia* can be a virtue as well as a vice because it ‘cleanses the wantonness [...] of his [...] pleasure [...] by lamentations of sorrow’.<sup>33</sup> A modern psychiatric view, however, is that despair does not carry the possibility of hope within it: ‘it is not possible to experience things as hopeful all the while being in despair’.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand to be hopeful does carry the possibility of despair within it, as it ‘founds the experience of despair’.<sup>35</sup> According to Sweeny, Aquinas considered *acedia* as ‘a kind of sorrow and distinguished from sorrow as a real evil, which, if moderate and not so overwhelming as to draw us away from good deeds, is not sinful’.<sup>36</sup> Aquinas also identified two different kinds of despair: passionate and theological, and Christopher Bobier has recently argued that, if the former kind is acted on in the correct way, it can sometimes be good and lead to further positive acts.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 10, n. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony J. Steinbock, ‘The Phenomenology of Despair’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2007), 435–451 (p. 449).

<sup>35</sup> Steinbock, ‘The Phenomenology of Despair’, p. 450.

<sup>36</sup> Eileen C. Sweeny, ‘Aquinas on the Seven Deadly Sins: Tradition and Innovation’ in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. by Richard G. Newhauser & Susan J. Ridyard (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), pp. 85–106 (p. 93).

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Bobier, ‘Revisiting Aquinas on the Passion of Despair’, *New Blackfriars*, vol. 102, 1097 (2021), 123–138.

Elizabeth Gilliam Brown thinks that the thirteenth century is notable for manuals for despair with a ‘therapeutic approach’, seeing it as a ‘disease of the soul’ which could therefore be ‘cured, or at least managed, by sound advice’.<sup>38</sup> O’Hara advises modern counsellors to understand that hope and despair are not at either ends of a spectrum of good and bad but that ‘the two need to be simultaneously acknowledged and felt in order to lead a life where one is right with God’. Furthermore, a successful counsellor seems to be akin to a spiritual confessor (although O’Hara does not draw this comparison) in that it is their ‘whole life orientation that inspires hope in the patient’, someone who ‘is not unduly fearful of the descent into the underworld’.<sup>39</sup>

The inherent complexity and pervasiveness of despair – its resistance to easy definition – is markedly apparent. Despair permeates the inner and outer self, has the power to force someone either further away from God towards damnation, or closer towards the divine and eventual peace. It can be a subversive and disruptive threat to the surrounding community, or it can be understood, shared, and utilised as a theological tool for spiritual growth. Writers of texts on despair might have a particular purpose in mind, but the reader or translator is always required to carry out some spiritual work in response, whether it be acts of penance or working towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between self and divine. Throughout this study, I have found that despair is clearly at the heart of lived Christianity, but that in some quarters there has been an endeavour to simultaneously explain and hide its existence and impact. This complexity has meant that the course of this thesis has involved high levels of intrigue and

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<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Gilliam Brown, ‘Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2010), p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Denis J. O’Hara, ‘Counselling & Psychotherapy in Action: Psychotherapy and the dialectics of hope and despair’, *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), 323-329 (p. 327).

confusion, fascination and frustration in equal measure.

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## 2. Despair of salvation — large studies

There have been several large studies of religious despair which approach the topic from different points of view. The first of these, Sister Bernard Donna's 1948 thesis, compares the theological approaches of Langland and Augustine to find that they both see despair as 'the aftermath of unrepented sin' which will dissipate upon repentance when a person 'is assured of God's mercy and hope is again renewed in his soul'.<sup>40</sup> The author does not broaden her study to consider the wider social situation in which Langland and his audience were positioned, nor does she provide the context of religious handbooks or sermons.

Another early study by Bloomfield discusses despair in terms of the deadly sins and their beginnings in the East with Evagrius, and the West with John Cassian's *De institutes coenobiorum* and Gregory the Great's *Moralia on Job*. He charts the changes in the meaning of *acedia* from 'dryness of the spirit' to laziness in carrying out God's works, and ultimately to just bodily laziness or sloth. He looks at medieval literary works with a particular focus on *Piers Plowman* and *The Faerie Queen*, considering the latter to be 'the last great treatment of the Sins in English Literature'.<sup>41</sup> Kuhn follows a similar span and literary focus to Bloomfield, tracing *ennui* from classical writings through to the present and raises the point that for all that was written about what *acedia* is and how to avoid it, no medieval writer apart from Dante actually addresses how it felt

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<sup>40</sup> Sister Rose Bernard Donna, *Despair and Hope: A Study in Langland and Augustine* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), p. 176.

<sup>41</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: State University Press, 2nd ed., 1967), pp. 44, 67, 69, 72, 149.

to be in despair.<sup>42</sup>

Still the most comprehensive discussion related to despair to date is Siegfried Wenzel's *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* which surveys the concept from the third to the fourteenth century. It categorises the monastic, scholastic and popular as three distinct manifestations of *acedia*, but that the 'fourteenth and fifteenth century sermons and handbooks addressed to lay men' encapsulated rather than replaced earlier writings that treated 'sloth in God's service', albeit shifting focus from the spirit to the body.<sup>43</sup> After 1300 he considers that the concept remained static, with writers ceasing to 'explore and analyze fresh insights into human nature or into the truths of revealed religion', instead relying on repeating traditional sources.<sup>44</sup> Wenzel analyses the meanings and development of *acedia* and sloth in a wide range of texts, paying particular attention to handbooks and sermons written within the mainstream religious discourse, as well as iconography and works of poetry, but gives scant attention to works of contemplation. Given the breadth of his focus, few texts are considered in-depth, but the study provides a good overview of how historical periods and their corresponding works approached the concept of *acedia* and is therefore a useful study for identifying the focus of further attention.

Susan Snyder's thesis examines medieval despair theologies as a contextual background for literary works which build on the 'view of despair as both a soul-destroying sin and the peculiar, even necessary, temptation of God's elect.'<sup>45</sup> Snyder

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<sup>42</sup> Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 88-9.

<sup>44</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 180, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Snyder, 'The Paradox of Despair: Studies of the Despair Theme in Medieval and Renaissance Literature' (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1963), p. 1.

provides a comprehensive and useful overview of what key thinkers have written about despair over time, but there is no sense as to whether writers from one period were actually aware of earlier work.

Nicholas Watson is also aware of this medieval trend of despair containing an element of hope, and looks at Flete's *De Remediis* in order to demonstrate that the medieval view of despair was not always treated as an 'abnormal and wholly negative experience', but was of interest to contemplative 'religious specialists' concerned with the existential sins of unbelief, blasphemy, and a preoccupation with predestination.<sup>46</sup> He considers some of the differences between the versions of *De Remediis*, noting that the third English recension of *Remedy Aynst the Troubles of Temptacyons* 'goes so far as to distinguish 'two willes, a good will and an evill' in the soul of 'every man and woman', which the earlier recensions do not.<sup>47</sup> He also thinks that this version pays more attention to the idea of double predestination and the threat of despair than the original Latin and was therefore symptomatic of the time and audience it was translated for. He concludes that what he calls the '*De remediis* tradition' (which includes Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich) is to an extent 'proto-Protestant'.<sup>48</sup> Watson therefore highlights the strong links between medieval and early modern despair, and in looking at the development of *De Remediis* he explores how changes are made within the same text by different writers and translators at different times, and for different audiences.

Huber's 2008 thesis considers Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, *Pearl*, *Piers*

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<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Watson, 'Despair' in *Cultural Reformations*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 342–358 (pp. 342, 344) These page numbers are based on a pre-publication copy: <<https://www.academia.edu/12679110/Despair>> [October 2015].

<sup>47</sup> Watson, 'Despair', p. 353. See Jessica Michelle Lamothe, 'An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete's *De remediis contra temptaciones* (*Remedies against Temptations*)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2017), for a previously overlooked fourth recension.

<sup>48</sup> Watson, 'Despair', p. 356.

*Plowman* and Margery Kempe in the light of the post Lateran-Four confessional emphasis. She argues that self-reflection in fourteenth and fifteenth century England led to ‘the definition and performance of sadness as a cultural idea’ and ‘the discovery of the psyche as fundamentally flawed’.<sup>49</sup> She uses the work of Judith Butler to view despair as part of a struggle for self identity within the prevailing power structures, and questions the use of nineteenth and twentieth-century psychiatric tools for diagnosing Margery Kempe, instead using medieval spiritual ones to determine that through her ‘disbelief in God's omnipotence’ and ‘scorn for his creations’ she was suffering from despair rather than hysteria.<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Krug takes a similar view in a chapter devoted to despair in her monograph *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*, delving further into the idea of Margery’s despair as both frighteningly dangerous and a normal part of spiritual life.<sup>51</sup> She shows that for Margery despair, with its feelings of abandonment, was not something which could be cured by confession, but an ongoing disposition which she learned to accept as part of her experience.<sup>52</sup>

Kristen Leigh Allen’s thesis questions Alexander Murray’s view in *Suicide in the Middle Ages* that despair of salvation always led to suicide. She analyses European texts by people who ‘struggled with despair, but ultimately managed to overcome it’ and so provided their readers with the tools of repentance and, in one case, presumption. By citing the story of Cain against that of Judas, she concludes that despair did not necessarily lead to suicide, and that Murray may have confused spiritual and physical

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<sup>49</sup> Huber, “For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y”, p. v.

<sup>50</sup> Huber, “For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y”, p. 182.

<sup>51</sup> Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*, ch. 2, ‘Despair’, pp. 58-95.

<sup>52</sup> Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*, pp. 92-5.

death in his sources.<sup>53</sup>

The most recent large study is Elizabeth Gilliam Brown's *Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair* which analyses references to despair in a range of texts from its beginnings in the desert monasteries to the nineteenth-century English Church. She thinks that between the fifth and tenth centuries, despair is elusive to pin down and trace, to the extent that it is difficult to know if there actually was such a phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> In addition to despair as a result of temptation, she also recognises a 'shadow tradition' where orthodox people may have had ideas that God demanded death, that a person might be worshipping the wrong God, or that it was the result of personal 'griefs' or 'fantasies'.<sup>55</sup>

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## 2.1 Other recent scholarship on despair

In the past few years, writers have approached despair in a variety of ways. Some have looked at it from the point of view of emotion and illness, while others have considered its visual aspects and, in one case, language. Elspeth Whitney explores how dream visions link the phlegmatic humors and swampy landscapes which represent acedia and spiritual despair, her main point being that some medieval writers saw a connection between nature, human psychology and religion.<sup>56</sup> Elina Gertsman, like Moshe Barasch before her, examines the visual iconography of despair, with Judas

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<sup>53</sup> Kristen Leigh Allen, 'Sicut scintilla ignis in medio maris: Theological Despair in the Works of Isidore of Seville, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim and Dante Alighieri' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2009), pp 4, 12, 273.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, 'Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair', p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, 'Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair', p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Elspeth Whitney, 'Phlegmatic Landscapes: Perceptions of Wetlands, Acedia, and Complexion Theory in Selected Later Medieval Allegorical Pilgrim Narratives', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*, 13 (2019), 157–80.



Iscariot an example of what happens when people lose hope of forgiveness.<sup>57</sup> She looks at the relationship between visual and literary despair imagery and the fact that abject despair can lead to salvation.<sup>58</sup> For Gertsman, these images provide the same function of affective devotion as those in Middle English Meditations on the Life of Christ.<sup>59</sup> Through a wide range of writers such as St Bernard, Hugh of St Victor and Aquinas, Gertsman provides a succinct overview of despair, its relationship to the humours and melancholy, its genesis and consequences. Brit Mize has also examined the role of Judas in the thirteenth-century *Southern English Ministry and Passion*, where he is a warning of the possibility of not being saved, even when one has fulfilled all the acts of penitence required.<sup>60</sup> In terms of language, Joseph Snow has shown that the Spanish drama *Celestina* demonstrates the impossibility of the words used to do anything other than obfuscate and hide the truth of darkness and despair in each situation.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, my thesis demonstrates that even dense and paradoxical language has the capacity to enlighten and clarify spiritual reality for the reader.

The history of emotions, led by Barbara Rosenwein is a burgeoning area of research, some of which has touched on despair.<sup>62</sup> Rosenwein has looked at the

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<sup>57</sup> Elina Gertsman, 'Inciting Despair' in *Emotions, Communities, and Difference in Medieval Europe: Essays in Honor of Barbara H. Rosenwein*, ed. by Maureen C. Miller and Edward Wheatley (London: Routledge, 2017) pp. 121-138; Moshe Barasch, 'Despair in the Medieval Imagination', *Social Research*, 66 (1999), 565-76.

<sup>58</sup> Gertsman, 'Inciting Despair', p. 132.

<sup>59</sup> Gertsman, 'Inciting Despair', p. 123.

<sup>60</sup> Britt Mize, 'Working with the Enemy: The Harmonizing Tradition and the New Utility of Judas Iscariot in Thirteenth-Century England', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 36 (2010), 68-110.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph T. Snow, 'Darkness, Death and Despair in *Celestina*: An Essay', *EHumanista*, 19 (2011), 317-327.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion on the history of emotions with particular reference to sin, confession, and repentance for the laity, see John H. Arnold, 'Inside and Outside the Medieval Laity: Some Reflections on the History of Emotions', in *European Religious Cultures. Essays Offered to Christopher Brooke on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. by Miri Rubin (London: University of London Press; Institute of Historical Research, 2020), pp.105-27

differences in how personal feelings of despair were transmitted pre and post Reformation. She compared Margery Kempe's manuscript with a printed book by a seventeenth-century nonconformist Protestant. Rosenwein is interested in the sequence of emotions, so for Margery, she identifies pain, confession, dread, and self-violence, followed by a return to equilibrium after being reassured that Christ and God had not abandoned her.<sup>63</sup> With reference to Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* which connects wanhope with sorrow, dread, repentance and mercy, Rosenwein deduces that despair was experienced at this time as 'part of a sequence of emotions that led from dread to reassurance', but was not necessary for a spiritual life. This had reversed by the mid-seventeenth century when despair was essential to salvation, by the nineteenth century a form of it had become melancholia, which in turn developed into depression in the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> The issue of whether there is any continuity from melancholia to depression has been explored by Somogy Varga who comes to the conclusion that there are some similarities.<sup>65</sup>

Despair has also been examined from the point of view of the allied field of medical humanities. Natalie Calder, for example, has demonstrated that William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations* addresses the mental health of the medieval reader suffering from despair.<sup>66</sup> By looking through both medical and religious lenses, Iona

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Coda' in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 249-266, pp. 250-1.

<sup>64</sup> Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pbk 2017), p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> Somogy Varga, 'From Melancholia to Depression: Ideas on a Possible Continuity', *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* 20:2 (2013), 141-155.

<sup>66</sup> Natalie Calder, 'Remedies for despair: considering mental health in late medieval England' in *Medical Paratexts from Medieval to Modern: Dissecting the Page*, ed. by Hannah C. Tweed, and Diane G. Scott (Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 93-106.

McCleery decides that the fifteenth-century writings of King Duarte of Portugal show that his form of despair is both sin and illness.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Philippa Byrne's 2017 paper 'Despair and Presumption in Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth-Century Pastoral Care' puts the case that much pastoral advice did not acknowledge how hard it could be to balance the paths between emphasising God's punishment and mercy, despair and presumption. Instead, she points to works for Cistercians with instructive exempla. Some of these are stories demonstrating the consequences of what happens when pastors give rash or harsh advice without thinking about the effect it will have – similar to Margery Kempe's experiences discussed above. Byrne's point is that what these writers saw as important, which the pastoral writers did not, was the need for sensitivity when taking and responding to confession. However, the Latin texts I examine in chapter one of this thesis, including Chobham's *Summa de arte praedicandi* and Grosseteste's *Deus Est*, which Byrne also discusses, do I think show some understanding of the complexity and potentially serious consequences of the pastoral role.<sup>68</sup>

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### 3. The Evolution of this Thesis

This finished thesis is not at all what I envisioned it to be at the start of the project and this section reflects on the decisions I made and why I chose some paths over others. By explaining the chronology of these decisions, I hope to enlighten the reader as to why some things which might be obvious now, only became evident to me as my research progressed.

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<sup>67</sup> Iona McCleery, 'Both "Illness and Temptation of the Enemy"; Melancholy, the Medieval Patient and the Writings of King Duarte of Portugal (r. 1433-38)', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 1 (2009), 163–78.

<sup>68</sup> Philippa Byrne, 'Despair and Presumption in Late Twelfth- and Early Thirteenth-Century Pastoral Care', *Viator*, 48 (2017), 151–68.

Originally entitled ‘Medieval Spiritual Despair: The Transition of English Perspectives on Salvation’, the genesis for this thesis began with my undergraduate research project on the concepts of grace and predestination in Old English poetry. My subsequent MA dissertation compared the extent to which ordinary lay people were informed about predestination through sermons and the more spiritually ambitious through the fourteenth-century *The Pricking of Love* [hereafter *Pricking*]. My findings were that it was pastorally impractical and ill advised to inform most people about the doctrine that whatever they do God has already pre-ordained whether they will be saved or not. For most, this could lead to debilitating spiritual despair. In contrast however, devotional literature like *Pricking* was more likely to address the concept.

My initial proposal for this thesis was to develop the focus on despair through a long durée analysis from the medieval to early modern. This timeline could have included works from Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* and Guillaume de Lorris’s and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* through to Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* as well as works by John Bradford, John Fisher, and William Tyndale.<sup>69</sup> However, this long time line proved to be unwieldy, and my main focus of interest was always in how the spiritually interested laity might have been taught to encounter a specifically theological, rather than emotional, loss of hope. I had therefore planned to look at how spiritual despair was addressed in other fourteenth-century texts and manuals and how later readers might have engaged with these through manuscript marginalia. This would have been a means to consider how areas of early

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<sup>69</sup> For the view that Burton dispels despair with wonder see Stephanie Shirilan, ‘Exhilarating the Spirits: Burtonian Study as a Cure for Scholarly Melancholy’, *Studies in Philology*, 111 (2014), 486–520; A post-Reformation sermon on despair by Richard Hooker demonstrates the view that God can still be found when someone is in the depths of doubt and despair because of their desire to find Him, regardless of intellect, emotion or change of behaviour. See Andrea Russell, ‘Finding God in the Darkness: A Fresh Look at Richard Hooker’s “A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect”’, *Perichoresis*, 12 (2014), 77–92.

thinking on despair were retained, rejected, or altered by, later writers. Texts to be considered included *The Book of Margery Kempe*; the *Book of Privy Counselling*; Chastising of God's Children; *Cloud of Unknowing*; *Prick of Conscience*; St Birgitta's Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God; the translation of *Documento Spirituale*, known as *Cleanness of Sowle*; the Middle English version of William Flete's *Remedy Against Temptation*; Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*; Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and *Pricking of Love*; and Richard Rolle's *Form of Perfect Living*, as well as the Middle English *The Mirror of Simple Souls*.<sup>70</sup>

Early on in the project however, I realised that it would be beneficial to look at some of the Latin penitentials and *Summae* developed in response to the 1215 Lateran Council ruling that everyone should confess once a year. I also thought it would be useful to examine some of the Latin inward-looking, contemplative cenobitic literature aimed at spiritual growth in similar ways to some of the later vernacular writers listed above. This longer medieval history allowed me to establish a sense of how the professed taught and were taught about despair and the kinds of issues these vernacular writers were working with as their general material. This approach also highlighted that definitions and responses to despair altered according to both for whom the author was writing and their intended spiritual purpose, rather than being a smooth, continuous change in one direction. This contextual examination revealed the extent to which despair was considered dangerous for the laity and allowed me to more clearly see and pursue the positive, paradoxical and ambiguous view of despair in the cenobitic and later vernacular responses. In the first chapter I therefore aimed to establish how despair was

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of how *Cleanness of Sowle* has been misidentified and was actually a translation of *Documento Spirituale*, a dictation taken by William Flete from Catherine of Siena in 1377, see Jennifer N. Brown, 'The Many Misattributions of Catherine of Siena: Beyond the Orchard in England', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41 (2015), 67–84, 69.

treated in doctrinal terms in pastoral manuals written by different writers for their layered audience of friars, priests, confessors and preachers with the ultimate aim of dissemination to the laity. Whereas these Latin texts take a theoretical approach to despair, the cenobitic and vernacular writings discussed in the following chapters were written with a more direct audience in mind – real people looking for a deeper relationship with the divine in ways which might lead them towards, and through, desperation. And while they might demonstrate an awareness of the doctrinal thought expressed in pastoral treatises, as well as how despair was utilised within a monastic environment, many vernacular texts also developed their own understanding of, and responses to, the issue – work by St Bernard often looms large, for example.

When turning to the vernacular literature, I first examined Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* [hereafter *Simple Souls*], originally encountered through an edition of the Middle English and an early twentieth-century translation of it. While my first idea was to compare *Simple Souls* with Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love* [hereafter *Revelations*], I soon discovered that some of the meanings in *Simple Souls* were unclear, particularly with regard to ideas of spiritual despair. Because I was grappling to establish meanings in this way, I found it valuable to both expand and contract my focus. My investigations broadened by looking at the three extant manuscript versions, the Latin translation of the Middle English, modern translations of the French, and editions of the French and continental Latin. This enabled me to get an understanding of how these various readers themselves understood and interpreted their source. I was then able to understand that the available readings often depended on the intention and background of the reader as well as that of the writer. Because of this attention to the layers of readers, interpreters, and translators, *Simple Souls* became my

main focus of study in part two. Julian's *Revelations* consequently became less important but, in conjunction with examples from some other texts, provided a useful counterpoint for demonstrating how vernacular writers chose to overtly address despair for a lay audience in a way that *Simple Souls* did not.

I further found that the manuscript copies of *Simple Souls* led to previously overlooked evidence of a potential lay readership. Even though the conceptual focus of this thesis is spiritual despair, it is also about the mutability of meaning due to differences in manuscripts and their readers. I therefore decided that the codicology was a valuable area to examine in greater detail in chapter four since a non-Carthusian audience would have a different understanding of despair – one similar to the teachings I found in the pastoral literature discussed in chapter one of this thesis. As a result, I think that a case can be made for the Middle English version to be seen as a possible focus of resistance for some people against the established Church in a similar way to that imagined by the author of the original French. My expansion of focus on *Simple Souls* in this way led to a consequent contraction in the number of other texts I was able to investigate and to a further concentration on the particular language used by authors and translators. My close reading of several parts of the text discussed in chapter five led me to realise that I might more comprehensively understand the various options available to a wider Middle English readership through examining the semantic reach of some of the terms used. It was therefore in the final stage of this thesis that my thinking crystallised into the realisation that all of it was ultimately about the mutability of language and meaning. I realised that these shift according to writer and audience and that the audience itself also shifts according to whether it is seen as the authors' ideal, intended, or imagined reader or the actual recipients, all of which, as will be seen in the second

part of this thesis, can only be hazily understood. Had I started from this premise initially, both parts of the thesis would have more consistently explored the linguistic and semantic history and background of key terms associated with despair. It was only by going through this evolutionary and exploratory process that I was able to fully realise the complexities involved in the creation and finding of meaning in devotional literature of this kind.

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#### 4. The premise and structure of this thesis

The above studies are all useful for providing an understanding of what has been written about despair in medieval literature and teasing out some of the conceptual complexities. What they have not tended to do, with the partial exception of Watson, is explore how ideas of despair have been expressed in terms of the devotional language in use by individual writers, translators, and within particular kinds of manuscript compilations. This thesis examines not only what has been said about despair, but undertakes some close readings to determine how language is used to express it, what that language allows subsequent readers and translators to do with it, and how it can point to a network of further meanings and connotations.

Split into two parts, the first is concerned with Latin pastoral and theological texts which approach despair from different perspectives, and the second with Middle English vernacular theology and mysticism. In order to understand how some medieval writers defined despair in more detail, and to discern the different types of pastoral work associated with despair, chapter one discusses a range of thirteenth and fourteenth-century texts by Robert Grosseteste (c.1168-1253), Thomas Chobham (c.1160-c.1236), William Peraldus (c.1200-c.1271), Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274), and John Bromyard



(d. c.1352). Chosen for their attention to despair, this chapter compares how these writers variously defined the concept. It explores how they differently instructed confessors, priests, and students on how they should and should not convey the idea of despair, and any acceptable responses, to their audience. By briefly examining some of the manuscript and circulation contexts of these works, as well as the language used, I will also demonstrate how each one reflects not only the individual concerns and purpose of the writers within their own religious or scholastic contexts, but also their intended or imagined audience. My transcription, translation, and interpretation of parts of Bromyard's work in particular is new to the scholarly discussion on vernacular devotional writing, as is my analysis of the layers of audiences actually involved in texts broadly categorised as pastoral manuals. By looking at how the intermediaries might have used the texts available to them, I show how their own creativity was important in conveying meaning. Following a similar approach to that taken by Michael Sells, Vincent Gillespie, and Maggie Ross, I demonstrate how a seemingly commonplace term, previously discussed only in relation to where it has come from, rather than to where it might lead, is less didactic and potentially more open to creative interpretation than usually considered.

Chapter two discusses texts with a more theological basis by the Benedictine monk St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), and the Cistercian monks, St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-67). These eleventh and twelfth-century monastic and cenobitic texts were sometimes conveyed directly to the intended audience either as letters and written manuscripts, or through sermons which were later converted into written form for a wider distribution. They were often intended to be a tool for the reader to use in their private devotion and internal examination of sins. This

inward focus, while related to repentance, was not only part of the sacrament of confession, but a daily practice to face the realities of one's own soul. And this is where the propensity for despair might not only arise as a result, but be actively used as a means to get closer to God. We will see that the effects of the language used in some texts evoke fear and trembling, while others provide some amelioration and consolation to a soul in a state of distress, and consider these two approaches within their community contexts. This chapter also reconsiders how ideas of artifice and drama relate to these monastic texts, as well as the extent to which they embody pseudo-Dionysian concepts. Unlike Bernard McGinn, my interest here lies not in proving or disproving that pseudo-Dionysius was a source text, but in acknowledging that the monastics' work reflected his perspective, possibly earlier than is usually thought. Commensurate with my open approach, this chapter also highlights how the *vita contemplativa* writers discussed here altered their approach to despair over time, showing an awareness of, and responsiveness to, their community context and wellbeing.

The monastic's internal focus became of interest to spiritually interested lay people later in the medieval period. This was especially true for those whom, like Margery, the sacrament of confession increased a sense of sinfulness and sorrow without providing commensurate community stability or support. With these points in mind, the main focus of part two is fourteenth and fifteenth-century vernacular texts which were originally written by women outside of male-sanctioned religious groups, possibly for lay people with similar interests to their own. Both the Middle English *De Mirroure of Simple Soules* (hereafter *Simple Soules*), and Julian of Norwich's two versions of her divine revelations, provide the reader with an understanding of the nature and difficulties inherent in pursuing spiritual love and divine connection, but they do so in very different ways.

*Simple Souls* was translated by someone known only as MN from the Middle French *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames Anienties et qui Seulement Demourent en Vouloir et Desir D'Amour* written by Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) in either the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The French was translated into several other European continental languages (which I am not concerned with here), as well as Latin, and MN's version of *Simple Souls* was itself translated into Latin by Carthusian monk Richard Methley (c.1450-c.1527). While it is sometimes necessary to examine how some terms are expressed in the original French and both Latin versions as well as the modern translations, my intention is not to determine any definite idea of what was meant, but to explore the different readings potentially available, particularly as expressed in the English vernacular version. This medieval translation provides a useful starting point for analysing how Porete's conceptual language was understood and interpreted by her nearer contemporaries.

It should be stated at the outset that no version of *Simple Souls* ever overtly names or addresses the concept of spiritual despair. It is a dense and paradoxical text which deliberately and consciously defies simple interpretation and allows for, even demands that, the reader create their own network and system of spiritual understanding. By analysing some of this language in comparison with other texts which do overtly address despair, especially *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *A Revelation of Love*, I will demonstrate that *Simple Souls* is obliquely imbued with ideas and concerns related to the experience of spiritual despair.<sup>71</sup> Where both language and concepts expressed in *Simple*

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<sup>71</sup> This approach is not new and has been recently employed by Louise Nelstrop to show that both Richard Rolle and Julian are writing about deification even though they do not explicitly state that is what they are doing. Her method of investigation is however different from my own. See Louise Nelstrop, *On Deification and Sacred Eloquence: Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

*Souls* can be categorised by the apaphatic, by notions of negativity, obscurity, occlusion, and the internal journey of someone set apart from Christian society, Julian of Norwich's texts appear to be cataphatic, more positive and concrete, their meanings seem on the surface to be clearer, and although they too are concerned with the inner nature of the embodied soul, they also ensure the reader is aware that they are part of the whole Christian community. This means that where Julian's works can be seen as instructional tools with a fairly fixed meaning as far as despair is concerned, *Simple Souls* is an ideal vehicle for exploring the covert concept of spiritual despair in more creative ways. This complex text is the perfect focus for investigating the equally complicated concept of despair because it too evades simplicity and clarity.

I am particularly interested in the semantic range and networks created in Middle English by individual writers and translators, and between writers who address similar seams of interest, sharing the same connotations attached to certain words. Part one looks at how meaning shifted even in the codified system of Medieval theological Latin, and briefly discusses the apophaticism of pseudo-Dionysius where language can only form 'that speech about God which is the failure of speech'.<sup>72</sup> Part two examines how *Simple Souls* addresses this problem throughout the text, where God can never be fully known and 'noon ne kan o word of seie, ne alle þo of paradise oon oonli poynt atteyne ne vndirstande, for al þe knowinge þat þei haue of him'.<sup>73</sup> It considers to what extent MN shares the same devotional semantic network with Julian and other writers, and how

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<sup>72</sup> D. Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 19-20; For a discussion on how *Simple Souls* utilises this apophaticism see Nicholas Watson, 'Misrepresenting the Untranslatable: Marguerite Porete and the *Mirouer Des Simples Ames*', *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies*, vol. 12 (1991), 124-37.

<sup>73</sup> Marilyn Doiron, '*De Mirroure of Simple Soules: An Edition and Commentary*' (doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1964), p. 30. This edition was also published as Marilyn Doiron, ed., "'The Mirror of Simple Souls': A Middle English Translation' in *Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta*, 5 (1968), 243-355, but the thesis has a more comprehensive introduction and will be used unless otherwise stated.

they might appropriate a term with an accepted meaning in one context and subvert it to encompass a wider range of meanings and semantic connections. This then allows for the consideration of the extent to which readers, listeners and translators project their own concerns onto the devotional material they encounter. By examining some previously unrelated codicological aspects of two of the extant *Simple Souls* manuscripts, I consider the possibility that one of them in particular might have been available to a wider audience than usually thought, with the potential to include laypeople and women. By going on to use the work of medieval and modern translators to analyse the text, I shed some new light on how individual backgrounds and beliefs impact the variety of meanings available to the reader. My close readings of some excerpts and specific words used by Julian and in *Simple Souls* further demonstrates how meanings can be open and shift according to a variety of factors including time and individual or group perspective. Even allowing for these changes, paradox and opposites are often inherent in the same language at the same time, making the idea and use of despair much more complex and transient than can usually be expressed in large studies of the subject.

Parts one and two show how despair, and the language used to describe it, was dealt with in separate time periods, and by distinctly different writers with a range of agendas. However, my contention is that the themes of compassion, complexity of meaning, and the difficulties associated with discussing despair, can be seen throughout the texts discussed in this thesis. My focus is on the complexity of the concept and language of despair, how it can be used to mean different things to different people for different purposes, and at its heart is the paradox that the texts I consider – and even this

thesis itself – all have to rely on language to elucidate and communicate thoughts and ideas which consistently defy adequate expression.

## Chapter 1: Foundational Latin Pastoral Texts and Despair – Causes and Remedies for the Greatest Sin

This chapter considers how some foundational Latin treatises of the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries define and treat despair. It will firstly set out the biographical and manuscript context to provide a sense of the audiences for whom the authors were writing and for what purpose, as well as how some of the texts might have been utilised. This will then provide the background for a summary of the textual premise, and an analysis of those sections specifically addressing despair.

Most of the key texts of interest to this study were intended for preachers and confessors who had to be taught the theological and pastoral essentials outside of the university system. The thirteenth-century was a period of change in terms of the levels of education of the parish priest. Early in the century, he was likely to have been picked from within the village according to his character rather than any specific levels of learning or literacy, and so had to be imbued with the values of the Church from without.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, some of these texts are early attempts to educate local priests through a variety of means including grammar schools and deanery meetings at the lower end, with higher levels of learning taking place within cathedral schools and universities.<sup>2</sup> The main texts aimed directly at the English parish priest are supplemented by Dominican treatises generated across Europe, some of which became important reference sources within the Dominican education system. The secular pastoral texts of concern are *Deus Est, Templum Domini*, and *Perambulavit Iudas* by Robert Grosseteste

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph W. Goering, 'The Changing Face of the Village Parish II: The Thirteenth Century', in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. by J. A. Raftis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), pp. 323–34 (pp. 328–9); Andrew Reeves, *Religious Education in Thirteenth-Century England: The Creed and Articles of Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Reeves, *Religious Education*, pp. 56–60.

and Thomas Chobham's *Summae de confessorum, de arte praedicandi* and *de commendatione virtute et expirtation vitiorum*; the Dominican texts are the *Summae* on the vices and virtues by William Peraldus; Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*; and John Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum*.<sup>3</sup> According to Boyle, there was a hiatus between the issuing of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council *Inter Cetera* constitution which ordered bishops to set up groups of friars who could preach in parishes, along with the associated tasks of taking confession and giving penance, and further mention of the friar's responsibilities in papal letters of instruction to each diocese. After many letters had been issued since 1217, Honorius III wrote to all 'archbishops, bishops, and prelates' in 1221 finally including the mandate that they should 'allow the preachers to hear confession and counsel souls'. With this dual role of 'preaching and counselling', Boyle concludes that they were then in a position to follow through from preaching to ensuring 'conversion of heart' and 'a new way of life'. This imperative led Dominicans who had been taught at the *Studium generale* or *Studium Provinciale* to write pastoral manuals for 'the general body of the [Dominican] brethren, whose chief occupation was preaching and counselling souls'.<sup>4</sup>

The language used in these manuals therefore had to make sense to non-university educated audiences, a proportion of whom could have had little theological knowledge and basic Latin. Many of the definitions of despair are from the vices and virtues framework set out by Gregory the Great, with lists of words showing lines of descent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Snyder has discussed Aquinas in relation to despair in Susan Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 12 (1965), 18–59; Siegfried Wenzel discusses works by all the writers discussed here, but with reference to *acedia* rather than despair specifically in Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Boyle, 'Pastoral Training in the Time of Fishacre', *New Blackfriars*, 80 (1999), 345–53 (pp. 346–7).

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction to this thesis.



Because they were providing basic instruction, the presumption is that they will demonstrate a clarity of thought and language which would require little interpretation, but it will be seen that even everyday language used in some of the simplest of texts allow the reader to be either literal or creative according to his own inclination and capacity. And while all authors are ultimately writing for transmission to the laity, they differ on the precise language of despair they are willing to impart.

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## 1. Contextual summary of authors' background and roles

Of the central writers examined here, two held strategic positions of high office within the English Church. Much has been written about Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168-1253) elsewhere, but the key issue of interest to this study is that before he was twenty he was part of the household of the bishop of Hereford, the cathedral school of which was known for teaching 'Greek and Arabic science' where he may have had his first introduction to Aristotle, the works of whom influenced some of Grosseteste's texts discussed here.<sup>6</sup> From around 1214 or 15 he taught theology at Oxford University, held what became the first chancellorship post, and in 1229-30 helped to establish a theology school for Franciscans.<sup>7</sup> At around the same time he was also made archdeacon of Leicester, canon of Lincoln and prebend of St Margaret's in Leicester, but resigned all the positions that involved the care of souls in 1231 because he felt unable to fulfil the role to a sufficiently high quality.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after this however, in 1235, his pastoral responsibilities increased when he was appointed Bishop of Lincoln in 1235, a position

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<sup>6</sup> James McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. xi.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Boyle, 'Robert Grosseteste and the Pastoral Care' in *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), pp. 3-51 (p. 4).

in which he remained until his death in 1253.<sup>9</sup> As bishop, Grosseteste took the view that he was ‘responsible for every soul in his diocese’, which he demonstrated by travelling around it early in his appointment to instruct the clergy in how to ‘preach by word and instruct by example’. He also obtained permission to use educated Franciscan and Benedictine friars to instruct the clergy and supplement their work.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Thomas Chobham (c.1160-c.1236) had a background in University teaching in Paris before his association with Salisbury Cathedral in the household of Richard Poore, Bishop of Salisbury from 1198. He may have been Salisbury Cathedral's teaching master in response to the Fourth Lateran Council’s eleventh constitution that cathedral churches should ‘instruct without charge the clerics of the cathedral church and other poor scholars’, which would account for the text book style of his *summae*.<sup>11</sup> Although never reaching the office of bishop, Chobham did end his career as subdean, with responsibilities over those serving in the parishes. He may have been penitentiary of the cathedral while he wrote his *Summa confessorum*, and his works reflect an approach of moderation and temperance towards penitents.<sup>12</sup> He first demonstrated this in his inaugural Paris lecture which warned teachers against ‘hasty action, inveterate ignorance, humiliating faintheartedness, rebellion of life, desire of vainglory, perversity

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<sup>9</sup> McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. xi; For a comprehensive overview see R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Boyle, ‘Robert Grosseteste and the Pastoral Care’, p. 8; McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. xi, 47 - 50; Robert Grosseteste, ‘Mandate from the Bishop of Lincoln to his Archdeacons 1235 x 1253 (Undateable)’ in *Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church 1205-1313*, ed. by F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 479 - 80.

<sup>11</sup> William Hopkins Campbell, “‘*Dyvers Kyndes of Religion in Sondry Partes of the Ilande*’: *The Geography of Pastoral Care in Thirteenth-Century England*’ (unpublished doctoral thesis: St Andrews, 2006), p. 32; ‘On Schoolmasters for the poor’ in *Fourth Lateran Council Constitutions*, <<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Goering, ‘The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession’, *Traditio*, 69 (2004), 175–227 (p. 216).

of doctrine, and the sting of envy'.<sup>13</sup>

The Dominicans were given their mandate to preach and hear confessions after the first secular educational tract of Chobham's discussed here, and were expected to nurture their professional development throughout their careers by the mandatory attendance at school lectures.<sup>14</sup> Little is known of the life of William Peraldus (c.1200–c.1271) beyond the fact that he was celebrated for his preaching, was possibly prior of the Lyon convent, and that his treatises on the vices and virtues were widely circulated within his lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Scholastic and theologian Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274) taught, and was taught, in Paris before becoming a teacher in Dominican schools, Preacher General of Naples, and tasked with setting up a *studium* in Santa Sabina, Rome. This school was focused on a theological rather than pastoral education, and is where he may have first had thoughts about changing the standard Dominican method of teaching practical theology, to a system that combined it within a wider theological framework.<sup>16</sup>

Details of the John Bromyard who wrote the *Summa praedicatorum* are vague. Scholars have often confused an older Dominican friar based at Hereford priory with a younger friar of the same name also based there. Recent research has determined that the *Summa praedicatorum* was being distributed prior to 1352, making the author John Bromyard the elder, since the younger was only ordained a priest in 1350 and would not

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<sup>13</sup> John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes & Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle*, 2 vols. (Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 111, 114.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas', in *The Gilson Lectures on Thomas Aquinas*, 1982 reprint (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), pp. 19–45 (p. 19); William H. Campbell, 'Franciscan Preaching in Thirteenth-Century England', in *The Friars in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 2007 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 25–40 (p. 28); Leonard Boyle, 'Notes on the Education of the Fratres Communes in the Dominican Order in the Thirteenth Century' in *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), pp. 249-67 (p. 256).

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on the veracity of the available evidence see Antoine Dondaine, 'Guillaume Peyraut, vie et ouvrages', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18 (1948), 162-236 (pp. 169, 187-8).

<sup>16</sup> Boyle, 'The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas', pp. 25-38.

have had the time to create such a large work.<sup>17</sup> Peter Binkley and others have assumed that Bromyard died in 1352 due to a Hereford *Super cathedram* confessional license in that name being transferred to someone else in 1352.<sup>18</sup> Alex Holland has suggested that this need not be the case, and could simply mean that he moved or was otherwise unable to carry out the confessional role.<sup>19</sup> He also suggests that it could refer to John the younger being made a confessor sooner than would normally be the case due to the depletion of friars caused by the Black Death.<sup>20</sup> However, the *Summa praedicatorum* demonstrates knowledge unique to a university education such as civil and canon law and administrative procedures appropriate to a preacher-general, which would make John Bromyard the elder more likely. Holland thinks that as preacher-general he would have been able to preach and take confession without permission from the prior, and evidence from the *Summa praedicatorum* shows he also had business abroad.<sup>21</sup> His experience was therefore varied enough to understand the vicissitudes of human nature, and the *exempla in desperatio* show he knew what might motivate reluctant penitents. Specific dating of composition is also a problem, with Boyle placing it somewhere between 1327 and 1348, and Keith Walls assuming an earlier date, but giving no precise timespan.<sup>22</sup> Holland infers that Walls means ‘the late 1320s’, but provides further

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<sup>17</sup> Alex Holland, ‘John Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum*: An Exploration of Late-Medieval Falsity Through a Fourteenth-Century Preaching Handbook’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent, 2018), p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Binkley, ‘John Bromyard and the Hereford Dominicans’ in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. by Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Leiden, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 255–66; (pp. 261-2).

<sup>19</sup> Holland, ‘John Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum*’, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Holland, ‘John Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum*’, pp. 21-2.

<sup>21</sup> Holland, ‘John Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum*’, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Keith Walls, *John Bromyard on Church and State: The Summa Praedicatorum and Early Fourteenth-Century England. A Dominican’s Books and Guide for Preachers*. (York: Clayton-Thorpe, 2007), pp. 189-193; Leonard E. Boyle, ‘The Date of the *Summa Praedicatorum* of John Bromyard’, *Speculum*, 48 (1973), 533–37.

evidence from BL MS Royal 7 E iv., the earliest known manuscript, that it was ‘produced or acquired before the middle of the fourteenth century’ by ‘the precentor, Thomas Horstede, for Rochester Priory’ who was ordained a priest in 1333 and who lent it out in 1390.<sup>23</sup>

All the authors discussed here were deeply concerned that the clergymen or friars tasked with spiritually advising the laity were properly equipped to do so, and the texts discussed here relate to that aim. With a couple of exceptions, most of the texts were intended as guides or reference manuals for either all members of the Dominican order or the parochial clergy. In general, the works of Grosseteste and Chobham can be seen in the light of providing locally sanctioned instruction, whereas the works by the Dominicans are written from a more theologically motivated perspective. Peraldus’ treatise is aimed at the ‘*Fratres communes*’, common brothers who were not concerned with the higher level *Studium provinciale* or *generale* schools, but who had to be taught enough theology to preach and hear confessions within the lay community, while Aquinas’ work is probably aimed at the higher schools.<sup>24</sup> In all cases however, our texts are aimed at intermediaries who will be expected to have contact with the laity at some point, and so any discussion of despair must be considered to have some relevance to them, and not only to the contemplative monastic long known to be prone to its lure through spiritual sloth (*acedia*).

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## 2. Manuscript contexts

In contrast to the ten full text versions of Grosseteste’s *Deus Est (Deus)*, currently

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<sup>23</sup> Holland, ‘Summa Praedicatorum’, pp. 122-3, 133-2.

<sup>24</sup> Boyle, ‘Notes on the Education of the Fratres Communes’, p. 253.

extant, there are over ninety of *Templum Dei* (*Templum*), with the extant manuscripts for both texts having been produced between around 1250 and 1500. The date of *Templum* is still unclear. Boyle places it between 1239 and 1246, when Grosseteste was a bishop concerned with the education of his clergy.<sup>25</sup> He travelled around his diocese in 1238 in order to instruct by example, and this trip may have clarified the need for an accessible and easily remembered text. Writing a few years after Boyle however, Goering and Mantello put it much earlier, between 1220 and 1230 due to the ‘content, sources, and style’, while Fritz Kemmler thinks it possible that Grosseteste wrote *Templum* before 1235, while he was archdeacon of Leicester.<sup>26</sup> Most recently, Goering has considered the view that Grosseteste may have written *Templum* even earlier, while he was working for Hugh Foliot, archdeacon of Shropshire in the 1190s.<sup>27</sup> Whichever was the case, he would have been aware of the level and mode of education required by parish priests through his own experiences of teaching, either before or after he had ultimate responsibility for a diocese.

The view that Grosseteste wrote *Templum* while holding a pastoral position with some responsibility for other priests, is strengthened by the following opening passage:

‘Templum Dei sanctum est, quod estis uos’ (prima ad Corinthios, tercio). Sermo iste, quamuis omnes tangat quos spiritus Dei inhabitare debet spiritualiter, specialiter tamen sacerdotibus conuenit quorum corpora templum sunt spiritus Sancti. Singulis quidem diebus templum Domini ingredimur, ita Christus singulis diebus corpora sacerdotum sacramentaliter ingreditur.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Boyle, ‘Robert Grosseteste and the Pastoral Care’, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Boyle, ‘Robert Grosseteste and the Pastoral Care’, p. 10; Robert Grosseteste, *Templum Dei*, edited from MS. 27 of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, ed. by Joseph Goering and F.A.C. Mantello (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), p. 6. All further references are to this edition; Fritz Kemmler, ‘*Exempla*’ in *Context: A Historical and Critical Study of Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s ‘Handlyng Synne’* (Tubingen: Gunter Nar Verlag, 1984), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Goering, ‘The Internal Forum’, p. 185, n.30.

<sup>28</sup> Grosseteste, *Templum*, prologue, p. 29.

[‘The temple of the Lord is holy, which are you’ (1 Cor 3:17). That remark might say the spirit of God should dwell spiritually in all men, yet specifically it is appropriate to priests whose bodies are the temple of the holy spirit. Indeed we enter the temple of the Lord every day, thus Christ enters the bodies of priests sacramentally every day.]

Of all the texts discussed here, *Templum* is the most emphatic in not only defining the parish priest as the intended reader, but also projecting the required expectations of a divine representative onto him. The priest should be a temple of God in miniature through receipt of the sacrament, showing ‘moderation in all things’ and be strong enough to ‘support what the whole world is unable to comprehend’ with ‘strong supporting walls of magnanimity, constancy, freedom from worry, and confidence’.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to *Deus Est*, James Ginther has narrowed down both Wenzel’s 1216-1250 and James McAvoy’s 1241-1250 dating to it to 1229-35, with a *terminus post quem* of 1229/30, when Grosseteste was teaching theology at Oxford, and therefore before he had direct responsibilities for the clergy tasked with the care of souls.<sup>30</sup> Even so, Wenzel introduces his edition of *Deus Est* as a ‘technical treatise’ and practical guide for taking confession, and one of the ‘pastoral manuals’ responding to the requirements of the fourth Lateran council. He considers that the theology and ‘history of salvation’ Grosseteste sets out, before enumerating and explaining the sins and their required penances, makes it more ‘sharply focused on confession’ than *Templum*, and James

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Templi quidem corporalis fundamentum sunt renes et ea que corpus uegetant, cuius pauimentum est omnis temperancia prohibens ab omnibus inconuenientibus terre inhabitantem. Parietes sunt latera, dorsum, pectus, quorum ornamentum est fortitudo quadruplex, scilicet magnanimitas, constancia, securitas, fiducia.’

[The kidneys [seat of the emotions] are the foundation of the bodily temple and they give life/energy to the body, the floor of which is moderation of all things, restraining everything from not conforming. The sides are the walls, of which the fourfold strength is the ornament, magnanimity, constancy, freedom from worry, confidence], Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> James R. Ginther, ‘Robert Grosseteste’s Theology of Pastoral Care’, in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Middle Ages (1200-1500)*, ed. by Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 95–122 (pp. 103-6); For a brief overview of Grosseteste’s time at Oxford see McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 154 - 156.

McEvoy considers that it is aimed at ‘learned priests’.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Ginther takes issue with the idea of *Deus* being a practical guide, using the sources, rhetoric, and the manuscript context to argue that it was ‘written for a theologically literate audience’ within ‘the schools and universities’, and was therefore intended for scholarly scrutiny in a similar manner to the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St-Victor and Peter Lombard.<sup>32</sup> The theological and rhetorical structure need not, however, preclude its practical use. Even if *Deus* was written for use within the university, the date that Ginther puts forward means that Grosseteste was teaching within the Franciscan school, an order which was expected to employ their theological learning in a practical way through preaching. The fact that, as bishop of Lincoln, Grosseteste later used the friars within his own diocese to educate the secular clergy indicates that he was confident they would be reliable in both their theological understanding and pastoral abilities.<sup>33</sup>

Both *Templum* and *Deus* were bound with other sermons and theological treatises. All extant manuscripts containing *Deus* were originally owned by monastic houses such as Westminster Abbey and Merton Priory in Sussex.<sup>34</sup> There is some evidence that *Templum* had a wider range of owners including parish priests. Of the sixty-five manuscripts of *Templum* that Goering and Mantello examined, most reproduce what appears to be the original diagrammatic format that aids memory and recall.<sup>35</sup> It is

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<sup>31</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, ‘Robert Grosseteste’s Treatise on Confession, “Deus Est”’, *Franciscan Studies*, 30 (1970), 218–93 (pp. 218–221). All further references are to this edition; McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 142.

<sup>32</sup> Ginther, ‘Robert Grosseteste’s Theology of Pastoral Care’, pp. 105–6.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of Grosseteste’s use of Franciscan and Benedictine friars see Alexander Murray, ‘Confession as a Historical Source in the Thirteenth Century’ in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages. Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. by R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 275–322 (pp. 305–322).

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of each one see, Grosseteste, *Deus*, pp. 224–7.

<sup>35</sup> Grosseteste, *Templum*, pp. 8, 14 – 15.



thought that the text might have been circulated within the diocese as additional practical material to support Grosseteste's 1239 statutes for Lincoln due to the fact that in Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS. 27 (used as the base text for Goering and Mantello's edition) they are bound together with a range of pastoral material in the original quire.<sup>36</sup> Regarding ownership and use: it has been corrected by three different hands; has glosses, verses and notes by other hands; and various flyleaf inscriptions indicate that it was used by a curate at Sompting parish church, Chichester.<sup>37</sup> Another text, Oxford Bodleian Ashmole 1280, is described by Andrew Reeves as bound with some Anglo-Norman translations of sermons by Maurice de Sully, Bishop of Paris (1190-1196), some exempla, texts on catechesis and taking mass.<sup>38</sup> In addition, according to Reeves, the volume is small enough to carry, measuring 11x15cm and the colours used in the illuminations are red, blue and green, which, he says, denotes the hand of secular clergy rather than mendicant friars, who are known for using red and blue.<sup>39</sup> These examples indicate that *Templum*, along with its neighbours in the manuscript, was intended as a practical guide for parish priests to provide proper pastoral care for their parishioners.<sup>40</sup> BL Royal MS 8 B IV is also small in size, written in a personal hand without guidelines, on poor quality, different sized offcuts. Because

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<sup>36</sup> Grosseteste, *Templum*, pp. 18-19; See also M. R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Emmanuel College, A Descriptive Catalogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), pp. 22-27, <<https://archive.org/stream/westernmanuscrip00emmauoft#page/22/mode/2up>> [accessed 8 December 2016].

<sup>37</sup> Daniel S. Taylor and Joseph Goering, 'The *Summulae* of Bishops Walter de Cantilupe (1240) and Peter Quinel (1287)', *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 576-94 (p. 577); *Templum*, pp. 16 - 18, 20, 21. See also Andrew Reeves, 'Teaching the Creed and Articles of Faith in England' in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Middle Ages (1200-1500)*, ed. by Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> Reeves, *Religious Education*, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Reeves, *Religious Education*, p. 81; For a discussion of the attributes in terms of size and colour associated with mendicant books, see Mary O'Carroll, 'A Thirteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook: Studies in MS Laud Misc. 51' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Bedford College, University of London, 1983), pp. 130-2.

<sup>40</sup> Reeves, 'Teaching the Creed', pp. 41-72, 58.

this quire is so different to the surrounding texts in script and support, it may originally have been intended as a single set of notes for personal use.

The reader is explicitly told in the prologue that he needs to exhibit a capacity to learn (*docilitas*) as well as foreknowledge, circumspection, and caution. This, and Alastair Minnis' theory that it was 'taught in the vernacular', indicates that *Templum* might have been intended either as a reminder to the uneducated or recalcitrant priest, or as a primer for those newly ordained but lacking in a formal education.<sup>41</sup> This view is supported by Minnis' observation that 'it is equipped with enough diagrams and tables to guide even the dimmest of priests through the process of confession' and Vincent Gillespie's more kindly framed description of it as 'a masterpiece of compact instruction geared specifically to assisting the humbler members of the parish clergy'.<sup>42</sup> The manuscript pages are always laid out with clear apparatus so that the required subject area can be found quickly, and sentences are generally short and to the point, enabling the contents to be easily read, understood, and remembered. Its influence can be further seen in BL Additional 32578 which contains a fifteenth-century English verse entitled *Templum Domini* alongside the *Prick of Conscience*, also in verse.<sup>43</sup> Whilst the English *Templum* is not a direct translation of the Latin, it does use the conceit of the temple, and

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<sup>41</sup> 'Tectum uero domus est capud suis sensibus, cuius ornamentum est prudentia in suis quatuor speciebus, que sunt prouidencia, circumspectio, caucio, docilitas.', Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 29. [In truth the roof of the house is the head to their senses, of which the distinction is four types of prudence, and are providence/foreknowledge, circumspection/careful consideration, caution and readiness to learn/docility.]

Alastair Minnis, '1215-1349: culture and history' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* ed. by Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp 69-89 (p. 74)

<sup>42</sup> Minnis, '1215-1349: culture and history', p. 74; Vincent Gillespie, '*Doctrina and Predicacio: The Design and Function of some Pastoral Manuals*' in *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), pp. 3-20 (p. 7).

<sup>43</sup> For bibliography see Robert R. Raymo, 'Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction' in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. by Albert E. Hartung (New Haven, Conn., 1986), vol. 7, p. 2545 for *Templum domini*, and pp. 2486-92 for *Prick of Conscience*. See also *DIMEV* 1589-1 and 5398-47 respectively via <[www.dimev.net](http://www.dimev.net)> [accessed 23 November 2016].

paraphrases the discussions on hope and despair.<sup>44</sup>

Chobham's *Summa confessorum* of around 1215 was as widely distributed as *Templum*. The fact that the *Summa confessorum* was written then, together with its popularity, demonstrates that there was a pre-existing and previously identified need for practical guidance on confession before Canon twenty-one of the Fourth Lateran Council was issued, and that it was a text that continued to be both relevant and useful.<sup>45</sup> There are over one hundred extant copies of *Summa confessorum* throughout Europe, dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. They range from the 'authentic' and 'improved' (in practice, according to Broomfield, mostly slight changes in word order and usage), to abridged versions prevalent on the continent.<sup>46</sup> Several show signs of ownership by Benedictine houses, and one fourteenth-century copy, Canterbury Cathedral CCA-DCc-LitMs/B/10, appears to have been owned by a canon of Wingham College, also rector of Ickham from 1386, William Blankpayn.<sup>47</sup> His name is clearly on the top right-hand side of the front inside cover, and in the middle of the outside of the

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion on its relation to the Latin see S. Harrison Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln 1235-1253* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 138-40; For the English edition of *Templum domini* see Roberta D. Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle: A Study in the Mediaeval Allegory of the Edifice with Especial Reference to Religious Writings* (La Finestra Editrice, 2010), pp. 99-118.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Summa for Confessors as a Genre, and its Religious intent' in *The Pursuit of Holiness*, ed. by Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 126 in response to Thomas N. Tentler's argument that *summae* are mainly a means for the clergy to exercise control within a legal system. See his chapter 'The Summa for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control', pp. 103 - 126 in the same volume.

<sup>46</sup> Baldwin, *Masters, Princes & Merchants*, p. 26 n. 216; Thomae de Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, ed. by Revd. F. Broomfield (Belgium: Nauwelaerts, 1970), pp. lxxxi-lxxxii. All further references are to this edition, hereafter referred to as *Summa confessorum*.

<sup>47</sup> See the entry at Canterbury Cathedral Archives, CCA-DCc-LitMs/B/10 <<https://archives.canterbury-cathedral.org/CalmView/Overview.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog>>; For details of William Blankpayn see Roberts, W. A. Scott, *Ickham Church: Its Monuments and Its Rectors* (London: Mitchel and Hughes, 1881). There is also a William Blankpayn who was a Fellow of Merton (fl. 1359-1386). See A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957-1959), pp. 199-200. For an overview of Wingham, including its College for Secular Canons, established in 1282 by Archbishop John Peckham, see A. Hussey, *Chronicles of Wingham* (Canterbury: J. A. Jennings, 1896).

back cover. Both are in the same coloured ink, but different hand to the manuscript as a whole. In addition to Blankpayn, the indistinct inscriptions ‘R. Chelmyngton 1461’, and ‘R. Chelmyngton monachus ecclesie Xi Cant’ appear on f.61v and f.94v respectively.<sup>48</sup> These show engagement by a monk of the Benedictine Cathedral priory of Christ Church, Canterbury, who was ordained there in 1417, made *magister ordinis* in 1435 and penitentiary in 1462.<sup>49</sup> The parchment cover (with text in the main hand on the inside), appears to be a chemise style.<sup>50</sup> It is folded over to form an envelope, with a leather thong for tying it closed, thereby making it easily portable and possibly a receptacle for other, individual documents. The folios are comprised of misshapen offcuts, with closely lined script written in one column, and many marginalia. Some of these are an integral part of the text, noting particular *canon*, but there are also many informal notes, *manicula*, crudely drawn faces, and in one instance a neatly drawn image of a church with a cross on the steeple. The manuscript is therefore of a low status, practical nature, owned by someone who clearly engaged with its contents. Both Blankpayn and Chelmyngton were educated, and held positions where they would have been expected to educate parish clergy through the schools, meetings, and confessions, as well as to hear the confessions of the laity directly. The evidence of this manuscript broadly substantiates Goering’s view that Chobham’s *Summa confessorum* was one of such manuals probably ‘composed by and for the diocesan penitentiary’ and which continued to be used in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by those who heard the ‘confessions

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<sup>48</sup> *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain (MLGB)* <[http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/1188/?search\\_term=Chobham&page\\_size=500](http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/1188/?search_term=Chobham&page_size=500)> [accessed 14 November 2016].

<sup>49</sup> *MLGB*; Joan Greatrex, *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priories of the Province of Canterbury c.1066-1540* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 116-7.

<sup>50</sup> For a description of the chemise binding as a predecessor of a dust jacket, see Michele P. Brown, *Understanding Illuminating Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* (London: The J. Paul Getty Museum, and The British Library Board, 1994), p. 38.

of the diocesan clergy, adjudicated cases reserved to the bishop from the local confessors, and supervised the imposition of public penances in the bishop's stead' rather than for the parish priest.<sup>51</sup> A later example shows that the education of the local priest may have increased to the extent that the *Summa confessorum* was more accessible. The probate register for York shows that in 1480 a copy of Chobham's *Summa confessorum* was given by a John Bullington to St Crux Church, York, requiring them to keep it chained in the choir, possibly to form part of a larger reference library for each incumbent.<sup>52</sup> This bequest shows the expectations of the benefactor more definitively than the need or literacy of the priest, but it appears that *Summa confessorum* was considered relevant to the priest's role over two hundred years after its first appearance.

Its usefulness is evident from the prologue explaining that each section will cover: what penances are, their different types, and the appropriate one for each sin; what kind of person should administer penance, and to whom; how the priest should behave in confession and make inquiries of the penitent; and the compensation required for sins by canon law.<sup>53</sup> Joseph Goering describes Chobham's *Summa confessorum* as 'an innovative synthesis of practical theology, canon law, local and regional legislation, and

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<sup>51</sup> Goering, 'The Internal Forum', p. 184.

<sup>52</sup> York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, *Exchequer Probate Register* V, f. 96v as cited in Stacey Gee, 'Parochial Libraries in Pre-Reformation England' in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. by Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 199-222 (p. 216).

<sup>53</sup> 'Primo considerandum est quid sit penitentia et secundo quot sint eius species. Tertio que sunt peccata pro quibus iniungenda est penitentia. Quarto, quis et qualis debeat esse qui penitentiam debet iniungere. Quinto, quis, quibus et pro quibus possit et debeat iniungere penitentiam. Sexto, quomodo sacerdos se debeat habere in audiendo confessiones, scilicet in considerando personam confitentis et que sint et inquirenda a penitente. Septimo et ultimo, que satisfactio cui peccato sit imponenda. Et quia circa penitentiam multa a iure canonico statuta sunt, in omnibus predictis canonicas institutiones quandoque interserere oportet.' Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, pp. 3-4.

[First considering what the penance might be and second how many types of it there might be. And third what penances will be enjoined for which sins. Fourth, who and what kind of person should he be who ought to enjoin penances. Fifth, who, to whom and for what should be able to enjoin penances. Sixth, in what way the priest ought to keep when hearing confessions, and of course with regard to examining the person of the confessor also how they should be inquiring the penitent. Seventh and last, which amends/compensation should be imposed to which sin. And because there are many established canon laws around penance, it is necessary to place within each preceding canonical institution.]

what we might call “popular spirituality”, as these pertain to the pastoral care of souls.’ He thinks that Chobham brought together knowledge and practices that had previously only been communicated by word of mouth or in subject specific texts, and in doing so he ‘ignored the boundaries of scholastic disciplines (law, theology, arts, etc)’ and was therefore an early influence on ‘a standard programme or curriculum for pastoral education in the centuries to come’, a view upheld by the number of remaining copies of the text.<sup>54</sup>

From the number of extant manuscripts, the three other texts by Grosseteste and Chobham appear to have been used on a much smaller, more personal scale. Grosseteste’s *Perambulavit Iudas* (*Perambulavit*), a personal confession where he admits that his sorrowful state is toxic to those around him, followed by a standard template of confession for the lower orders to follow, was apparently written in response to the request of someone (probably in a position of responsibility) for his own use. Goering and Mantello date the text to some time between 1200 and 1230, when Grosseteste was still in a teaching role rather than ultimately responsible for pastoral care within a diocese that subsequently fell to him as bishop.<sup>55</sup> It survives in four incomplete versions and influenced two late Anglo-Norman confessionals.<sup>56</sup> The most complete version is the late thirteenth-century Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. MS 527, ff. 257r - 262v, a codex of 287 folios, compiled by the Cistercian order at Fountains Abbey. It is bound with thirty-five other texts, including mid-twelfth-century papal

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Goering, *William de Montibus (c. 1140-1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> J. Goering and F. A. C. Mantello, ‘The *Perambulavit Iudas* (*Speculum confessionis*) attributed to Robert Grosseteste’, *Revue benedictine* 96 (1986), 125-68 (pp. 131-4). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>56</sup> See *Perambulavit*, p. 147, n. 51; Matthias Hessenhauer, ‘For a Larger Audience: Grosseteste’s *Perambulavit Iudas* in Anglo Norman’ in *Robert Grosseteste: His Thoughts and Impact* ed. by Jack P. Cunningham (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), pp. 259 - 313.

decretals of canon law dealing with such subjects as the relationship between marriage and monastic vows, in addition to those dealing with the apportioning of tithes between the monastery and its parish priests.<sup>57</sup>

The general confessional form of *Perambulavit* was clearly superseded by other texts such as *Templum* which was in greater demand, but the personal confession provides a model for how those in positions of authority should examine their own behaviour. The ideal view of the priest expressed in *Templum* is tempered in *Perambulavit* with the reality of human frailty and the need for the self knowledge that confession provides. In what passes for a prologue, Grosseteste explains his tardiness in providing the requested form of confession by saying that in ‘examining [his] sins [his] feelings were battered by concerns, occupations and temptations such that afterwards [he] was scarcely able to breathe’.<sup>58</sup> This recognition of his own difficulties, followed by his personal confession, which leave him ‘tepid, negligent, and cast adrift like a corpse, as if nothing is possible’ gently leads by example, rather than didactic instruction.<sup>59</sup> The exchange of knowledge between contemporaries is the currency of the letter. Grosseteste models the attitude he expects the reader to take with those he himself guides, encouraging each one to allow his ‘soul [to be] melted by the sun of grace, [...] without

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<sup>57</sup> H. O. Coxe, *Bodleian Library Quarto Catalogues II Laudian Manuscripts*, ed. by R. W. Hunt, Reprint of 1858-85 with corrections (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1973); pp. 381-5. See also Peter Landau, ‘Collectio Fontanensis: A Decretal Collection of the Twelfth Century for an English Cistercian Abbey’ in *Law as Profession and Practice in Medieval Europe: Essays in Honor of James A Brundage*, ed. by Kenneth Pennington and Melodie Harris Eichbauer (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 190-204 (p. 196).

<sup>58</sup> ‘Dilacionis causa est: peccatis nostris exigentibus, ita sensus mei sunt obtusi curis, occupationibus, temptationibus, postquam me rogasti vt tibi scriberem formam confessionis, vt vix aliquando postea valerem respirare’, Grosseteste, *Perambulavit*, p. 148.

<sup>59</sup> ‘A tepido enim, et negligente, et disidioso, uelud a mortuo et quasi qui non sit, perit confessio.’ Grosseteste, *Perambulavit*, p. 148.

stain or wrinkle hidden.’<sup>60</sup> It is similar to Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Pastoral Prayer* both in terms of some self-examination and its manuscript context.<sup>61</sup> Like Grosseteste, Aelred acknowledges that he is an imperfect leader in need of guidance due to ‘faults and malicious passions [that] attack [his] soul’.<sup>62</sup> As well as being part of a twelfth to thirteenth-century compilation by another Cistercian house, *Pastoral Prayer* is bound in Cambridge MS Jesus College Q.B. 17, ff. 97-99, with a miscellany of monastic documents.<sup>63</sup> These include two copies of Rievaulx Abbey’s library catalogue, some sermons, a theological tract by William de Montibus and ‘Pope Innocent II’s 1132 privilege to the Cistercians’.<sup>64</sup> Like the Fountains Abbey manuscript, it was clearly kept as a document of record and reflection for those in authority; as Dutton notes, *Prayer* is preceded by a heading stating that it is ‘meant for prelates and especially abbots’.<sup>65</sup> The fact that both *Perambulavit* and *Prayer* were retained by a Cistercian house indicates that the Cistercian hierarchy valued works that held themselves to a closer introspective account, as well as materials that helped educate those in their charge.

Two of Chobham’s works discussed here survive on a similarly small scale. According to Morenzoni, the *Summa d’Arte praedicandi (praedicandi)*, of around 1221-2 is extant in two manuscripts originating in England and Germany, while a full

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<sup>60</sup> “cuius anima, liquefacta ad solem gracie, ad lumen ueritatis explicata, nihil in se celat de se; set sic sine simulacione diiudicat se in confessione sicut se uidet in oracione, hoc est in uero lumine. Ibi utique non latet ruga nec macula.” Grosseteste, *Perambulavit*, p. 148.

<sup>61</sup> See chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>62</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *For Your Own People: Aelred of Rievaulx’s Pastoral Prayer*, trans. by Mark DelCogliano, ed. by Marsha L. Dutton (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> Marsha L. Dutton, ‘An Introduction to Aelred’s Pastoral Prayer’ in *For Your Own People: Aelred of Rievaulx’s Pastoral Prayer*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>64</sup> For a full list see M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Jesus College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), pp. 43-5, together with transcriptions of both catalogues on pp. 45-56.

<sup>65</sup> Aelred, *For Your Own People*, p. 10.



version of his *Summa de commendatione uirtutum et extirpatione uitiorum (Virtutum)*, is only extant in the same mid thirteenth-century German manuscript. This also includes a copy of Pennaforte's *Summa*, some sermons, and Bernard of Clairvaux's *Contemptus mundi*.<sup>66</sup> A second fifteenth-century manuscript however, contains the last three chapters of the *uirtutum* together with several other texts treating the vices and virtues written in the same hand, probably that of a monk at the Benedictine abbey of St Emmeram, Germany, to whose library it belonged.<sup>67</sup> While he clarifies that he can neither prove nor disprove it, Morenzoni hypothesises that because both texts have many repetitions, a definitive version was never written, which explains the small number of copies.<sup>68</sup> However, for Grosseteste's *Templum*, which also has repetitions and a muddled structure, the inverse is true, suggesting that *Templum* was found to be more practically useful than Chobham's texts which assumed a greater degree of knowledge, and were less easily memorised than *Templum*. Indeed, the overall coherence of *Templum* is less important than the individual diagrams, as they set out specific instructions which can be applied to a particular problem without reference to anything else. Nevertheless, the likelihood that Chobham's *praedicandi* and *uirtutem* were copied for a monk's private use, and kept with other important texts, indicates that they were considered to contain legitimate advice and information, continuing to be useful guides for more than one

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<sup>66</sup> *Virtutum*: Munich Staatsbibliothek Clm 14062 and 14549; *Praedicandi*: Munich Staatsbibliothek Clm 14062 and Cambridge Corpus Christi College 455; For a description of Munich manuscript Clm 14062 see E. Wunderle, *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek Munchen, Die Handschriften aus ST. Emmeram in Regensburg, Band 1, Clm 14000-14130* (Wisebaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), pp. 142-8; For Corpus Christi 455 see *The Parker Library on the Web*; See also Franco Morenzoni, 'Introduction', *Summa de Arte Praedicandi* ed. by Franco Morenzoni (Turnholti: Brepols, 1988), pp. xiv-xv; Reeves, 'Teaching the Creed and Articles of Faith in England', p. 59; G. R. Evans, 'Review of *Thomas de Chobham. Summa de Arte Praedicandi* by Thomas of Chobham, Franco Morenzoni' in *The English Historical Review*, vol. 107, no. 425 (Oct., 1992), 985.

<sup>67</sup> Franco Morenzoni, 'Introduction' in *Summa de commendatione uirtutum et extirpatione uitiorum*, ed. by Franco Morenzoni (Turnholti: Brepols, 1997), p. x. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>68</sup> Chobham, *Virtutum*, p. xxxvi.

generation.<sup>69</sup> The *praedicandi* in particular would have been a useful textbook to someone without a university education to learn the art of rhetoric and its applicability to sermon composition. Chobham explains that the philosophical approach of a virtue between a weakness or insufficiency on the one hand, and a moral or spiritual imperfection on the other, needs to be combined with the foundational theological virtues of forgiveness and grace as well as faith, hope, and charity.<sup>70</sup> Using a comparison of theology and philosophy, Chobham explains how the tools of narrative, tropology (moral meaning), allegory (symbolic meaning), and anagogy (mystical or spiritual meaning) should be used.<sup>71</sup> As Morenzoni has pointed out, Chobham's *praedicandi* does not provide material which can be taken out and used in a priest's own sermon, but instead explains the different types of sermons and how to compose them effectively. As such, and unlike his *Summa confessorum*, it would have been of little direct use to most parish priests, and may have been quickly superseded by the educational texts emanating

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<sup>69</sup> Morenzoni, 'Introduction', *Summa de Art Praedicandi*, p. xxvi.

<sup>70</sup> 'Sed quia philosophice inuestigationis inbecillitas circa uirtutes duplici peccauit errore, tum in earum diminutione, tum in earundem imperfectione, diuine bonitatis indulgentia superaddidit theologiam, que super quaternarium uirtutum cardinalium, fidei, spei et caritatis superaddidit ternarium; aliis etiam uirtutibus, gratie fundamentum subposuit. Quorum neutrum, scilicet nec ternarius ille theologicus, nec gratie principatus autenticus, mentes philosophorum attigerat.' Chobham, *Praedicandi*, Prologue, l 29 - 36. [But because of the mental weakness of philosophical inquiry, it has made a double error concerning the virtues, not only through understatement about them, but also through incompleteness. The leniency of divine goodness added theology, which, in addition to the fourfold structure of the cardinal virtues, added a threefold structure of faith, hope and charity. Or, rather, it placed the foundation of grace beneath all other virtues. Of these, neither the original theological three nor the true rule of grace had touched the minds of the philosophers.]

For an overview of Chobham's use of rhetoric and a partial translation of the prologue and other relevant chapters see 'Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de Arte Praedicandi*, ca. 1220' in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475* ed. by Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 614-638.

<sup>71</sup> 'Currus iste sancta predicatio est, per quam fidelis anima, tamquam quatuor rotis, in celum transuehitur. Prima autem rota est hystoria, secunda tropologia, tertia allegoria, quarta anagoge. Tot enim modis littera sacre Scripture, a qua predicatio elicienda est, exponitur.' Chobham, *Praedicandi*, Prologue, l 51-8. [The chariot is holy preaching, by which the faithful soul, as if on four wheels, is transported to heaven. The first wheel is history, the second is tropology, the third is allegory, and the fourth is anagogy. In this number of ways the letter of sacred Scripture, by which preaching is to be summoned forth, is expounded.] Trans. by Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, p. 616.

from the Mendicant orders.<sup>72</sup> Andrew Reeves has put forward the case that the Dominican education system may have been available to secular clergy, and this may help to explain why Chobham's *praedicandi* was not circulated widely.<sup>73</sup>

Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum (praedicatorum)*, also appears to have had a limited dispersal in manuscript form, there being only two full manuscripts currently extant, and a further five incomplete or abridged versions.<sup>74</sup> I have used the earliest extant manuscript, BL MS Royal 7 E. iv, now bound in two volumes in conjunction with the earliest print copy, Basel, c.1484 for my transcriptions and translations.<sup>75</sup> There are many further European printed editions up to 1627, indicating that it was available throughout the Catholic community and beyond the English Reformation. It was of direct value to members of Bromyard's own friary even while he was writing it, since the prologue refers to discrepancies after entries on the letter A, due to a copy having been borrowed before appropriate revisions could be made.<sup>76</sup> The prologue also exhorts the reader to preach by drawing on the past and to pass on that knowledge to future generations. He quotes from the likes of Cicero, Seneca and Aristotle, as well as Scripture, in making the point that man should live for the benefit of others, those living

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<sup>72</sup> Morenzoni, 'Introduction', *praedicandi*, p. lx.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Reeves, 'English Secular Clergy in the Early Dominican Schools: Evidence from Three Manuscripts', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 92 (2012), pp. 35–55.

<sup>74</sup> Complete MSS: BL MS Royal 7 E. iv and Cambridge, Peterhouse, MSS 24 & 25; Incomplete: Avignon, Biblioteque Municipale, MSS 305, 306; Abridged: Oxford, Oriel, MS 10, Cardiff, Public Library, MS 3.174, BL MS Harley 106; Boyle, 'The Date of the Summa Praedicatorum', pp. 533–37.

<sup>75</sup> Johannes de Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum* (Basel, Johann Amerbach, not after 1484). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>76</sup> 'Aliud, quod exemplatum ab isto acceptum, antequam esset factum vel correctum, in multis et specialiter in prima litera, a, sequencium discrepat capitulorum distincione et exteriori articularum annotatione.' Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum*, prologue, section 7, trans. by Alex Holland; Binkley, 'John Bromyard and the Hereford Dominicans', pp. 255–66 (257).

now as well as in the future.<sup>77</sup> He includes in his work ‘sayings and examples’ from many areas of study, ‘provided that they lead towards salvation’.<sup>78</sup> Like the other writers he makes a virtue of using different sources, specifically pointing out that he has selected and adapted them to provide greater nourishment than the original.<sup>79</sup>

Of the remaining Dominican texts, Peraldus’ *summae* on the vices and virtues, along with Raymond Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentia*, were considered by Humbert of Romans, Dominican General 1254-1263, to be ‘the two well-springs [...] of Dominican or “moral” theology’ which every library should contain, and the number of extant copies reflects this.<sup>80</sup> They were written as separate treatises, with the vices first, between 1236 and 1248 and are extant in a total of over 350 manuscripts.<sup>81</sup> The copies of the *virtutem* in particular were owned by members of the clergy as a pastoral aid, as well as by libraries within monastic orders.<sup>82</sup> Richard Newhauser has described Peraldus’ *vitiorum* as an easy to use pastoral manual, presented in ‘a schematically

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<sup>77</sup> ‘sed etiam posteris et distantibus quantum possibile est proficere debent exemplis scriptorum’, Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum*, Prologue, section 1. [for future generations and those far away, through the examples of writers] trans. by Alex Holland.

<sup>78</sup> ‘dicta et exempla [...] dummodo edificent ad salutem.’ Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum*, Prologue, section 3, trans. by Alex Holland.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Alimenta, que accepimus, quamdiu in sua qualitate perdurant, stomacho onera sunt, ac, cum mutata sunt, in vires et sanguinem transeunt.’ Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum*, Prologue, section 5. [Having been nourished, those things which we consumed are burdens for the stomach whilst they remain in their original state, yet when they have been digested, they course through men and through their blood.] trans. by Alex Holland.

<sup>80</sup> Boyle, ‘The Setting of the *Summa theologiae* of Saint Thomas’, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi* (Romae: Ad S. Sabinae, 1975), no. 1622; For a brief overview see Richard G. Newhauser, Siegfried Wenzel, Bridget K. Balint, and Edwin Craun, *William Peraldus, Summa on the Vices, An Outline* via <http://www.public.asu.edu/~rnewhaus/peraldus/> [accessed 21 December 2020]. There is currently no full edition of Peraldus’ *Summa*, although one is in progress by Richard Newhauser, Siegfried Wenzel, Bridget K. Balint, and Edwin Craun for Oxford University Press. An outline of the whole, and the full text on *Acedia*, edited by Siegfried Wenzel is available via <http://www.public.asu.edu/~rnewhaus/peraldus/> [accessed 21 December 2020]. I am grateful to Richard Newhauser for supplying me with extracts from the edition of Peraldus’ *Summa* of virtues which he is currently working on.

<sup>82</sup> Richard G. Newhauser, ‘Unerring Faith in the Pulpit: William Peraldus’ Tractatus de Fide in the Summa de Uirtutibus’ in *Archa Verbi: Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology*, ed. by Marco Forlivesi, Riccardo Quinto, and Silvana Vecchio (Munster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2014), pp. 389-90.

accessible and practical manner’, and both of them intended for friars who would be ‘preaching to the masses’.<sup>83</sup> *Vitiorum* is neither as condensed, mnemonic nor as diagrammatic as *Templum*, but as Mulchahey points out, *de vitiis* ‘suggests themes for sermons’ and includes many *exempla* which could be taken out and used, so having a ‘double utility to both the preachers and the confessors of the order’.<sup>84</sup> Only the *virtutem*, written first, has a full prologue, but, as Newhauser has shown, the emphasis on teaching and learning is evident in both texts. The *de vitiis* explains that

religious teaching on the vices is very useful because of the fact that the vices must be avoided with the utmost effort and the utmost care. But they cannot be avoided unless they are understood. (trans. Newhauser)<sup>85</sup>

And in *virtutem* Peraldus extends this need for knowledge to instruct the ‘studious’ reader to be interested in the usefulness of philosophy, indicating that this line of inquiry might be less popular in some quarters than the purely theological or Scriptural. He defends his view that ‘the chief part of philosophy (which concerns itself with virtues) ought to be least neglected by the studious’ by saying that he ‘crosses over into the enemy’s camp, not as a deserter but as a scout’ (trans. Newhauser).<sup>86</sup> This approval of, and reliance on, writers both sacred and profane features in all the texts. Grosseteste’s prologues are overtly theological in their references, with *Deus* defining God and the

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<sup>83</sup> Newhauser, ‘Unerring Faith in the Pulpit’, p. 389; Richard Newhauser, ‘Jesus as the First Dominican? Reflections on a Sub-theme in the Exemplary Literature of Some Thirteenth-Century Preachers’ in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, ed. by Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 7) (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998), pp. 238–255 (p. 241).

<sup>84</sup> M. Michele Mulchahey, *First the Bow Is Bent in Study’ Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), p. 541.

<sup>85</sup> Peraldus, *De vitiis, Praefatio*, f. 6rb: ‘... doctrinam uiciorum perutilem esse per hoc quod uicia summo studio et summa diligencia sunt uitanda. Vitari autem non possunt nisi cog- noscantur’ quoted by Newhauser, ‘Unerring Faith in the Pulpit’ p. 389.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Precipua pars philosophye est (que circa uirtutes uersatur) studiosis minime negligenda ... “In aliena castra transiens non tanquam transfuga sed tanquam explorator”’ quoted by Newhauser, ‘Unerring Faith in the Pulpit’, p. 389.

ramifications of Adam and Eve's fall, without mentioning the Aristotelian basis for how he will structure opposing vices between a balanced virtue. Bromyard is still justifying the use of 'works outside the Christian faith' around 100 years after Peraldus, but it is Chobham's prologue to the *praedicandi* which explains the relationship between philosophical and theological enquiry, the need for both, and the best ways to utilise them in the greatest detail.

As Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* currently exists in various fragments as well as complete copies, the exact number of extant copies is difficult to establish, but the whole text of the *Secunda secundae*, which is of most interest to this study since it is essentially a study of the vices and virtues, is extant in seventy-four manuscripts from the thirteenth to fourteenth-centuries, and 136 in the fifteenth.<sup>87</sup> Boyle considers Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* as his comment on the need for an emphasis on 'more truly theological' training as part of the basic curriculum on practical theology, and to move away from the legal emphasis represented by Pennaforte's *poenitentia*.<sup>88</sup> According to the very short prologue, the intended reader is ostensibly a new trainee friar (*incipientium*), but where *Templum* educates the secular priest with just enough information to carry out his duties, *Summa theologiae* aims to provide a thorough theological background for the beginner so that he would not be confused by the 'pointless questions, articles, and arguments' of existing material. Instead, Aquinas intends to 'pursue the things held by Christian theology, and to be concise and clear, so far as the matter allows'.<sup>89</sup> Quite whom

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<sup>87</sup> J. N. Hillgarth, 'Who Read Thomas Aquinas?', in *The Gilson Lectures on Thomas Aquinas*, originally delivered in 1991 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), pp. 46–72 (p. 49).

<sup>88</sup> Boyle, 'The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas', pp. 13 - 15.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin text and English translation, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries*, 61 vols., ed. by Thomas Gilby O. P. (Cambridge: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, and McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964-1981), vol. 1, p. 3. All further references and translations are to this edition, hereafter referred to as *Summa Theologiae*.

Aquinas means by beginners is open to question, with Boyle of the opinion he was writing for the *fratres communes* and others for students further on in their studies.<sup>90</sup> Whichever is the case, it is clear that the beginner is expected to become learned in theology and has reached a sufficient level, or is in the appropriate environment, to make that proposition possible. Despite Aquinas' motive and perceived need for his type of treatise to be taught within the schools, it was not immediately a main text, unlike those of Pennaforte and Peraldus, although it was adapted and borrowed from by fellow Dominicans such as John Freiburg. Through him, rather than any direct instructional use, Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, and the *Secunda Secundae* in particular, grew in importance within the Dominican school system to such an extent that by 1315 an order was issued by the General Chapter that the '*studia generalia*' should have a complete set of Aquinas' works.<sup>91</sup>

All these pastoral manuals do provide instruction to the reader, but the type of guidance, intended audience, and ultimate utility vary widely. Chobham's *confessorum* is for the parish priest to learn how to take confession, and while Grosseteste's *Templum* is for the same purpose, scholars do not concur about the level of reader it was aimed at, and the manuscript evidence itself shows that both the parish priest and mendicant friars owned and used copies. An example later in this chapter demonstrates its capacity to meet the needs and capabilities of readers from a range of educational backgrounds. Grosseteste's *Perambulavit* and *Aelred's Prayer*, while examples of pastoral guidance, are not for the lower orders of priests and friars, but for advising fellow monastic leaders

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<sup>90</sup> Boyle, 'The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas'; John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) as cited in Anthony Keaty, 'The Demands of Sacred Doctrine on "Beginners"', *New Blackfriars*, 84 (2003), 500–509 (p. 503).

<sup>91</sup> Boyle, 'The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas', pp. 13 - 15; J. N. Hillgarth, 'Who Read Thomas Aquinas?', p. 51.

with similar concerns to their own. While Bromyard's *praedicatorum* is useful for preaching friars, Peraldus was aiming more broadly for clergy and monks, preachers and confessors, specifically interested in philosophy in addition to theology and scripture, and who wanted to know how to write their own sermons. Aquinas had a similarly ambitious agenda regarding a sound theological education for friars, though again, the level of education aimed at within the system is unclear. So while this chapter is nominally about foundational Latin pastoral texts, there is in fact no such homogenous group. *Pastoralia* as a term was invented to describe a huge range of literature and all the texts discussed here were written for different imagined audiences and purposes, were in turn used in a variety of ways according to need and access to the text, and some were clearly dispersed and utilised more than others.<sup>92</sup> These differences indicate that the way they define and treat despair is also likely to vary.

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### 3. Causes of despair

Many thirteenth and fourteenth-century pastoral texts ostensibly consider despair in terms of its place in the schema of vices and virtues as defined by Gregory the Great's (d. 604) *Moralia on Job*, where the main sins that lead to despair are *luxuria* and *tristitia*. Prior to *Moralia*, *acedia* and *tristitia* were two distinct vices, which Gregory initially merged under the one term of *tristitia*.<sup>93</sup> According to Wenzel, by the twelfth-century this was often replaced by *acedia* in the general list of sins, but the texts discussed here still show signs of that process.<sup>94</sup> *Acedia* is a transliteration from the

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<sup>92</sup> For an overview of this see Joseph Goering, 'Leonard Boyle and the Invention of Pastoralia' in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200-1500)*, ed. by R. J. Stansbury (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 7-20.

<sup>93</sup> Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 72; See also Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*.

<sup>94</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, p. 28. For a full discussion of this transition from Evagrius and Cassian onwards see pp. 23-8. See also Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God', pp. 44-5.



Greek word *αχνηδία* meaning ‘lack of care’ but which was used in the *Septuagint* to mean ‘faintness, weariness, anguish’.<sup>95</sup> It gradually accrued the meaning of mental apathy and a turning away from God’s work, or a ‘dryness of the spirit’.<sup>96</sup> Wenzel hypothesises that *tristitia* replaced *acedia* in the West as the *acedia* caused by solitary contemplation in the desert no longer applied to European communal living, and reverted back to *acedia* when it became more associated with bodily rather than spiritual sloth, and therefore of greater relevance to the laity.<sup>97</sup> He also sees the association of *acedia* with outward rather than internal actions as a result of ‘the practical intention of a given work rather than its audience’, an emphasis that he sees in the thirteenth-century pastoral works focusing on confession and penitence discussed here.<sup>98</sup>

Chobham’s *Summa confessorum* is one of the earliest and most influential texts to guide priests in taking confession. Goering is of the opinion that

nowhere else in medieval literature are we brought so near to the practice of penance as it was conceived by learned scholars and recommended to the simple clergy.<sup>99</sup>

It is therefore the obvious place to start for pastoral definitions of despair, and worth looking at in some detail. In the section outlining the sins for which penance should be undertaken, after citing pride as the parent of them all, Chobham mentions despair in the traditional classification system taken directly from Gregory’s *Moralia*, where each sin leads to a worse one:

De tristitia, malitia, rancor, pusillanimitas, desperatio, torpor circa precepta,

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<sup>95</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 96.

<sup>97</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 28, 37-8.

<sup>98</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 177-9.

<sup>99</sup> Goering, *William de Montibus*, p. 85.

vagatio mentis circa illicita nascitur.<sup>100</sup>

[From sorrow, malice, resentment, lack of courage, despair, numbness around the commandments, the mind wandering around the forbidden].

De luxuria, cecitas mentis, inconsideratio, inconstantia, precipitatio, amor sui, odium dei, affectus presentis seculi, horror autem futuri vel desperatio generatu.<sup>101</sup>

[From lust, mental lack of discernment, inconsideration, inconstancy, destruction, self love, hatred of God, passion for the present world, while producing dread or desperation of the future].

But when one turns to find the satisfaction for each sin there is no parallel listing.

Instead *tristitia* is replaced by *acedia*, which he calls

gravissimum est peccatum, et fere omnibus ignotum [...] Peccatum autem accidie ab Apostolo vocatur tristitia seculi que mortem operatur [...] quia per tedium et fastidium aufert homini bona opera sua quibus vitam eternam mereri possit.<sup>102</sup>

[the most serious sin, and almost unknown to all men [...] The apostle calls *accidie* the sin of sadness of the world and serves death. [...] because through tedium and loathing it removes good works from man by which he might be able to deserve eternal life].

The greatest sin is that idleness and carelessness takes one away from the obedience to God which could result in salvation, and towards the devil with his ‘many evils’ (*multa mala*). The fact that this might then lead to the sin of despair is not explicitly stated here. Likewise, while many sins are listed under *luxuria*, they are all to do with worldly and carnal desires such as adultery and fornication, without the corresponding link to despair. The conclusion from this is that, unsurprisingly, despair was not something Chobham thought people had to grapple with on a daily basis. Both *acedia* and *luxuria*

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<sup>100</sup> Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, pp. 536-7.

are described in terms of the ways people physically behave in the world, their outward manifestations appropriate to the laity in Wenzel's terms, rather than how they might react to the possibility of eternal damnation. However, the issue of despair remains central to Chobham's treatise. Alexander Murray might be right in saying that despair is the one sin 'directly opposed to the institution of confession' since it cannot be forgiven, but here the process of confession is itself the main cause of despair, and Chobham's *confessorum* is the only text considered in this chapter which explicitly addresses the priest's responsibility for not pushing someone towards it.<sup>103</sup>

The priest must find out whether the penitent is truly repentant, and if he assesses through such signs as 'whether he might laugh or deny his sins, or he might defend his sins' that he is unrepentant, the priest must on no account 'impose a penance on him' because he can only be saved upon true repentance.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, however, Chobham instructs the priest to be ameliorative in his approach:

Nec tamen debet eum exterrere ne mittat eum in obstinationem vel desperationem, sed debet ostendere consilium beati Gregorii quod tale est: si aliquis est in peccato et in proposito peccandi, faciat interim quicquid boni potest, ut dominus cor eius illustret ad penitentiam.<sup>105</sup>

[He should not terrify that person lest he might send him into presumption or desperation, but he should give the counsel of St Gregory which is: if anyone is in sin and sinning with intention, in the meantime he should do whatever good he can, in order that the Lord might illuminate the soul of that person towards the act of penance].

Chobham does not want the laity to face themselves and their sins so fully that they move further away from God. The language of terror that he uses here is emphatically

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<sup>103</sup> Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Curse on Self-Murder*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; reprint 2011), vol. 2, p. 377.

<sup>104</sup> 'si rideat vel se peccasse neget vel peccata sua defendat ... nullum potest vel debet ei iniungere penitentiam', Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, p. 240.

<sup>105</sup> Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, p. 240.

about a human response to official disapproval rather than the fear of God which can lead to salvation. Chobham acknowledges that people are likely to continue sinning with intention, and emphasises to the priest that he has to deal with the reality of this with a degree of empathy. Through gentle counselling they may eventually find themselves truly repentant and so able to undertake acts of penance. A miscalculation in the priest's response may cause a person to either despair of their salvation or presume that they will be saved regardless. Even when someone does sincerely repent their sins the priest must impose a penance that can actually be carried out, even if it does not strictly satisfy the sin committed:

Sed si iniungat ei sacerdos tanta ieiunia vel tantas vigiliis vel tantas eleemosynas et dicat penitens se non posse sustinere, ibi temperet sacerdos ne mittat penitentem in desperationem vel in contemptum. Quia/ si penitens libenter receperit modicum quod ei iniungitur, etiam si non sit condignum, sperandum est tamen de misericordia divina quod ipse suppleat in purgatorio quod minus est. Hoc autem diligenter providendum est sacerdoti ne unquam dimittat penitentem recedere desperatum propter gravitatem penitentiae iniuncte, sed ita temperet penitentiam ut penitens credat se posse complere.<sup>106</sup>

[But if the priest should impose to that person too much fasting, or too many night vigils, or too many alms, and he might say it is not possible for him to sustain doing penance, in that case the priest should be mild lest he might send the penitent into desperation or contempt. Because if he should accept doing penance willingly a restrained/moderate kind is imposed to that person, and also, even if he might not be wholly deserving, yet it should be hoped that he might supply himself [with] what is missing from divine mercy in purgatory. However, this is provided he doesn't abandon diligently doing penance to the priest at any time, to withdraw into desperation by means of serious/weighty penances having been imposed, but so he should give mild penance so that he is able to be satisfied he is being truly penitent].

Chobham shows both an understanding of, and compassion for, human nature along with his commitment to saving souls. As true confession and repentance is the only route to salvation, Chobham wants to make the process an achievable one. By telling the priest to be lenient, the implication is that he need not adhere strictly to canon laws, and may transfer part of his own responsibility to bind and loose to God's mercy instead. Murray

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<sup>106</sup> Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, pp. 329-40.

has made the point that counsel was often given during confession, taking the form of a discussion between priest and penitent to work out what was morally right according to Christian ethics, while also being achievable for the individual, and Chobham's direction is an example of that.<sup>107</sup> The other side to this is that despair or contempt is not only directed at God, but the Church and local clergy as well. In a system where hope has to be physically enacted within a community by accepting the authority of the priest, it makes pragmatic sense for that priest to be judicious in the punishments he metes out. It is also worth bearing in mind that if *confessorum* was intended as a teaching tool within the diocesan structure, where education would take place partly through confession between priests, then Chobham is advocating a leniency in approach which would have been taught by example from one priest to another, who might themselves have been prone to despair. In essence then, Chobham is advising that despair is a sin only the priest should be aware of; if he carries out his role carefully enough the lay penitent should never have to experience it, nor have any detailed knowledge about it.

Of the two causes of despair Chobham quotes from Gregory's *Moralia*, the term '*luxuria*' itself is little used by our writers except in their own references to *Moralia*. Snyder notes that *luxuria* is not usually in works on the tree of vices, probably because it was not included in *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* from which the others derived. When it is included, it tends to depend on Gregory's list.<sup>108</sup> An exception is Aquinas who briefly identifies a worldly-focused lust (*luxuria*) as an alternative, less common cause of despair to *acedia*, where *luxuria* displaces the desire for spiritual goodness with

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander Murray, 'Counselling in Medieval Confession', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 63–77 (pp. 76–77).

<sup>108</sup> Snyder, 'The Left Hand of God', p. 47.

desires of the body:

The fact of losing one's taste for the appeal in spiritual things, or no longer considering such goodness as of any significance, comes about largely through a predilection for bodily pleasures, especially those of sex. And it can well happen that desire for pleasures such as these will bring about such a disgust for goods of the spirit that a man no longer looks upon these as difficult, i.e. as worth hoping for. In this fashion, despair is caused by lust.<sup>109</sup>

Whereas Aquinas is concerned with classifying despair primarily for theoretical discussion in the classroom (and possibly for the sake of completeness in response to Gregory's list), as the foundation for later pastoral duties, Bromyard expands on Aquinas' definition of *luxuria* (though without naming it), to the extent that it underpins his whole argument. Snyder has observed that despair deriving from *tristitia* is a 'conscious, self doubting' process which cares deeply about the possibility of being denied salvation, whereas despair from *luxuria* is 'unconscious – self-satisfied' and is unconcerned with the idea of damnation because there are too many bodily pleasures to enjoy on earth, which eclipse any needs of the soul.<sup>110</sup> Bromyard's whole section on despair is largely based on the assumption that the preacher using his work will need to rouse people out of this unconscious despair, to defend themselves against the devil as death draws close. He sees loving things of the world as an active choice, and the first cause of despair where 'loving the present position according to excesses of the body and mankind causes hatred of God and the other world'.<sup>111</sup>

Bromyard explains this necessary animosity between the carnal person and God in

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<sup>109</sup> 'Ad hoc autem quod bona spiritualia non sapiunt nobis quasi bona, vel non videantur nobis magna bona, praecipue perducimur per hoc quod affectus noster est infectus amore delectationum corporalium, inter quas praecipuae sunt delectationes venereae, nam ex affectu harum delectationum contingit quod homo fastidit bona spiritualia, et non sperat ea quasi quaedam bona ardua. Et secundum hoc desperatio causatur ex luxuria.' Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae q. 20 a. 4 co.

<sup>110</sup> Snyder, *The Paradox of Despair*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>111</sup> 'que specialiter quantum ad praesens per positum sistit in nimia carnis et mundi dilectione et dei et alteri seculi odio.' Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v.

the recognisable terms of human relationships, where not only ‘are people not willingly separated for a long time from someone they love’ but are unlikely to ‘hurry to live for a long time with someone they greatly dislike’.<sup>112</sup> Consequently they will be unlikely to do anything they know to please that person, will associate with that person’s enemies rather than his friends, and so will not receive a favourable impression when they are finally forced to do business with him:

Si ergo oportet talem magna negocia in curia illius expedire quem odit: in via desperat de bona expeditione. sic loquitur vel cogitat: despero bene negocia mea expedire: quia semper sui inimicus ei(us): et amicus inimici sui.<sup>113</sup>

[If therefore it is necessary to obtain such great business in that court which he hates, in the way he despairs of the good account, so he speaks or thinks: I rightly despair to obtain my business, because his enemy is always the same, and a friend of his enemy].

That everyone listening to the sermons will inevitably have to ‘do business in that court’ at the final judgement is Bromyard’s main point, and factions of friends and enemies that can either help or hinder that process are easily understood in terms of everyday business. For Aquinas *luxuria* is an unconscious sin because people are not interested in achieving any spiritual good, and Bromyard does admit that there are some people who ‘had been accustomed to being wiser, bolder and more powerful among mankind’, who have the presumption ‘not to hope enough in the midst of death’, and for whom things will go ‘badly in the other world’.<sup>114</sup> But he does so in a peremptory way, preferring to tell people that they will certainly despair on the point of death if they continue to lead a

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<sup>112</sup> ‘Videmus eum quem qui diligit unu(m) non libenter ab eo diu separatur: specialiter ubi dilectio est carnalis. Sic etia(m) qui multu(m) odit unu(m) non libenter ad illu(m) vadit: ut diu cu(m) illo co(n)uersetur.’ Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v.

<sup>113</sup> Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v.

<sup>114</sup> ‘qui suerunt sapientiores: et audaciores/ et potentiores apud mundum: min(us) in morte spera(n)t et hec est magna presumptio quod male erit eis in alio seculo.’ Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v.

life of vice and riches without repenting, a point he underlines using a pre-existing English verse:

worlyes blisse haf gad day Ich habbe for þe lasse dolorum þe more wey la way.<sup>115</sup>

[goodbye world's bliss, I have for the less sorrow the more pain].

Such verses of weilaway or sorrow were common in preaching material between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries and a similar one occurs in a sermon on the mutability of life:

Wordys blysse haue now go day  
from þe I schal so weyla way  
þe bettere for þe werse o I haue for go  
ala alas & weyla wey.<sup>116</sup>

The placement of these 'wailing' lyrics at the end of the *exempla* was recommended in the Franciscan *Liber exemplorum* as a strategic device 'to strike terror into the audience', and all Bromyard's *exempla* are aimed at doing exactly that: frightening people to direct their lives towards God's goodness before they lose the ability to do so at the point of death.<sup>117</sup>

As well as the connotations of lust and worldly excess, *luxuria* could encompass another, more common type of passion for the present world, involving the mortification of the flesh. In his description of excessive curiosity (*curiositas*) (one vice against

<sup>115</sup> Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v; *DIMEV* 6788.

<sup>116</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson C.301 (SC 12158), f. 93v, where it appears along with other English verses, and is bound with a variety of religious extracts, including those of St. Bridget, Grosseteste and St Augustine. See *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum, Bibliothecae Bodleianae, Partis Quintae, Fasciculus Secundus. Viri Munificentissimi Ricardi Rawlinson J. C. D., confecit Gulielmus D. Macray, A. M.* (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1878), pp. 133-4.

<sup>117</sup> *MED*, wei-lā-wei, interj., 1. (c) and (d); *Liber Exemplorum ad Usus Praedicatorum, Saeculo XIII Compositus a Quodam Fratre Minore Anglico de Provincia Hiberniae*, ed. by A. G. Little, British Society of Franciscan Studies 1 (Aberdeen: University Press, 1908), p. 45 cited by Siegfried Wenzel in *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 239; and Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons, "Fasciculus morum" and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 45, 72.



spiritual occupation, the other being *acedia*) in *Deus*, Grosseteste describes people obsessively performing ‘good works’ and punishing themselves beyond the penance they were given:

Sunt enim quidam qui nocturnis vigiliis in tantum se cruciant, alii qui tam assiduis orationibus insistunt, alii continuis fletibus, alii durs cubilibus et ceteris laboris intolerabilibus corpus mortificant, quod aut animo deficiunt aut in infirmitates magnas corruunt.<sup>118</sup>

[Indeed, certain people who are awake at night are in so much torment to themselves, some who persevere to such an extent with constant prayer, others with continuous wailing, others with a hard bed, and the rest reduce the body to weakness from intolerable hardships, who either fail in the mind or collapse into great sickness].

These examples are most appropriate for a monastic audience, but Bromyard sees similar kinds of acesis as part of the sin of omission, a dereliction in carrying out works of mercy, and his second cause of despair. Unlike true alms which provide a good account on judgement, fasting, never sleeping, or walking in shoes on the wrong way round, merely punish and damages one’s own body, without benefitting either oneself or anyone else.<sup>119</sup> The act of physical self-harm takes precedence over allowing either the confessor to confer appropriate punishment, or Christ to be the final judge, and so by meting out one’s own punishment a form of self-love and prioritising the body is taking place, springing from the subversion of what was once a focused faith.

Another parent of despair rarely cited as the direct cause, but ultimately at the root of all sins, and evident in the previous example, is *superbia* (pride), and one of the categories, along with hope, under which Chobham treats despair in *Virtute*. His main

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<sup>118</sup> Grosseteste, *Deus*, p. 274.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Pro quo est scie(n)dum q(uem) qui ieiunat vel vigilat: vel discalciatu(us) ambulat: carne(m) affligit ⁊ castigat. Qui vero elemosina(m) dat: iudice(m) ⁊ eius amicos munerib(us) placat.’  
[About which is to be understood someone who fasts or remains awake, or walks in shoes in different directions punishes and damages the body. Who truly gives alms, placates the judge and his friends with gifts]. Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, Elemosina*.

concern is that it is one of the four sins against the Holy Ghost, the others being presumption, attacking the truth, and brotherly hatred.<sup>120</sup> To sin against the Father and the Son are excusable as they are sins of weakness and ignorance respectively, whereas to sin against the Holy Spirit is a sin of ill will which

contempnendo potentiam Dei per presumptionem, uel bonitatem Dei per desperationem: uel diminuendo gratiam Dei inpugnando ueritatem Dei agnitam, inuidendo bonitati Dei per odium fraternum.<sup>121</sup>

[holds with contempt the power of God through presumption, the goodness of God through desperation; diminishes the grace of God by attacking the knowledge of the truth of God, and grudges the goodness of God through brotherly hatred].

The texts designed for preaching are the most persistent and explicit in linking despair and presumption to the Holy Spirit and the notion that such sins questioning the power, mercy, truth and goodness of God cannot be forgiven. In *praedicandi* Chobham says there is ‘no tinge of an excuse’ for it and that by doing so someone sins twice-over.<sup>122</sup> Peraldus’ *virtutem* calls despair ‘blasphemy in the Holy Spirit, and is no means forgiven either in this world, nor in the future’, with someone being ‘unworthy of the protection of God’.<sup>123</sup> Bromyard, too, says despair is a ‘sin in the Holy spirit, a hardening to death which will not diminish in strength in the future’.<sup>124</sup> All these examples clarify why Chobham’s *confessorum* places such importance on the priest steering people away from despair and presumption in the first place. For them there are no subtle distinctions; both

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<sup>120</sup> ‘uel peccatum <presumptionis>, uel desperationis, uel inpugnatio ueritatis agnite, uel odium fraternum.’, Chobham, *virtute*, p. 234.

<sup>121</sup> Chobham, *virtute*, p. 234.

<sup>122</sup> ‘nullum habet colorem excusationis. Et dicunt quod dupliciter peccat aliquis contra bonitatem Dei’, Chobham, *praedicandi*, p. 178.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Desperatio est blasphemia in Spiritum Sanctum, que non remittitur neque in hoc seculo, neque in futuro’, Peraldus, *virtutem*, *spes*, 77ra.

<sup>124</sup> ‘q(uia) ad morte(m) dura(n)s e(st) p(ec)c(a)t(u)m i(n) spiritu(m) s(an)ct(u)m q(uo)d non remittetur hic ueq(ue) i(n) futuro’, Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 174r.

despair and presumption are sins in the Holy Spirit and therefore unforgivable. However, Aquinas only refers to the Holy Spirit in relation to presumption, and specifically the kind which ‘hopes to obtain pardon without repentance or glory without merits’, because it ‘dismisses or disdains the assistance of the Holy Spirit which serves to call men back from sin’, and not the kind which predicates a belief in being solely responsible for one’s own merits.<sup>125</sup> This does not prevent him from considering despair as a greater danger ‘in terms of the effect upon us’, rather than lack of faith or hatred of God (*infidelitas et odium Dei*) because the loss of hope it entails means ‘that men plunge into evil without restraint and abandon their efforts to do good’.<sup>126</sup> Chobham’s view in *virtute* is that despair is an evil because it can only proceed from someone without hope, and hope depends on the ‘merit of faith’, so if someone is in despair they are without both, making it the ‘son of unbelief’.<sup>127</sup> Again however, Aquinas considers there to be a distinction where someone can be in a state of despair without lacking a faith in God. They can believe in God’s salvation as a general principle without thinking it to be possible in their particular case.<sup>128</sup> Despair is the most serious sin for all the writers discussed here, but Chobham and Peraldus are the only ones to make the explicit connection to a wider lack of faith.

Chobham and Peraldus also place particular importance on grace (*gratia*) in relation to despair. In the *proemium* to *confessorum* Chobham sets out his theology of grace to substantiate the need for repentance. He explains that before Christ the ‘guilt and dishonour of original sin’ was ‘erased’ by circumcision but this could ‘not confer

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<sup>125</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 21, a.1, reply.

<sup>126</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a-2ae, 20, a. 3, reply.

<sup>127</sup> ‘meritis fidei’, ‘filius diffidentie’, Chobham, *virtute*, p. 132.

<sup>128</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a-2ae, 20, a. 2 ad 2.

grace nor open the door of paradise’, something only possible after Christ’s Passion and through the remedy of baptism.<sup>129</sup> When man continued to sin ‘by breaking the faith of baptism, [and] again deserved death’, ‘grace was very abundant’ as ‘the Lord put remedy on top of remedy, through confession and penance’.<sup>130</sup> Chobham’s *virtute* sees the possibility that people will hope that ‘the Lord will give his own grace’ to them even as they are ‘in the midst of sin away from the holy’, as a ‘sufficient mediator’ between hope and despair.<sup>131</sup> Grace is also a buffer in Peraldus’ *virtutem*, citing Rom 5:20 ‘where sin abounded, grace did more abound’ as a reason for why ‘it is foolish to despair on account of the number or size of the sin’.<sup>132</sup> In his *vitiis* the barrier to that grace is *tristitia*, an excessive sadness which ‘dries the strong mind from the moisture of grace in order that it might break by the sin of despair’.<sup>133</sup>

*Tristitia* is the main cause of despair referred to in our texts, sometimes related to *acedia* due to following Gregory’s schemata, but sorrow and its relationship with hope is key. In *Templum*, Grosseteste describes how the four walls of the spiritual temple are active agencies made up of: dreading God’s justice and punishment; having confidence that He will save the converted in His mercy; repenting courageously so as to be free

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<sup>129</sup> ‘reatum et maculam originalis peccati debebant, sed nec gratiam conferebant’, Chobham *Summa confessorum, proemium*, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Superabundans autem gratia fuit cum homo, fracto federe baptismi, iterum mortem meruit, et dominus tamen remedium remedio superaddens, per confessionem et penitentiam hominem resurgere concessit’, Chobham, *Summa confessorum, proemium*, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> ‘et habet spem informem quod Dominus dabit ei gratiam suam’; ‘Ad quod tamen dicendum quod spes et desperatio non <sunt> immediata. Immo quedam est satis medius inter illas duo’, Chobham, *virtute*, p. 132.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Sed fatuum est propter multitudinem vel magnitudinem peccati desperare, cum *vbi superabundauit delictum, superabundet et gratia*, Romanorum v’, Peraldus, *virtutem*, f.77ra.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Tristitia etiam fortem animum exsiccat ab humore gratiae, ut per peccatum desperationis frangatur’, Peraldus, *vitiis*, p. 205.

from punishment; and actively pursuing good works.<sup>134</sup> To live in hope in this way is echoed by all the texts. In *Deus* and *Templum*, hope is a remedial virtue flanked by despair at one end, where all hope is lost, and presumption, at the other, where there is too much of it. They explain the mental and emotional states of a penitent in despair as a ‘lack of confidence in the power of God, when they imagine God has not so much power to forgive so many sins’, or thinking that He ‘might not be merciful, even if he has the power’, combined with a fear of the ‘severity of God’s justice’ because He might not want to ‘remit any punishment owed’.<sup>135</sup> As well as this lack of confidence in God, all writers identify a variation on the lack of self confidence: people ‘imagine they should not deserve a pardon because of the great number and size of their sins’, or that they are unable to ‘keep away from evil’, or are afraid of the harshness or length of their penance.<sup>136</sup> Where Peraldus’ *vitiis* gives only excessive sadness as a cause of despair, his *virtutem* has a further three: ‘the first is the size and number of sins’,<sup>137</sup> ‘the second is the great number of temptations’ which should instead be seen as a ‘sign that one may have escaped from the evil demon’.<sup>138</sup> Chobham agrees with this view, seeing temptations as there to be patiently endured: if hope and trouble were weighed in a set of

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<sup>134</sup> ‘Species spei: Timor de Dei iusticia que punit malos. Confidencia de Dei misericordia que saluat conuersos. Audacia de penitencia que liberat a pena. Munificencia in bonis operibus quibus conferuntur premia. Hec quatuor species distribuuntur secundum: posse, uelle, et scire.’ Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 33. [Types of hope: dread of God’s justice which punishes evil; confidence in god’s mercy which saves the converted; courage in repentance which frees from punishment; bounteousness in good works which bring rewards. These four types are divided according to the following: to be able, to will, and to know].

<sup>135</sup> ‘Desperant enim homines multis de causis diffidendo de posse Dei, cum scilicet opinantur Deum non posse tanta et tot peccata dimittere; Alii quod non sit tam misericors qui, etsi possit, non velit tanta dimittere. Alii propter rigorem iustitiae Dei [...] quod nihil velit dimittere de poena debita’, Grosseteste, *Deus*, p. 260.

<sup>136</sup> ‘quia quidam opinantur, quod non possint mereri veniam prae multitudine et magnitudine peccatorum [...] Quidam dicunt se non posse abstinere a malo [...] Quidam tamen timent poenam poenitentiae, tum propter acerbiteriam, tum propter diuturnitatem.’ Grosseteste, *Deus*, p. 260.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Primum est peccati magnitudo vel multitudo.’ Peraldus, *virtutem*, f. 77ra.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Secundum est multitudo tentationum. [...] Multiplicatio tentationum signum est quod aliquis de manibus demonum euaserit.’ Peraldus, *virtutem*, f. 78ra.

scales, one should be afraid of too much lightness in the pan of troubles.<sup>139</sup> One should strive for joy, but be weighed by enough adversity to counter any complacency or threat of presumption. Peraldus' third cause of despair is 'constant falling or relapsing' which, like Chobham, he advises to be faced with humility as it is 'foolish to trust that human weakness is more likely to disappear than that God has the power to exonerate'.<sup>140</sup>

All the texts define despair in terms of sorrow caused either by doubting God or oneself in these ways, but Peraldus and Bromyard also specify the devil or demon as a distinct factor. In Peraldus' *vitiis*, when someone 'speaks a word of desperation [they] speak an evil word', shift the balance of power in the devil's favour, and 'are conquered'.<sup>141</sup> Rather than benefitting from the strength that hope in God provides, the devil appropriates that strength to himself, leaving someone in a much weaker position and more vulnerable to attack.<sup>142</sup> It is Bromyard, however, who gives the demon the most prominent position as the third cause of despair for acting with 'crafty deceitfulness', especially on those about to die.<sup>143</sup> This craftiness works best if it has previously been used to urge a sense of presumption on the young and healthy, so that

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<sup>139</sup> 'appendatur quasi in una libra tribulatio in una lance, et spes in altera. Vt cum uiderit id quod speratur preponderare, parum metuat tribulationis leuitatem.' Chobham, *virtute*, p. 133.  
[Just as must be weighed out in the scales: suffering in one pan and hope in the other. So that when he sees that what is hoped is weightier, then the lightness of suffering might be too little feared]

<sup>140</sup> 'Tertium est frequens casus vel recidiuatio. Sed fatuum est credere infirmitatem humanam plus posse cadendo quam Dei virtutem releuando.' Peraldus, *Virtutem*, f. 78ra.

<sup>141</sup> 'quia ille qui dicit verbum desperationis dicit malum verbum; quod dicunt illi qui victi sunt.' Peraldus, *vitiis*, p. 205a.

<sup>142</sup> 'Et ideo diabolo valde gratum est, qui est adversarius noster.' Peraldus, *vitiis*, p. 205a.  
[And therefore it is a pleasing strength to the devil, who is our enemy].

<sup>143</sup> 'Tercia desperationis causa est callida demonis deceptio: qua specialiter in morte videtur morie(n)tem in desperationem ponere.' Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 172v.  
[The third cause of desperation is crafty deceitfulness of the demon: in particular, anyone seeming in the midst of death will be placed, dying, in the midst of despair]

they rely on having plenty of time to confess and appeal to God's mercy.<sup>144</sup> Bromyard uses the specific term *presumptio* only once under despair, he is nevertheless always describing and counselling against it. The devil promotes living well like a form of usury, not demanding back what is owed until someone is in poverty and loses their inheritance, just as they will lose their heavenly inheritance by choosing what is congenial while fit and healthy.<sup>145</sup> This is what throws some people into despair: through the devil's guile people cross over into death instead of eternal life.<sup>146</sup> Stories such as these are ready to be taken by the preacher as warnings to people that if they die unprepared, and therefore fall into despair at the last moment, they will be unable to deny the devil anything he asks. By externalising the issue of self control to one of manipulation by an outside force, and making it comparable to worldly threats, the audience is less concerned with self reflection, while still being fully alert to the possible dangers of such a serious sin.

Where *exempla* written for parish priests to use directly in their sermons are mainly concerned with the perils of death-bed despair, without dwelling on the associated theological implications other than the risk of damnation, pastoral manuals written as part of a theological education, such as that by Aquinas, are able to consider some of the nuances of what despair can mean. A summary of the causes of despair

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<sup>144</sup> 'deus est misericors/ adhuc iuuenis es/ vel sanus et fortis et poteris confiteri.' Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, Amicitia*, f. 81r.

[God is merciful, thus far you are youthful or healthy and strong, and will be able to confess].

<sup>145</sup> 'ei no(n) statim debitum repetit: s(ed) id crescere permittit/ vsque sit in tali miseria et paupertate/ q(ui) illud soluere non possit', Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 173v.

[He does not immediately repay the debt to him, but allows it to grow to the extent that he who cannot repay it will be in such misery and poverty].

<sup>146</sup> 'quos aliquo(e)n(s) nititur in desperationem ponere per colorem nimie iusticie [...] In mortis vero transitu p(er) colorem nimie astucie', Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 173v.

[It arises with some others that they are put into desperation by the pretext of justice being excessive. In truth, by crossing into death through the deception of excessive cunning].

covered here reveals the extent to which the language of despair is wide-ranging, paradoxical, and slippery. It can descend from *acedia*, curiosity, pride, sadness, and lust; it can be demonstrated by consciously caring too much about the spiritual self, or by unconsciously caring too much about the bodily and worldly self; it is connected with unbelief in the divine and a complete faith in God; it can be about fear of the self, or of God's justice, or of the devil; it occurs when one falls back into old sins; it obscures the notion that temptations to sin are signs of God's grace; and finally despair is in opposition to the sin of presumption and denies the possibility of hope. Chobham, writing to instruct parish priests, gives clear, practical instructions that they should show compassion in order to elicit repentance because the alternative is '*recedere desperatum*', to withdraw in desperation, which implies a rejection not only of God, but the priest, duty to the community, and one's rational mind. Uppermost for Chobham is that people retain their faith, and rather than directing the language of despair directly at the laity, who he knows are likely to suffer under the power of self-loathing induced by stern instruction, he instead places responsibility firmly on the priest. Conversely, Bromyard, also writing for the parish priest, gives him the words to inspire fear in his audience, with horror stories based in the real world and rooted in concrete, everyday language. He wants to frighten the ultimate listeners into realising the futility of a profligate lifestyle, using the economy of exchange and personification of the devil to do so. Peraldus also invokes the devil, and as effective preachers they would both have understood the power that images of a demonic presence dragging people down to hell, would have had on those gathered about them. By using words relating to the body living in the world, Bromyard in particular emphasises its irrelevance to one's ultimate salvation.



The pastoral literatures discussed here therefore approach the idea of despair in several different ways. All of the writers are interested in providing instruction and guidance on faith and sin with an eye to their texts benefitting hazily imagined lay communities, but in the first instance they are writing for a variety of intermediaries who themselves might have a range of agendas of their own. And while all the authors might have had ultimate intended audiences in mind, in reality it is impossible to clarify the actual layers of audience reached, and the complexity of transmission and reception involved in the process.

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#### 4. Diving into remedies for despair

Unlike its causes, the remedies for despair tend to be more specific. Solutions offered by mendicants, Peraldus and Bromyard, are markedly different in approach to those by Grosseteste and Chobham. Peraldus' treatises on the vices and virtues are examples of a number of Dominican preaching manuals that are Christocentric in approach. Richard Newhauser has shown how Peraldus, along with contemporary Dominicans Stephen of Bourbon and Humbert of Romans, used examples from Christ's life as a model for Christian behaviour, as well as to substantiate the way of life of their own order.<sup>147</sup> Peraldus, in particular, viewed 'the example of Jesus' virtues as sufficiently efficacious to cure any vice' and his *vitiis* is the only one of our texts to use Christ's suffering as a direct remedy for despair.<sup>148</sup> Citing Bernard of Clairvaux, Peraldus draws on the contemplative life of the monastic, recommending the practice of affective devotion to the students learning from the text, and by extension, to the laity. Not only is

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<sup>147</sup> Richard Newhauser, 'Jesus as the First Dominican?', p. 249.

<sup>148</sup> Peraldus, *Summa de virtutibus* 1.12 (Paris, 1512), lib. 1, fol. 12va: 'Non paucum efficacem est exemplum virtutum Christi...' as quoted by Richard Newhauser, in 'Jesus as the First Dominican?', pp. 244, 252, n. 32.

the penitent advised that ‘the greatest remedy against the sin of despair is the memory of the Lord’s suffering’<sup>149</sup> which will activate the conscience in a process of self reflection, but he should also carry out similar acts of mercy that Christ showed to others in his lifetime, such as ‘not scorning poverty, nor shrinking from sinners [...] nor the person discovered in adultery [...] nor your wicked crucifiers’.<sup>150</sup> Peraldus is not interested in mollifying the penitent; rather than providing encouraging and comforting examples of converted sinners from Scripture, he reinforces the need for the Dominican student, intermediary, and laity to imitate Christ’s example.

This foregrounding of the acts of mercy required by humankind, in exchange for God’s ultimate mercy, is developed by Bromyard, though without the explicit Christocentric focus. He regards not carrying out works of mercy as one of the causes of despair, the cause of omission as described above. The corollary is that one of the remedies is to remember those good works at precisely the right moment as otherwise it will lead to further sin. When someone is ‘healthy and strong he should not think too much of his good works lest it leads to pride’, but when he is dying ‘he ought to think all things good lest he might despair, [as] good works produce hope’.<sup>151</sup> For Bromyard, previous good works are the main medicine for despair. One should learn from the story of David who took courage from having conquered the lion and bear before his fight

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<sup>149</sup> ‘summum remedium contra peccatum desperationis est memoria dominicae passionis’, Peraldus, *vitiis*, p. 205b.

<sup>150</sup> ‘non spernas paupertatem, peccatores non horreas [...] non deprehensam in adulterio [...] non impios crucifixores tuos’, Peraldus, *vitiis*, pp. 205b - 206.

<sup>151</sup> ‘sanus et fortis: non debet nimis de bonis operibus cogitare ne superbiat [...] Ita morie(n)s o(mn)ia bona cogitare debet: ne desperet. bona enim opera spem generant’, Bromyard, *Summa praedicantium, desperationis*, f. 174r.

with Goliath.<sup>152</sup> In the same way, if someone remembers they have already ‘conquered the lion of hell’ then they can ‘be bold in the fight in death’s crossing, hoping in he who previously freed him’.<sup>153</sup> Every example Bromyard gives in *desperatio* is to urge action before the point of death on the assumption that his ultimate audience is not naturally inclined to do so.

Practical forms of hope are also evident in the secular texts. Chobham’s remedy in *virtute* for ‘being oppressed’ by the ‘vast burden of sins’ is to ‘divert daily tears by praying to Him of certain hope, and kindness of mercy’, with reference to God rather than Christ.<sup>154</sup> The required actions of repentance and good works to satisfy God’s justice are also made clear to the priest in *Templum* and *Deus*, but they are not mentioned in the sections devoted to despair. Instead, as guides to the confessional process itself, the texts provide the priest with examples of converted sinners to use in consoling and encouraging the penitent. Both texts use much the same examples, but where *Deus* has the space to be more expansive and explain the story arc of each character, *Templum*, partly by necessity of the schematic layout, is more concise. Where *Deus* explains that ‘David was an adulterer and murderer and afterwards became the highest herald of prophecy’<sup>155</sup> *Templum* is more emphatic about the nature of the sin by recalling ‘murderers in the nature of David the murderer.’<sup>156</sup> Although concise, the priest

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<sup>152</sup> ‘ille in illo periculoso bello recordabat qualiter prius fortiter leonem et vrsum vicerat et confortabatur et audacter bellum illud ingressus est’, Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 174r. [he was mindful in that dangerous fight, how earlier he had strongly conquered the lion and bear, and he was fortified, and boldly began that fight].

<sup>153</sup> ‘quia recordatur se prius leonem infirmi vicisse: audax erit in bello in transitu mortis: sperans in eum qui prius eum liberavit’, Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum, desperationis*, f. 174r.

<sup>154</sup> ‘nemo quamuis ingenti peccatorum pondere prematur [...] set spe certa, misericordie illius indulgentiam sibi cottidianis lacrimis deprecari’, Chobham, *virtute*, p. 135.

<sup>155</sup> ‘David, qui adulter erat et homicida et postea factus est prophetiae summus nuntius’, Grosseteste, *Deus*, p.261.

<sup>156</sup> Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 46.

is left in no doubt as to the nature of sins and the exemplary saints to counteract them; the small prompt assumes enough knowledge of Scripture to identify the correct David and make use of the most appropriate story. In his work on Christian writing as artificial construct, M. B. Pranger describes how Bernard of Clairvaux often assumes his reader to have the necessary knowledge of any given story so that by ‘summarising it, through a literary “imperative of density”’, he projects the ‘required literary skills onto his hypothetical reader’ – someone who can remember the details when prompted and ‘contract it into a single memorial image’.<sup>157</sup> This ‘imperative of density’ occurs in our texts wherever there is concision of thought, and a brief referral to other sources, but is particularly evident in *Templum*, where skills and deficiencies are implicitly ascribed to the reader.

In addition to stories of conversion, both texts also provide reassurance of God’s mercy, with *Templum* expanding on ‘I refuse the death of the sinner’ [Ez. 33:11] from *Deus* to ensure that mistakes in theology cannot be made: ‘I do not will the death of the sinner, however so that he might live according to me and might be converted’.<sup>158</sup> The manuscript that Goering and Montello use as a base text for *Templum* then follows these examples with the non-Scriptural similitude

omnis malicia hominis ad misericordiam Dei tanquam scintilla in medio mari’; et consimilia.<sup>159</sup>

[all a man’s evil is to God’s mercy like a spark in the middle of the sea].

This is an ideal example for demonstrating how some readers might be creative with the

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<sup>157</sup> M. B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity: Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 56.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Nolo mortem peccatoris’, Grosseteste, *Deus*, p. 261; ‘Nolo mortem peccatoris set ut conuertatur et uiuat ad me’, Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 46; trans. *Douay-Rheims*.

<sup>159</sup> Grosseteste, *Templum*, p. 46; MS Cambridge Emanuel 27, f. 60v.

text, and how even the seemingly narrowest term can be open to expansion. The meaning of the watery image appears to be straightforward, and most scholarship to date has considered it a commonplace, generally confining investigations to tracing sources, and surveying the texts in which it occurs. While in MS Cambridge Emanuel 27 a second hand has attributed the phrase to ‘Gregory’ (presumably Gregory the Great), some modern scholars have considered that Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 143:2 is the most likely source. This says that mercy is above judgement and that ‘the fire of sin is put out by a wave of mercy’.<sup>160</sup> The meaning here is clearly that the destructive and powerful nature of fire represents human sin, which can yet be put out by a more powerful surge of cleansing water, as the mercy of God is as wide and enveloping as an ocean. Not everyone is convinced by this however, and my own view is that another source is more likely. A seventeenth-century work on sources cites the phrase from a sermon by German Dominican, theologian, natural philosopher and scientist Albertus Magnus, who was alive at the same time as Grosseteste. In a passage related to despair, like Grosseteste’s, he says:

Divine mercy is so great in regard to all human sins, however big they might be, or of whatever kind, they are just like a spark in the middle of the sea (*sunt quasi scintilla in medio maris*), and this should bring about hope to the truly repenting person. What do you fear? Why do you despair? What multitude of sins frightens you? The mercy of God is larger than your sins.<sup>161</sup>

Magnus is using the comparison of size to make his point: any sin is reduced to the dimensions of a tiny spark in relation to the vast ocean of divine mercy. And the source

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<sup>160</sup> ‘Unda misericordiae peccati ignis exstinguitu’, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, PL 37: 1861. For a discussion of this see John A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Guide to the Quotations. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 77 (Binghampton: State University of New York, 1992), p. 47 and Joseph Goering ‘The Summa de penitentia of Magister Serlo’, *Medieval Studies*, 1976, 1-53 (p. 1).

<sup>161</sup> Albertus Magnus, ‘Sermon on the 3rd Sunday of Advent’ as cited in Aloysius Novarinus, *Electa in Sacra in quibus qua ex Latino, Graeco, Hebraico, et Chadaico fonte; qua ex antiqvis Hebraeorum, Persarum, Graecorum, Romanorum, aliarumque gentum ritibus, quadam divinae Scripturae loca nouiter explicantur et illustrantur* (Durand, 1639), p. 363.

he cites does the same. John Chrysostom (c.349-407) uses the image of the spark frequently in his writing, and the following homily is particularly pertinent:

For the man who fears God as he ought, and trusts in Him, gathers from the very root of pleasure, and has possession of the whole fountain of cheerfulness. And as a spark falling upon a wide ocean quickly disappears, so whatever events happen to the man who fears God, these, falling as it were upon an immense ocean of joy, are quenched and destroyed.<sup>162</sup>

It is clear that he is talking about a small spark of fire falling into the sea, which is immediately quenched by the waters of mercy. That this was a direct source for Grosseteste seems more likely than the Augustinian phrase, especially as it is known that he translated some of Chrysostom's writings from the original Greek.<sup>163</sup> It is possible therefore that the phrase containing 'scintilla' without 'ignis' was transmitted from Chrysostom rather than Augustine to Grosseteste, and from him to Albertus Magnus. It might then be that it was from these sources that the phrase became a fourteenth-century commonplace. In Langland's *Piers Plowman*, for example, there is a 'gleede' which could either be Augustine's fully-fledged fire, or a small spark in the middle of the sea. When Repentance tries to prevent the 'sherewe in wanhope' from hanging himself he says:

And al the wikkednesse in this world that man myghte werche or thynke  
Nis na moore to the mercy of God than in [middles] the see a gleede:  
*Omnis iniquitas quantum ad misericordiam Dei est quasi scintilla in medio maris*  
Therefore have mercy in thy mynde.<sup>164</sup>

Mary Davlin, the one commentator who has analysed the phrase, interprets the gleede as a 'single spark or coal', denoting how tiny man's repented sin is in comparison

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<sup>162</sup> John Chrysostom, 'Homilies on the Statues to the People of Antioch' in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church IX*, trans. by William Richard Wood Stephens, ed. by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company 1889), Homily 18.6, p. 460.

<sup>163</sup> McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 26.

<sup>164</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (London and New York: J. M. Dent and E. P. Dutton, 1978), Passus 5, 283-5 <<http://name.umd.umich.edu/PPIlan>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

to the vast sea of God's surrounding mercy.<sup>165</sup> In her reading, the metaphor denotes humankind dwelling in God: when in the middle of the sea, the repentant sinner is immersed in the 'vastness of divine mercy' where their own 'mind can expand to receive' it.<sup>166</sup> This same connotation is also given in a twelfth-century treatise by Aelred, where all man's sins are absorbed in an immense sea of charity.<sup>167</sup> And so again, as with Augustine's phrase, the comparatively small fire of sin is extinguished by a stronger, all-encompassing force.

The sense of *scintilla ignis*, the spark of fire, is fixed in several fourteenth-century texts including the Latin preaching handbook on the vices and virtues, *Fasciculus Morum* and the English vernacular fourteenth-century poem *Prick of Conscience*, which both use the Latin '*sicut scintilla ignis in medio maris*'.<sup>168</sup> The fire is removed, and meaning opened out again, in another English fourteenth-century pastoral manual, *Speculum Christiani*. Under the heading of 'agayne dyspayre' in relation to Judas' suicide, the metaphor is used to emphasise the need for confession:

Therefore in verray confessyon knowleche youre synnes and doo penaunce, [and] the kyngdom of heuens schal come nere zou. Augustinus: The kyngdom of heuens es schette to no man, but to hym that schetez oute hymselfe. Idem: as a sparcle in the mydel of the see, so es al the wyckednes of man to goddys mercy, et cetera.<sup>169</sup>

The spark becomes a sparkle, and so lends itself to the figurative allusion of a flash of

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<sup>165</sup> Mary Clemente Devlin, *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 115.

<sup>166</sup> Devlin, *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art*, p. 115.

<sup>167</sup> Aelred, *Mirror of Charity*, trans. by Elizabeth Connor, OCSO, introduction and notes by Charles Dumont, OCSO (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 158.

<sup>168</sup> *Fasciculus morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preachers Handbook* ed. and trans. by Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), pp. 126-7; Richard Morris, *Prick of Conscience: Corrected and Amplified Reading Text*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood (London: EETS, 2013), o.s. 342. p. 2013, 16309-18.

<sup>169</sup> *Speculum Christiani*, ed. by Gustaf Holmstedt (London: EETS, 1933), o.s. 182., p. 72.

light upon the water. And this takes us back to *scintilla* which can also refer to a spot of light. So we might interpret the phrase to mean that a repented sin is but a small glint of light on the water, indistinguishable from many others, and of no test to God's mercy. As a refraction of light on the surface, it contains the hope of salvation unavailable down in the depths. The watery glint amongst many also contains the idea that just as sins cannot be distinguished from each other, neither can the sinner: all people and their sins, large or small, carry the same significance to God, and all carry the possibility of the depths of despair unless repentance carries them to the light, and life-giving, surface.

A closer look at the possible meanings of *scintilla* allows for further creativity since it was also used as a metaphorical name for a fish. In his twelfth-century Latin word list, *Liber Derivationem*, the Benedictine monk and lexicographer Osbern of Gloucester, records a '*fundulus*, a small fish which is called both gudgeon and *scintilla* or spark' (*fundulus, minutus piscis, qui et gobio et scintilla dicitur*).<sup>170</sup> With his interest in science and medicine, there is a possibility that Grosseteste may have been aware of this, and he is known to have enjoyed exploring the etymology of words to expand their meaning. In a letter on his translation of a Greek work on monasticism, for example, he explains that the word 'monk' derives from the Greek verb to possess, so that 'he is like a solitary who possesses something singular, so that, living alone in this way, he may by a very fervent love possess him who is truly alone'. From there he explains that '*monachus*' can come from the word to mean 'the unhappiness that brings silence' because it is 'appropriate for a monk to sit alone and be silent', and should 'ceaselessly groan in sorrow for his own sins and those of others'. And finally, he makes the

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<sup>170</sup> For a discussion of these see Christopher Bonfield, 'Medicine for the Body and Soul: Healthy Living in the Age of Bishop Grosseteste c.1100-1400' in *Robert Grosseteste and the Pursuit of Religious and Scientific Learning in the Middle Ages* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), pp. 87-102 (p. 99).



connection that another name for someone reflecting in solitude is *'therapeutae'* from the Greek which can mean 'I heal'. In this way, monks are 'spiritual physicians', who 'heal the souls of those who approach them from the wickedness of the passions, as if from the humoral disproportion brought on by illness'.<sup>171</sup> Grosseteste carried out word for word translations in order, he said, to maintain the literal sense of the original and, like St Augustine he thought the only way to understand the full meaning was for people to read a text in the original Greek. At the same time, he also acknowledged that 'it is quite often necessary for many things to be expressed ambiguously in a variety of senses, even though they cannot have a variety of senses in the Greek idiom'.<sup>172</sup> These examples of Grosseteste's creative translations strengthens the possibility that he was aware *'scintilla'* was also a fish, and could plausibly have deliberately decided to use the word without Augustine's qualifying *'ignis'* as well as Chrysostom's context of falling *scintilla*, or *scintilla* being quenched or extinguished. These *scintilla* are in the sea already. So we have a further layer: A repentant sinner, recognisable by the spark of light, primed to transform into something more intense, will swim in the sea of mercy ready to be swept up in the merciful net of the divine, along with everyone else in the Christian community.

Further, the *scintilla* or *gobio* is described in a twelfth-century Arabic translation of the *Materia medica* by first-century Greek physician and botanist Pedanius Dioscorides as a purgative when boiled up in pig's tripe.<sup>173</sup> Bernard has connected sin

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<sup>171</sup> Robert Grosseteste 'Letter 57. To the abbot and monks of Bury St Edmunds, sending them Grosseteste's Latin rendition of a Greek work on monastic life' in *The Letters of Robert Grosseteste*, translated introduced and annotated by F. A. C. Mantello and Joseph Goering (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 200.

<sup>172</sup> Irena Dorota Bakus, *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West, From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 211.

<sup>173</sup> Pedanius Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, trans. by Lily Y. Beck (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2005).

with the stomach, lamenting that the ‘stomach of his memory’ is congested with foulness because of the bitter impression his sins have left him with.<sup>174</sup> A connection can therefore be made that, just as the fish can be boiled up inside a pig’s stomach to be a purgative for the body, so the sins of man hold within them the possibility of redemption. If they are sterilised in hot tears of repentance, then the soul will be purged and abundant mercy bestowed.

Not all the extant manuscripts include this line however; having examined twenty-one of the forty extant manuscripts in British libraries, only three have the phrase at all, including Goering and Montello’s base text, which may indicate that in one recension it was inserted due to its usefulness. It is also possible that it was in the original text and taken out in a recension which then became an *exempla* for other copies. Whichever is the case, this one commonplace phrase, whether or not Grosseteste intended it to, or indeed actually wrote it in the first place, amply demonstrates that even a basic text can be extemporised in imaginative ways by the curious preacher gifted with a facility for language, and wanting to find ways of guiding his listener away from thoughts of despair. The *scintilla* in the middle of the sea could be a tiny spark of fire – the sin easily washed away in the abundant waters of mercy; it could be a spot of light signifying the repentant sinner, illuminated by the divine; or it might be a fish, holding within it the means of purging the foul and putrid sins of the body gathered in the depths, ready to be collected with the rest of the Christian community in the net of God’s love, catching the light of redemption as it reaches the surface. This easily dismissed commonplace can therefore be engaged with on a number of levels, enabling the text to have been useful to

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<sup>174</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘On Conversion’ in *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works*, ed. by Emilie Griffith and trans. by G. R. Evans (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), pp. 4-5.

both the ‘dimpest of priests’ as well as the more learned pastor able to approach it with a sense of playful curiosity. Rather than being a simple, fixed image, it might have ignited the spark of memory and imagination, until it grew into a fire of erudition and good counsel.

Reassuring examples such as fire, light upon the water, and fish, taken from life and woven into day-to-day living, demonstrate an understanding of human frailty and are central to the argument that lay confession and repentance is not only necessary but that it, along with salvation, is readily available to ordinary people and not just those within the cloister. The fact that this example occurs in *Templum* and not *Deus*, which otherwise gives the same Scriptural remedial advice, is an acknowledgement that the intended reader is someone with immediate contact with the laity.

Unlike the many different causes for, and associations with, despair discussed in these texts, the remedies are fairly limited and straightforward. The antidote to despair along with all other sins was not only to repent but to carry out good works, to pray with hope for God’s mercy and to focus on either the suffering or virtues of Christ. The question of despair might be complex and confusing, but the answer is always simple and clear, if open to the imaginative erudition of the confessor. What none of these texts have the space to do on their own is to fully demonstrate any empathy with a distressed soul. Any shared acknowledgement that inclinations towards sadness and despair are inevitable must be amplified by the priest who can use the examples of saints or sparks in the sea as a starting point.

With a new emphasis placed on confession by the Fourth Lateran Council, these texts are the pivot point for when despair started to become an issue outside the monastery. The inevitable consequence of this emphasis on inward reflection was that

the spiritually inclined were likely to become disturbed when faced with the reality of their own sins. The ideal was that people should sorrow just enough for their sins in order to repent, but not enough to despair completely, and the priest was always encouraged to steer people away from any thoughts of despair because it was dangerous not only to the individual, but also to the stability of the wider community. This concern has long been apparent closer to the cloister where the personal, compassionate concern for the writers' brothers is more evident. Aelred's *Pastoral Prayer* for example, is concerned with diverting others away from desperation, using the term *desperatio* specifically when referring to the brothers in his care rather than himself. Aelred links the vice with its behaviour to ask that 'the spirit of pride and vainglory, envy and sadness (*tristicie*), sloth and slander, despair and indifference (*desperationis et diffidentie*), lust and uncleanness, presumption and discord' be driven from his brothers, and as we have seen, all of these are inextricably linked with despair.<sup>175</sup> Grosseteste's *Perambulavit* also shows how the behaviours occasioned by *acedia* or *tristitia* can apply to the leaders of a community, and that they willingly acknowledge that their own actions can lead to discord and despair. This more personal and passionate response will be explored in greater detail through the *vita contemplativa* literature covered in the next chapter.

The texts discussed in this chapter, while they are all concerned with the care of souls, do not form such a distinct genre. The word *pastoralia* may be a useful umbrella term for them but these texts demonstrate how much writers differed in the messages they wanted to convey about the same concept, and the means by which they chose to do so. Just as despair is not one discrete entity, but used by each writer on their own terms to emphasise different things, so the term *pastoralia* is not one genre with an

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<sup>175</sup> Aelred, *For Your Own People*, p. 55.

overarching set of rules, but a convenient name which conceals as much as it reveals. Both words are useful tags which gesture towards something seemingly specific and graspable but which on closer analysis collapses into an amorphous and slippery mass made up of lots of different elements.

## Chapter 2: Despair and Cenobitic Literature – A Route to the Divine

Unlike the ultimate recipients of the devotional literature examined in chapter one, the texts explored in this chapter are aimed at either the professed religious or spiritually elite laywomen, who are intensely concerned with the internal development of their souls. Their purpose in reading or hearing these works is not to learn the basic principles, but to internalise narratives which provide succour and material upon which to meditate for a closer understanding of God. These texts are certainly concerned with salvation, the main purpose of the pastoral manuals, but they also encourage their readers to travel on an inward journey to find the divine, to determine the extent to which they might or might not be close to Him already, and provide guidance on where and how spiritual despair fits into that process. In part two I will be exploring texts written for laypeople outside of enclosed communities who nevertheless wanted to embrace the idea of divine unity, and this chapter gives an indication of the kinds of ideas which those fourteenth-century writers were drawing upon and developing for their own purposes. After a brief introduction to the writers and texts to be discussed here, I shall analyse their use of language, understanding of despair, and the ways in which they utilised it to invoke particular responses in their readers. I will then look at the writers themselves to consider how certain aspects of their backgrounds and communities might have inflected their conception of ideas relating to despair, its role for someone seeking a spiritual internal life, and the language they chose to write about it.

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## 1. The writers and their texts

The writers considered here are key figures within the eleventh and twelfth-century monastic *vita contemplativa* tradition. St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Aelred of Rievaulx (1110 - 67) were at the forefront of a change towards a developed inward focus. Mysticism and contemplation was always of interest to those outside the cloister as well as in it, with St Anselm being one of the first monastics to provide material for non-professionals.<sup>1</sup> His *Prayers and Meditations* (hereafter referred to as *Prayers*), particularly *Meditation One* written around 1071 and sent to high-born religious and secular women as aids to devotion, often encourage the reader to the brink of despair while detailing the dire consequences of staying there. His intellectual works for monastics which are based on reason and logic, *Proslogion* of 1077-8 and *Cur Deus Homo* of 1095-98, treat the existence of God and the need for Christ respectively, developing these themes from *Prayers*. These texts provide Anselm's informing theology that man can think of nothing greater than God, and that if God and Christ are taken away as if they did not exist, reason would argue them back into existence. He explains that mankind is unable to repay the debts caused by Adam's sin, because an act against the will of God is so grave that man does not have anything in his essence which can counteract it:

You do not therefore give recompense if you do not give something greater than the entity on account of which you ought not to have committed the sin.<sup>2</sup>

All that is left is for individuals to repay their personal debt to Christ through good

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Anselm, 'Why God Became Man', in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* ed. by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford University Press, 2008), book 1, ch. 21, p. 306. All further references are to this edition unless otherwise stated. 'Non ergo satisfacis, si non reddis aliquid maius, quam sit id pro quo peccatum facere non debueras', Schmitt, ed., 'Cur Deus Homo', *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, I:21, p. 89.

works, penance and contrition. Anselm makes clear that because man sinned, and he is no longer able to do what God made him for, his state on earth can only be one of sorrow: ‘that without which nothing is happy has gone from him and that by which itself is nothing but misery remains to him’.<sup>3</sup> Man ‘lost the blessedness for which he was made’ and is by default unable to be happy.<sup>4</sup> In the *Prayers* of interest here, the reader is meant to realise they are in the blind, dark, bitterness of death where once they had light, vision, joy, and life, with Anselm often framing his and the readers’ thoughts in the dialectic of confusion, anguish and anger: ‘why did he deprive us of light and surround us with darkness? Why did he take life away from us and inflict death upon us?’<sup>5</sup>

The other two writers of concern here are Cistercians who developed the use of contemplation within their order. The most prominent of these is St Bernard of Clairvaux whose *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (*Song*) was an influential commentary on this key Scriptural text, as well as encapsulating the Cistercian focus on Christian love (*caritas*).<sup>6</sup> Bernard composed and revised this text during the last decade of his life, taking it from a verbally given sermon to a sophisticated written work enabling deeper rumination.<sup>7</sup> The intended audience were established contemplatives who had ‘reached

<sup>3</sup> Anselm, ‘Proslogion’, in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ch. 1, p. 85. All further references are to this edition unless otherwise stated. Hereafter Anselm, *Proslogion*; ‘Abscessit sine quo nihil felix est, et remansit quod per se non nisi miserum est’, ‘Proslogion’ in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Brothers, 1946), vol. 3, Cap. I, p. 98. All further Latin references are to this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 85; ‘Perdidit beatitudinem ad quam factus est’, Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, Cap. 1, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 85; ‘Quare sic nobis obseravit lucem, et obduxit nos tenebris: Ut quid nobis abstulit vitam, et inflixit mortem?’, Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, Cap. 1, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion on the development of Bernard’s spoken to written work see: Jean Leclercq, ‘Introduction’ in *On the Song of Songs* vol. 4, trans. by Irene Edmonds (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980), pp. xvi-xvii; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 338, note 68; Christopher Holdsworth, ‘Were the Sermons of St Bernard on the Song of Songs Ever Preached?’ in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 295-318 (pp. 308, 311-6).



[spiritual] maturity ... unless in vain have [they] prolonged [their] study of divine teaching, mortified [their] senses, and meditated day and night on God's law'.<sup>8</sup> In these sermons, despair arises as a result of: not knowing oneself or God well enough; through a sense of self disgust felt most strongly in the early stages of conversion; and through the sorrow felt at not being filled with the Holy Spirit to the extent or frequency desired. Bernard is clear that man's time on earth is arduous and sometimes close to despair, but, unlike Anselm, *Song* tempers this with an optimism and encouragement that the fully developed spiritual man is capable of moments of divine connection, and will ultimately be saved. A series of texts which reveal Bernard's more doctrinal views on despair than those found in *Song* are *The Sentences* – a selection of earlier sermons delivered at chapter and written up by attendant monks.<sup>9</sup> These describe the negative aspects of despair in clear terms, spelling out its consequences using a combination of Scriptural and real-world metaphors.

At Bernard's request, his junior fellow Cistercian, St Aelred of Rievaulx further developed the focus on *caritas*. His first work as novice master was *Mirror of Charity* (written around 1142-3 and hereafter referred to as *Mirror*), was aimed at new Cistercians finding it difficult to get used to the stricture of the order.<sup>10</sup> It contains a conversation between a character also called Aelred and a novice who found it easier to

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermons on the Songs of Songs', in *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs* vol. 1, trans. by Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), Sermon 1, section 1, p. 1; 'SAPIENTIAM LOQUIMUR INTER PERFECTOS, quales vos nimirum esse confido, nisi frustra forte ex longo studiis estis caelestibus occupati, exercitati sensibus, et in lege Dei meditati die ac nocte', 'Sermones super Cantica Canticorum' in *Sancti Bernardi Opera* ed. by J. LeClercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais, 4 vols. (Romae: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957) vol. 1, Sermo 1, section 1, p. 1. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: From Gregory the Great to the Twelfth Century* (London: SCM Press, 1994), p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Marsha L. Dutton, 'Introduction' in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx 1110-1167* ed. by Marsha L. Dutton (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 1-16 (p. 16); Marsha L. Dutton, 'Aelred of Rievaulx: Abbot, Teacher, and Author' in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx 1110-1167* ed. by Marsha L. Dutton (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 17-47 (pp. 30-31).

cry tears of contrition when he could follow his own will and inclinations in the secular world, constantly repeating the process of sin and repentance, rather than following this new path of constant obedience, self-abnegation, prayer and contemplation. Towards the end of his life, around 1160-2 Aelred also wrote a *Rule of Life for a Recluse* (briefly discussed in chapter one of this thesis), consisting of chapters on the inner man, the outer man, and a threefold meditation. Despair is mainly considered in the personal terms of his own conversion, rather than as a condition his reader is likely to face having already converted, but *Rule* is occasionally referred to here as an example of a work intended for use outside the monastery, and which reveals influences further developed in fourteenth-century vernacular theology.

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## 2. Inner contemplation and despair

All the texts discussed here are couched in the need for introspection as a route to the divine. In a letter to William Rufus' daughter 'the venerable Adelaide, a lady of royal nobility but nobler in the character of a virtuous life', Anselm tells her that two of his prayers 'if recited from the inmost heart when it is at leisure' will 'increase love's flame'.<sup>11</sup> Anselm also required his reader to cultivate a quiet, inner contemplation, at the beginning of the *Proslogion*, an otherwise scholarly work for monastics on the proof of God's existence:

Come now, little man, turn aside for a while from your daily employment, escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside your weighty cares, let your burdensome distractions wait, free yourself awhile for God and rest awhile in him. Enter the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything except God and that which can help you in seeking him, and when you have shut the door, seek

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<sup>11</sup> Anselm, 'Letter 10, To Adelaide' in *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 3 vols., trans. and annotated by Walter Fröhlich (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 92-4. 'Venerabili dominae regia nobilitate, sed nobilius morum probitate polenti Adelidi'; 'quae si intimo corde dicantur, cum vacat, plus tendunt ad accendendum amorem' in Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, Epistola 10, p. 113.

him. Now, my whole heart, say to God, 'I seek your face, Lord, it is your face I seek'.<sup>12</sup>

As well as placing an intellectual work within the realm of inner contemplation, this paragraph summarises the monastic *raison d'être* for entering the soul's 'inner chamber'. At this point the tumultuous thoughts and 'weighty cares' which come to the fore when examining the self – a necessary process towards contrition – should recede, enabling the soul to carry out its true function of finding the essence of the divine which already resides within. Anselm therefore required quiet introspection when he was using reason and logic to prove the existence of God and the need for Christ, as much as when he uses emotional language in the *Prayers and Meditations* to encourage self scrutiny.

All three writers teach that an inner silence should lead to knowledge of one's sinful nature, which, while inevitably taking one to the brink of despair, is ultimately the way to a full knowledge of God. Gillespie and Fanous are concerned that the texts and practices relating to contemplation be seen as 'firmly rooted in the society, culture, and intellectual environment in which they and their authors and readers were produced, and by which they were inevitably coloured and conditioned'.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the texts discussed here, the incubating environment is defined by the *Rule of St Benedict (RB)* as it applies to both Benedictine and the more rigorous Cistercian houses where introspection was promoted in order that 'with the support of their community, monks and abbots could develop an interior silence in which they could hear the voice of

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<sup>12</sup> St Anselm, 'Proslogion' in *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, translated and with an introduction by Sister Benedicta Ward, S. L. G. (London: Penguin, 1973), ch. 1, p. 239. 'Eia nunc, homuncio, fuge paululum occupationes tuas, absconde te modicum a tumultuosis cogitationibus tuis. Abice nunc onerosas curas, et postpone laboriosas distentiones tuas. Vaca aliquantulum deo, et requiesce aliquantulum in eo. Intra in cubiculum mentis tuae, exclude omnia praeter deum et quae te iuvent ad quaerendum eum, et clauso ostio quaere eum. Dic nunc, totum, 'cor meum', dic nunc deo: 'Quaero vultum tuum; vultum tuum, domine, requiro.' Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, *Proslogion*, p. 98

<sup>13</sup> Fanous and Gillespie, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, p. xii.

God'.<sup>14</sup> The *RB* sets out daily routines such as when to pray, work and read, as well as a list of seventy-four 'tools of good works', all of which are incorporated into the heart of the texts discussed here.<sup>15</sup> Where the first is 'to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's strength' from Matt. 22:37, the last is 'to never despair of God's mercy'.<sup>16</sup> Its inclusion at all, in addition to its placement at the end, after a list of behaviours difficult for people to consistently carry out, indicates the extent to which despair of salvation was always an alternative, and just as likely choice, to despair of the worldly self which can be transformed into contrition and salvation. Other injunctions from *RB* to 'place your hope in God alone' and to 'live in fear of judgement day and have a great horror of hell', are also tools embedded in the works of the writers discussed here, albeit to various degrees.<sup>17</sup>

Despair could have been a particular issue for neophytes in Cistercian houses at this time as they admitted only grown men who were either priests or had a secular, often knightly background, rather than child oblates. These novices had to negotiate the transition from the external world to a life of obedience and repetition in the cloister, forcing them to confront themselves and their relationship with God in a totally new way which required an internal dialogue that was not needed so much for children.<sup>18</sup>

The difficulties faced in such instances are covered by Aelred in *Mirror of Charity*.

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<sup>14</sup> Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> St Benedict, 'Chapter four. The tools for good works' in *The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>16</sup> 'et de Dei misericordia numquam desperare', 'diem iudicii timere, gehennam expavescere', St Benedict, *Rule*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>17</sup> 'spem suam Deo committere', St Benedict, *Rule*, pp. 182-3.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussions on this see Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 28-35; Elizabeth Gilliam Brown, 'Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair' (unpublished doctoral dissertation: Yale University, 2010), pp. 35-6; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Jesus as mother and abbot as mother: some themes in Twelfth-century Cistercian Writing', *Harvard Theological Review*, 70 (1977), 257-84 (pp. 278-9).

A dialogue between a struggling novice and novice master reveal why the harder monastic path, drawing one closer to despair, is also the one leading to an earthly connection with the Divine and heavenly salvation:

But because anyone who enters God's service hears Scripture say: 'Be steadfast and prepare your soul for temptation', it is necessary as the toils of temptation press in on him every day that some spiritual savour flow into him while he is still faltering and near despair. Refreshed by the drops, he takes up the struggle against his faults with more intense mental ardor, endures it more generously, overcomes it more easily, or escapes it. Examine yourself more carefully. After that experience of utterly sweet attachment, when you returned to those silly vain occupations, once you regained your composure again did you not feel disconcerted and, as I said, did you not simmer with a sort of salutary hatred for yourself? Then you thought about adopting a stricter life and imposing such great obligations on yourself so that, even if your will consented to such things, there would be no opportunity of returning to them.<sup>19</sup>

Self-hatred and being close to despair are the necessary first steps of conversion, feelings which are always, at this early stage, ameliorated by experiencing an attachment to God through the flow of spiritual savour so that he is encouraged to continue 'living soberly, justly, and godly' even when that attachment is no longer readily felt.<sup>20</sup> Aelred goes on to tell the novice that eventually, after 'countless victories', temptations will no longer have the power to hurt him, and he will be able to 'repose in the pleasantness of

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<sup>19</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, book 2, chapter 19, section 58, pp. 203-4; 'Sed quia accedens quis ad seruitutem Dei audit Scripturam dicentem : *Sta fortiter et praepara animam tuam ad tentationem*, necesse est, ut quoties labor tentationis oppresserit, nutanti iam peneque desperanti spiritalis quidam sapor interfulat ; cuius recreatus aspergine, uitiorum colluctationem acriori mentis aestu sus ipiat, magnanimiter toleret, fa ilius superet, uel euitet. Teipsum diligentius intuere. Nonne post illam dulcissimi affectus experientiam, ad ludicra uanaque reuersus, cum iterum redires in te, confundebaris, ac quodam, ut ita diserim, odio salutari contra teipsum accendebaris? Hinc meditati arctiorem uitam arripere, tantamque tibimet apponere necessitatem, ut si etiam talibus consentiret uoluntas, nulla tamen foret ad talia redeundi facultas.' Aelred, *De Spec. Caritatis*, II 59, *Opera Omnia*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>20</sup> 'To say this in simpler words so you may understand more easily, anyone who keeps trying to the best of his ability to reach God—that is, by obeying his commandments and living soberly, justly, and godly, according to the teachings of the Gospel and the apostles—even though he does not taste any of this sweetness, should be said to love God, on the testimony of him who said *The person who keeps my commandments is the one who loves me.*' Aelred, *Mirror*, book 2, chapter 18, section 56, p. 202; 'Vt ergo simplicioribus uerbis utar, quo facilius intelligas ; qui quantumcumque potest, insistit, ut Deum habeat, mandatis uidelicet illius obtemperando, et secundum apostolica et euangelica praecepta sobrie, et iuste, et pie uiuendo, etsi nihil huius dulcedinis gustet, Deum tamen diligere dicendus est, ipso attenstante qui ait : *Qui mandata mea custodierit, ille est qui diligit me.*' Aelred, *De Spec. Caritatis*, II 56, *Opera Omnia*, p. 92.

the virtues' through the 'grace of the divine loving-kindness', implying that this will be the start of resting in God in the way that Anselm's meditation in *Proslogion* requires.<sup>21</sup> Pain must be endured, but there will come a time when all pain is spent, and all that is left are virtues which are the closest the body can get to resting in God. When the novice replies 'with eyes brimming over' that he is 'confident that some day he will reach the kind [of visitation from God] that is sublime and ineffable', he exhibits both a lack of confidence and a sense of the possibility of achieving the enormity of the task ahead of him.<sup>22</sup> By showing the reader an understanding of the difficulties alongside encouragement that they can be conquered, Aelred demonstrates the Cistercian focus on community support and balance which acknowledges the role of despair while trying to keep it from overwhelming the individual.

In contrast, when Anselm initially sent his prayers and meditations to Adelaide, his intention to provide 'some passages' to 'increase love's flame' in the prayers to 'St Stephen and Saint Mary Magdalene' is eclipsed by his focus on using the meditation to break the soul until it is terrified of the day of judgement. Even though this work finally allows the reader to consider salvation through Jesus' name, it is constructed so that self-despair is repeatedly approached in real time while saying the prayer, rather than treated as a vague concept which may occasionally happen. That Anselm consciously designed

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<sup>21</sup> 'Finally, after countless victories, when you have become like an old soldier and when those temptations which now wear you out as a novice will be thoroughly deadened, you will repose in the pleasantness of the virtues. Admitted by the grace of the divine loving-kindness to that most sublime kind of consolation which is, as it were, the reward of the just, you will say with the prophet: *How great is the abundance of your sweetness, O Lord, which you have hidden for those who fear you.*' Aelred, *Mirror*, book 2, chapter 19, section 59, pp. 204-5; 'donec post innumeras uictorias, auasi emeritus iam miles effectus, his tentationibus quibus nunc quasi nouitius fatigaris, penitus consopitis, in uirtutum suauitate repaues : ad illud quoque sublimissimum consolationis genus gratia diuinae pietatis admissus, quod quasi praemium constat esse iustorum, dicas cum Propheta : *Quam magna multitudo dulcedinis tuae, Domine, quam abscondisti timentibus te.*' Aelred, *De Spec. Caritatis*, II 59, *Opera Omnia*, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, book 2, chapter 19, section 60, pp. 205. 'secundum uero quod in me iam incipiat actitari, te instruente persentio ; at sublime illud et ineffabile quandoque me adepturum confido.' Aelred, *De Spec. Caritatis*, II 59, *Opera Omnia*, p. 94.

the meditation this way is made clear in his letter which says it should be used by

the soul of the sinner to briefly contemplate itself; contemplating it despises itself; despising it humiliates itself; humiliating, it agitates itself by the terror of the last judgement, and through this agitation it breaks down in groans and tears.<sup>23</sup>

Where Walter Fröhlich translates this passage to say that the soul should ‘contemplate itself’, Anselm did not I think mean the quiet, peaceful contemplation used to ‘increase love’s flame’ or consider a theological treatise. The verb *discutio* literally means ‘to strike asunder, dash to pieces, shatter’, with tropological connotations of ‘to separate mentally, distinguish’.<sup>24</sup> By using the subjunctive case Anselm indicates that the soul should tear itself completely apart with full force in order to distinguish between its individual components clearly, and so see the complete truth about one’s soul laid uncompromisingly bare. R. W. Southern’s translation ‘let the soul of the sinner examine itself’ is closer to Anselm’s intentions, and his analysis that ‘the penitential stage of horror at the deformation of the image of God in the soul must come first’ before any communion with God aptly sums up Anselm’s approach at this time.<sup>25</sup> In a later letter of 1104 accompanying the larger collection of *Prayers and Meditations* to Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, Anselm, possibly with the benefit of his seventy-one years’ more developed understanding of human nature and likely reader reaction, alters his stance slightly. He no longer uses the language of violence when talking about fear, but suggests that a sense of calm introspection should be maintained when inciting both fear and love:

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<sup>23</sup> Anselm, ‘Letter 10, To Adelaide’, p. 94. ‘qua se peccatoris anima breviter discutiat, dicutiendo despiciat, despiciendo humilet, humiliando terrore ultimi iudicii concutiat, concussa in gemitus et lacrymas erumpat’, Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, Epistola 10, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Short, *discutio*, v I and II.b.2.

<sup>25</sup> R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, reprinted 1995), p. 104.

They are arranged so that by reading them the mind may be stirred up either to the love or fear of God, or to a consideration of both; so they should not be read cursorily or quickly, but little by little, with attention and deep meditation. It is not intended that the reader should feel impelled to read the whole, but only as much as will stir up the affections to prayer; so as much as does that, think it to be sufficient for you.<sup>26</sup>

This shift to a balanced use of love and fear may reflect the person to whom he is writing. Where Adelaide might have been an institutionalised religious of noble birth, Matilda was a political figure of greater influence whose main purpose was not complete devotion to God. This change, along with the more explicit recommendation to read only small parts at a time, suggests that Anselm may have become more aware of the toll constant self-denigration exerts on the reader, especially one who is not professionally religious.<sup>27</sup> In his summary of this last phase of Anselm's *Prayers*, although Southern does not comment on the subtle change of language in Matilda's letter, he does say that the alterations made to the collection as a whole 'reflect [Anselm's] position as a public figure, writing for a wider circle of users' and 'were designed to make them more generally useful for devotional purposes'.<sup>28</sup> He also considers this collection as a point of change in Anselm's own devotional struggle along with the *Prayers'* wider dissemination:

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<sup>26</sup> St Anselm, 'Letter of Anselm to the Countess Matilda of Tuscany' in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, p. 90. 'Quae quoniam ad excitandam legentis mentem ad dei amorem vel timorem seu ad suimet discussionem sunt editae, non sunt legendae cursim vel velociter, sed paulatim cum intenta et morosa meditatione. Nec debet intendere lector quamlibet earum totam legere, sed tantum quantum ad excitandum affectum orandi, ad quod factae sunt, sentit sibi sufficere', Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Prologus*, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> The same advice, to only read those parts of interest or useful for promoting devotion, is given in Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. This is a fifteenth-century text ostensibly for non professionals but actually drawing on monastic practices. It is also a revised translation of pseudo-Bonaventure's fourteenth-century *Meditationes vitae Christi* which does not allow its reader any flexibility in following the prescribed hebdomadal structure. For further details see Allan Westphall and David Falls, 'The Active, Contemplative and Mixed Lives' and 'Meditative Reading and the St Cecilia Model' in 'Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ', *Geographies of Orthodoxy: Mapping the English pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ* via <<https://geographies-of-orthodoxy.qub.ac.uk/resources/>> [accessed 2 September 2017 and 17 January 2021 when not all functions were working].

<sup>28</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, p. 111.



By 1104, words that had first been written towards the end of his years of silence as expressions of his most intimate fears and hopes had finally emerged from the privacy in which they had originally been composed to become part of the common devotional property of the medieval world. Thereafter the whole collection became very generally known throughout Europe.<sup>29</sup>

Mary Jane Morrow writes that Anselm conversed with a range of women by letter including Eulalia of Shaftesbury as well as Adelaide and Matilda.<sup>30</sup> The latter she says were valuable political and social allies, and his gratitude for their friendship was expressed along with suggestions for enhancing their devotional practice. Even though he may have taken the stance of spiritual advisor with female associates, Anselm consistently acknowledged the importance of their support especially during his bouts of political conflict. For Anselm to share his compositions with Adelaide and Matilda implied that he was giving his works to friends whom he felt would read, use, and appreciate such devotional texts. In addition, these powerful women approved and amplified Anselm's work as can be seen by the large number of versions (and added prayers) in circulation.

By implication then, Anselm did not consider that the secular reader would benefit from the same 'dashing to pieces' or '*discutio*' of the self, a process leading to despair which he had previously advocated for the seriously devout non-monastic. Like Anselm, Aelred too advocates short periods of concentrated focus in his *Rule*, where the aim of the recluse is to be in silent communion with Christ without any allusions to self-violence. Due to the readers' solitude, rather than their inability to grasp grave theological truths, Aelred advises a constant change in occupation, since 'it is more

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<sup>29</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm: Portrait in a Landscape*, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Jane Morrow, 'Sharing Texts: Anselmian Prayers, a Nunnery's Psalter and the Role of Friendship' in *Voices in Dialogue - Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 97-113 (p. 104).

profitable to pray often and briefly than for too long at one time, unless of course it be prolonged without one's knowing it, by the inspiration of devotion' in order to maintain long term enthusiasm for prayer and devotion to God.<sup>31</sup>

All three writers consider that the spirit of a person needs to be broken, but where Anselm's overall tendency in the prayers and meditations which treat despair is to dwell on the details of self-inadequacy at the expense of either Divine or brotherly comfort, the Cistercians consider the soul as part of a community in need of demonstrations of love from those around him (including the author of the text he is reading), as well as from God. In the same way that Aelred exhibits an ameliorative approach with the novice, Bernard too takes a softer stance. Both writers may have been influenced directly by Anselm's shift to a softer approach, but it is equally likely that their own observations of the psychological damage caused by repeated enforced despair was a factor. In *Song*, for example, Bernard recognises the almost visceral pain experienced by 'those of you who have recently come to us from the world, who have renounced your sinful ways and are inevitably gripped by the bitterness and confusion of the repentant soul, that, like the pain of fresh wounds, torment and distract one beyond bearing'.<sup>32</sup> For Bernard this 'torment' is itself the medicine for one's sins:

A soul entangled in many sins can prepare for itself a certain ointment once it begins to reflect on its behavior, and collects its many and manifold sins, heaps them together and crushes them in the mortar of conscience. It cooks them, as it were, within a breast that boils up like a pot over the fire of repentance and sorrow, so that it can exclaim with the Prophet: "My heart became hot within me. As I mused the fire burned." Here then is one ointment which the sinful soul

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<sup>31</sup> Aelred, *Rule*, The Outer Man, 9, p. 55; 'Vtilius est enim saepius orare breuiter, quem semel nimis prolixo, nisi forte orationem deuotio inspirata, ipso nesciente qui orat, prolongauerit.' Aelred, *De Instit. Inclus.*, 9, *Opera Omnia*, p. 645.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 1, Sermon 10, section 6, pp. 64-5; 'Vobis dico, quos nuper conversos de saeculo, et a viis. Vestris pravis recedentes, exceptit mox amaritudo et confusio animi paenitentis, ac velut recentium adhuc vulnere dolor nimius excruciat atque pertubat.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 10, section 6, p. 51.

should provide at the beginning of its conversion and apply to its still smarting wounds, for the first sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than actively encouraging his audience to repeat that sense of pain in the way that Anselm does, Bernard instead reassures the reader that ‘God will not scorn this crushed and broken spirit’ as, joined with the agonising of conscience over sinful acts, it is the necessary ointment ‘that not only inspires men to amend their lives but even makes the angels dance for joy’ and so ‘must not be easily spurned nor cheaply priced’.<sup>34</sup> Bernard further softens this gentle counsel explaining the need for such distress by going on to advise the dangers to the soul of dwelling in ‘troubled and anxious reflection on your own progress’ for long periods at a time. Of equal value to the embodied soul, and to maintain a healthy balance of emotions, the heart and mind should focus on

smoother ways where the gifts of God are serenely savored, so that the thought of him may give breathing space to you whose consciences are perplexed [...] Sorrow for sin is indeed necessary, but it should not be an endless preoccupation. You must dwell also on the glad remembrance of God’s loving-kindness, otherwise sadness will harden the heart and lead it more deeply into despair.<sup>35</sup>

Despair then is a real issue for all the writers discussed here, but the Cistercians do not leave the reader teetering on the brink of despair for long periods, instead there is

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 1, Sermon 10, section 5, pp. 63-4; ‘Est ergo unguentum, quod sibi conficit anima multis irretita criminibus, si, cum incipit cogitare vias suas, colligat, congerat, conteratque in mortariolo conscientiae multas ac varias species peccatorum suorum, et intra aestuantis pectoris ollam simul omnia coquat igne quodam paenitentiae et doloris, ut possit dicere cum Propheta: CONCALUIT COR MEUM INTRA ME, ET IN MEDITATIONE MEA EXARDEXCET IGNIS. Ecce, hoc est unum unguentum, quo anima peccatrix suae conversionis primordia condire debet, plagisque suis recentibus adhibere: primum namque sacrificium Deo, spiritus contribulatus.’ Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 10, section 5, pp. 50-51.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 1, Sermon 10, section 6, p. 65; ‘Securae manus vestrae distillent myrrhae amaritudinem in salubrem hanc unctionem, quia cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despiciet. Non est omnino spernenda nec cilis aestimanda huiuscemodi unctio, cuius odor non solum homines provocat ad correctionem, sed et angelos ad exultationem invitat.’ Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 10, section 6, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 1, Sermon 11, section 2, p. 70; ‘Quamobrem suadeo vobis, amicis meis, reflectere interdum pedem a molesta et anxia recordatione viarum vestrarum, et evadere in itinera planiora seniorioris memoriae beneficiorum Dei, ut qui in vobis confundimini, ipsius intuitu respiretis [...] Et quidem necessarius dolor pro peccatis, sed si non sit continuus. Sane interpoletur laetiori recordatione divinae benignitatis, ne forte prae tristitia induretur cor, et desperatione plus pereat.’ Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 11, section 2, p. 55.

often a more immediate reminder of God's love and mercy, as well as a general assurance of salvation. Anselm leaves this assurance to the very end of *Meditation One* and in his *Prayers*, which Eileen Sweeney has noted ultimately end with 'a sense of entitlement to heavenly communion' only after first taking the reader to 'the depths of hellish despair'.<sup>36</sup> When anthropomorphising and directly addressing his sins in the *Prayer to St Paul*, for example, he accuses them of leading him to the silence and lack of agency brought by despair:

And thus, the wretch you have deceived and captured you make fast in despair, to be silent and lie insensible, as if lost to God and forgetting God, until he is sold to the merchants of hell, who collect their merchandise in the lake of death. [...] Alas, how evil it is to despair and to be silent like this; and alas, how vain it is to cry out without hope, to strive without hope.<sup>37</sup>

Being in complete despair renders the reader in the double bind of being unable to speak to God nor to carry out any ameliorative actions. Salvation is only possible if God is approached through hope, otherwise the sinner's actions must make them the property of the 'merchants of hell' and spiritual death. This desperation turns to a glimmer of hope in the next verse where Anselm appeals to God,

whose goodness is not exhausted, whose mercy is not emptied out, whose knowledge does not fail, whose power can effect what you will; whence shall I ever be able to get back life, who have thus been driven desperate by my sins?... Teach me, O Lord, whence I ought to hope so that I can pray.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Eileen C. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> St Anselm, 'Prayer to St Paul', in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, p. 144; 'et sic miserum vestrum deceptum, captivatum, ligatum facitis desperare, tacere et insensibilem velut perditum ei et oblitum dei iacere, donec illum vendatis mercatoribus inferni, qui merces suas comportant in lacum mortis [...] Heu, quam malum est sic desperare, sic tacere! Et heu, quam vanum est sine spe clamare, sine spe conari!', Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Oratio 10, Oratio ad sanctum Petrum*, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Anselm, 'Prayer to St Paul', p. 145; 'Deus, cuius bonitas non exhauritur, cuius misericordia non exinanitur, cuius scientia non deficit, cuius potestas quod vult efficit: unde potero respirare, qui sic ob peccata mea cogor desperare? [...] Doce me, domine, unde debeam sperare, ut possim orare', Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 35.

This faithful yearning is swiftly replaced by the knowledge that it cannot be converted into prayer due to the unworthy state of the sinner:

For I long to pray to you; but I neither know how because of my ignorance, nor am I able to because of my hardness. And I am forbidden to do it by despair because of my sins.<sup>39</sup>

Sins are at the root of despair for Anselm, but for Bernard, and, as we shall see, Julian and Porete, they become a necessary step towards God without the personal felt reaction of abhorrence which Anselm expects. His attention then reverts to Christ in a similarly reproachful manner to that used in the concluding stanza to *Meditation One*:

Jesus, good Lord, why did you come down from heaven, what did you do in the world, to what end did you give yourself over to death, unless it was that you might save sinners?<sup>40</sup>

Anselm takes the reader through the need to have an active faith as well as hope before salvation is possible, since ‘the fertility of evil works forbids me to have hope; and sterility of good works proves me to be without faith’.<sup>41</sup> Verse twenty-three swings back to an appeal to Christ with an understanding that hope must be at the centre of his prayers:

At least if I may hope, I may pray as much as I can; nor cease until I obtain what I can. Certainly, if you will, you need not despair; and if you pray you are able to obtain. Ask then, that this dead soul which you brought to life may be restored to life, nor cease until he is given back to you, living.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Anselm, ‘Prayer to St Paul’, p. 145; ‘Orare namque te volo, sed nec scio propter ignorantiam meam nec possum propter duritiam meam, et prohibeor desperatione propter iniquitatem meam’, Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Anselm, ‘Prayer to St Paul’, pp. 145-6; ‘Iesu bone domine, cur de caelo venisti, quid in mundo fecisti, ad quid te morti dedisti, nisi ut peccatores salvares?’, Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Anselm, ‘Prayer to St Paul’, p. 147; ‘Vae, foecunditas malorum operum prohibebat me spem habere, et sterilitas bonorum operum probat me fide carere’, Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Anselm, ‘Prayer to St Paul’, p. 155; ‘Certe si vis, non potes desperare; et si oras, potes impetrare. Insta ergo ut anima mortua, quam tu vivam peperisti, vitae restituatur, nec cesses, donec tibi viva reddatur’, Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 41.

In the final verse Anselm is wholly positive of Christ's ability to revive the 'dead chicken' who 'puts himself under [His] wings'.<sup>43</sup> Despair does not inevitably lead to death through the merchants of hell, but by Jesus' 'sweet smell the despairing are revived, [his] warmth gives life to the dead', until,

despairing of himself, let him be comforted by you; and in your whole and unceasing grace let him be refashioned by you. For from you flows consolation for sinners; to you be blessing for ages and ages. Amen.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to Anselm, Aelred and Bernard have a greater tendency to maintain a sense of assurance. Bernard is clear that man's time on earth is arduous and sometimes close to despair, but he tempers this, especially in *Song*, with an optimism and encouragement that the spiritual man is capable of moments of divine connection, and an assurance that he will ultimately be saved. This assurance reflects Bernard's view that his Clairvaux monks had a higher claim on heaven than others. Wim Verbaal, for example, cites a letter by Bernard saying that Clairvaux 'herself is Jerusalem, affiliated to the Jerusalem which is in heaven, by the complete devotion of the mind, by the imitative way of life and by a spiritual affinity' and more like the real Jerusalem than 'this earthly Jerusalem to which Mount Sinai in Arabia is related, which is in bondage with her children'.<sup>45</sup> An anecdote of one of his sermons underlines Bernard's belief in the spiritual efficacy of Clairvaux's monastic life, saying to his audience that 'Judas, who betrayed and sold God, would be granted pardon if he could be in the same place where you are'.<sup>46</sup> This

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<sup>43</sup> Anselm, 'Prayer to St Paul', pp. 155-6; 'Christe mater, qui congregas sub alas pullos tuos, mortuus hic pullus tuus subicit se sub alas tuas', Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Anselm, 'Prayer to St Paul', section 25, p. 156; 'a se desperans a te confortetur et in integram et inseparabilem gratiam tuam per te reformatur. A te namque fluit consolatio miserorum, qui sis benedictus in saecula saeculorum, amen', Anselm, *Opera, Oratio 10, Oratio ad Sanctum Petrum*, vol. 3, p. 41.

<sup>45</sup> Letter 64. 1-2 as cited by Wim Verbaal, 'Timeless Time: Dramatical Eternity in the Monastery under Bernard of Clairvaux', in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*. International Medieval Research Vol. 9, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riano (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), pp. 233-51 (p. 233).

<sup>46</sup> *Liber visionum et miraculorum* as cited by Verbaal, 2003, p. 242.

example, among others, is used by Elizabeth Gilliam Brown to argue that Bernard himself was responsible for driving his monks to despair by setting too stringent an example. She also argues that ‘in this atmosphere, of so much energy and so much hope, despair probably did not seem very important or very daunting’, that it had a higher profile, and was linked to temptation, only with the second generation of Cistercians.<sup>47</sup> However, an examination of the texts discussed here, rather than the few extant anecdotes of people reportedly suffering from despair (of which there may have been more with the later Cistercians), clearly shows that the first generation were well aware of its dangers and causes, and used language carefully to both expose and mitigate its effects.

The basic theology of all three writers is that mankind was originally made in God's image, and that he is trying to rediscover that likeness which was lost after the Fall and therefore cannot be seen clearly. All the writers discussed here are concerned with remembering the self made in God's likeness, and agree that the Divine within can only be recovered by travelling through stages of fear of God, self despair, love, and hope, but they disagree on the proportions in which their audience should be reminded of each, and the length of time required to dwell on them. Bernard and Aelred also base their soteriology on love and it is this emphasis on love which informs their descriptions of despair and the consequent counselling required. The following discussion examines some aspects of the texts in more detail. It looks at how language is manipulated to stretch the semantic connotations and nuances of spiritual despair, and demonstrates how the texts demand a high degree of readerly attention. The reader has to negotiate a series

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<sup>47</sup> Brown uses examples from a late twelfth-century collection of stories, *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense*, compiled by Konrad of Eberbach. See Brown, ‘Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair’, pp. 38-42.

of complex tasks: an immediate response to the text; a sense of what the words themselves mean; an understanding of what the author is trying to say; and then the creation of their own interpretation.

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## 2.1. Slipperiness by enstrangement

One of the ways in which language can be made mutable in an attempt to manipulate the readers' response is by presenting ideas in unexpected and unusual ways. Much of the writing discussed here can be understood through the lens of Shklovsky's idea of de-familiarisation – or 'enstrangement' – where an action, thing, or concept appears in an unfamiliar format, forcing the reader to pause and consider the brutal reality of the words.<sup>48</sup> Shklovsky took the view that art should 'make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged' in order to understand something in an individual, fully conscious, rather than commonly assumed, way. This is achieved in the writings discussed here through a mixture of rhetorical and poetic techniques including: metaphorical exegesis of Scripture combined with the writer's own out-of-context-message; the use of paradox and terms with ambiguous meanings; as well as a simple but powerful alternating of positives and negatives. All the texts share a method which explores the tension between positive and negative idioms, whether it be the sin and the

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<sup>48</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology, Second edition*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), p. 19. The 1965 version in *Russian Formalist Criticism* by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis translates Shklovsky's term *ostraniene* as 'defamiliarization'. I prefer Benjamin Sher's 1990 translation which eschews this term because Shklovsky is describing 'a process or act that endows an object or image with "strangeness" by "removing" it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expression based on such perceptions'. In contrast, he thinks the term 'defamiliarize' implies a sense of taking something 'from the "familiar" to the "unknown"' rather than the 'cognitively known' to the 'familarly known' through a complex 'perceptual process' of 'metaphors, similes and a host of other figures of speech'. See Viktor Shklovsky, and Benjamin Sher (trans.), 'Introduction', *Theory of Prose* (Champaign, London, Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991).



remedy, the sinner and the redeemer, hope and despair or any other state of being, there is always a constant tension between the two. The oppositions often follow swiftly from each other, juxtaposing positives and negatives in unusual ways to reveal new depths of meaning, and the extent to which the actions of mankind are always intimately connected with Christ's suffering.

In *Mirror*, for example, Aelred adopts these kinds of rhetorical devices when explaining that his initial conversion started with *luxuria* – the unconscious despair of enjoying worldly sins without thinking of the next life:

I was lying rotten and covered over, bound and captive, snagged in the birdlime of clinging iniquity, overwhelmed by the weight of inveterate habits. So I interrogated myself: who am I, where am I, what kind of person am I? I shuddered, my Lord, and trembled at my own effigy. I was terrified at the loathsome image of my unhappy soul. I was displeasing to myself, because you were becoming pleasing to me. I wanted to escape from myself and to escape into you, but was paralyzed in myself.<sup>49</sup>

Aelred is 'terrified at the loathsome image of [his] unhappy soul' (*terrui me tetra imago infelicis animae meae*), precisely because God 'was becoming pleasing' and he wanted 'to escape into [Him]' leaving the self which stopped him from doing so behind. Here, Aelred gestures to the ultimate goal of being completely immersed in what pseudo-Dionysius calls the 'divine darkness' to the extent that all self-identity and individual thought is expunged:

By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, Book 1, chapter 28, section 79, pp. 134-5. 'Iacabam enim pollutus et obuolutus, ligatus et captiuatus, irretitus uisco tenacis iniquitatis, oppressus mole inueteratae consuetudinis. Itaque intendi meipsum, quis essem, ubi essem, qualis essem. Exhorruui, Domine, et expaui propriam effigiem meam; terrui me tetra imago infelicis animae meae. Displicebam ipse mihi, quia tu placebas. Volebam fugere a me, et fugere ad te, sed retinebar in me.' *De Speculum Caritatis*, I ch. 28, section 79, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Mystical Theology' in *pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works* trans. by Colm Luibheid (New York & Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), chapter 1, section 1, pp. 133-141 (p. 135).

The difficulties of dwelling in this ‘divine shadow’, the closer prospect of which may itself lead to a particular kind of despair seen in later stages of monastic conversion, in this early stage of Aelred’s self-knowledge can only project him towards the ‘terrifying spectre of death’ (*mors suspecta terrebat*), and the understanding that if his soul remains entrenched in the ‘intolerable stench’ then ‘inevitable punishment’ will be waiting for him.<sup>51</sup> Knowing the truth about himself and the knowledge that he would be damned if he continued to indulge the corporal rather than spiritual needs, is what nearly drives Aelred to despair. It is the joy of divine friendship, signified by the Lord’s out-stretched hand, which saves him after a brief period of wavering:

The specter of death was terrifying, because after death inevitable punishment awaited such a soul [...] Very deep within me was my wound, crucifying, terrifying, and corrupting everything within me with an intolerable stench. Had you not quickly stretched out your hand to me, O Lord, unable to endure myself I might perhaps have resorted to the worst remedy of despair.<sup>52</sup>

The negative uses of ‘wound’ and ‘crucifying’ in this personal context have an intertextual connection with the positive consequences of Christ’s Passion. By saying that the ‘crucifying, terrifying, corrupting’ wounds were happening ‘deep within’ him, Aelred reinforces the monastic reality that the route to God is an internal one – by considering and seeing the inner self clearly one is a step closer to God. The inadequacy of the self in comparison with God however also delays hope, clarifying the reality that without the grace of God’s ‘hand’ it is easier to give up all hope in Him, and so bring

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<sup>51</sup> *Mirror*, I.28.79, pp. 134-5; ‘De speculum caritatis’ in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia* ed. by A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Mirror*, I.28.79, pp. 134-5; For a full analysis of Aelred’s conversion story and its influences see Dennis J. Billy, ‘Aelred of Rievaulx’s Account of his Conversion in the *Liber de Speculo Caritatis*’ in *The American Benedictine Review*, vol. 52. Issue 3, 2001, 239-54.  
 ‘Mors suspecta terrebat, quia talem animam post mortem certa poena manebat [...] valde enim intus erat plaga mea, crucians, terrens, et intolerabili fetore omnia interiora mea corrumpens ; et nisi cito admouisses manum non tolerans meipsum, forte pessimum desperationis remedium adhibuissem.’ *De Speculum Caritatis*, I ch. 28, section 79, p. 47.

despair of salvation closer.<sup>53</sup> These ‘wounds’ killing the soul also remind the reader that crucifixion was a just punishment for the guilty sinner, as well as an unjust one for the innocent Christ.

Bernard was famously against any kind of visual imagery which took the mind away from God, but he uses literary imagery to its full extent in his writing and sermons. He uses the crucifixion as a focus point in one to remind his listeners that they should be hanging on Christ’s cross rather than the devil’s. He describes the scene in detail, but also uses it as a metaphor for the contrasting works and attributes which determine whether each person will be saved by Christ’s sacrifice or damned through their own sinfulness. Bernard makes this point in *Sentences* with the juxtaposition of unexpected opposites when he compares Christ’s cross with the devil’s, showing his audience that they must choose which one they will finally hang on.<sup>54</sup> ‘To know God is the highest form of knowledge’ for Bernard, and God and Christ can only be properly known through Christ’s crucifixion.<sup>55</sup> The audience can choose between the cross occupied by the unrepentant thief next to Christ – where they will endure full knowledge of the devil through despair and damnation, stealing their soul from what is rightfully God’s – and Christ’s cross imbued with the promise of hope and salvation. While we resist hanging on Christ’s cross, we are ‘thieves’ and ‘murderers’

since we kill our soul, which is far dearer than our body. We put earth over it by gazing longingly at earthly things to hide the fact that when we are occupied with earthly desires, we are actually dead [...] Putting aside our thievery, therefore, let us hang on the cross of Christ, confessing our wretchedness to him and, with full

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<sup>53</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, p. 135

<sup>54</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, in *Bernard of Clairvaux The Parables and Sentences*, trans. by Michael Casey and Francis R. Swietek (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 3.74, pp. 254-6.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 74, p. 254. ‘Scire Deum summa scientia [...] Non potest autem cognosci Iesus Christus, nisi dum pendet in cruce’, Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, Series Tertia, chapter 74, p. 112.

devotion of heart, begging his mercy. We can, however be on a cross in such a way as not to be on the cross of Christ at all. For while there is the cross of Christ, there is also a cross of the devil. The cross of the devil is truly a cross because it is an instrument of punishment. Like the cross of Christ, it has four aspects – depth, height, length, and width. The cross of Christ is comparable to that of the devil in that it attacks contrary elements with contrary elements of its own, and likeness with likeness. The depth of the punishing cross is despair. One who nurses at the breast of despair rises up only with great difficulty.<sup>56</sup>

To take the last sentence first, Bernard's startling image of someone being suckled by despair, rather than an agent of goodness, indicates that they are seeking and being given nourishment from the wrong source. Usually, Bernard uses the image of the breast-feeding mother in association with the positive, as in *Song*, where he talks about the Church providing milk of consolation and encouragement.<sup>57</sup> With the breast of despair, while someone may perceive that they are benefiting from this succour, they are actually imbibing a poison, weakening their ability to fight the devil's contagious disease.<sup>58</sup> Nursing at the breast indicates a level of innocence for which there might be some compassion, and yet what the translation above does not capture is that '*lactatur*' can involve someone being deceived, flattered, or weedled into taking the wrong course of

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<sup>56</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 74, p. 255. 'Sic et nos homicidae sumus, cum animam nostram, quae dignior est corpore, occidimus. Terram superponimus, dum terrenis rebus inhiamus, ut, occupati saeculari voluptate, celemus nosmetipos esse mortuos, ne resipiscamus, dum blandiendo vel nobis quod committimus, fragilitati carnis imputamus, vel indulgendo supra modum mimsericordiae Dei innitimur. Latrocinio itaque postposito, in cruce Christi pendeamus, confitentes nostram miseriam et, tota cordis devotione, Christi implorantes misericordiam. In cruce autem possumus esse, ita tamen quod non in cruce Christi. Crux enim alia est crux diaboli, alia Christi. Crux diaboli vera crux est, quia cruciat, quae suas habet quattuor diversitates sicut et crux Christi: Profundum, altum, longum, latum. Crux autem Christi, collata cruce diaboli, contraria contrariis et similia similibus expugnat. Profundum cruciantis crucis est desperatio. Vix enim resurgit qui desperationis ubere lactatur.' Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, Series Tertia, chapter 74, p. 113.

<sup>57</sup> 'And you may see her unhesitatingly nourishing her little ones with the milk of these full breasts, from one the milk of consolation, from the other that of encouragement, according to the need of each.' Bernard, *Song*, Sermon 10, Section 2, p. 62. 'Videas eam mox plenis uberibus parvulis incubare lactandis, et ex uno quidem consolatoria, ex altero vero exhortatoria uberius ministrare, prout singulis convenire videbit.' Bernard, *Opera, Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermon 10, section 2, p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion on the use of maternal language in Scripture and theological discussion see Hannah W. Matis, 'Early-Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs and the Maternal Language of Clerical Authority', *Speculum*, vol. 89, issue 2 (2014), 358-381.

action.<sup>59</sup> While deception indicates that someone is unaware of the wider picture, if they are being grossly flattered or constantly weedled, the implication is that they are ultimately a knowing and willing accomplice to any consequent wrong-doing. By increasing the sense of the subverted will through the analogy of thieves and murderers, and the comparison of the two types of cross, Bernard makes the importance of choosing to act for good or evil clear to those members of his audience who might have trouble concentrating on more complex analogies, as well as providing deeper layers of meaning for the more alert or spiritually literate. By using the dimensions from Ephesians 3:18, quoted here, Bernard is alluding to the need to fully know Christ, reinforcing his initial statement that He can only be known through the positive effects of his crucifixion rather than intellectually:

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man, That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, You may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth: To know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.<sup>60</sup>

In the same way, the ‘punishing’ cross of the devil involves being filled with his essence, and excruciatingly suffering the knowledge of despair. Bernard’s contention here is that ‘the height of the devil’s cross is destroyed by the depth of Christ’s’, as at the root of Christ’s cross is ‘fear of that true judge’ which ‘utterly splits the trunk of the other cross’.<sup>61</sup> Hope at the height of Christ’s cross defeats the despair at the depth of the

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<sup>59</sup> *Lewis Short*, *lacto*, 1, v. freq. a. lacio, I.

<sup>60</sup> Ephesians, 3:16-19, *Douay-Rheims*.

<sup>61</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 74, p. 256; ‘Altitudo autem crucis diaboli destruitur per profundum crucis Christi, quia extollentia in nobis reprimatur per timore, illius veri examinantis, qui reddet unicuique iuxta opera sua. Haec autem profunditas findit stipitem contrariae crucis usque in profundum, et per spem, quae altitudo est in cruce Christi, destruitur desperatio, profundum scilicet diaboli; quia enim spes vera civium supernorum menti nostrae imprimit imaginationem, sustinemus, ne labamur in desperationem. Sic ergo contraria contrariis destruuntur : per spem desperatio, per timorem elatio.’ Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, vol. VI, 2, Series Tertia, chapter 74, p. 114.

devil's.<sup>62</sup> But even when being falsely nourished by a lack of hope, just as Aelred was plucked from despair by God stretching out his hand, so too Bernard's doctrinal instruction on despair in *Sentences* allows for someone to 'rise up' albeit 'with great difficulty', but Bernard emphasises its danger and the need to consciously choose for oneself 'to hang on the cross of Christ' rather than wait to be transported there. For Bernard, true hope will provide a sustaining 'image of blessedness' upon the mind.<sup>63</sup>

Aelred describes the intimacy of God's imagined presence by hearing His 'voice as if from far off' while his soul was in 'the depths of hell':

What are you doing, worthless, squalid wretch? Why are you wallowing in squalor? Why are you delighting in shameful deeds? Look at what sweetness there is with me, what pleasantness, what joyfulness! Do you despair because of the enormity of your sins? But shall I, who pursue you when you flee from me, reject you when you come to me? Shall I, who embrace and draw you to myself when you turn your face from me, push you away when you hide under the wings of mercy?<sup>64</sup>

Your voice, O Lord, your inspiration. Where does such hope for the despairing soul come from, if not from your giving, O Lord, you who heal our infirmities in wonderful ways and restore form to our deformity?<sup>65</sup>

This first stage of awakening the soul to God is through His act of mercy unexpectedly couched in what appears to be the use of nasty names. But by calling the soul worthless (*indigne*) and squalid (*sordide*), God is not demonstrating rejection and anger so much as acknowledging the great depths to which the soul has sunk, and that it is still possible to

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<sup>62</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>63</sup> 'Because the true hope which belongs to citizens of the kingdom above presses an image of blessedness upon our mind', Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 74, p. 256; 'quia enim spes vera civium supernorum menti nostrae imprimit imaginationem', Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, Series Tertia, chapter 74, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, II.11.27, pp. 181; 'Quid agis, indigne et sordide? Vt quid in his sordibus uolutaris? in his turpibus delectaris? Ecce quid apud me dulcedinis, quid suauitatis, quid iucunditatis. An scelerum tuorum immanitate desperas? Sed qui persequor fugientem, reiciam uenientem? Qui auertentem te faciem tuam a me amplector et attraho, sub alas miseriordiae meae fugientem repellam?', *De Speculum Caritatis*, II, 27, p. 78.

<sup>65</sup> Aelred, *Mirror*, II.11.27-8, p. 181; 'Et uox tua, Domine, inspiratio tua. Vnde enim animae desperatae tanta spes, nisi te, Domine, donante, qui miris modis curas infirmitates nostras, formas deformia nostra?', *De Speculum Caritatis*, II, 28, p. 78

turn from that shameful life to one of joy and full divine acceptance. Through a combination of castigating the sinner and encouraging him forward, Aelred makes clear that the despairing cannot find hope through their own efforts alone, while providing an assurance that God is both helping him draw near, and accepting him when he chooses to be drawn. In the same way that Aelred's conversion goes through a sense of despair at the possibility of his sins not being forgiven on the day of judgement, Anselm's *Meditation One* is also focused on this remote and yet impending prospect. He allows the sinner to see God, even acknowledging that He is waiting for him, and so hinting that all is not in fact lost, but these are only very short glimpses before the image of a nourishing God is snatched away, and the reader, reminded again of his own lack, is forced to wait until all tears are spent before he can be allowed to reach contrition.

It frightens me this life of mine. I lay it bare and I find little in it that is not sin-stuff, sterile. If there is any fruit here, it is make-believe, or it is flawed, or gone off. At any rate, not the sort to please God likely enough to displease God. And yours, sinner, your life? It is not a matter of little but, steeped through with sin and so up against damnation, or contemptible because no fruit on it. ...Again (this clinches it), nothing I do that is any use, that hits the mark, is going to make good the ill use I shall always make of this food that feeds my body. Who will feed an animal that is worth less than it eats? Yet you, good God, you give to eat and you wait for your no-use worm and its sin-stench. A fetid dog is less foul in a man's nose than the soul that sins to God, the sinning soul more wretched to God than the dog to the man. And what is here is not even a man, but "scorn of men" more vile than the beast and lower than the very corpse. "My soul wearies at my life" (Job 10:1). To live brings me shame, and I have learnt the fear of dying. What is there left, sinner, other than to lament your whole life your whole life long, the whole of it crying lament for the whole.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Anselm, *Meditation One*, trans. by M. B. Pranger in Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, pp. 111-2. 'Terret me vita mea. Namque diligenter discussa apparet mihi aut peccatum aut sterilitas fere tota vita mea. Et is quid fructus in ea videtur, sic est aut simulatum aut imperfectum aut aliquo modo corruptum, ut possit aut non placere aut displicere deo. Ergo o peccator, vita tua, non iam fere tota, sed certe tota aut in peccato est et damnabilis, aut infructuosa et contemptibilis... Denique si quid ago utile, prorsus nullatenus illud compenso alimentis corporis quibus abutor. Sed quis pascit pecus, quod nec tantum prodest quantum consumit? Et tamen tu benignus deus, tu nustris et expectas tuum inutilem vermem et foetentem peccatis. Quam tolerabilis canis putris foetet hominibus quam anima peccatrix deo! Quam infelicis ista deo quam ille hominibus! Heu non hominem, sed >>opprobrium hominum<<, vilis pecore, peius cadavere! >>Taedet animam meam vitae meae<<. Vivere erubesco, mori pertimesco. Quid ergo restat tibi, o peccator, nisi ut in tota vita tua plores totam vitam tuam, ut ipsa tota se ploret totam?' Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Meditatio 1*, pp. 76-7.

The previous passage is M. B. Pranger's translation of the opening paragraphs of *Meditation One*, used because it reproduces the often disjunctive and confrontational nature of the original, causing the reader to stop and consider the reality of his 'enstranged' words and phrases. When discussing the first sentence of the first paragraph, Pranger changes his initial translation of '*terret me vita mea*' from 'it frightens me this life of mine', to the more personal and urgent 'my life terrifies me'.<sup>67</sup> By doing so he demonstrates how an initial reading can expand in the mind, becoming more affective to the reader the more he contemplates in peace. Pranger's translation highlights the consequent disjointed nature of some of the phrasing, highlighting that Anselm's text has a threefold purpose: to create a greater sense of terseness and discombobulation; to emphasise his constant message of self-disgust and fear of God; and to be economic in the expectation that his reader would be able to fill in the gaps as part of the contemplation process.

As with Aelred, after languishing in the worldly, Anselm's self-knowledge takes him to greater depths of misery, filling him with the same terror of himself and the prospect of death. But where Aelred's reader can quickly 'rest awhile' in God's goodness, well away from despair, Anselm insists on continually hovering on the brink for six verses until the seventh eventually but briefly provides relief. Just as Aelred waits until hope has been restored when God 'quickly stretched out [his] hand' before he uses the term despair, so Anselm also refrains from giving a name to his self-loathing. Only when Christ suddenly appears, bringing grace and mercy is it safe to label the previous danger as despair because it was not ultimately fulfilled.

Yes, this is the one, this is Jesus, the one. The same one, the judge, the very one

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<sup>67</sup> Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, pp. 111, 123-4



whose hands I am trembling in. Start breathing again, sinner, no need to throw your hopes away. Put your hope in the same one you fear, fly to the one you fled.<sup>68</sup>

‘Breathe now, sinner, breath, do not despair’ is a more literal translation of the Latin ‘*respira iam, o peccator; respira, ne desperes*’ than Pranger’s above – and is a reading which more emphatically aligns despair as the route to death. The reader is unable to consume the life-giving oxygen of hope until they turn to Christ. As the main purpose of the piece is to awaken terror in the reader, the mercy at the end is only there to complete the salvation story. In his final analysis of the meditation, Pranger argues that the opening sentence ‘my life terrifies me... appears to be a contradictory opposition, a contradiction in terms: life and terror mutually exclude one another’ because the speaker already knows that he is ‘God’s creature sharing his homeland with the number of the elect [which] gets in the way of total anguish and loss’.<sup>69</sup> His argument is that the whole meditation does not affect the reader emotionally or psychologically, because they know their salvation is possible through Christ:

consequently, pronouncing or reading this sentence means preventing it from coming true. It just cannot be realized. This fact, belonging as it does to the literary design of the meditation, breaks through the linearity of dramatic development. It thus deprives the soul’s outcry “there is nothing in my entire being that can tolerate you” of its superior position as the dramatic climax of my first reading attempt puts in place. This final move makes the de-dramatization of the meditation complete. Without fear of arbitrariness, the reader may start or stop wherever he likes. The access to the text lies open.<sup>70</sup>

I would argue that the corollary of this is that if someone regularly repeats individual passages designed to ‘stir up fear’ as Anselm proposes, they are more likely to

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<sup>68</sup> Anselm, *Meditation One*, Pranger trans., p.114; ‘Iam ipse est, iam ipse est IESUS. Ipse idem est iudex, inter cuius manus tremo. Respira iam, o peccator; respira, ne desperes. Spera in eoquem times. Affuge ad eum a quo aufugisti.’ Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Meditatio* 1, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, p. 134.

<sup>70</sup> Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, pp. 134-5.

internalise a negative view of themselves, believing it more strongly over time, even in the face of ultimate forgiveness. A perfect reader may be able to negotiate a shortcut from terror to Christ without getting lost in self-despair on the way, but this negates the purpose of the meditation. If a devout spiritual can read in either a linear or sporadic fashion without being moved as intended, then they are not fulfilling their spiritual duties properly and are failing to carry out the good works, particularly humility and self-abnegation, required to repay their personal debt to Christ in exchange for salvation. Furthermore, even though there may be an implicit assurance of salvation if the debt is repaid, outright presumption is not the intended outcome for the reader. Pranger argues that having full knowledge of the narrative arc from terror to salvation takes away from any sense of drama, suspense and actual feeling. My response to this is that, like any drama, the delivery of the text has to be offset by the reader suspending their extra knowledge gained from outside the timeframe of the immediate narrative. By treating the text as a piece of literary drama, and by extension the reader as an actor adopting a role, rather than a real person facing their own sinfulness and responding to devotional material, Pranger, while making the point that these texts are artificial poetic constructs, still runs the risk of devaluing the whole monastic process. When commenting on Bernard's sermons, Wim Verbaal has said that they were successful in maintaining a cohesive community precisely because they 'created a dramatic atmosphere in the monastery which [...] gave the monks the uncomfortable feeling of being on some kind of stage, of being looked at by an invisible audience and by an all too visible and omnipresent director'.<sup>71</sup> This analogy can be extended to Anselm's audience. Here, the

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<sup>71</sup> Wim Verbaal, 'The Preaching of Community: Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons and the School of Experience', *Medieval Sermon Studies*, vol. 48 (2004), 75-90 (p. 83).

reader is part of a spiritual drama where the narrative arc is contingent on all the monastic actors inhabiting the same role. So while an individual might choose to access Anselm's meditations at any point, ignoring the fear and conflict, and going straight to the happy resolution, in practice their abbots, brothers, and community practices are designed to monitor and prevent tendencies to both presumption and despair. Where Pranger argues terror and life are mutually exclusive, his contention is that the monk knows himself to be predestined and so can bypass anything which might lead him towards self-doubt and despair. By his own admission, this fails to take into account the human condition and the propensity for spiritual and psychological frailty, which cannot, I think, be separated from the reading and meditation process. As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, particularly with regard to *Perambulavit*, all levels of the hierarchy might suffer from attacks of low self worth, which will only be exacerbated by repeatedly being confronted with the fact of their own sinfulness.

Pranger also contends throughout his work that monastic time collapses until eternity and the present are indistinguishable from each other. Anselm's *Meditation One* supports this view, using judgement day as an imminent and frightening proposition where nothing can be foretold, and effectively stalling any ideas of presumption:

Judgment day is with us, "the great day of the Lord is round the corner, quick, quick, near as can be" (Soph. 1:14). "That day, the day of anger, is the day of sorrow, the day of anguish, day of adversity, misery dark day and day of blindness, day of cloud, wind, trumpet, trumpet sounding." (ibid 1:15ff).<sup>72</sup>

[...]

There, be sure, you will get back blow for blow as you have acted in the here and now of the body. There, when mercy has had its day, and the penitent goes

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<sup>72</sup> Anselm, *Meditation One*, trans. Pranger, p. 112; 'Dies iudicii venit. >>luxta est dies domini magnus, iuxta et velox nimis<<; >>dies irae dies illa, dies tribulationis et angustiae, dies calamitatis et miseriae, dies tenebrarum et caliginis, dies nebulae et turbinis, dies tubae et clangoris<<.' Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Meditatio 1*, p. 77.

unheard, and the promise of mended ways will be an empty saying.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, while in *Song* Bernard reinforces the need for repentance, his understanding of the brothers' propensity for sorrow means that he gives greater reassurance than both Anselm and Aelred by saying that if the reader has carried out their good works faithfully then salvation will be theirs. There is an additional reassurance for Bernard, however. Although he concedes the reader will say that 'the resurrection on the last day is a long time to wait' he allows for a positive stage between the brink of despair, tears, and the final judgement, which can be looked forward to with pleasure:<sup>74</sup>

And can the hope of this great happiness be without happiness? The Apostle speaks of rejoicing in hope. David, when he expressed the hope of entering the house of God, said that it gave him happiness now, not in the future. Eternal life was not yet his, but his hope reached out to it; so that in his heart he experienced the Scriptural truth that the just man finds joy not only in the reward but even in the expectation of it. The assurance of pardon for sins begets this joy in the heart where the seeds of righteousness are sown, if that assurance is corroborated by a holier life inspired by the efficacy of the grace received.<sup>75</sup>

Bernard depicts God as being an active agent who can 'win back the pusillanimous soul from the abyss of despair [...] with the sweet caress of his faithful promise', or alternatively stop him from falling into it in the first place.<sup>76</sup> Where Anselm seeks to break the reader of *Meditation One* with terror, Bernard wants to hold his audience back

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<sup>73</sup> Anselm, *Meditation One*, trans. Pranger, p. 113; 'Ibi procul dubio recipies prout gessisti in corpore, tunc cum iam non erit tempus misericordiae; tunc cum paenitentia non recipietur, cum emendatio non promittetur.' Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 3, *Meditatio* 1, p. 78.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard, *Song*, Sermon 37, section 2, p. 182; '<<At istud>>, inquis, <<in resurrectione in novissimo die, et est nimis songum>>', Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 37, section 2, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Bernard, *Song*, Sermon 37, section 3, p. 183; 'Sed numquid tantae laetitiae spes erit sine laetitia? SPE GAUDENTES, ait Apostolus. Et David non laetaturum, sed laetatum se dixit, quod in domum Domini se speraret iturum. Nondum vitam tenebat, sed spem profecto vitae messuerat, atque in semetipso experiebatur veritatem Scripturae perhibentis, quia non modo remuneratio, sed ipsa quoque EXSPECTATIO IUSTORUM LAETITIA. Hanc parit in animo illius qui sibi ad iustitiam seminavit, praesumpta indulgentia delictorum, si tamen ipsam indulgentiam efficacia attestatur acceptae gratiae ad vivendum sanctius deinceps.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 37, section 3, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard, *Song*, Sermon 11, section 2, p. 70; 'Audi denique Deum, quomodo ipse contriti cordis temperat amaritudinem, quomodo pusillanimum a desperationis baatro revocat, quomodo blandae et fidelis promissionis melle maerentem consolatur, erigit diffidentem.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 11, section 2, p. 55.

from despair with God's kindness:

By the mouth of the Prophet he declares: "For my praise I will bridle you, lest you should perish" [Is 48.9] By this he seems to say: "Lest you should be cast down by excessive sadness at the sight of your sins, and rush despairingly to perdition like an unbridled horse over a precipice, I shall rein you in, I shall curb you with my mercy and set you on your feet with my praises. Then you will breathe freely again in the enjoyment of my benefits, overwhelmed though you be by evils of your own making, because you will find that my kindness is greater than your culpability."<sup>77</sup>

For Bernard, alongside the self-knowledge which bypasses despair on the soul's path to the Divine, a thorough knowledge of God is also required. On the one hand, this knowledge is a straightforward understanding of how His justice is tempered by mercy. Bernard devotes sermon thirty-eight of *Songs* to explaining how 'ignorance of God leads to despair', starting with an imagined non-religious who 'wants to reform and abandon his evil and carnal ways' but whose 'sensually inspired reason' convinces him that his 'sins are too grave and too many' so that 'even stripping the skin from his flesh' will not 'make satisfaction for them'.<sup>78</sup> By using a rapid succession of questions and answers, negative countered by positive, Bernard refutes all objections:

What are you afraid of, you men of little faith? That he will not pardon your sins? But with his own hands he has nailed them to the cross. That you are used to soft living and your tastes are fastidious? But he is aware of our weakness. That a prolonged habit of mind binds you like a chain? But the Lord loosens the shackles of prisoners. Or perhaps angered by the enormity and frequency of your sins he is slow to extend a helping hand? But where sin abounded, grace became

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<sup>77</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 1, Sermon 11, section 2, p. 70; 'Ait per Prophetam: EGO INFRENABO OS TUUM LAUDE MEA, NE INTEREAS; hoc est: <<Ne intuitu cacinorum tuorum nimiam incurras tristitiam, atque instar effrenis equi desperatus in praeceptis ruas, et pereas; freno te>>, inquit, <<inhibebo indulgentiae meae et meis laudibus erigam, respirabisque in bonis meis, qui de tuis malis confunderis, dum me sane benigniorem quam te culpabiliorem invenies.>>', Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 11, section 2, pp. 55-6.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 38, section 1, p. 187; 'Quomodo ignorantia Dei desperationem parit... cogitansque resipiscere et redire ab omni via mala et carnali conversatione sua, si ignorat quam bonus sit Deus, quam suavis et mitis, quam multus ad ignoscendum, nonne sua carnalis cogitatio arguet eum, et dicet: Quid facis? Et vitam istam vis perdere et futuram? Peccata tua maxima sunt et nimium multa; nequaquam pro tot et tantis, nec si te excories, sufficies satisfacere.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 38, section 1, p. 14.

superabundant.<sup>79</sup>

This level of divine knowledge is however more suited to Aelred's novices than the spiritually mature elite to whom *Song* is directed. The aim of the *vita contemplativa* for Bernard is to reach a more intimate connection with, and knowledge of, God, and it is the difficulty of achieving this which causes despair at the other end of the conversion spectrum. Any vision of his glory is 'reserved for the pure of heart', and those who think they are ready for it while still in the 'earthly body' lack vital self-knowledge because they should know they are not yet ready and are in danger of presumption.<sup>80</sup> Someone who desires to be with Christ may merit a union 'for a short time' as 'suddenly he is gone again just when we think we hold him fast'.<sup>81</sup> He will return on several occasions to those who pursue him with 'intense devotion, vehement desire and the sweetest

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<sup>79</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 38, section 2, p. 188; 'Quid timetis, modicae fidei? Ut peccata nolit remittere? Sed affixit ea cruci cume suis manibus. Quod teneri et delicati estis? Sed ipse novit figmentum nostrum. Quod male assueti et ligati peccandi consuetudine? Sed Dominus solvit compeditos. Forte ne irritatus immanitate et multitudine criminum, cunctetur porrigere manum adiiutorii? Sed ubi superabundavit delictum, superabundare et gratia consuevit.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 38, section 1, p. 15.

<sup>80</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 38, section II.3, p. 189; 'But he thinks fit to reprove her on account of her presumption, and hints that she lacks self-knowledge by judging herself ready for a vision so great: in her excitement she may have overlooked that she was still living on this earth, or hoped against hope that even while still in this earthy body she could draw near to his inaccessible brightness. Hence he at once recalls her to her senses, proves her ignorance to her, and reprimands her boldness: "If you do not know yourself," he told her, "go forth."...He is not venting his anger; his intention is to inspire the fear that purifies, that by this purification she may be made ready for the vision she longs for. It is a vision reserved for the pure of heart.'

'sed reprimenda censetur propter praesumptionem, et de sua ipsius commonenda cognitione, in qua nimirum visa est aliquatenus caligare, quae tantae se aestimarit idoneam visioni: sive minus attendens prae excessu suo, quod esset in corpore, sive frustra sperans, etiam manentem in corpore ad illam se posse inaccessibilem accedere claritatem. Ergo ad seipsam protinus revocatur, et ignorantia vincitur, et insolentia castigatur. SI IGNORAS TE, inquit, EGREDERE...et non quasi iratus, sed ut territa purgaretur, purgata idonea redderetur huic ipsi, cui inhiat, visioni. Mundicordibus nempe illa visio sequestratur.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 38, section II.3, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> 'His heart's desire will be given to him, even while still a pilgrim on earth, though not in its fullness and only for a time, a short time. For when after vigils and prayers and a great shower of tears he who was sought presents himself, suddenly he is gone again, just when we think we hold him fast.' Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 32, section I.2, p. 135.

'Siquidem DESIDERIUM CORDIS EIUS TRIBUETUR EI, etsi adhuc peregrinanti in corpore, ex parte tamen, idque ad tempus et tumpus modicum. Nam cum vigiliis et obsecrationibus et multo imbre lacrimarum quaesitus affuerit, subito, dum teneri putatur, elabitur', Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 32, section I.2, p. 227.

affection’, but it is only on death that a full union can take place:<sup>82</sup>

The beloved has no choice but to endure this state until the hour when she lays down the body’s weary weight, and raised aloft on the wings of desire, freely traverses the meadows of contemplation, and in spirit follows the One she loves without restraint wherever he goes’.<sup>83</sup>

Even the Bride, with no ignorance of God ‘must cease from searching too curiously into the nature of things of heaven’ because

to be drawn up through the clouds, to penetrate to where light is total, to plunge through seas of splendor and make her home where light is total...is beyond the scope of an earthly life or an earthly body...she cannot possibly lift up her eyes and fix them on this radiant light that the angels long to contemplate.<sup>84</sup>

In the *Proslogion* Anselm too uses the metaphors of light and dark to explain how inaccessible God is. Anselm’s soul is

darkened by its weakness, or is it dazzled by Your splendour? In truth it is both darkened in itself and dazzled by You. It is indeed both darkened by its own littleness and overwhelmed by Your immensity.<sup>85</sup>

He presents a deity which is completely unknowable even though he is surrounded by, and is already in, It:

O supreme and inaccessible light; O whole and blessed truth, how far You are from me who am so close to You! How distant You are from my sight while I am so present to Your sight! You are wholly present everywhere and I do not see You. In You I move and in You I have my being and I cannot come near to You.

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<sup>82</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 32, section 3, p. 135; ‘ingens devotio et desiderium vehemens et praedulcis affectus sponsam probat et dignam’, Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 32, section I.3, p. 227.

<sup>83</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 32, section 2, p. 135; ‘et hoc tamdiu necesse est pati dilectam, donec, semel posita corporeae sarcina molis, avolet et ipsa levata pennis desideriorum suorum, libere iter carpens per campos contemplationis, et mente sequens expedita dilectum quocumque ierit.’ Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 1, Sermo 32, section I.2, p. 227.

<sup>84</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 2, Sermon 38, section 5, pp. 190-1; ‘Sed enim induci in nubes, penetrare in plenitudinem luminis...nec temporis est huius, nec corporis...Nam si te plenius nosset, scires utique corpore quod corrumpitur aggravatam nullatenus posse attollere oculos, et figere in illum fulgorem, quem prospicere angeli concupiscunt.’ Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 38, section III.5, p. 17.

<sup>85</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 14, p. 96; ‘Tenebratur oculus eius infirmitate sua, aut reverberatur a te. Utique et obscuratur sua brevitare, et obruitur tua immensitate.’ Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, *Proslogion*, ch. 14, p. 112. This juxtaposition of the soul in darkness with God in a dazzling light also appears in *Simple Souls*, discussed in part two of this thesis.

You are within me and around me and I do not have any experience of You.<sup>86</sup>

Rather than being transported with love, Anselm is distressed at his inability to sense the divine, emphasising his usual refrain in the prayers that mankind is so far apart from God that any connection with Him cannot be imagined. It is this sense of the impossible which makes the seeking of God more worthwhile. God is both present and absent, and cannot be seen. God dwells in ‘inaccessible light’, and Anselm wants guidance on how to get into that light to see God’s face, but the whole process is full of tension. The seeker is *anxius* (tormented in this translation, but can also mean oppress, troubled, distressed and anxious) by their love of God.<sup>87</sup> Their love is headed towards the good but cannot be happy and free from trouble because that good is obscured by darkness. Anselm is yearning for something far away, unknown, and in an inaccessible place, so a sense of certainty co-exists with uncertainty. He wants to see God, but does not know His face, implying that he might not be able to recognise God even when he found Him.<sup>88</sup> Man was made to see God, but cannot do so, and cannot therefore carry out what he was made to do. His natural function, the direction of his nature, is cut off by this inability. Distress is caused by an acute love of God which cannot be satisfied by seeing or experiencing Him in any way, and so one’s very reason for being is thwarted. There is enforced fog, silence, and darkness in a being for whom seeing and experiencing God is the natural state. The overall tenor of the first paragraphs is therefore negative, plaintive

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<sup>86</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 16, pp. 96-7; ‘O summa et inaccessibilis lux, o tota et beata veritas, quam longe es a me, qui tam prope tibi sum! Quam remota es a conspectu meo, qui sic praesens sum conspectui tuo! Ubique es tota praesens, et non te video. In te moveor et in te sum, et ad te non possum accedere. Intra me et circa me es, et non te sentio.’ Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, *Proslogion*, ch. 16, pp. 112-3.

<sup>87</sup> ‘What shall Your servant do, tormented by love of You and yet cast off ‘far from Your face’ [Ps. 31: 22]?’ Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 85; ‘Quid faciet servus tuus anxius amore tui et longe proiectus >>a facie tua<<?’ Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 98.

<sup>88</sup> ‘He yearns to see You and Your countenance is too far away from him.’ Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 85; ‘Anhelat videre te, et nimis abest illi facies tua.’ Anselm, *Opera*, vol. 1, *Proslogion*, ch. 1, p. 98.



and yearning.

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## 2.2. The implications of pseudo-Dionysian negative theology

Both Anselm and Bernard express a form of pseudo-Dionysian negative theology where the more one reaches towards the Divine the less it can be rationally understood, or linguistically expressed in human terms:

Indeed the inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity, this supra-existent Being. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name. It is as no other being is. Cause of all existence, it alone could give an authoritative account of what really is.<sup>89</sup>

In *The Mirror of Charity and Rule*, Aelred also obliquely refers to this pseudo-Dionysian view, but from a position of being able to consciously direct the mind towards it as if he knows precisely what it is:

You must ascend to unity, for only one thing is necessary. That is the one thing, the unity which is found only in the One, by the One, with the One with whom there is no variation, no shadow of change. The man who unites himself with him becomes one spirit with him, passing into that unity which is always the same and whose years do not come to an end. Thus union is charity (*caritas*), as it were the edge and border of the spiritual vesture.<sup>90</sup>

Bernard McGinn's 1973 essay 'pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians' goes into detail on some specific examples of pseudo-Dionysian thought on Bernard and Aelred, but comes to the conclusion that although they may have been aware of its general

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<sup>89</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 588B, trans. Lubheid, as cited in Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> Aelred, *Rule*, 26, p. 74; 'His enim omnibus ad unum necesse est ut conscendas, quoniam unum est necessarium. Illud est unum quod non inuenitur nisi in uno, apud unum, cum uno, apud quem non est transmutatio, nec uicissitudinis obumbratio. Qui adhaeret ei unus cum eo spiritus efficitur, transiens in illud unum quod semper idem est, et cuius anni non deficient. Adhaesio ista caritas, quasi spiritalis ornatus finis et fimbria.' Aelred, *De instit.*, 26, p. 659.

approach, they were not fully conversant with it.<sup>91</sup> In his 1994 *The Growth of Mysticism* McGinn asserts that ‘twelfth-century writers were doubtless influenced by their reading of early authorities, especially, the pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus, and John the Scot’ but found new ways of expressing their theology, particularly on union with God.<sup>92</sup> He considers Bernard’s view of the soul’s journey to be based in pseudo-Dionysian concepts of ‘ascetical purification, virtuous illumination, and loving union’.<sup>93</sup> McGinn notes that there are some examples of Aelred’s *The Soul* which expressly refers to the Areopagite:

So only God is truly said to be being since he is always the same. He alone naturally possesses immortality, that is, unchanging in himself he dwells in unapproachable light. As he said to Moses: “I am who I am,” and “He who is sent me to you.” His existence is really such that he is the being of all things, as Dionysius the Areopagite says: “The superessential divinity is the being of all things that exist (*esse omnium existentium est superessentialis diuinitas*).”<sup>94</sup>

But McGinn thinks that Aelred was probably only aware of gobbets of Dionysian works, and had not read much of the corpus, especially since ‘Dionysianism appears to have had little substantial influence on Aelred’s major writings, such as *Spiritual Friendship*, *The Mirror of Charity*, and his sermons’.<sup>95</sup> Specific evidence that Aelred read and fully imbibed the Dionysian corpus is not, I think, necessary. It may be the case that he did read much of it but only took certain parts as they coincided with his own theology, or that he found out more about particular aspects through conversation, as McGinn suggests. That Aelred showed awareness, but not full engagement, is sufficient to spot

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<sup>91</sup> Bernard McGinn, ‘pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians’ in *Cistercian Studies Series: One Yet Two, Monastic Tradition East and West*, ed. by Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1973), pp. 200–243.

<sup>92</sup> McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: From Gregory the Great to the Twelfth Century*, p. 214.

<sup>93</sup> McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: From Gregory the Great to the Twelfth Century*, p. 183.

<sup>94</sup> Aelred, *De Anima*, II, 50 as cited by McGinn, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians’, p. 228, n. 147.

<sup>95</sup> McGinn, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians’, p. 230.

some connections. Contrary to McGinn's view, however, I think there is evidence in *Mirror* that Aelred was aware of pseudo-Dionysius earlier in his career. The following passage of *Rule* (which is seen above as part of a longer paragraph), uses the phrase 'the one' as pseudo-Dionysius does, to refer to God, and also that He is the 'necessary' or its cognate 'essential one':

From all of them you must ascend to unity, for only one thing is necessary. That is the one thing, the unity which is found only in the One, by the One, with the One with whom there is no variation, no shadow of change.<sup>96</sup>

The ineffable nature, power, and strangeness of God is reinforced by the fact that He is not named. Instead, His essence is described as an unchanging entity. In the earlier *Mirror*, Aelred refers to the 'One' but omits necessity, aligning his knowledge of aspects of pseudo-Dionysius with *Soul*:

And because there is no division in unity, let there be no outpouring of the mind in various directions, but let it be one in the One, with the One, through the One, around the One, sensing the One, savoring the One.<sup>97</sup>

Whether or not pseudo-Dionysius is a direct influence is ultimately of little importance, but by showing an awareness of God as an unchanging entity hidden in a blinding light, these writers are foreshadowing its later relevance.<sup>98</sup> Although Aelred is looking forward in time, he gives a sense that total unity is possible for the truly devout.

Similarly, in the less literary *Sentences*, Bernard applies pseudo-Dionysius' positive name 'the good' for God, followed by the most positive name in terms of man's redemption which is not used by pseudo-Dionysius. 'Mercy' encapsulates God's most

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<sup>96</sup> Aelred, *Rule*, 26, p. 74; 'His enim omnibus ad unum necesse est ut conscendas, quoniam unum est necessarium. Illud est unum quod non inuenitur nisi in uno, apud unum, cum uno, apud quem non est transmutatio, nec uicissitudinis obumratio.' Aelred, *De instit.*, 26, p. 659.

<sup>97</sup> *Mirror*, III.1, p. 221; 'Et quia in unitate nulla diuisio, nulla sit ibi per diuersa mentis effusio, set sit unum in uno, cum uno, per unum, circa unum, unum sentiens, unum sapiens', *De speculum caritatis*, III.1, p. 105.

<sup>98</sup> Fourteenth-century mystical writing addressed similar ideas, with the light being particularly important to the moment of divine unity in *Simple Souls*, as will be seen in part two of this thesis.

important essence of salvation, the ultimate gift only He can bestow, and the terms of exchange in which it is based. Bernard has Mary explain that God does such great things because of ‘his holy name’ which is ‘holy in itself’ and ‘made holy in us’. His name is ‘The good, because no one is good save God alone’, but Mary also says, ‘Behold his name! What is it? His mercy’ which ‘extends from generation to generation’ but ‘only to those who fear God’.<sup>99</sup> Bernard takes the same approach as Anselm in transitioning from fear to love of God, but he emphasises the good more prominently:

One begins from fear of him so as to proceed to love of him. Those who are still afraid by reason of their sins should not despair, because his mercy is shown to those who fear him. His mercy forgives sin for those who fear him, and that remission of sin nourishes the love of those who thirst after him. Those who love him know his name. The love itself constitutes that knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

The fact that God’s name is Love and Mercy indicates that these positive elements are ultimately more important than either fear or justice which are stepping stones to knowing the truth about God. The less we know God the less we can love him, but we can never ‘love him perfectly because we do not yet know him perfectly’ only ‘fear him

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<sup>99</sup> ‘What is this name? The good, because no one is good save God alone. So it is because of his unique goodness that he has done such great things for me—because he wished to reveal in me both his power and his goodness, for he is singularly powerful and holy is his name. But just as his name is holy in itself, so too is it made holy in us. As it was predestined in him for all eternity, so too should it be brought to fulfillment in us. ‘And his mercy will reach from generation to generation.’ Behold his name! What is it? His mercy. Where is it? His mercy extends from generation to generation—from Jews to all peoples, from the beginning of the world to its end – but not indiscriminately, only to those who fear him.’ Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 127, p. 450.

‘Quod est hoc nomen? Bonus. Quia NEMO BONUS NISI SOLUS DEUS. Ergo propter solam bonitatem suam tam magna fecit mihi, quia et potentiam et bonitatem suam voluit in me declarare; POTENS EST enim singulariter, ET SANCTUM NOMEN EIUS. Sed sicut in ipso sanctum est nomen eius, sic sanctificetur et in nobis. Sicut in ipso ab aeterno praedestinatum est, sic compleatur in nobis. ET MISERICORDIA EIUS A PROGENIE IN PROGENIES. Ecce nome eius. Quod? Misericordia eius. Ibi? A progenie in progenies, Iudaea in omnes gentes, vel ab initio saeculi usque in finem, misericordia eius impenditur, non passim, sed timentibus eum. Non est peronarum acceptio apud Deum.’ Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, vol. VI, 2, Series Tertia, chapter 127, p. 249.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, 3.127, pp. 449-50; ‘A timore incipitur, ut ad amorem eius perveniat. Non desperet timentes adhuc pro peccatis suis, quia misericordia illius super timentes eum. Misericordia eius remittit peccata timentibus eum; remissio peccatorum nutrit amorem sitientibus eum; qui autem diligunt eum, nomen eius agnoscunt. Amor ipse notitia est.’ Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, vol. VI, 2, Series Tertia, chapter 127, p. 249.

lovingly'.<sup>101</sup> This contradiction encapsulates Anselm's fear and love as part of the same emotive action, rather than the separate entities he seeks to stir up in his prayers. But the promise of an almost perfect knowledge of God is made available in Bernard's *Song*, with brief glimpses heightening desire and causing another type of despair which even Bernard struggles with. In his later sermons in *Song*, when the bride should be able to find her bridegroom after long devotion and constant searching

she is still disappointed of her hope. Why? What is the reason for this long, unrelenting disappointment, which induces weariness, foments suspicion, inflames impatience, acts as stepmother to love and a mother to despair? If he is still concealing his love, it is too painful.<sup>102</sup>

Bernard does not have a definitive answer except to say that 'those who seek' might not succeed because they are looking 'at the wrong time, or in the wrong way, or in the wrong place'.<sup>103</sup> There is a sense in which a completely new conversion process, not just a reiteration of the initial enlightenment, must take place after a certain point has been reached. The despair of not being able to experience God to His full extent must segue into an acceptance that it will come eventually if the spiritual gaze is held steadily towards the light with complete faith:

Where he is, you cannot come now, but you shall come hereafter. [Jn 13:36] Come then, follow, seek him; do not let that unapproachable brightness and glory hold [1Tim 6:10] you back from seeking him or make you despair of finding him. 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes' [Mk

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<sup>101</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, Series 3, chapter 127, pp. 450-1; 'Si autem illum nondum perfecte possumus amare, quia nec perfecte novimus, vel cum amore timeamus.' Bernard, *Opera, Sententiae*, vol. VI, 2, Series Tertia, chapter 127, p. 249.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 4, Sermon 75, section 1, p. 98; 'Et tamen in his omnibus frustrata est usque adhuc a desiderio suo. Quare? Quid sibi vult pertinax haec et diuturna fraudatio, taediorum nutrix, suspicionum fomes, impatientiae fax, noverca amoris, mater desperationis? Si adhuc dissimulatio est, nimis et molesta.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermon 75, section I.1, pp. 247-8.

<sup>103</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 4, Sermon 75, section 3, p. 100; 'cum aut videlicet non in tempore quaerunt, aut non sicut oportet, aut non ubi oportet.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermon 75, section 3, p. 249.

9:22]<sup>104</sup>

Monastic despair is then a necessary first step to conversion; a possible block to salvation unless God holds out His hand and the penitent consciously takes it; and a frustration that the promised connection with the Divine is never, or rarely, fulfilled even by the most devout monastic. In one sense the knowledge of predestination – that whatever one does may not be enough – makes the world of the monastic more intense. If these men who have dedicated their lives, thoughts and actions to God still might not be saved, then the likelihood of despair is even greater. This may explain Anselm's tendency in his prayers to end with a sense of entitlement, that it is the particular saint's duty to intercede on his behalf to Christ, whose Passion would have been in vain if He did otherwise. Even though this entitlement is in stark evidence, it continues the previous thoughts of despair; Anselm does not declare full confidence in divine mercy in the way Aelred and Bernard do, but reminds his readers of their need to make the sacrifice count in return for further glorification. But this approach does not fit with what Anselm says elsewhere about God being complete of Himself and unchanging – any form of argumentation will not sway Him – but it may have the effect of making the penitent feel better.

All three writers are therefore grappling with the need to keep their readers balanced between despair and presumption, to love God properly without causing severe psychological damage to themselves or each other. Pranger has pointed out that the rigid and repetitive monastic life held the same danger of the noon-day demon as it did for the original monks in the desert. The mundanity and strictures of the timetable could leave

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<sup>104</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 4, Sermon 76, section 6, pp. 114-5; Ubi ille est, tu non potes venire modo; venies autem postea. Age tamen, sequere, quaere; nec te illa inaccessibleis claritas vel sublimitas a quaerendo deterreat, ab inveniundo desperet. SI POTES CREDERE, OMNIA POSSIBILIA SUNT CREDENTI.' Bernard, *Super Cantica*, vol. 2, Sermo 76, section 6, pp. 257-8.

the monk with a feeling of torpor, and it was this which, emanating from ‘the artificial nature of his “splendid isolation” made him unhappy’.<sup>105</sup> Spliced into this tepidity are intense moments of joy which can last for only a short time before collapsing into its opposite of being distraught again. For Pranger, this lived experience of violent swings from one state to the other is matched by the circular and repetitive nature of monastic literature, where one finds the ‘sudden flashes of bliss and damnation, of hope and despair’, and for him this kind of despair is not psychological or emotional but a ‘monastic-literary technique’.<sup>106</sup> My argument is that this technique is capable of stirring up positive and negative emotions, and that the writers chose their words carefully, not just for dramatic effect, but to help regulate the feelings of isolation, doom, and despair amongst their community. While the honed nature of the writing is open to allegations of being contrived, this does not I think negate its validity and truth. All external expressions of thought or feeling are an approximation of the internal, and have to go through a process of making, of artifice, otherwise any articulation of despair would collapse into an indecipherable howl of pain.

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### 3. Writers’ biographies and the importance of community to discussions of despair

All three men discussed here had considerable contact with the world beyond the monastery and yet their overriding concern, particularly towards the latter part of their lives, was to ensure that the souls within their care would finally be reunited within the heart of the divine.

We are told by Anselm’s hagiographer Eadmer that his mother supported him

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<sup>105</sup> Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, pp. 4, 7, 108.

through a mental collapse shortly before she died, leaving him bereft. His relationship with his father seems to have been a destructive one, and he left at the age of twenty-three to travel through parts of Europe, dropping in at different schools along the way until, four years later, he settled in Lanfranc's school for non-monastics at Bec, where he then decided to stay and become a monk. While there he quickly took charge of the spiritual and academic education of the other monks, developing a new meditative approach based on reading, combined with self-introspection in the soul's inner chamber. It is possible that his early distress, combined with having to draw on his own resources when travelling across unknown territory, enabled him to develop an understanding of his own soul, unmediated by others, and to realise its inadequacy in relation to God. It is also likely that Southern is right in thinking that Anselm's early prayers and meditations were a direct result of 'his personal anguish and his first steps in recovery'.<sup>107</sup> If that was the case, then he was not writing for an audience at all in the first instance, but for himself so that he could express his own spiritual difficulties which were made manifest in the language of extreme self-loathing. So when he says in *Meditation One* that his sins make him smell more foul than a fetid dog, and that he is both shamed by his life and afraid of his death, it was perhaps an expression of his personal experience, mediated through ten years of reading the patristic writings such as those by St Augustine, while studying and teaching at Bec. Augustine's *Confessions* deals with similar spiritual struggles, and it is possible that Anselm followed this example when putting his own difficulties into words, clarifying his internalised experiences. Southern is right, I think, in saying that they are 'reflections of a tormented

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<sup>107</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, p. 112.



and tumultuous spirit'.<sup>108</sup> This method of externalising his internal thoughts as prayers and meditations for others to use in addition to the usual psalms, was a slightly different devotional method, being 'longer, more subtle, more personal, and theologically more daring' than those previously utilised, and proved popular for monastic and laity alike, with a large number of his prayers continuing to circulate after he died.<sup>109</sup> By providing this personally inflected material for people to read as part of the *lectio divina* process, and as a preamble to prayer, away from the more usual practice of listening to the psalms and Scripture, Anselm guided his readers to create their own inner cogitation on their sins and God's greatness.<sup>110</sup> Telling himself and his readers that they should despair of their life because they are worth even less than a corpse, may indeed reflect someone's own perception of themselves. But rather than leaving them to have these potentially dangerous thoughts on their own, Anselm's *Prayers* present a secure pathway towards the hope of redemption which may not have been reached by someone left to their own cyclical ruminations. It may equally be the case that the reader thinks of themselves as wretched in the eyes of God only after reading Anselm, when they had not done so before. This would be even more profitable, since the recognition of one's own sinful self is a prerequisite of any relationship with God.

Anselm's pedagogical experience and approach also helps to shed light on why he softened his advice to Matilda, so many years after sending the same prayers to Adelaide, including no words of self-disgust, humiliation, or the idea that she should fall

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<sup>108</sup> R. W. Southern 'Preface' in *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, ed. by Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm, A Portrait in a Landscape*, p. 9; Southern 'Preface' in *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, p. 10.

<sup>110</sup> Sister Benedicta Ward, 'Introduction' in *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, ed. by Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 46.

apart with violent emotional tears. In his early years at Bec, he assiduously set himself high spiritual standards, demanding the same of his pupils, one of whom, Osbern, he treated particularly harshly because he cared so much about the state of his soul. Osbern's subsequent sudden death was apparently a great sorrow to Anselm, and it is plausible to speculate that feelings of remorse, along with other experiences of seeing the consequences of his own severity contributed to his more compassionate nature displayed in his letter to Matilda. This is supported by Eadmer's story that Anselm advised another abbot not to beat the boys in his care, but to give them instead 'encouragement and gentle persuasion'.<sup>111</sup>

This greater display of human compassion towards the monastic community can also be seen in the writings of Bernard and Aelred, who were writing for other people in an environment where mutual community support was paramount. Their initial readers could tell them the kinds of material most effective in aiding their spiritual development. Again however, Bernard too had to learn for himself the dangers of taking people to the very edge of despair. In William of Thierry's biography of Bernard, written with a view to supporting Bernard's beatification, William recounts how remote Bernard appeared to those trying to follow him. His connection with God seemed to set him apart, so that no one could understand his full meaning, and in turn he was disappointed his followers were not as angelic as he thought they should be.<sup>112</sup> According to William, at first Bernard's harsh responses when hearing confession 'seemed to be sowing seeds of despair in men already weak' but he came to realise 'that he was demanding of simple

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<sup>111</sup> G. R. Evans, 'Anselm's life, works, and immediate influence' in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, Kindle Edition, 2015), pp. 32-3.

monks a degree of perfection that he himself had not yet attained', to the extent that he thought they might be better contemplating themselves in silence rather than listening to him, even thinking that 'his preaching might prove more of a stumbling block to them than a way of building up their interior lives'.<sup>113</sup> Over time, and apparently after an intervention from an internal spirit, Bernard did develop a greater understanding of those he ministered to and 'learned to some degree to take part in ordinary conversation and act in a more humane fashion'.<sup>114</sup> We saw an example of this humanity in *Songs*, when Bernard tells those new to monastic living about the ointment boiled up on the fire of repentance and sorrow at one's sins. Juxtaposing this language of healing, of soothing extreme pain with the broken spirit, Bernard provides the reader with a reassuringly positive ending to his current difficulties. Bernard saw community living as a necessary sign of obedience to God. An understanding of the importance of community reciprocation by that community was important to him, and Verbaal's opinion that Bernard's sermons helped each reader feel part of a 'textual community as an inner reality' makes sense, especially when taking into consideration, as he does, the rapidly increasing number of Cistercian monasteries being established during Bernard's lifetime.<sup>115</sup>

A large part of the Cistercian ethos was that mother and daughter houses should all carry out the same daily practice to a high standard, with abbots making special visits to check that this was the case.<sup>116</sup> Written texts like Bernard's sermons and Aelred's *Mirror*

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<sup>113</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>114</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>115</sup> Wim Verbaal, 'The preaching of community', p. 90.

<sup>116</sup> Emilia Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe 1090-1500* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

were therefore an important means of not only sharing information, advice, and theological perspectives, but also of conveying a sense of compassion for, and understanding of, feelings of despair. This allowed the individual monk to experience a sense of caring kinship with his brothers within his own monastery as well as those at the other houses. When Bernard urges his audience in *Sentences* to choose the cross of Christ to defeat the devil's cross of despair, he tells them the consequences of making the wrong choice, which can nevertheless be recovered from, and provides a clear image of warfare, familiar to ex-knights, that their fear of God will totally destroy the devil's cross. So he guides with both carrot and stick, using the language of height and depth to conjure the solidity of the three-dimensional world to support substantial figurative weight. In this way, he nurtures and teaches his listeners rather than frightening and disillusioning them, and in so doing gives them a common language with which to understand the consequences of choice and the power of Christ. Elsewhere in the *Sentences*, Bernard emphasises the idea that fear and love of God are enough to avoid despair, and it is love which is the driving force within the Cistercian community – by loving each other they create the right environment for love of God to flourish.

That Bernard understood the need for this is shown by his request to Aelred to write *Mirror*. Bernard wanted Aelred to write about *caritas*, or Christian love, for 'certain monks' – possibly noviciates given that Aelred includes a dialogue between master and novice – who were finding it difficult to adhere to the strictness of the Rule. Aelred's excuse (conforming to modes of humility), was that he was almost illiterate, having come from the kitchens and mountains rather than the school room, but Bernard is all the more insistent that in that case Aelred has been taught 'in the school of the

Holy Spirit'.<sup>117</sup> A son of Hexham's last Old-English priest before it was taken over by Augustinian canons, Aelred probably went to the cathedral school at Durham. Rather than continuing with formal education, from the age of fourteen to twenty-four he was in the service of King David I of Scotland where he was exposed to courtly life.<sup>118</sup> He would therefore have been aware of political tensions at a personal level, and the need for instilling a sense of authority and calm to those in the vicinity. This in turn would have influenced his view of community, that charity should be given to others in order to avoid self-interest, and that loving the self, others, and God is the route to happiness.<sup>119</sup> The corollary of this is that looking out for others is a remedy for despair, and most of Aelred's writing is dedicated to the positive experience. Even the negatives are examples of heading towards God's love, so his thoughts on despair must often be seen in terms of their opposite, rather than through any explicit statement on despair itself. The type of Christian love he expects and demonstrates, especially in his *Pastoral Prayer*, allows for human frailty's range of sometimes disagreeable emotions, but by loving each other as Christians his readers can manage these inadequacies before they turn into entrenched and irredeemable sins leading to despair.

This first part of the thesis has shown how different writers demonstrated compassion for members of their community in despair in their writing. It has also considered the many creative ways in which language could be creatively used to navigate audiences either towards or away from despair. The second part will examine

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<sup>117</sup> Dutton, 'Introduction' in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167)*, p. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Marsha L. Dutton, 'Aelred of Rievaulx' in *Oxford Bibliographies in Medieval Studies*, <DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195396584-0179>; Jean Truax, *Aelred the Peacemaker, The Public Life of a Cistercian Abbot* (Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), pp. 36, 39.

<sup>119</sup> Dutton, 'The Sacramentality of Community in Aelred' in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167)*, pp. 246-267 (p. 249).

how similar themes are also apparent even in later, vernacular, texts by writers outwith these long-established institutions for their own distinct communities.

## Part 2: Comfort, Joy, and Becoming Nought – Occluded Despair in Vernacular Mysticism

Now is þis soule fallen of loue into nouzt, wiþouten þe whiche nouzt sche may not be al, þe whiche fallynge is so parfiitli yfalle if sche be arigt yfalle, þat þe soule may not arise out of þis depnesse, ne sche owiþ not to do it.

*The Mirroure of Simple Soules* by Marguerite Porete, translated by MN.<sup>1</sup>

I have matter of true comfort and of joy that savith me fro dispeir.

*A Revelation of Love* by Julian of Norwich.<sup>2</sup>

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### Introduction

In a departure from the Latin texts of part one, part two considers the way the language of despair is used in fourteenth-century vernacular texts originally written by

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<sup>1</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), Chapter 79, p. 127. All references to the long text are from this edition. I am persuaded by Glasscoe's argument that BL MS Sloane 2499, upon which her edition is based, closely replicates the Middle English from which it might have been copied. The long text found in the seventeenth-century Paris BNF Anglais 40 has updated some of the language and might therefore be considered more of an interpretation or translation than an edition. A modern edition to which I also refer in this thesis for examples of the short text is *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* ed. by Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: State University Press, 2006). I have chosen not to use this for the long text, except for the occasional explanatory gloss, as it is an amalgamation of several different texts. Given that I am interested in how a contemporary reader might have understood these vernacular texts, the Glasscoe edition arguably provides the closest available example of a version available nearer Julian's own time. For discussions on the merits of extant copies and editions see: Marion Glasscoe, 'Visions and Revisions: A Further Look at the Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich', *Studies in Bibliography* 42 (1989), 103-20; Alexandra Barratt, 'Julian of Norwich and Her Children Today: Editions, Translations and Versions of Her Revelations' a revised version of "How many Children had Julian of Norwich? Editions, Translations, and Versions of her Revelations", in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism*, ed. by Anne Clark Bartlett et al. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer: 1995), pp. 27-39 via <[https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/3747/How\\_Many\\_Children....\\_by\\_A\\_Barratt.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/3747/How_Many_Children...._by_A_Barratt.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)> [accessed 22 April 2021]; the Introduction in Watson and Jenkins, esp. pp. 24-43; My choice also follows that of Vincent Gillespie as explained in Vincent Gillespie, 'Seek, Suffer and Trust: Ese and Disese in Julian of Norwich' <[https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:acdcc461-c497-46f1-bcdf-49898ad79891/download\\_file?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=Seek%2BSuffer%2Band%2BTrust%2BAAM.pdf&type\\_of\\_work=Journal+article](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:acdcc461-c497-46f1-bcdf-49898ad79891/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=Seek%2BSuffer%2Band%2BTrust%2BAAM.pdf&type_of_work=Journal+article)> [accessed 10 January 2021], p. 1, fn. 3 and Vincent Gillespie, 'Dead Still/Still Dead', *The Mediaeval Journal*, 1 (2011), 53-78, p. 64, fn. 27.

women outside the clear institutional structures we have previously seen. Both *Simple Souls*, originally written in French by Marguerite Porete (translated into Middle English by the unknown MN), and the two versions of Julian of Norwich's texts, exhibit some of the same monastic concerns adapted for their own, non-professed audience.<sup>3</sup> Like the *vita contemplativa* texts, the vernacular mysticism discussed here has an inward focus where self-knowledge, an understanding of one's essentially sinful nature, individual sins, and knowledge of God are inextricably linked. Similarly, *Simple Souls* and Julian's revelations grapple with the difficulties of trying to explain the unexplainable, of travelling towards a form of unity with the always inexpressible and ineffable divine.

Chapter one has shown how despair was treated with restraint in various forms of pastoral writing, while still allowing the reader or interpreter some creative agency. It explored how despair was associated with a range of negative words like sorrow, anger, pride, and *luxuria*, and with behaviours which, while appearing to show repentance, actually foregrounded the self and the body instead of the required spiritual abnegation and sorrow for Christ's Passion. It demonstrated how even for the ultimate but diverse lay audience, despair could be quite different things for different purposes, and that it was an entity which could be utilised both towards and away from God. This first chapter showed us that while despair does apply to the layperson as much as the monastic, the priest was encouraged to describe it only in negative terms, illustrating the dire consequences of failing to repent in the correct way or at the right time.

Chapter two demonstrated how the unexpected juxtaposition of positive and negative, together with strongly emotive affective language, allowed the reader to retreat

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion summarising the scholarship to date on MN's identity, including the possibility that they were a nun of Barking Abbey called Matilda Newton, see Robert Stauffer, 'Possibilities for the Identity of the English Translator of The Mirror of Simple Souls' in *A Companion to Marguerite Porete and the Mirror of Simple Souls*, ed. by Robert Stauffer (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 264–92.



to a state of solitary introspection where heightened spiritual ecstasy could profitably alternate with a tendency to loss of hope and self-destruction. Examining the use of pseudo-Dionysian thought has led us to the point where being unable to comprehend God through language leads to problems in fully recognising His presence. Both of these elements occur in the texts to be discussed here in part two which were written for equally sophisticated readers but who were probably imagined by the authors to be ordinary members of the laity, without the modifying conditions of an enclosed community, marked by a coherent purpose, and clear supervision.<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that the authors themselves were directly responsible for the care of their readers' souls, with Porete and Julian trying to demonstrate another way of spiritual communion with God for those unable or unwilling to join an authorised order.

Part two looks at how the same tendencies towards too much sorrow or joy also apply to the spiritually interested laity, and the ways in which they are either overtly or obliquely counselled against despair. It continues to explore the mutability of language and the ways in which it is manifest in the text. The texts discussed here take a similar pseudo-Dionysian approach to the monastic writers, acknowledging the ultimate inability of words to fully convey complex theological concepts, much less any true sense of the divine. Just as the monastics built on pseudo-Dionysian ideas which they may or may not have personally read, so the writers discussed here were able to expand and develop upon the cultural work of previous writers in their own thinking and writing.

The main text of interest, the fourteenth-century Middle English text known as *Be Mirroure of Simple Soules*, was originally written in French by Marguerite de Porete who

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter three of this thesis for a discussion of their community contexts.

was burned as a relapsed heretic in Paris in 1310. She had contravened the outcome of a previous trial when a copy of her text was publicly destroyed in front of her and she was ordered to stop circulating it. When she was rearrested, Porete refused to answer any charges put to her, causing the trial judges to base their verdict on the usual practice of reading excerpts taken out of context. Her book too was tried, condemned as ‘heretical and erroneous’ and sentenced to be ‘exterminated’.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, *Simple Souls* was translated into a variety of vernacular languages as well as Latin, but of particular interest to this study is the Middle English version translated and glossed by the still mysterious MN. At this point it is worthwhile explaining that, when discussing *Simple Souls* in the following chapters, a distinction is sometimes made between Porete’s ideas (the originating mind behind the text), and the textual evidence. As the Middle English is the focus of this thesis, when discussing the premise of the text, and Porete’s two churches, in chapter three, I have mostly used MN’s translation in the body, with the corresponding French in the footnotes. Sometimes, here and elsewhere depending on the context, I have paraphrased the French in the body, with both the original French and MN’s translations in the footnotes for comparison. It is occasionally the case that MN’s translation differs, and in these instances I have pointed out the divergence.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, *Simple Souls* does not use the term despair, nor any specific cognate for that expression. The text does however make several allusions to it in a variety of complex ways which will be compared in the following chapters with Julian’s divine revelations as she described and reflected upon them in the short and then long texts. Julian is the ideal experimental control for

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<sup>5</sup> See the translated trial transcripts in Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), Appendix A, esp. p. 224; For the French inquisition papers see Paul Verdeyen, ‘Le Procès d’Inquisition contre Marguerite Porete et Guiard de Cressonessart 1309-1310’, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique*, 81 (1986), pp. 47-94.

examining despair in *Simple Souls*, as the only extant version of the short text is bound with it in BL MS Add 37790 (Amherst). Julian also explicitly uses the language of despair while discussing the same ideas of sin and divine unity, but conceptualises her audience in a different way. Where the ideal audience for *Simple Souls* is often referred to as spiritually elite with the language used reflecting this, Julian provides specific encouragement and advice on how her ordinary audience and Christian community should respond to their temptations of doubt and despair – an aspect which will be reflected upon in chapters four and five.

Even though Julian's focus on despair is clear in the way that *Simple Souls* is not, she does recognise the mutability of language, and its limitations in being able to fully express in words what has been transmitted to her through her ghostly or spiritual sight, rather than sights or sounds experienced through the bodily senses.<sup>6</sup> This concern with expression and understanding is shared in *Simple Souls* by both MN in his glosses, and within the text itself. MN warns the reader that

alle suche wordis moste be declared wiþinne hemsilf þat reden þis boke. For þese derke wordis and hize maters derkli spoken in þis writyng, it is don for to make þe soules of þe rederis þat ben disposed to goostli felinges to circuie and enserche bi sotilte of wit to come to þese diuine vndirstandinges.<sup>7</sup>

MN knows that ideas about God and the divine are expressed in obscure ways which the reader might find difficult, so he tells them that the obscurity is purposefully designed. The soul must consciously study, investigate, and ruminate on the text in order to find any personal connection with the divine. There is a similarity here with Shklovsky's idea

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (Pennsylvania: State University Press, 2006), p. 115. All references to the short text will be to this edition. For a discussion of how Julian's frustrations with language are similar to Margery Kempe's see Johannes Wolf, 'The Art of Arts: Theorising Pastoral Power in the English Middle Ages' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2017), pp. 217-8.

<sup>7</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrour of Simple Soules*, p. 106.

of enstrangement discussed in chapter two of this thesis. The complexities and paradox inherent in the material compels the reader to pay closer attention to the words and to consciously try out their own interpretations and responses through the *lectio divina* process. This idea of conscious interpretation also occurs several times in the body of *Simple Souls* itself, where the listener is asked to interpret the text in an attempt to find truth and meaning which may yet still elude them:

Gloseþ þese wordis and ze wole vndirstande it or ze schal misvndirstande it, for it haþ sum semblaunce of þe contrarie þat vndirstandiþ not þe fulhede of þe glose, and semblaunce is not trouþe, but trouþe is trouþe and noþing ellis.<sup>8</sup>

The writer knows that some readers will misunderstand her intended truth but is willing to say it anyway, forcing the reader to carry out hard internal, spiritual work. Other ME devotional writing such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* also emphasises the inability of the intellect to fully comprehend the divine. Here, God can be partly found only when rational instincts are suppressed beneath a blanket of darkness and ignorance, with love for the divine the only possible expression which might reveal Him:

þis derknes & þis cloude is, how-so-euer þou dost, bitwix þee & þi God, & letteþ þee þat þou maist not see him cleerly by lizt of vnderstanding in þi reson, ne fele him inswetnes of loue in þin affeccion. & þerfore schap þee to bide in þis derknes as longe as þou maist, euermore criing afer him þat þou louest ; for zif euer schalt þou fele him or see him, as it may be here, it behoueþ alweis be in þis cloude & in þis derkness.<sup>9</sup>

We will also see how the perfect soul in *Simple Souls* ultimately has to dispense with reason, language, conscious desire, and all sense of self. She has to do this before she can enter the darkness of the abyss which, being annexed from the false light of human

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<sup>8</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 145; ‘Glosez ces motz, se vous les vouez entendre, ou vous les mal entendrez, car ilz ont aucune semblance de contrarieté, qui n’entend le noyau de la glose, mais semblance n’est mie verité, mais verité est, et nulle aultre chose’, Guarnierie, *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 97, p. 270.

<sup>9</sup> ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’, in *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson, EETS (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1944), ch. 2, p. 17.

reason, is the only place where God's true light can be fully seen. The constant paradox and irony is that all these devotional texts are dependent on language to express the inexpressible. There is a further layer of complexity in the fact that the vernacular is used by MN, Julian, and others to interpret and adapt originally Latinate concepts which might not always directly fit the needs and knowledge of their own message and intended audience. Writers therefore often had to rely not only on a word's definition but also its connotations, 'the web of associations which "go with" the word', and which change according to time and context.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter three provides some context by briefly touching on Porete and Julian's biography and community backgrounds, Porete's medieval and twentieth-century translators, and the premise of the texts. It also examines the three fifteenth-century English manuscripts in which MN's *Simple Souls* occurs, providing previously overlooked evidence for the possibility that one of them in particular may have had a lay, potentially female, audience. It therefore allows for a consideration of some of the other texts with which *Simple Souls* travelled in addition to Julian's short text and which will be briefly touched upon in chapter five.

Chapter four considers how Julian and *Simple Souls* utilise the two concepts of sin and the abyss, and explores their paradoxical relationship with despair. It looks at how Julian and *Simple Souls* approach the role of sin as a source of spiritual development which need not necessarily cause temptations towards despair. It will examine the ways in which scholars have located despair in Porete's *Simple Souls*, and extend their investigations by looking at how ideas of the abyss simultaneously gesture up towards

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<sup>10</sup> Simon Horobin and Jeremy Smith, *Introduction to Middle English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Kindle Edition, 2002), section 5.3 'Some notes on meaning'; For a discussion on how some ME words changed their connotative meaning over time, see section 5.5 'Chaucer's lexicon'.

divine goodness as well as down towards human wretchedness.

Chapter five starts with some case studies from *Simple Souls* and, through comparative close reading, explores how the figure of the abyss is used as a point at which the soul is finally able to become closer to God. It then goes on to compare some key terms which both MN and Julian use, examines their semantic reach, the extent to which *Simple Souls* gestures towards ideas of despair, and the writers' possible conception of, and intended relationship with, their ideal reader.

## Chapter 3: Marguerite Porete and Julian of Norwich – their texts and contexts

Scant details are known about the two women, leaving much to scholarly speculation, but we can be relatively certain of two key dates. We know that Marguerite Porete was burned at the stake in Paris in 1310 and that Julian of Norwich received her series of visions sixty-three years later in 1373. The following provides an overview of what is known about each woman and her community, how this might have influenced her writing, and the basic premise of their respective texts. This will provide the context for later chapters which explore each woman's conceptualisation of despair, and the related scholarly discussion, in more detail. I will briefly address Julian first in order to highlight the key comparative aspects with Porete before moving onto explain Porete's social and manuscript context in greater detail.

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### 1. Julian of Norwich

Sixty-three years after Marguerite Porete's violent death, Julian of Norwich received a series of visions on what she thought was her death bed. There is some debate as to whether Julian was a nun or member of the laity at this time. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh and Nicholas Watson have argued that she probably learned theology and the art of writing at a local convent.<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Benedicta Ward and Felicity Riddy speculate that her illness took place at home within an intellectually curious and nurturing devotional community and that her life as an anchorite would also have given

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 'Editing Julian of Norwich's Revelations: A Progress Report', *Medieval Studies*, 38 (1976), 418-419; *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* ed. by Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: State University Press, 2006), p. 4, all references to the short text, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, are from this edition. For a discussion of Julian's possible background see also Emma Louise Pennington, "'All the Helth and Life of the Sacraments...I It Am": Julian of Norwich and the Sacrament of Penance' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford, 2014), p. 20.

her an important role within a society where she understood the difficulties and needs of its people.<sup>2</sup> Opinions also differ as to whether *the long text* was an improved version of the short text or whether the latter was deliberately written with less theological content and for a specific purpose. One of the most persuasive hypotheses is that the short text was written as a *probatio* for the Bishop of Norwich, to persuade him that she had sufficient ‘strength and endurance of mind’ to lead an enclosed life, pledged to a life of solitary prayer and obedience to God, canonical teaching, and her ‘spiritual fathers’.<sup>3</sup> The short text may therefore have been purposefully written in the most appropriate mode to gain the bishop’s approval, rather than a set of thoughts that had not been pursued in enough detail yet, and that any potentially contentious theological issues were therefore deliberately omitted, and the long text written afresh for a completely different audience and purpose.<sup>4</sup>

While she may have been enclosed away from society, Julian was nevertheless an invisible centre of her the community, receiving bequests from the people of Norwich and providing the devout, most notably Margery Kempe, with prayer and counselling.<sup>5</sup> Watson and Jenkins posit the idea of an informal network of God’s ‘tru lovers’ with whom Julian may have discussed her work before revising and sending it out more

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<sup>2</sup> Felicity Riddy, ‘Women talking about the things of God’: a late medieval sub-culture’ in Carole M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), pp. 104-127, (pp. 111-113); Benedicta Ward, ‘Julian the Solitary’ in *Julian Reconsidered* ed. by Kenneth Leech and Benedicta Ward (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG, 1995), pp. 11-29, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Gillespie, ‘[S]he do the police in different voices’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 192-207, (p. 196); ‘The Office for the Enclosing of anchorites (according to the use of Sarum)’ in Mary Rotha Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1914), Appendix A, pp. 1913-8, esp. 193-5. For a more recent discussion of different rites ceremonies and the role of the bishop, see Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gillespie, ‘[S]he do the police in different voices’, pp. 196-7.

<sup>5</sup> Liz Herbert McAvoy, ‘Introduction’ in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 6-7; Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 6.



widely.<sup>6</sup> They also indicate that the subject of despair may have been of particular interest to Julian's local spiritual community, since in the long text she discusses it in more detail and appears to be answering 'the questions and suggestions of the devout circle who likely constituted the work's earliest readers'.<sup>7</sup> Over her twenty years as an anchorite she was able to expand on her text in complex theological detail, treading a path between the need to follow penitential Church orthodoxy, finding a direct union with the divine for oneself, and communicating this in an engaging way to those interested in a spiritual life.

Julian's texts recapitulate her divine 'sheweyngs' which she hopes the reader, her 'even cristen', will be able to experience in the same way.<sup>8</sup> Crucially, it is her 'understanding' of the showings, their true meaning, which she most hopes to convey to her reader – as if 'Jesus had shewid' directly to them without any intermediary.<sup>9</sup> However, both the short and long texts also defer to the authority of the Church; the short text does this much more overtly, and both versions acknowledge the necessity of Holy Church's continual intervention between man and God through the sacrament of confession. Unlike *Simple Souls*, Julian's texts embrace the terminology of reason, will, and desire as a means of making a connection with the divine.

Julian's texts are often regarded as providing comfort to the reader, reassuring them of God's constant and enduring love even though they, like her, are wretched

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<sup>6</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 350.

<sup>8</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 8, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 8, p. 13.

sinner.<sup>10</sup> There was a need for this reassurance because, as Emma Pennington has convincingly argued, Julian lived in a fourteenth-century culture where the responsibility for facing and atoning for one's sins had shifted in focus from the pastoral to the personal.<sup>11</sup> Like contemporary vernacular manuals and 'tribulation texts such as William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations* and *The Chastising of God's Children*', Julian too speaks to a crisis point experienced by her fellow Christians who struggled internally with their sense of sinfulness even after the supposed cleansing sacrament of confession and penance.<sup>12</sup> As we have seen in the introduction, Margery Kempe was constantly flipping between post-confession tears of contrition and feelings of despair.<sup>13</sup> Julian's extended focus on despair acknowledges this constant tension between 'wele and wo' and that relying on the power of repentance will always cause the embodied soul periods of anxiety.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Porete is also addressing a section of her spiritual community who on the one hand are guilty of the sin of presumption and pride in their works of virtue, and on the other are constantly warring with their own sinful will and the desire to fully unite with God. The problem here for Porete is that both require a focus on and importance of the self, even in one's very desire for the divine.

During the course of the text Julian considers the spiritual meanings of sixteen revelations as they pertain to herself and her 'even cristen', the wider Christian

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion. Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 300 where she refers to 'Julian's astonishing, perpetual optimism' and Porete's assurance that the perfect soul need have no 'qualms of conscience' nor 'disquiet for any sins she has committed'.

<sup>11</sup> Pennington, "'All the Helth and Life of the Sacraments...I It Am'", pp. 27, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Pennington, "'All the Helth and Life of the Sacraments...I It Am'", pp. 26-7.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Coda. Transmitting Despair by Manuscript and Print' in *Crying in the Middle Ages. Tears of History* ed. by Elina Gertsman (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 249-266 (p. 251).

<sup>14</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 1, p. 1; ch. 15, pp. 23-4; ch. 52, p. 81; ch. 62, p. 100; ch. 68, p. 111.

community. She describes her own experiences of receiving the divine images and their meanings, occasionally using God and Christ as characters to underline a particular point, but she also considers those insights in terms of how an ordinary person might manage their psycho-spiritual pain. Always writing from a position of the body, Julian describes Christ's Passion in both forensic detail and metaphorical terms. The blood, pain and suffering emanating from Christ's wounds signify all the foulness of man's sins, while at the same time His blood acts as a cleansing agent for those sins. The embodied soul and lived experience is of central concern. Julian wants her readers to be encouraged in their pursuit of salvation, while also acknowledging the constant struggles of people striving to lead spiritual lives in a three dimensional, created world.

There is one fifteenth-century witness to Julian's short text in London, BL MS Additional 37790 (Amherst), and fragments of the long text in London, Westminster Treasury MS 4 dated to about 1500. Unlike Porete's work however, all further examples of Julian's work, including the whole of the long text, were produced after the Reformation. These include a seventeenth-century version with updated language (Paris, BnF Anglais 4), and an early seventeenth-century version potentially more faithful to the original Middle English. The first printed edition was also produced in the seventeenth-century, in 1670 by Benedictine Serenus Cressy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a full discussion of the manuscripts and editions to date see Barratt, 'Julian of Norwich and Her Children Today: Editions, Translations and Versions of Her Revelations'. See also footnote two to the Introduction of Part Two of this thesis.

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## 2. Marguerite Porete

It is difficult to locate Porete within a precise community. The beguine label assigned in the trial documents has been generally accepted, with the suggestion that she may have been either a ‘solitary’ or part of a Northern French Community.<sup>16</sup> Recent scholarship concurs with this view. In their review of *Simple Soul’s* authorship Sean Field, Robert Lerner and Sylvain Piron are of the opinion that it was written by a woman ‘who was close to beguine circles’ and was therefore probably writing for them.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, Field has suggested that, since *Simple Souls’* ‘radical apophatic mysticism’ is very similar to the works of beguines Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, and Mechtild of Magdeburg, Porete probably was associated with similarly marginalised and focused religious women.<sup>18</sup> However, when Porete refers to the beguines’ disapproval of her work she may be consciously breaking away from the usual spiritual practice with which she came into contact. Most recently, Alison More prefers to use ‘laywoman’ to describe Porete rather than ‘beguine’ since ‘both the precise meaning of the term ‘beguine’ and Marguerite’s relationship with the beguines of Hainault are unclear’.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Stauffer thinks that Porete’s use of the romance genre indicates she was not writing for a cloistered audience, and that even though she writes with reference to pseudo-Dionysian, Victorine, and Bonaventuran concepts, he is certain that she was not

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<sup>16</sup> Maria Lichtman, ‘Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) The Mirror of Simple Souls’ in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Arthur Holder (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 124–35 (p. 126).

<sup>17</sup> Sean L. Field, Robert E. Lerner & Sylvain Piron, ‘A Return to the Evidence for Marguerite Porete’s Authorship of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*’, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2017), 153–73 (pp. 167-9).

<sup>18</sup> Sean L. Field, ‘On Being a Beguine in France c. 1300’ in *Labels and Libels: Naming Beguins in Northern Medieval Europe*, ed. by Letha Böhringer *et al* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 117–34; Sean L. Field *et al*, ‘A Return to the Evidence for Marguerite Porete’s Authorship of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*’, p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, Kindle Edition), p. 62.

writing for a ‘university-trained audience’ either.<sup>20</sup> Marleen Cré suggests that Porete’s ‘mother tongue’ may have allowed a ‘greater emotional directness’, particularly for affective texts.<sup>21</sup> *Simple Souls* often refers to hearers as well as readers, indicating an aural reading practice which may have taken place either in small household groups similar to Cecily Neville’s religious readings over dinner; in an individual meeting between a reading priest and a member of the laity, in the way that Margery Kempe encountered religious literature; or possibly in larger, more public groups.<sup>22</sup> For Doiron this internal evidence indicates that the text was ‘read aloud, probably to a religious community’ and also ‘for private reading by individuals’, and Porete is known to have promulgated her book to the unregulated laity.<sup>23</sup> A combination of private and public reading is possible, with the latter, as Joyce Coleman has pointed out, being a ‘key means of achieving very sophisticated sociopolitical goals’, since group reading leads to discussion of the text and refinement of one’s own interpretation and ideas.<sup>24</sup> Porete herself sought approval from a variety of religious men for what is called in the ME translation, ‘pees of auditoures’, a statement which shows her own awareness of the authorities’ unease with what Kerby-Fulton has called ‘the spectre of semi-religious or

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<sup>20</sup> Robert F. Stauffer, ‘M.N and the Yorkshire Circle: The Motivation Behind the Translation of the *Mirouer Des Simples Ames* in Fourteenth Century England’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 2011), pp. 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Marleen Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse: A Study of London, British Library, MS Additional 37790*, *The Medieval Translator* 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 299.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which books were aurally consumed see Ryan Perry & Lawrence Tuck, “[W]heþyr þu redist er herist redyng, I wil be plesyd wyth þe’: Margery Kempe and the Locations for Middle English Devotional Reading and Hearing” in *Spaces for Reading in Later Medieval England* ed. by Mary C. Flannery and C. Griffin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 133-148.

<sup>23</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. lxiv.

<sup>24</sup> Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 97. On pp. 98-9 Coleman also points out that ‘invitations to “hear” ... may be no more than metaphorical or rhetorical’, and that because something might be figurative does not necessarily mean that it is.

lay gatherings' where her book might be shared.<sup>25</sup> The fact that a copy of her text was burned and she was ordered to neither own nor distribute a version of it demonstrates the extent to which the authorities were concerned about its effect on untrained auditors. Barbara Newman has argued that Porete had access to funds to reproduce her text, as well as the ability to travel in order to promulgate it more widely, and concurs with the idea that Porete might have herself commissioned *Simple Souls* to be translated into Latin and therefore not only for a wider public, but also 'with its implicit claim to be theology and not mere devotional writing for the laity'.<sup>26</sup> If this was the case, by having the temerity to convert her text into the language of doctrinal power Porete was asserting her agency and social connections in the strongest possible terms. In translating Latin religious texts into English, it was not only a matter of language that needed transposing, but also theology. 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.'<sup>27</sup> By so visibly interpreting and opposing Church doctrine in its own language Porete made herself a more obvious problem, which may be a contributing factor as to why she was arrested for a second time and eventually killed. Cré, however, thinks it more likely that it was translated by the authorities for the very specific audience of the trial inquisitors so that they could

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<sup>25</sup> This does not occur in any of the French versions, but does appear to be Porete's rather than MN's sentiments; Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 6; Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 279.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', *Speculum*, vol. 91, no. 3 (2016), 591–630 (pp. 618–9). For further discussion on the likelihood of whether Porete copied the Latin texts herself or employed scribes to do so see Suzanne Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 32–4.

<sup>27</sup> Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology' in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 401–20 (p. 402).

more easily understand it.<sup>28</sup> Whichever was the case, the existence of Porete – and her book in any language – was so prominent and disruptive that the authorities were compelled to take action against her.

The current consensus is that the Middle English versions are thought to have been Carthusian in both origin and readership, therefore limiting lay exposure and any similar public discussion to that which took place on the continent. As I discuss below however, the aristocratic or mercantile classes may also have had some access to the text, but it was certainly not as widely distributed as it was elsewhere.

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## 2.1 The premise of *Simple Souls*

The main purpose of *Simple Souls* is to describe how, through a seven step journey beginning with an initial conversion ‘in þe firste estate of grace’, it is possible for the embodied soul to achieve partial unity with the divine before death, at which point the soul finally has ‘perfeccioun bi diuine fruicion in liif of pees’.<sup>29</sup> Entwined within these stages are the three deaths of sin, nature and the spirit, and a nomenclature labelling the changing condition of the soul: the ‘perished’ (*periz*), the ‘marred’ (*marriz*), and the ‘nouzted’ (*adniente*). The argument in *Simple Souls* is made through a variety of personified attributes, the most prominent of which are Love, the perfect Soul, and Reason. Where Reason stands in for the structured and learned, as well

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<sup>28</sup> Marleen Cré, ‘Contexts and Comments. The Chastising of God’s Children and The Mirror of Simple Souls in MS Bodley 505’ in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 122-135 (p. 129).

<sup>29</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 6; ‘premier estat de grace’, ‘parfection par diuine fruicion ou pais de vie’, Margareta Porete, Marguerite Porete, *Speculum Simplicium Animarum; Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ed. by P. Verdeyen, R. Guarnieri (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), Prologue, p. 10. Hereafter when providing a French translation I shall refer only to Guarnieri. For a comparison of these stages with those of Augustine and Bonaventure, see Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, pp. xcvi-xcviii and chapter five of this thesis. For an explanation and discussion of these stages see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 120 - 126, and for reference to Porete’s image of the annihilated soul imprinted on the divine and its ‘precise analogue in Eckhart’ see p. 124.

as the rules and scripture of the Church, Love is the essence of God, and the Soul is the representative of the chosen few who have divested themselves of all sin, will, and spiritual desire in order to return to their pre-created state within the Trinity.

At the start of the treatise a separate authorial voice explains to the ‘actif and contemplatif, þat to þis liif may come’ that they should ‘herkeneþ now some myztes of þe clene loue, of þe noble loue, and of þe hize loue of þe fre soules, & hou þe Hooli Goost haþ his saile in his schippe’.<sup>30</sup> A discussion then takes place between Love and Soul, during which the soul is persuaded to take leave of the virtues ‘to þe whiche uertues þis soule many a day haþ be seruaunt to’, after which it is able to rest in peace. At this point Reason takes over most of the remaining discussion, asking difficult questions and exposing moments of paradox.<sup>31</sup> By this means, and the eventual capitulation of a defeated Reason, *Simple Souls* demonstrates how a true understanding of the text, and by extension God Himself, cannot be found through rational argument, and that not all souls are destined for a full reconnection with God even if they are one of the saved.

The seven stages increase in spiritual difficulty but gradually decrease in the amount of action required – by the later estates a still passivity is required. At the first stage the soul is saved to the extent that it has been touched by God’s grace and is free from sin, but because people are content to accept God’s grace by limiting themselves ‘to kepe þe comaundementis of God pat he comaundeþ in þe lawe up payne of deþ [...] þou3 sche liuede a þousynd zeer’ they will not go beyond basic salvation in the afterlife

<sup>30</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 6; ‘Entre vous actifs et contemplatifs et peut estre adnientifs par vraie amour, qui orrez aucunes puissances de la pure amour, de la noble amour, de la haulte amour de l’Ame Enfranchie, et comment le Saint Esperit a mis son voille en elle comme en sa naif’, Guarnieri, *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, Prologue, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 13-14; ‘Vertuz qu’elle a esté par long temps et par mainte journee en leur servage’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 6, p. 24.



– there they will be able to access God from a distance, but never obtain full unification, nor any hint of it before death.<sup>32</sup> In the second stage the soul is willing to go beyond the imperative of what God commands, but also what he ‘consaileþ’ (*conseille*) as well.<sup>33</sup> She wants to know how ‘to best plesse his beloued’ and strives to follow Christ’s example of ‘dispisinge richessis, delices (beauty, joy sensual pleasure) and worschipes (honour or respect)’ without feeling any ‘bittirnesse’, ‘dulness, ne febilnesse of body’.<sup>34</sup>

In the third estate the soul becomes addicted to carrying out ‘werkis of bounte bi feruour of grace, in takinge alle laboures in whiche sche may hir spirite fede’ because she finds it pleasurable to focus her will in this way.<sup>35</sup> In this same chapter ostensibly dealing with the third stage, the text seems to jump ahead to the fifth, warning that the soul will find it ‘ri3t hard’ to do what she must and ‘relinquiþ þese werks’ which she enjoys by putting the ‘wille to deep’ which drives her to carry out the works which lead to her enjoyment of the spiritual life so much.<sup>36</sup> This letting go of self-will and good works is necessary for the soul to start ‘brekinge hirsilf’, which is arguably an act of self loathing or despair required to make a large enough space within her where her ‘loue

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<sup>32</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 169, ‘Le premier estat, ou degré, est que l’Ame, qui est de Dieu touchee par grace et desnuee a son pouoir de peché, a entencion de garder sa vie, c’est a dire pour mourir, les commandemens de Dieu, qu’il commande en la Loy [...] Si semble a ceste Ame assez labour pour elle, pour tout ce que elle scait faire; et luy semble que, se elle devott vivre mil ans, que son pouoir a assez a faire de tenir et garder les commandemens’, Guarneri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 318.

<sup>33</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 169; Guarneri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, p. 318.

<sup>34</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 170; *MED*, *dēlice* n. 1. (a), 2. (a), 3. (a); *worshipen* v. 1. (a); ‘plaist a son amy’, ‘desprisant richesses, delices et honnours’, ‘Adonc ne craint elle ne perte d’avoir, ne paroles de gens, ne fobloice de corps’, Guarneri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, p. 320. Note that MN deviates from the French in the last quote except with regard to the feeble body. Porete here talks about the loss of possessions and men’s words.

<sup>35</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 170; ‘Or est il ainsi, que la voullenté de ceste creature n’ayme fors oeuvres de bonté, par raideur de grans emprises de tous labours, dont elle peut son esperit repaistre’, Guarneri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, p. 320.

<sup>36</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 171; ‘Or est il ainsi, que la voullenté de ceste creature n’ayme fors oeuvres de bonté, par raideur de grans emprises de tous labours, dont elle peut son esperit repaistre [...] Ainsi se esconvient il mouldre en deffroissant et debrisant soy mesmes, pour eslargir le lieu ouquel Amour voudra estre’, Guarneri, ed., *La Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, pp. 320-322.

wolde haue his beyngē'.<sup>37</sup> If the soul is full of her own will, and her attention fixed on outward actions, then she leaves no room for God's will nor has the ability to enact what He wills.

By the fourth stage the soul delights in meditation and contemplation because it 'relinqueþ fro alle laboures outward & of obedience of opire bi hizenesse of loue in contemplacion' becoming 'daungerouse, noble, & deliciose'.<sup>38</sup> This 'daungerouse' soul might be overbearing, haughty, aloof and hard to please, believing themselves to be answerable only to God through contemplation, about which they feel great pride.<sup>39</sup> This soul 'melts in swetnesse' believing that there is 'noon heizer liif þan to haue þis'; she is unaware 'þat God haþ eny grettir zifte nyȝ to ziuē to ze soule þan þis loue þat loue haþ bi loue wiþynne hir yspred'.<sup>40</sup> In the fifth she must break free of this comfortable spirituality and see herself as God sees her, full of wickedness. Falling down into an abyss of meekness she can see the divine light most clearly and completely relinquish her will. She is now peaceful and calm, unable to drop back down into the fourth state. In the sixth she has occasional glimpses of the divine, through 'a swift openyngē and an hasti schittyngē', and in the seventh she is fully rejoined with the divine after death.<sup>41</sup>

These stages are most clearly defined towards the end of the text, with much of the body of the work focused on the consequences of each state, the difficulties of

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<sup>37</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 171; For the French see the above footnote. For a further discussion on this point see chapters four and five of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 171; 'relinquie de tous labours de dehors et de obedience d'aultruy par haultesse de contemplacion; donc l'Ame est si dangereuse, noble et delicieuse', Guarnieri, ed., *La Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, pp. 322.

<sup>39</sup> *MED*, daunġerōus adj. 1. (a); 2. (a) (b).

<sup>40</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 171-172; 'dont est maistresse du celustre, c'est a dire de la clarté de son ame, qui la fait merueilleusement remplie d'amour de grant foy, par concordance d'union qui l'a de ses delices mise en possession', Guarnieri, ed., *La Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 118, pp. 322.

<sup>41</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 93; 'une ouverture a maniere de esclar et de hastive closure', Guarnieri, ed., *La Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 58, p. 168.

transitioning, and the properties of a soul divested of its own will. The first and second stages roughly relate to the group she labels as the ‘perischyd’, those who ‘lyuen liif of perfeccion bi werkis of uertues in affeccion of lyf of spirite’ and are not aware ‘þat þer is eny bettir beyng þan þe beyng of werkis of uertues and depis of martirdom’.<sup>42</sup> Through this ‘affeccion’ the soul is emotionally rewarded by leading a spiritual life, it has its desires met while retaining its own free will and has never considered the prospect of swapping both in exchange for the immersive state of divine union. Both MN and Kirchberger have translated the French ‘*periz*’ directly as ‘perished’ in contrast to Babinsky and Colledge who both favour ‘lost’, presumably to ensure a distinction between the damned and the saved, a confusion which MN clarifies by saying that those who ‘perischen in her werkis’ are not in ‘perdicion of soule’ but ‘leue so to her owen werkes’ that they are unable to ‘atayne to þe hizest’.<sup>43</sup> In other words, they are still focused on and content with a degree of worldly satisfaction and pride in their faith, and this combination of desire, will, and self-satisfaction assumes an ability to alter God’s will rather than allow the self to not only be altered by Him but subsumed within Him.

These concerns are similar to definitions of despair of salvation discussed in the first part of this thesis. *Simple Souls*’ perished may not be completely aligned with the worldly unrepentant, categorised by Bromyard, where loving the present through bodily

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<sup>42</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 89; ‘Ilz sont deux manieres de gens qui vivent de vie de perfection par oeuvres de vertuz en affection d’esperit’, ‘et ont si grant plaisance en leurs oeuvres qu’ilz n’ont point cognaissance qu’il soit nul meilleur estre que ll’estre de oeuvres de vertuz et mort de martire’, Guarnieri, ed., *La Mirouer des Simple Ames*, ch. 58, pp. 158-9.

<sup>43</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 164; Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* translated and introduced by Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), ch. 57, p. 133; Margaret Porette, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, translated from the French with an Introductory Interpretative Essay by Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, reprint 2010), ch. 57, p. 76; Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 89, 91; Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ed. by C. Kirchberger (Vancouver: Soul Care Publishing, reprint of 1927 first edition), pp. 79-81.

excess leads to a hatred of God.<sup>44</sup> However, neither do they correspond to the Latin *Vita Contemplativa*'s requirement for true self-knowledge where seeing one's sinful nature clearly, in relation to God's goodness, is a pre-requisite for any kind of mystical or divine understanding.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, in this mystical rather than salvation economy, where one's highest expectations are not forgiveness of sins but union with the divine, these perished souls could be said to be the equivalent of Bromyard's unconsciously despairing parishioners. But where Bromyard's main audience, via the parish priest, are those who are totally untroubled by thoughts of salvation, *Simple Soules*' starting point is a grade higher: those who only care about their salvation, and are satisfied that they are doing enough to reach it. Therefore in her parallel taxonomy of mystical union the perished are similar to the unrepentant sinner as both are filled with pride and self-satisfaction, neither of which cannot co-exist with a state of divine unity.

The 'marred' are wiser than the 'perished' since they know there is a closer connection with the divine to be had, 'þei holden þat þer is a better beyng þan is her beyng, and þese knowen wel þat þei haue no knowinge of þat bettir beyng'.<sup>46</sup> Where MN used 'marred' to translate '*marriz*', Babinsky and Colledge chose to use 'sad' and 'forlorn' respectively. Definitions of the French *marris* or *marriz* include to grieve, be sad, get angry, and become distressed.<sup>47</sup> The *MED* definitions of 'marred' include: troubled, distressed; to be vexed or bewildered; and possibly to lament, but they also

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<sup>44</sup> 'que specialiter quantum ad praesens per positum sistit in nimia carnis et mundi dilectione et dei et alteri seculi odio.' Bromyard, '*Desperationis*' in *Summa praedicatorum*, BL Royal 7 E. iv, f. 118r.

<sup>45</sup> As discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>46</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, pp. 91-2; 'qu'ilz tiennent qu'il est ung estre meilleur que n'est leur estre, et si cognoissent bien qu'ilz n'ont pas cognoissance de ce meilleur que ilz croient', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 164.

<sup>47</sup> *Le Grand Robert de la langue Française*, 2017, *marri*, adj. *contrit, fâché*.

include to hinder, damage, corrupt and perish, as well as to be bemused or bewildered.<sup>48</sup> This group have a ‘brennyng desire’ to know how they can proceed further, continually asking ‘damysel knowinge enlumyned of diuine grace’ what to do, and by their nature are unable to follow her advice and go ‘bi þe contrey of nouzt willynge’.<sup>49</sup> In a rare appearance, the Holy Ghost, rather than Love, tells Reason that for as long as ‘þei maken askinges eiþir at knowinge or at loue or doen enyþing þat may be in loue or in knowinge or in crauyng’ they will remain ‘litel’.<sup>50</sup> This constant desiring for divine union without achieving it means the marred might come close to despair, but their very act of desire means they are not relinquishing hope, which, paradoxically, they have to do in order to fulfill it, and the final abandonment of hope and desire leads not to despair – but peace.

The third group, the nouzted, reach this peace by going through the ‘nouzt willinge’ (*nient vouloir*), of the fifth and sixth stages.<sup>51</sup> They ‘noþing asken nor crauen, for alle beynges, whateuere þei be, is but þe mountaunce [value] of aressche [a rush] and a defaute, as anentis þe souereyne beyng of nouzt willinge’.<sup>52</sup> Kirchberger translates this as ‘they be little that often ask, but those be lords that nothing ask nor crave, for all beings, whatever they be, are but as strong as a reed, and a default as compared to the

<sup>48</sup> MED, merren v. 4 (b) ppl. merred (c) and (d).

<sup>49</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 92; ‘Et pource qu’ilz tiennent et scevent de vray qui<lz> sont marriz, ilz demandent souvent la voye, par ardent desir, a celluy qui la scet, - ce’st damoiselle Cognoissance, enluminee de diuine grace’, ‘le pays de nient vouloir’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 166.

<sup>50</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 92, ‘Voir, tant et si longuement que elle fera nulles demandes ne a Cognoissance ne a Amour, ne que elle fera compte de chose qui puisse estre, ne en amour, ne en cognoissance, ne en louenge’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 166.

<sup>51</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 93; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 166.

<sup>52</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 92; MED, mōuntaunce n. 1. (a); rishe n. 2; ‘Car tout estre, quel qu’il soit, n’est que un jeu de pelote et jeu d’enfant envers le souverain estre de nient vouloir’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 57, p. 166. Note that in the French, what MN has called a rush is a child’s game of ball.

sovereign Being of naught-willing'.<sup>53</sup> With all their self-will and constant desire to know God, all those below the fifth stage are hollow and weak in comparison to those who are filled with God's will which makes them strong and unbendable in the face of all external forces, be they positive or negative. In the seventh stage the soul is fully born into a 'liif of glorie' which she could only glimpse with the help of the 'fernyz' (*Loingprēs*) while embodied at the sixth level.<sup>54</sup> *Simple Souls* also separately emphasises the three deaths of the soul embedded within these stages: in the first two, 'mortefyiinge synne' itself has to die; then the death of 'mortefiyng nature' gives birth to the 'liif of spirite' where the soul is in constant 'delicious' contemplation; and finally the spirit dies and a 'liif of glorie' is born.<sup>55</sup>

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## 2.2 Porete's two Churches

To underpin her theology Porete calls out the Church hierarchical system as unfit for purpose. For her, reason, self-will and desire, hierarchy and literalness, obscure and replace, rather than reveal, God's will. *Simple Souls* is therefore an explication of the pointlessness of placing one's hope for anything beyond a basic life of grace in what is called 'Holy Church the little', designed and presided over by the created rather than the creator. Cré points out that Porete distinguishes between "Holy Church the little," that is those who live by reason; and "Holy Church the great," those souls who are subsumed

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<sup>53</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 94; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 58, p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 94; 'Au commencement vesquit ceste Ame de vie de grace, laquelle grace est nee en la mort de peché. Après vesquit, dit Amour, de vie d'esperit, laquelle vie d'esperit est nee en la mort de nautre; et maintenant vit de vie divine, laquelle vie divine est nee en la mort d'esperit', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 59, p. 170.

within God's love and unable to be swayed by external forces.<sup>56</sup> Cré has noted how Porete repeatedly 'teases and provokes her potential critics', the clergy, with the following:

This þat suche is, seiþ this soule, sche seke no more god bi penaunces, ne bi no sacramentis of hooli chirche, ne bi þouȝtes, ne bi wordis, ne bi werkes, ne bi hooli creatures, ne bi creatures of aboue, ne bi ryȝtwysnes, ne bi mercy, ne bi glorie, ne bi diuine knowinge, ne bi diuine loue, ne be diuine herynge and laude.<sup>57</sup>

In Porete's view, the authoritative structure of the Church, represented by the character Reason, actually prevents a soul from achieving union with God, in whom all burdens and distractions caused by her own individuality can be released. For Porete, the clergy and others who trust in Church sacraments, and enacting the virtues, might be saved but will only be admitted to the margins of the divine kingdom. As Sargent has pointed out, Porete further baits the 'clerics and churchmen' of reason by allowing that they might be saved but only as the 'equivalent to granting salvation to a deathbed-repentant murderer' since they are "rubes, servants and tradesmen" – *villains, sers et marchans* – who would never be allowed in the presence of the King'.<sup>58</sup>

Most controversially, the perfect soul has to 'takeþ leeu' of the virtues, which formed a key part of the heresy charge against Porete.<sup>59</sup> MN's gloss tries to make the position clearer and allied to Church doctrine by explaining that when the soul struggled to carry out the virtues they were master over her but now they are her subjects and the

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<sup>56</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, pp. lxxvi-lxxvii, 45; 'Saint Eglise la Petite', 'Sainte Eglise la Grant', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 19, p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 170-1, n. 22; Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 131; 'Ceste, qui telle est, ne quiert plus Dieu par penitance ne par sacrement nul de Sainte Eglise, ne par pensees ne par paroles ne par oeuvres, ne par creature d'ycy bas ne par creature de lassus, ne par justice ne par misericorde ne par gloire de floire, ne par divine cognoissance ne par divine amour ne par divine louenge', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 85, p. 242.

<sup>58</sup> Michael G. Sargent, 'The Annihilation of Marguerite Porete', *Viator*, 28 (1997), 253-80 (p. 268).

<sup>59</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 13; 'Vertue, je prens congé de vous a toujours', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 6, p. 24. This is the first line of a poem which ends the chapter.

soul ‘is lady ouer uertues’.<sup>60</sup> This context was not however taken into account in the trial documents.

For Porete, to be rational and learned takes one away from, rather than further towards, God’s love. Reason is too active and noisy, getting in the way of true understanding. Her text is therefore a simulacrum of the relationship between the Holy Church the Little and its method of bureaucracy and an expression of a yearned for spiritual existence outside that structure which obstructs rather than illuminates the path to a full knowledge of God’s love. Caroline Walker Bynum has suggested that as a woman Porete might have found the idea of divine unity an attractive alternative to the ‘weight of social structure and human responsibility’, much of which was irrelevant to her own inner sense of self.<sup>61</sup> I think there is merit in this since, as a woman in particular, the structures act more as a hinderance than a means of connection. Indeed, for Porete, that is their purpose – to always impose an intermediary between the self and God so that God’s will can be safely curated, taught, and understood in accordance with the agreed doctrine.

I have gone to some length to explain Porete’s position against the Church here because I think it helps to explain why she never specifically uses the term despair even though she may gesture to it in places. As we have seen in the earlier chapters of this thesis, despair is firmly rooted in the monastic and pastoral literatures including the vices and virtues framework, and has a clear role within the repentance based salvation which Porete ultimately rejects. A self-interested pursuit of the divine, focused on one’s

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<sup>60</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 15-16. See also pp. lxiv-lxvi for a discussion of MN’s gloss on this point.

<sup>61</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 48-9.



own salvation, can easily lead to despair, but in Porete's theology the final return to one's pre-created state within the divine entails an acceptance of one's wretchedness alongside a certainty which is stronger than hope, and yet is neither presumption nor pride.

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### 3. Medieval Translations of *Simple Souls*

*Le Mirouer des Simples Ames* was translated into Latin, Italian and English and continued to be distributed throughout France and Europe until the fifteenth century, though without Porete's name attached.<sup>62</sup> There is evidence that readers on the continent were aware that the writer was a woman, including Jean Gerson, chancellor of Paris University, who recommended it to other religious in 1428, using female pronouns to describe the author's relationship with God.<sup>63</sup> All the French copies, apart from the text in the fifteenth-century Chantilly, Condé, F xiv 26 (which has no external title), are listed with titles that includes the word *aneanties* and sometimes use 'book' instead of 'mirror', emphasising the core concept of self-annihilation rather than the process of reflection.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the Middle English version, although the text may have been reproduced within monasteries, it was also definitely distributed externally to the laity, with booklist evidence showing its occurrence by 1500 in an apothecary's house and a

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<sup>62</sup> Zan Kocher, 'The Apothecary's Mirror of Simple Souls: Circulation and Reception of Marguerite Porete's Book in Fifteenth-Century France', *Modern Philology*, vol. 111, no. 1 (2013), 23–47 (p. 25).

<sup>63</sup> Kocher, 'The Apothecary's Mirror', p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Kocher, 'The Apothecary's Mirror', pp. 44-5; The Chantilly manuscript contains a longer title not replicated elsewhere: '*Le mirouer des simples ames qui en vouloir et en desire demourent*'. Michael Sargent inserted square brackets to clear the contradiction: '*The Mirror of Simple, Annihilated Souls, and [of those] who remain only in will and desire of love*'. See Michael G. Sargent, 'Marguerite Porete' in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c.1500*, ed. by A. Minnis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 291-309 (p. 291); Sean Field considers this title to be a mistake 'based on medieval misunderstanding and modern mispunctuation of a passage in the *Mirror*', see Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 2012, p. 248, n. 1.

book shop.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, this distribution may have been slow in the immediate aftermath of Porete's trial, with possibly only a 'few' copies covertly circulating in the following century and a half.<sup>66</sup> So far there is no clear evidence of similar circulation and transmission routes for the Middle English version.

In England *Simple Souls* was considered to be a theologically complex and difficult, but orthodox text, written by a man. The later fourteenth-century translator MN, makes no reference to whom the original author might have been, but was aware of the need to frame the text for the reader. He was aware of its difficulty of both theology and language, and was compelled to make a second attempt after having been 'enfourmed þat some wordis þerof haue be mystake'.<sup>67</sup> He describes himself in the traditional trope of humility as a 'moost vnworþi creature and outcaste', who is 'riȝt wrecchid and vnable to do eny such werk, poore and nakid of goostli fruytes, derked wiþ synnes and defautes'. He finds it difficult to translate this 'boke of hize diuine maters and of hize goostli felynges' which is 'kernyngli and ful mystili spoken', and is worried that his readers will also find it difficult to understand the 'diuine werkis priueli hid vndir derk speche'.<sup>68</sup> He therefore advises them to 'taasteþ' the 'swetnesse' of 'diuine fruyvcion' before trying to understand the 'unsaueri' 'spekinges and writynges of þese hize goostli felynges' and the 'goostli workynges of diuine love'.<sup>69</sup> Through the word 'unsaueri' MN is acknowledging that much of the text is 'unappealing to the intellect or

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<sup>65</sup> Kocher, 'The Apothecary's Mirror', p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Michael G. Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*: The French and English Traditions' in *Middle English Writing in Practice: Texts, Reader, and Transformations*, ed. by Nicole R. Rice (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 47–90 (p. 6).

<sup>67</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>69</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 2.

spirit, devoid of spiritual appeal’, and therefore a justification for his own interventions, but there may also be a hint of something more disapproving.<sup>70</sup> The Wycliffite *The Order of Priesthood* for example uses it to castigate ‘evil priests’ who promise that their own prayers mean people are excused ‘to-fore god for þe almes þat þei don’, which in turn encourages them to lead a sinful life.<sup>71</sup> Because of this, the tract says, ‘þes euele prestis...lette goddis word þat it be not knowen & kept & opynly tauzt. & þei sclaudren goddis lawe wiþ many errouris & maken it vnsawory to worldly men’.<sup>72</sup> This chimes well with MN’s gloss on Porete’s statement that the perfect soul desires ‘ne masses ne sermons ne fastynge ne orisons’ which Kerby-Fulton has pointed out he strenuously argues against by saying that such things ‘moste be take goostli and diuineli’.<sup>73</sup>

In order to aid the slow process of understanding, MN adds his own explanatory glosses possibly in an attempt to prevent the lay reader from exploring all possible meanings, but also as a way to make the difficult concepts and circular style more appealing to the reader, and so that the spirit is less likely to turn away or make their own errors of misinterpretation. Cré acknowledges that MN ‘provides a reading that narrows down the daring and provocative openness of the text’ while he simultaneously ‘opens the text up for a vernacular English readership’.<sup>74</sup> While his glosses are clear examples of MN’s intention to do this, inserting his own orthodox interpretation after particularly difficult portions between his initials, there are other times when he provides a translation which silently alters the sense and range originally available in the French.

<sup>70</sup> *MED*, unsāvōurī adj. 1. (c).

<sup>71</sup> ‘The Order of Priesthood’ in *The English Works of Wyclif*, ed. by F. D. Matthew, EETS, OS, 74 (1880; reprint 1973), p. 177, cap. 25.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew, ed., ‘The Order of Priesthood’ p. 177, cap. 26.

<sup>73</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 286.

<sup>74</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 196.

These may be a result of his own effort to make sense of the unclear, using his own doctrinal knowledge rather than a concerted effort to close down dangerous associations, especially as the register of his prologue is one of approval of the original text and an acknowledgement of his own inadequacies as a translator. As well as these obvious insertions to the text, MN also acknowledges that he has had to alter areas in order for them to make sense: ‘in translatynge of Frensche, summe wordis nedden to be chaunged or it wole fare vngoodli, not acordynge to þe sentence’.<sup>75</sup> By doing so, MN shows an understanding of the need to translate according to sense rather than word by word, and that in doing so he is providing an interpretation rather than an exact copy of the original text. By making the changes he does, MN is, in Lawrence Venuti’s terms, ‘investing the foreign language text with a domestic significance’. In other words, he applies the parameters of his own community discourse onto the text in order to make it understandable within his receiving culture.<sup>76</sup>

MN seems to have been aware that parts of the text needed to be explained lest it be understood contrary to doctrine, but I think it unlikely that his glosses are in direct response to the ‘free spirit heresy’ trials taking place on the continent as Kerby-Fulton suggests.<sup>77</sup> If this were the case, MN had the opportunity to address these concerns in his prologue, but he instead focuses on the value the text will have to those who have the ability to digest the ‘sad mete’ it contains. This becomes more likely if one accepts the premise that no specific sect or rules of engagement were ever discovered, and that instead *Ad Nostrum*, the instrument used to define free spirit heresy, was collated from

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<sup>75</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> As we will see below, this also applies to modern translators of the text. Lawrence Venuti, ‘Translation, Community, Utopia’ in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2000, 2nd edition), pp. 482-502 (p. 482).

<sup>77</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 261-2.

disparate phrases, often written by women, ‘that looked heretical or immoral when quoted out of context, and wove together a heresy and a sect from them’.<sup>78</sup> I think it more likely that MN was unaware of the continental disputes, that he values the text as difficult but orthodox, does not police the text as much as other writers and translators of the time, and that the nature of his copy text, including ‘unfamiliar terms and concepts, as well as a messy French manuscript’ allowed MN to be less faithful to Porete’s key concepts, and the reader more room to gloss the text for themselves.<sup>79</sup> It is worth considering that why, if MN viewed *Simple Souls* as a dangerous text, did he take the trouble to translate it not just once but twice?

It is possible that he became aware of its illegitimate status after his first attempt and decided to add clarifying glosses at that point. MN also cautions that the well disposed reader will be able to discern the true meaning of a particular passage, especially if they have read the whole text through two or three times. This approach reinforces the idea that his intended readership is someone with the monastic training, as well as the time, to read and utilise the text in this way. Even so, MN is still careful to show that his view of clerks and priests directly opposes Porete’s. Where she dismissed them as being unable to understand the book’s true import, which is clearly true for MN too, he employs the same cautious *topos* as Julian. Just as she is emphatic in the short text that her revelations are only for ‘thame that shalle be safe’, and that they do not obscure ‘the trewe techinge of halye kyrke’, so MN also places himself and the text before the greater knowledge of ‘hooli chirche, preiynge goostli lyuers and clerkis’ for

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<sup>78</sup> M. D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 186.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Watson, ‘Melting into God the English Way: Deification in the Middle English Version of Marguerite Porete’s *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*’, in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 19–50 (pp. 38, 42).

any ‘correcciouns’ and ‘amendes’ they might wish to make.<sup>80</sup>

From this it could be inferred that the translator imagined his work to be seen by the Church hierarchy who might be the ultimate arbiters on the orthodoxy and utility of the text, as well as the audiences for whom it could be appropriate. These remarks also raise the possibility that MN may have been writing for an audience of ‘clerkis’ and other ‘goostli lyuers’ outside of a specifically monastic setting, or it may be that he chose the language he did in order to clearly signal his own distance from Porete’s strident opposition to Church figures of authority.

Towards the end of the fifteenth-century Richard Methley, a Carthusian monk at Mount Grace Charterhouse, Yorkshire, translated MN’s version into Latin, replacing the glosses with his own after each chapter, but retaining some of the original translation mistakes and errors. As Laura Saetveit Miles has demonstrated, this translation is a hint that MN may have been a fellow Carthusian monk since Methley finishes with ‘*oracio vel translatoris primi vel nunc secundi Cartusiensis*’ (the prayer of the first, or now of the second, Carthusian translator).<sup>81</sup> Methley’s translation reflects his ideal reader as a fellow Carthusian with the theological training and monastic protection necessary for a more expansive reading rather than a lay reader in need of policing.<sup>82</sup> He translated MN’s text into Latin for a brother who could not understand the English version, but

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<sup>80</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 75; Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Laura Saetveit Miles, ‘Richard Methley and the Translation of Vernacular Religious Writing into Latin’ in *After Arundel*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 449-466 (p. 461).

<sup>82</sup> There is one extant copy of Methley’s translation in Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS. 221. The only current edition is Richard Methley, *Speculum animarum simplicium: a glossed Latin version of The mirror of simple souls*, 2 vols., ed. by John Clark (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2010). All further references will be to this edition. For a discussion of Methley as a translator from vernacular into Latin where it could be ‘limited to appropriately supervised readers, readers whose spiritual aptitude matches their linguistic aptitude’ see Saetveit Miles, ‘Richard Methley and the Translation of Vernacular Religious Writing into Latin’, p. 465.

while this may have been a pragmatic course of action rather than a further exercise in safeguarding, it also gave him the opportunity to write his own guiding glosses tailored for a distinctly Carthusian audience.<sup>83</sup> That English was viewed as an acceptable vehicle for spiritual enlightenment is indicated in a letter Methley wrote to Hew Hermyte which included the suggestion that saying a prayer in either ‘englishe or in latyn’ was acceptable according to how ‘thou hast most deuocyon’.<sup>84</sup> He also includes the ‘redyng of holy englishe bokes’ in addition to prayer, meditation, contemplation and good deeds as part of the required activities of daily devotional life.<sup>85</sup>

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#### 4. Fifteenth Century English Vernacular Manuscript Contexts of *Simple Souls*

The original intention for this section was to give a short description of each manuscript for context, but I found some anomalies in the scholarship which revealed the potential for a slightly wider original readership than is usually accepted. Because of the importance of this to Porete scholarship, and because different intended audiences suggest a wider range of readings, there follows a more in-depth analysis of two of the manuscripts than would otherwise have been presented here. The previous parts of this chapter have discussed the possible imagined and intended audiences of *Simple Souls*, and we know that some of the actual audience were Carthusians. Chapters four and five include close readings of the Middle English texts, often speculating on how some real lay readers might have understood the language of despair. The following codicological

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<sup>83</sup> Colledge *et al*, ‘Introductory Interpretative Essay’, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. lxxxiii.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Methley, *to Hew Hermyte: A Pystyl of Solytary Life Nowadays*, ed. by James Hogg, in AC 31, 91-119 (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literature, 1977), p. 118; See also <<http://www.umilta.net/hewheremyte.html>> [accessed 22 April 2019], *cap.* vij.

<sup>85</sup> Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness, Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 50, citing Richard Methley, *to Hew Hermyte*, p. 118, *cap.* xj.

evidence, which suggests the possibility of an additional lay readership, therefore supports the validity of these speculations.

MN's Middle English translation of *Simple Souls* is in three extant manuscripts: British Library, MS Additional 37790 (hereafter referred to as Amherst); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 505, and Cambridge, St. John's College, C. 21, all three of which were clearly owned by the 'very small, very austere Carthusian Order'.<sup>86</sup> Opinions differ as to whether they were all made for and kept within Carthusian conduits of dissemination, or distributed through other means as well.<sup>87</sup> Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Robert Stauffer think that *Simple Souls* could have circulated outside monastic circles, with Kerby-Fulton speculating that Amherst 'was created deliberately as an anthology of women's texts', noting that there is evidence for fifteenth-century Carthusians making their vernacular texts available to 'lay patrons' through forms of outreach.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, Stauffer sees a close comparison between MN's *Simple Souls* and the Yorkshire writers such as Rolle and Hilton who provide a 'safe' means of spiritual devotion by closely curating the text.<sup>89</sup> Conversely, Marleen Cré and Michael Sargent are inclined to think there is little evidence to show that these texts were ever

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<sup>86</sup> The Cambridge manuscript was previously catalogued by M. R. James as MS. 71, a classification no longer used by the library, but is often still used in the scholastic literature; Michael Sargent, 'Marguerite Porete' in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, p. 302.

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of Carthusian interest in the text see Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, esp. pp. 166, 169, 179, 196; For an analysis of Carthusian interest in spiritual texts including *Simple Souls* see Michael G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1976), 238-9.

<sup>88</sup> See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'The Fifteenth-Century as the Golden Age of Women's Theology in English: Reflections on the Earliest Reception of Julian of Norwich', in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ's Life*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 573-592 (p. 591).

<sup>89</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 293, 296, 260; Stauffer, 'M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle', pp. 125-6, 191-3; Kerby-Fulton, 'The fifteenth century as the golden age of women's theology in English', pp. 590-1.



intended for a lay readership.<sup>90</sup> Sargent speculates that the Carthusians may have collected *Simple Souls* because they thought it was by Jan van Ruusbroec, while Cré points out that this sort of mystical writing was keenly collected by Carthusians and that the material they wrote and circulated for women and laypeople was usually of an affective nature like Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, Stauffer sees a link between Love's and MN's respective *Mirrors* in their expectations of the reader, leading him to think it was written for the 'Latin-illiterate', while Vincent Gillespie has recently cautioned against the assumption that vernacular Carthusian texts were regularly intended for distribution to a lay readership.<sup>92</sup> The following analysis of the manuscripts shows potential, but by no means definite, signs of an external, pre-Carthusian interest, within the higher echelons of society.

In addition to her thorough analysis of Amherst, Cré has also briefly described Bodley 505 and SJC C. 21, pointing out that they require further research, and that the 'literal (i.e. textual) contexts of the *Mirroure* in these three manuscripts are the first place to start when you want to contextualize the reception of MN's translation'.<sup>93</sup> She takes

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<sup>90</sup> Marleen Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*' in *A Companion to Marguerite Porete and The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ed. by Wendy R. Terry and Robert Stauffer (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 240–63 (pp. 244–5); Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porète's *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*: the French and English traditions', pp. 75–76 and n 95.

<sup>91</sup> Sargent, 'Marguerite Porete', pp. 291–312, 302; Michael G. Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer Des Simples Âmes Anienties*: The French and English Traditions', p. 72; Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*', p. 247.

<sup>92</sup> Stauffer, 'M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle', pp. 13, 19–20, 31, 64; Vincent Gillespie, 'The Haunted Text: Ghostly Reflection in *A Mirror to Devout People*', in *Text in the Community*, ed. by Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 129–72 (pp. 153–4, 157); For a development of this point see Vincent Gillespie, 'Preaching to the Choir: Another Look at English Carthusian Transmission of Vernacular Spiritual Writings' in *The Carthusians in the City: History, Culture and Martyrdom at the London Charterhouse c. 1370–1555*, ed. by Julian Luxford (Toronto: Toronto University Press), in press at the time of writing and therefore unseen. For a brief review of a talk based on this essay see *The Early Book Society Newsletter*, Spring 2019, volume 24, number 1, p. 12 <<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/EBS/NewsSp19.pdf>> [accessed 15 February 2020].

<sup>93</sup> Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*', pp. 244–5.

this approach because ‘there is no proof’ that any of the extant texts ‘ever left the closely circumscribed environment of the English Carthusian houses’.<sup>94</sup> However, neither of her descriptions reflect upon certain codicological features, particularly the manuscripts’ decoration and a certain type of correction, which may hint at production and ownership contexts. I shall therefore examine each manuscript with particular regard to some of these previously overlooked areas.

Bodley MS 505 comprises parchment leaves of 140 mm by 178 mm and contains the two texts *Chastising of God’s Children* (ff. 1-92) followed by *Simple Souls* (ff. 93r-220v).<sup>95</sup> It was bound on boards with white leather dated in the catalogue to the early sixteenth century, and on examination, the codex also shows signs of having had clasps. The *textura rotunda* script tending towards cursive is of a professional quality. It is written in a single ruled column in black ink, with alternating red and blue paraphs and blue initials two lines of text in height and decorated with red pen work flourishes denoting the start of each chapter. The text block is approximately 70mm wide by 125mm with a narrow border of blank space on the pricked outside edges which have been trimmed, and deeper borders at the bottom edge which may have been mirrored at the top, but these have also been trimmed.<sup>96</sup> The beginning of each text is marked by an illuminated champ style initial letter, four text lines in height for *Chastising* and six for

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<sup>94</sup> Cré, ‘Further Thoughts on M.N.’s Middle English Translation of Marguerite’s *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*’, p. 243.

<sup>95</sup> For a basic description see Cré, ‘Further Thoughts on M.N.’s Middle English Translation of Marguerite’s *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*’ p. 243; *A catalogue of Western manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries and selected Oxford colleges*, Summary Catalogue no. 2676 <[https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript\\_1534](https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_1534)> [accessed 2 November 2019].

<sup>96</sup> I am unable to be precise about the dimensions as my original images were taken without including a measure and I have been unable to revisit at the time of writing due to COVID-19. The approximate dimensions given here have been extrapolated from the images I do have, together with the known size of the parchment leaves.

*Simple Souls*, but both are in blue, red, and white leading to matching ‘good borders’.<sup>97</sup> The two sided borders develop from red, blue, and gilded bar-frames into sprays ending in elongated green finials interspersed with gilded circles and gilded, whiskered trefoils. They are similar in style and quality to the borders in British Library, MS Harley 2838 containing *Speculum humane salvationis* presented to Henry VII, as well as the sprays in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MSS 142 and 143 which decorate copies of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror*. Sargent has pointed out that the matching borders of both *Chastising* and *Simple Souls* in Bodley 505 may indicate that both texts were considered by the compiler to be ‘complementary’ rather than ‘antagonistic to each other’.<sup>98</sup> This characteristic indicates that the manuscript was intended as a single campaign, and questions the proposition raised by scholars that it’s main purpose was to modify the effects of the subsequent more dangerous text.<sup>99</sup>

Bazire and Colledge note that missed words in *Chastising* were marked up and subsequent changes made by two different hands, a process of ‘such care’ that they think the text was intended for use by a ‘lector in a religious house’.<sup>100</sup> The changes to *Simple Souls* are in a fourth hand which are present both directly on the page and on inserted parchment tags in the margin, usually, but not always beside chapter headings, often over the top of initial flourishes, and with much less care than that paid to the original

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<sup>97</sup> Otto Pächt and J. J. G. Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), vol. 3, p. 92, no. 1071; Note the entry number is actually 1071 and not 1971, a typo included in Sargent, ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s ‘*Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties: The French and English Traditions*’, p. 66. n. 65.

<sup>98</sup> Sargent, ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s ‘*Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties: The French and English Traditions*’, p. 74.

<sup>99</sup> See for example Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 260-71; Stauffer, ‘M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle’, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge, eds., ‘Introduction’, *The Chastising of God’s Children* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 3.

text.<sup>101</sup> Because of this, and the untidy cursive script, I think it unlikely that the original scribe put them there himself as Stauffer has suggested.<sup>102</sup> Sargent has pointed out that these labels correlate with Methley's Latin '*distinctiones* and *capitula*' with the only difference being the numbering system, thereby demonstrating a 'continuing Carthusian interest in the text' into the sixteenth century and 'until the dissolution of the monasteries'.<sup>103</sup> While many of the labels do correspond with where Methley's headings are placed, there are also areas where this is not the case. For example, Methley made a small section nineteen which treats the false desire of the contemplative which is not included in Bodley 505, although the next one, section twenty, is.<sup>104</sup> There is frequent evidence of cross-checking such as on f. 120r where a piece of parchment with a large blue letter A has been stuck over in the original black ink, and a label stuck by the side. This was not however, with reference to Methley, since the same passage occurs in the middle of his section thirty-seven. There are some additional notae, marginalia indicating a personal reader rather than lector, but they are rare occurrences.

It would therefore appear that someone, probably a Carthusian, fully engaged with and valued the existing text to the extent that, in consultation with Methley's headings but with the addition of his own ideas, he wanted to make it easier for others (probably lectors, as Bazire and Colledge suggest for *Chastising*) to navigate. Bodley 505 therefore exhibits signs of continuing interest, as Sargent suggests, up until the Reformation.<sup>105</sup> A

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<sup>101</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., 'Introduction', *The Chastising of God's Children*, p. 3; Thanks to David Rundle for identifying by email correspondence that the 'the corrections added on the page and the inserts are by the same person'.

<sup>102</sup> Stauffer, 'M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle', p. 165

<sup>103</sup> Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete's 'Mirouer Des Simples Âmes Anienties': The French and English Traditions', p. 74.

<sup>104</sup> Bodley 505, f. 107r; Methley, '*Quod illud quod est licitum speculatiuis contemplatiuis, illicitum est susperspeculatiuis, nisi forte ex instinctu Spiritu Sancti*', vol. 1, pp. 17-18.

<sup>105</sup> SJC C. 21 also exhibits signs of ongoing interest as discussed briefly below.

similar insertion of additional parchment with information to guide the lector can be seen in manuscripts owned by female enclosed houses. Syon Abbey, for example, owned a copy of Love's *Mirror*; MS Longleat 14, which includes parchment slips instructing the 'legister' to read the text in a particular order.<sup>106</sup> In this case, the book appears to be totally within the control of the 'authority...figures within the house', potentially shutting down the possibility of personal creative reading.<sup>107</sup> With Bodley 505 Stauffer has argued that the added labels reflect the more 'distanced tone' of the titles found in the Chantilly version of the French text, which demonstrates a 'didactic approach to those who have failed to heed the word of God' rather than the more 'humble tone' and inclusive message of the Valenciennes manuscript.<sup>108</sup> These title headings are summaries rather than direct instructions as with Longleat 14, but they do indicate what someone thought was the essence of each section and possibly the key message they wanted the lector to impart to their audience.

In contrast to the dating evidence for the text, Pächt and Alexander have dated the illuminations to the last two quarters of the fifteenth century.<sup>109</sup> They have further tentatively suggested a date of before 1469 and note that the inscription '*Liber domus salutacionis matris dei ordinis cartusiensis prope London per Edmund Storour, eiusdem loci monachum*' on f. 223v shows that it was given to the London Charterhouse by Edmund Storour (d. 1503), the prior between 1469 and 1477.<sup>110</sup> By signing himself as a

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<sup>106</sup> Ryan Perry, 'Some Sprytual Matter of Gostly Edyfyacion': Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ*, ed. by Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 79–126 (pp. 117–120).

<sup>107</sup> Perry, 'Some Sprytual Matter of Gostly Edyfyacion', p. 120.

<sup>108</sup> Stauffer, 'M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle', p. 166.

<sup>109</sup> Pächt and Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford*, vol. 3, p. 92, no. 1071.

<sup>110</sup> Pächt and Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford*, vol. 3, p. 92, no. 1071.

monk, Sargent speculates that Storour may have gifted it to the charterhouse before he became prior, which tallies with Pächt and Alexander's date, and Doyle suggests that Stourer may have either 'copied or acquired it for the London Charterhouse'.<sup>111</sup> Lerner favours the former option because to him the inscription, as he read the transcription of it by earlier scholars, indicates 'that the monk copied the manuscript while in the house', and that it is possible that 'all three descend from a prototype' produced there'.<sup>112</sup> The inscription evidence alone however is not enough to support this view.

Porete scholarship has not previously noted that exactly the same wording occurs in a small, mid-thirteenth-century decorated bible, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery MS 1.<sup>113</sup> Both inscriptions occur on an end flyleaf, are in the same hand and ink, and may have been written at the same time.<sup>114</sup> Clearly, Storour could not have copied the thirteenth-century bible himself, and if he had copied Bodley 505 it is possible that he would have used a different form of words to indicate his work or, as with SJC C. 21, included a colophon directly following the main text. It seems likely that Storour acquired both manuscripts and gave them to the charterhouse at around the same time, but neither codex bears earlier ownership marks. It is therefore still possible that Bodley 505 originated within a Carthusian context, but, as Cré has pointed out, one of the

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<sup>111</sup> Sargent, 'Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete's 'Mirouer Des Simples Âmes Anienties: The French and English Traditions', p. 66, n. 65; *Syon Abbey*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie with *The Libraries of the Carthusians* ed. by A. I. Doyle (London: British Library, 2001), p. 616; See also p. 609 and pp. 615-620 for a list of late 15th or early 16th century loans to Hull from London.

<sup>112</sup> Robert E. Lerner, 'New Light on *The Mirror of Simple Souls*', *Speculum*, vol. 85, no. 1 (2010), 91-116 (p. 105, n. 61).

<sup>113</sup> Julian M. Luxford, 'Precept and Practice: The Decoration of English Carthusian Books' in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages*, ed by Julian M. Luxford, Medieval Church Studies 14 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), pp. 225-268 (p. 232); N. R. Kerr, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 108-9.

<sup>114</sup> My thanks to Anthea Purkis, Curator of Art, and Caroline Wilkinson at Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery for making it possible for me to consult this manuscript.

houses may have acquired it from a local translator with whom they were connected.<sup>115</sup>

Turning to, SJC C. 21, this fifteenth-century manuscript currently has a twentieth-century binding which contains only *Simple Souls* and no other texts. It comprises 104 parchment leaves measuring 153 mm by 229 mm and a single column ruled text box surrounded by a large amount of blank space, particularly a deep bottom edge and a slightly narrower outer edge. The main scribe has used this outer edge to insert additional finding apparatus, such as scribal nota; the demarcation of the eleven names for the perfect soul on f. 12r; and for marking up where MN's initials should be later added in red. There are several ownership inscriptions, with R. Wittonus on the first folio; *Liber domus Carthusie prope Londonias* on f. 104b; and on the end flyleaf *Libellus Cartusie* is written in pencil.<sup>116</sup> The rubricated colophon on f. 104b is in a very similar hand to that of the main scribe, but cannot be definitively attributed to him. The verso of the front flyleaf bears the title 'The Myrreour of Simple Sowls' written in a humanist hand dating anywhere between the mid-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It may be by the same annotator as on f. 71v who wrote 'Without Will may no creature synn; and the most mortified soul hath no will: for all her will is gods will; and so cannot syn for want of will' paraphrasing a passage explaining that the soul has deeply planted her will in the trinity to the extent that 'sche may not synne but sche unplaunte it / for sche haþ not of what to synne wiþ / for wiþoute wille: may no creature synne / now sche dar not recke of synne'. The possible later date, along with the fact that free will became a subject of sixteenth-century contention and discussion – exemplified by Martin

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<sup>115</sup> Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*', p. 247.

<sup>116</sup> M. R. James's *Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of St John's College, Cambridge* with updates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913) <[https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special\\_collections/manuscripts/medieval\\_manuscripts/medman/C\\_21.htm](https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/C_21.htm)> [accessed 3 December 2019].

Luther's 1525 *De Servo Arbitrio* (The Bondage of Will) in response to Erasmus' 1524 *De libero arbitrio* (On Free Will) – indicate a possible Reformation era interest in this passage of the text.

The main scribe's 'good narrow upright English hand' described in the catalogue is a *textura quadrata* of professional quality executed with great care in black ink with blue paraphs. It has been noted in the updates to M. R. James's *Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of St John's College, Cambridge* that SJC C. 21 'appears to be in the same hand' as Cambridge, St John's College MS G. 20, which contains the contemplative texts *Friar Sanal's Vision*, *þe Treetijs of Loue*, *þe Passioun of Our Lord* and *þe Sermon of Tribulacioun* and which Catherine Innes-Parker speculates may have been compiled for a 'lay audience'.<sup>117</sup> If so, this may indicate a link between commissioner, producer and intended readers of both codices, strengthening the possibility that the originally intended audience might not have been Carthusian. However, while the hands are very similar, G. 20 has more elaborate otiose features, with a strikingly ornate *punctus elevatus*, for instance, but the regularity and confidence of the C. 21 script is not matched by that in G. 20. There are many other differences between the two, and while this could be due to the same scribe writing in a slightly different form, it seems to me more likely that the two manuscripts were written by different scribes. In contrast to the script, the decoration is less ornate in G. 20. Although each text starts with an illuminated letter, in the same colours as C. 21, with green finialed fronds, they are less controlled and the gilding less abundant. In G. 20 capital

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<sup>117</sup> Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*', p. 242. Note that Cré uses the now obsolete M. R. James catalogue number MS 71; Catherine Innes-Parker, 'þe Passioun of Our Lord': A Middle English Adaptation of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* in St John's College, Cambridge MS G. 20', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2007), 199–206 (p. 199).



letters are often coloured in red and the punctus marks overlaid with yellow, with new paragraphs marked by large blue letters with red flourishes. Overall there is far more sustained gilding in C. 21, making for a more opulent product, so that even if both codices were produced by the same workshop, they probably did not have either the same commissioner or intended recipient.

Turning back to the decoration of C. 21, the three-sided border which marks the opening of the first chapter following MN's and Porete's prologues of *Simple Souls*, has an aroid in the centre of the 'O' starting the chapter 'O soule touched of God', leading out to shaded leaf and flower motifs and regular feathering with green finials.<sup>118</sup> This is in a different style to the prologue border comprising mainly feathering which emanates directly from the gilded initial letter, indicating a date of the 1450s.<sup>119</sup> It also indicates that a master limner, from Oxford or London, made the most important chapter border and someone else those elements denoting other supporting aspects of the text, as can be seen in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 361 (S. C. 2462), a medical miscellany from Salisbury but in a London or Oxford style, and datable to between 1453 and 1459.<sup>120</sup>

The same high quality and similar border decorations appear in several copies of Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. One of these, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 18.1.7, was made for 'Edmund Grey (? 1420-1489), 4th Lord Grey of Ruthin and his wife, Lady Catherine Percy, daughter of 2nd Earl of Northumberland', and others were made for 'high-status consumers in

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<sup>118</sup> For more information on border styles see Kathleen L. Scott, *Dated and Datable English Manuscript Borders c. 1396-1499* (London: Bibliographical Society and British Library, 2002), esp. pp. 8-11, 122.

<sup>119</sup> Scott, *Dated and Datable English Manuscript Borders c. 1396-1499*, pp. 8-11, 122.

<sup>120</sup> Scott, *Dated and Datable English Manuscript Borders c. 1396-1499*, pp. 70-3.

deluxe codices' to a 'very good professional quality'.<sup>121</sup> SJC C. 21 therefore bears signs of having been decorated by a professional limner based in either Oxford or London, and while the work could have been carried out by a trained Carthusian it is equally likely that a professional London workshop was responsible.<sup>122</sup> If that was the case it may have had more than one place of production since a text written within a particular house might have been illuminated somewhere else or by someone extra to the community.<sup>123</sup> This is borne out by the presence of what A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes have called 'accounts...on the end leaves of books or at the ends of quires' which 'indicate that writing and illuminating were separate stages in production'.<sup>124</sup> On the front flyleaf are a series of Roman numerals and letters which have been grouped together by inner and outer brackets, the latter of which is against what may be a name but is too faint to read. While there is no corroborating evidence, such as the doubling of quire signatures which occasionally occurs in other manuscripts, Doyle and Parkes' view substantiates the theory that two distinct London-based groups were responsible for the respective decorative and scribal elements of the manuscript.<sup>125</sup>

The multiplicity of trained labour, and the fact that similar examples of decoration

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<sup>121</sup> Kathleen L. Scott, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles Volume Six, Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490* (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), I, p. 275; II, ill. 375; Ryan Perry, "'Thynk on God, as We Doon, Men That Swynke": The Cultural Locations of Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord and the Middle English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Tradition', *Speculum*, vol. 86, no. 2 (2011), 419–54 (p. 450); Kathleen L. Scott, 'The Illustration and Decoration of Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*', in *Nicholas Love at Waseda*, ed. by Soichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 61–86 (p. 71).

<sup>122</sup> Luxford, 'Precept and Practice: The Decoration of English Carthusian Books', p. 266.

<sup>123</sup> Scott, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles Volume Six, Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>124</sup> A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, 'The production of copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the early fifteenth century' in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries. Essays presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scholar Press, 1978), pp. 163-210 (p. 197). Doyle and Parkes note that St John's is one of the manuscripts to contain 'accounts...on the endleaves of books or at the ends of quires', but do not specify which.

<sup>125</sup> For examples of quire signature doubling see National Library of Scotland, NLS Advocates 18.1.7.

were included in texts for people of exceptionally high rank, reinforces the superior status of this manuscript and the considerable investment made by whoever commissioned it. This raises the possibility that this copy of *Simple Souls* might have been commissioned for the use of a high ranking religious outside the Carthusian charterhouse, or it may have been commissioned by someone with both social, religious and financial weight who specifically wanted to present it to the Carthusians. This should be taken with caution however, as according to Kathleen Scott's work on Nicholas Love's manuscripts 'a copy with only one or two borders may be indicative of normal shop design rather than of more serious intervention by a patron'.<sup>126</sup> Although that could be tempered by the Carthusian preference for more simple presentation.

Scott notes that London was the centre of commercial work of this kind, with limners and scribes going on to form the Company of Stationers, and Julian Luxford has demonstrated that Carthusian Houses did own manuscripts decorated by trained limners but that these were often 'not originally made for' the order.<sup>127</sup> He also recognises that it is not possible to tell whether 'initial and border-work' was carried out externally, given that such work would 'not have been beyond the capacities of accomplished scribes'.<sup>128</sup> In addition however, he notes that 'the bulk' of this decoration was likely 'produced outside charterhouses', and that 'sumptuous decoration is rare' partly because of the Carthusians' 'apparent reluctance to commission it'.<sup>129</sup> The evidence of accounts

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<sup>126</sup> Scott, 'The Illustration and Decoration of Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*', p. 70.

<sup>127</sup> Scott, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles Volume Six, Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, pp. 26-7; Luxford, 'Precept and Practice: The Decoration of English Carthusian Books', p. 228.

<sup>128</sup> Luxford, 'Precept and Practice: The Decoration of English Carthusian Books', p. 235.

<sup>129</sup> Luxford, 'Precept and Practice', p. 266.

discussed above would indicate that SJC C. 21 was not created in-house, so if the Carthusians did commission it, why would they go to such expense for a potentially heretical text?

While most of the two-thirds of extant Carthusian manuscripts are decorated in this generic ‘forinsec’ style, the fact that someone not only chose *Simple Souls* to be bound without any other guiding or policing material, but also provided the funds for such a highly decorated and sumptuous manuscript, comparable to those made for the highest echelons of society, indicates that they may have done so precisely because of its difficult and spiritually ‘sophisticated’ subject matter.<sup>130</sup> As Sargent rightly suggests, there may be nothing concrete to establish that MN’s English ‘text had any other readers’ apart from Carthusians, and it may be simply that *Simple Souls* was valued by and distributed within the top levels of a theologically sophisticated Carthusian hierarchy, one of whom was willing to commission a relatively lavish copy.<sup>131</sup> But the clear evidence that secular workshops were involved in producing it leads to the plausible speculation that there may have been a gap between that production and its Carthusian ownership. Due to the close correspondence between the comprehensive and consistently high quality decoration of SJC C. 21 with copies of Love’s *Mirror*, as well as other texts distributed among high ranking laity, the possibility remains open that it may have been initially intended for someone within that same lay reading community who was interested in pursuing more theologically complex texts than Love’s *Mirror* provided. Indeed, it has been pointed out that Love’s *Mirror* gestures beyond itself

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<sup>130</sup> Sargent, ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s ‘*Mirouer Des Simples Âmes Anienties*’: The French and English Traditions’, pp. 63-4, 75.

<sup>131</sup> Sargent, ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s ‘*Mirouer Des Simples Âmes Anienties*’: The French and English Traditions’, p. 77.

towards other texts which assist the reader to further ‘progress with their devotional meditations’.<sup>132</sup> In addition, if, as Stauffer has suggested, there was a direct connection between Love’s and MN’s translations of their respective *Mirrors*, with both using the same mode of glossing the text to avoid ‘compromising’ the original, then this evidence of the production and decoration contexts suggests further possibilities.<sup>133</sup> There may, for example, have been lay readers of MN’s text, possibly part of the same reading community as the owners of the ‘deluxe’ editions of Love’s *Mirror*, who were of the highest levels of society, some of whom may have been women and patronesses of female communities.<sup>134</sup>

Further to this, Vincent Gillespie has noted the particularly porous nature of the relationship between the London Charterhouse and the mercantile and gentry classes. This means that ‘civic money and Carthusian piety existed in a symbiotic relationship’, with monastic prayers being bought with books and contributions towards building work, some of which was highly decorative.<sup>135</sup> It is known that Edmund Stourour was one of several to personally receive a financial bequest from wealthy Londoners and therefore he may also have received the Bible and Bodley 505 while a monk at the

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<sup>132</sup> Perry, ‘Thynk on God, as we doon, men who swynk’, p. 451; David J. Falls, ‘The Carthusian Milieu of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*’ in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition* ed. by Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 311-339 (pp. 323-4).

<sup>133</sup> Stauffer, ‘M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle’, p. 117.

<sup>134</sup> Catherine Innes-Parker, ‘Anchoritic Textual Communities and the Wooing Group Prayers’ in *Medieval Anchorites in Their Communities* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 167–82 (pp. 178-9); Perry, ‘Some Sprytuall Matter of Gostly Edyfyacion’, *passim*; Carol M. Meale, ‘“Oft sipis with grete deuotion I þought what I migt do pleysyng to god”: The Early Ownership and Readership of Love’s *Mirror*, with Special Reference to its Female Audience’ in *Nicholas Love at Waseda* ed. by Soichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 19–46.

<sup>135</sup> Vincent Gillespie, ‘The Permeable Cloisters? Charterhouses, Contemplation and Urban Piety in Later Medieval England: The Case of London’ in *The Urban Church in Late Medieval England: Essays from the 2017 Harlaxton Symposium Held in Honour of Clive Burgess*, ed. by David Harry and Christian Steer (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2019), pp. 238–57 (pp. 244, 253-4).

Charterhouse.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, SJC C. 21 may have been intended as a gift from a benefactor to someone there with the power and authority to ensure the donor's wishes were carried out.

A survey of the marginalia strengthens the possibility that SJC C. 21 was produced by London based professional workshops and read by an audience potentially interested in a range of material beyond the spiritual. There are about six distinct types of marginal amendments as well as other occasional markings. Most of these appear to be reader annotations, but there is also evidence of corrector interventions. In terms of annotations, there are three obviously distinct types probably made in the fifteenth century during separate campaigns: a trifolium in black ink; a zeta type sigil made with a very fine nib; and some clumsy nota abbreviations possibly made with a pencil or in dry point. The zeta sigil (often more like a '2' in form), occurs fairly consistently throughout SJC C. 21 as well as the Amherst version of *Simple Souls*, with usually a single example at the very edge of the folio but occasionally two or three together. While this symbol was used in early medieval manuscripts as an equivalent to the interrogative '*quere*' to question the content of a particular section, I think it likely that in these instances it has been used as a variation on the nota symbol. Especially since they replicate the way both trifolium and nota signs have been used in SJC C. 21, where three of them in a row presumably indicate particularly significant passages.<sup>137</sup> In contrast with the zeta and nota readers however, the trifolium reader may not have persevered with the whole book since the last one occurs on f. 48r, just under half way through. Nevertheless, SJC C. 21 was

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<sup>136</sup> Gillespie, 'The Permeable Cloisters?', p. 254 and *passim*.

<sup>137</sup> Eva Steinová, '*Notam superonera studui*. The Use of Technical Signs in the Early Middle Ages' (doctoral thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 2016), pp. 291-2.

actively engaged with by several individual readers closely contemporary with the text.

In addition to these annotations and the marginal paraphs, numbering, occasional headings and nota made by the scribe during the original production process, there are at least two other correctors who might be comparing the text to an exemplar. One example common to many manuscripts is where the corrector has inserted carets and crossed out text, putting the desired words alongside in the margin. This corrector seems to have tired of his task after the first third of the manuscript, unless there were no more errors after that point which is unlikely.

Another more unusual correction is the occasional use of ‘*quere*’ which does not correlate with any changes made within the body text, but may be pointing out an area of corrupt copying which needs to be checked. Or it could be telling the reader to think closely about this part of the text, to consult other texts, and to question the veracity of particular doctrinal or theological aspects.<sup>138</sup> Sargent has discussed how manuscripts probably produced by Carthusians were sometimes corrected by several different hands. As well as evidence that marginal glosses were sometimes subsumed within the text, as seems to have happened with a passage in the Amherst copy of *Simple Souls*, there is also evidence of ‘textual corrections’ and examples of where someone has ‘specified the doctrinal point in which he is interested’.<sup>139</sup> A particular type of what Ryan Perry has called ‘learned correction’ unusually occurs in some secular fifteenth-century texts produced in London in a very similar script but probably not the same hand or workshop. These include John Colop’s Common Profit book, Cambridge University

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<sup>138</sup> Steinová, ‘*Notam superonera studui*. The Use of Technical Signs in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 286.

<sup>139</sup> Michael G. Sargent, ‘A New Manuscript of The Chastising of God’s Children with an Ascription to Walter Hilton’, *Medium Ævum*, vol. 46 (1977), 49–65 (p. 57).

Library, MS FF. VI. 31; a tract *On Widehod* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 938; and a selection of texts by Walter Hilton in Lambeth Palace 472 which include ‘*scala perfeccionis*’ and ‘*medeled liyf*’.<sup>140</sup> In this last manuscript, contemplative in nature like the *Simple Souls* codices, there is a stipulation that it be passed from person to person, whether that be male or female, for ‘þe teerme of his lyf’.<sup>141</sup> This commercially produced and checked work was therefore considered to be a valuable spiritual guide for a lay readership, and was possibly of a similar nature to those available to a secular audience at the Guildhall library.<sup>142</sup> One instance of this checking process in SJC C. 21 was almost certainly made between when the scribe finished and the limner began since the last stroke of ‘*quere*’ ‘appears to be underneath the decoration’ of an illuminated letter.<sup>143</sup> This increases the likelihood that SJC C. 21 might also have been commercially produced for a secular audience, but it is equally possible that a Carthusian commissioner or intended recipient carried out this text checking process, in the way that Sargent discusses, before sending it back for decoration. So while SJC C. 21 was clearly owned by the London Carthusians, it is not certain that this copy of *Simple Souls* was originally produced by or intended for the charterhouse. It is therefore possible that there was some prior form of lay reader interaction with it.

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<sup>140</sup> These books are included in the corpus to be investigated as part of a Leverhulme project led by Ryan Perry (UoK) and Stephen Kelly (QUB), *Whittington’s Gift: Reconstructing the Lost Common Library of London’s Guildhall* (2020-23). See <<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/whittingtonsgift/>> [accessed 27 December 2020].

<sup>141</sup> Lambeth Palace 472, f. 260a, *Lambeth Palace Library Catalogue*, <<https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2F472>> [February 2020].

<sup>142</sup> Hugh Kempster, ‘A Question of Audience: The Westminster Text and Fifteenth Century Reception of Julian of Norwich’, in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays* ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), pp. 257-90 (p. 268).

<sup>143</sup> My grateful thanks to Adam Crothers, Special Collections Assistant at St John’s College Library for taking the trouble to check this for me just before the library closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. My photos taken on a previous visit were unclear on this point and my planned revisit could not take place.



The third *Simple Souls* MS, Amherst, occurs in an anthology containing twelve contemplative texts, and has been thoroughly described by Cré in her 2006 monograph so I shall only pull out some key aspects here.<sup>144</sup> At 180 mm x 266 mm, it is the largest of the three, but also the least embellished as, although the chapters are demarcated by blue initials with red flourishes, there is no gilding, borders, or any consistent decoration.<sup>145</sup> The script is mid-fifteenth century *Anglicana Formata*, written within a ruled but unlined text box with wider margins on the bottom and outer edges accommodating scribal as well as reader annotations. In addition, the top of the page has been trimmed. Cré counts ‘up to eight annotators in the text’ and, like SJC C. 21, Amherst also has several ‘non-verbal marks’ which may also be in lieu of nota.<sup>146</sup> *Simple Souls* (ff. 137-225r) is one of the five more substantial texts in the codex, together with the translations into Middle English of Heinrich Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* and John Ruusbroec’s *Vanden blinkenden steen* known as *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, as well as the only copy of Julian’s short text. These are interspersed with several smaller texts, often compilations, which include excerpts of *Form of Living* and *Ego dormio* by Richard Rolle, Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons *canticum canticorum* and *ascensioni Domini*, Anselm’s *Proslogion*, Hugh of St Victor’s *Liber de arrha animae*, Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, the *Cloud of Unknowing* and Bridget of Sweden’s *Revelationes*.<sup>147</sup> It seems probable that this anthology was compiled for trained religious ‘with a view to guiding the readers in their own spiritual growth’, rather than as a

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<sup>144</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*.

<sup>145</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 19.

<sup>146</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 20.

<sup>147</sup> For a full list see Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 243-4; British Library, *Digitised Manuscripts*, Add. MS 37790 <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_37790](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_37790)> [February 2020].

vehicle for providing pastoral advice within the lay community.<sup>148</sup> As Cré has pointed out, the first texts straightforwardly educate the reader on the principles of contemplation with Porete's more demanding and 'speculative' text concluding the longer reads.<sup>149</sup> Amherst fulfils the function of a guidebook to the contemplative process, leading the reader from first principles until they are able to make theological and imaginative leaps from a basic framework.<sup>150</sup>

Cré points out that while the only specific evidence of Carthusian ownership is that of James Grenehalgh (d. 1530) from Sheen Charterhouse, the fact that all the texts in Amherst concern the practice of contemplation, and that they are often linked with Carthusian patronage in other manuscripts, indicates that 'a Carthusian origin for Additional 37790 seems more than likely'.<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Dutton also points out that Julian's short text in MS Additional 37790 appears to have been intended for contemplation rather than reference as it is without the necessary manuscript apparatus.<sup>152</sup> Kerby-Fulton is of the opinion that the English *Mirror* was, like the original, also intended for a 'mixed audience' if not a completely female one. In support of this she cites the fact that Amherst's 'sister manuscript' was owned by nuns; *Mirror's*

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<sup>148</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 23, 39, 43. See pp. 23-49 for a full discussion on the possibility that a monk within a Carthusian monastery was the producer of this MS.

<sup>149</sup> Marleen Cré, 'Women in the Charterhouse: The Textual Presence of Julian of Norwich and Marguerite Porete in BL MS Additional 37790' in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Christiania Whitehead and Denis Renevey (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000), pp. 43-62 (p. 50).

<sup>150</sup> Cré, 'Women in the Charterhouse: The Textual Presence of Julian of Norwich and Marguerite Porete in BL MS Additional 37790', pp. 53, 55.

<sup>151</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 24-9. For more on James Grenehalgh, who annotated a dozen texts including those by Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle and is considered an important 'medieval English textual critic' see Michael G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 225-40 (esp. p. 229) and Michael G. Sargent, 'James Grenehalgh as Textual Critic', *Analecta Cartusiana*, 85 (1984). See also Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 291-4.

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Dutton, *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late Medieval Compilations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 49-50.

transmission with *Chastising of God's Children*, also intended for nuns; and its association with the Carthusians' provision of pastoral care to women.<sup>153</sup> While this last point of Carthusian transmission beyond the charterhouse is currently in question, as discussed above, the codicological evidence for SJC C. 21 in particular strengthens the speculative possibility of a potential lay reading community. If this was the case, then their understanding of what despair was – whether ultimately spiritually profitable or a direct route to damnation – and the extent to which they considered it to be either embedded within, or evoked by, *Simple Souls*, would have depended on their wider reading and ability to make linguistic connections. Both of these are likely to have been different from that of a professed Carthusian. Chapter five of this thesis will discuss some of the linguistic options available which might gesture towards elements of despair.

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## 5. Textual Policing

Cré points out that all the short texts provide a similar function to MN's glosses in that they 'serve the same mediating function for the longer texts', ensuring that they are 'read with the right spiritual attitude' and that no one erroneously thinks they have reached an enlightened state of perfection merely by enacting texts like *Simple Souls*.<sup>154</sup> These texts might be seen as trying to contain the slipperiness of *Simple Souls* by providing a firm context, or might be used by the reader to compare the use of language and any conceptual variation.

The placing of *Chastising* with, and directly prior to, *Simple Souls* in Bodley 505

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<sup>153</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 473, n. 75.

<sup>154</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 250.

has often been seen as a deliberate act of policing. Stauffer has argued that *Chastising* was paired with *Mirror* for its ability to modify suggestions of the ‘free spirit’ heresy in *Simple Souls*, making it a ‘less dangerous mode of contemplation’.<sup>155</sup> Kerby-Fulton too has pointed out the extent to which *Chastising* counters various heresies including quietist ‘Free Spirit thought’.<sup>156</sup> Stauffer and Kerby-Fulton have argued that MN’s glosses show an awareness of this issue, with MN trying to ‘defang’ *Simple Souls* of ‘presumption and pride’ in a similar manner to *Chastising*.<sup>157</sup> Stauffer thinks that *Chastising* ‘seems to stand as a direct warning for those who would read the text of [*Simple Souls*]’.<sup>158</sup> This idea that *Chastising* was consciously included in order to remind readers of the need to be spiritually cautious in their pursuit of mysticism, and so avoid any errors of carelessness, vanity and indulgence in *Simple Souls*, derives from the fact that chapters nine through twelve are from John Ruusbroec’s *De Geestelike Brulocht*, thought to consciously castigate elements of Porete’s French text.<sup>159</sup> Cré notes that there is no evidence that *Chastising* was deliberately placed as a corrective to *Simple Souls*, but acknowledges that they could clearly have some influence on each other.<sup>160</sup> She compares the sections between the two texts which treat the soul: no longer needing to practice the virtues; mistaking being at rest within itself for being ‘free in spirit and hooded to God without any meane’, including that of ‘hooli chirche’; considering itself as ‘bien in perfeccion, abou al seyntis and aungels’; and thinking it does not have to work,

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<sup>155</sup> Stauffer, ‘M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle’, pp. 109, 111.

<sup>156</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 265.

<sup>157</sup> Stauffer, ‘M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle’, p. 31; Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 260-271, 261; and as discussed above in section three of this chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Stauffer, ‘M.N. and the Yorkshire Circle’, p. 101.

<sup>159</sup> Cré, ‘Contexts and Comments’, p. 123.

<sup>160</sup> Cré, ‘Contexts and Comments’, p. 123.

but can ‘stonden al ydel as an instrument of god’.<sup>161</sup> Cré ultimately comes to the conclusion that intended or otherwise, the similarity between the *Chastising* and MN’s glosses must have resonated with the ‘attentive reader’ of both texts, reinforcing the message that true contemplation is only possible without any accompanying pride or presumption.<sup>162</sup>

While the glosses do drive home the point, Porete herself also makes exactly this case when describing the fifth stage. Here the soul can fully see herself in the depths of humility (*profondesse d’umilité*), and this full knowledge means that she can have no pride (*sans orgueil*) because only true humility can reside in this alternative abyss to sin.<sup>163</sup> Potentially then, Porete is implying that up to that point pride was still a factor in all the previous steps, that where there is free will there will also be pride, whether of one’s material accomplishments or religious piety, a difficulty which Porete takes particular issue with and is the ‘meane’ addressed by *Chastising*. But true self-seeing prevents even the finest filament of pride from entering the soul’s orbit, which cannot therefore wreak foul play on the soul. Consequently, rather than *Chastising* purely providing a mitigating effect to the dangers of *Simple Souls*, it might be useful to speculate that, for a theologically knowledgeable or ambitious audience, the intention was for expansion and comprehensiveness. *Chastising* may have been chosen so that the reader was prompted to question their own beliefs and whether they are being presumptuous in their spiritual life. It could have been intended as an introduction to, or reminder of the basic principles of contemplation. *Simple Souls* then stretches the

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<sup>161</sup> Cré, ‘Contexts and Comments’, pp. 124 - 126.

<sup>162</sup> Cré, ‘Contexts and Comments’, p. 133.

<sup>163</sup> Guarnieri, *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 328; Colledge *et al*, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 118, p. 144. MN uses ‘depnesse of mekenesse’ and ‘þere may not þe powdre of pride pleie’, Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 174. See chapter five for a more detailed analysis of this.

readers' understanding of how dangerous conscious contemplation can be, that it can create a self-satisfied pridefulness, rather than a pure contemplation of God in complete humility.

Another Ruusbroec text which appears alongside *Simple Souls*, this time in Amherst, is the Middle English translation of *Vanden Blinckenden Steen*, entitled *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*. Cré has described *Treatise of Perfection* as having the feel of a draft, rather than a fully finished translation, and thinks it may have been included in the manuscript because of its contemplative nature, the way the translator lessened the original message of union with God, but 'probably also because he had it close to hand'.<sup>164</sup> I think it may also have been chosen to resonate positively with *Simple Souls*. Several elements of Ruusbroec's original text replicate, and may have been copied from, Porete's, with some 'expressions and themes that not only allude to *Simple Souls* but also occasionally quote it literally'.<sup>165</sup> While the Amherst translation is altered in several ways, some of the language choices in the Middle English version are replicated in MN's version of *Simple Souls*.<sup>166</sup> These include the paradox of deepness as a positive, and a self-serving dread which is an indicator of mercenaries.<sup>167</sup> Like *Simple Souls*, *Treatise of Perfection* also requires the reader to 'dye fro syn', to 'forsake oureself', and 'in god bothe vnto ourselfe and to alle othere thynges we dye' leading to a

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<sup>164</sup> Marleen Cré, 'We are united with God (and God with us?): Adapting Ruusbroec in The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God and The Chastising of God's Children', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VII, Exeter Symposium* (Charney Manor, 2004), pp. 21-36 (p. 29-31); Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 131.

<sup>165</sup> John Arblaster & Rob Faesen, 'Mysticism in the Low Countries before Ruusbroec' in *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec* ed. by John Arblaster & Rob Faesen (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 5-46 (p. 41).

<sup>166</sup> Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, pp. 151-5.

<sup>167</sup> These are discussed in more detail in chapter five of this thesis.

new life as ‘hid sonnys of god’ rather than servants.<sup>168</sup> And while *Treatise of Perfection* does not attack reason to the extent that *Simple Souls* does, it does recognise that as long as clarity of conscience is found by reason alone it is impossible to go beyond an inward searching of the self:

Bot where that we folowe oure clerete above resoun, that is to saye oure felynge in loue with / a softe beholdynge and a voluntarye inclunacioun vnto the most hye lyfe, there we take the selfe perfytnesse of god in alle oure beynge, and also pere we fele oureselfe in god alletogydre vnbelappyed [surrounded]<sup>169</sup>

It may be useful to consider that *Chastising* and *Treatise of Perfection* are working in a two-way dialogue with *Simple Souls*, warning of the presumption that might arise from getting stuck at the fourth stage and a self-satisfied, ‘dangerous’ contemplative life. The nuance is that in *Simple Souls* this self-satisfaction results from following the sacraments of the Church of reason too closely. While the warnings against heretical tendencies discussed above are undoubtedly key contextual influences, so too is the fact that *Simple Souls*, which does not explicitly mention despair, is presented together with texts which do, and which may therefore remind the reader of how it fits into the real experience of woe and spiritual dryness faced by the still embodied soul. Unlike *Simple Souls*, these texts are grounded in a lived experience which invoke a human response, and are not an expression of an idealised state only achievable on an other, non-definable, level.

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## 6. Porete’s twentieth-century translations

While the circulation of the ME *Simple Souls* was probably confined to a small,

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<sup>168</sup> ‘The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God’ in *The Chastising of God’s Children and the Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* ed. by Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), ch. 9, pp. 244-245.

<sup>169</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, ch. 11, p. 249.

elite, or professional audience, present day English translations of the French are available to a much larger, wider audience. These translations often provide the basis upon which modern scholars encounter the text and it is therefore important to remember that these translators also used language in particular ways to suit their own agenda and understanding. While Porete sometimes chose specific language precisely because of its capacity to encompass a range of meanings, and MN might have tried to contain that range, the same is true of twentieth-century translators. This section therefore looks at the modern translators of *Simple Souls* and how their cultural contexts and doctrinal backgrounds also made them susceptible to possible misunderstandings, prejudice, and manipulation, which affected the way they presented the text to their own imagined reader.

After the medieval interest discussed above, all further English interest in *Simple Souls* appears to have lain dormant until the early years of the twentieth-century when a group of women academics led a resurgence of interest in mysticism.<sup>170</sup> In 1911 Evelyn Underhill read the Middle English version in BL MS Add 37790, and noted it with approval. In her article for *The Fortnightly Review* she regards the work on which the Middle English is based as a ‘lost work of a [male] French thirteenth century mystic’ who was ‘of the first rank’, and considers the text to be ‘one of the missing links of mystical history’.<sup>171</sup> This discovery was followed by Hope Emily Allen’s bringing to light Bodley 505; SJC C. 21; as well as Methley’s Latin version, Pembroke College, MS. 221. In 1928 Clare Kirchberger published her modern English version based on Bodley

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<sup>170</sup> Of particular note is Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism, The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, first published in 1911 and now in its twelfth edition (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994).

<sup>171</sup> Evelyn Underhill, ‘The Mirror of Simple Souls’, *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 89, Jan-June (1911), 345–54 (p. 345).



505, collated with the other two, and using Methley's Latin to help clarify 'the exact value of contemporary mystical phrases', and to 'shed much light on the syntax of an unpunctuated English MS.'<sup>172</sup> This was done silently within the text itself but she also provides some of her own glosses in addition to MN's. Kirchberger does this in order to prevent her readers from using their own erroneous 'discretion' since many of them will be heretics who 'do not recognise the Church's authority'.<sup>173</sup> At the same time she states that she does not want to intrude upon the spiritual nature of the text, hoping that her interventions are not 'unduly didactic', and perhaps because of this they are placed together after the body text.<sup>174</sup> She had no knowledge of what was still 'the lost French text', nor did she know that it had been written by a woman. She therefore did not have access to a more accurate rendition of the original author's intended meaning, and so her version continued to replicate MN's and Methley's errors. In her preface Kirchberger states that

an attempt has been made to retain as much as possible of the original, but it will be understood that exigencies of sense, space, and of *doctrinal expediency* have modified what, in any case, does not claim to be a critical text.<sup>175</sup>

In translating in line with 'doctrinal expediency' as a guiding factor, Kirchberger exposes the influencing factors implicitly common to all translators whose understanding of the text is to some extent dependent on their own cultural circumstances, affiliations, and beliefs. Because of this, Kirchberger's edition can to some extent stand in for the medieval reader encountering the text without any additional knowledge of its tumultuous history, or the benefit of a French version for

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<sup>172</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. vii.

<sup>173</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. xii.

<sup>174</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. xii.

<sup>175</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. viii, my emphasis.

comparison. She detects the possibility of quietist and pantheistic readings and the consequent need to provide her own ‘explanatory notes’ for the reader ‘who does not recognise the [Catholic] Churches authority’ rather than leave them to use their ‘own discretion’.<sup>176</sup>

In order to understand Kirchberger’s perspective it is helpful to have some understanding of her biography. She graduated with a first class honours degree in French, and with a ‘distinction in the colloquial use of the language’, from Somerville College, Oxford, in 1912, ‘joined All Saints’ Anglican Sisterhood, St Albans’ in around 1914 after teaching at Girton, and received an M. A. in modern languages in 1920.<sup>177</sup> She went on to publish several works on spirituality and mysticism including *Spiritual exercises of a Dominican friar: being ghostly meditations, and a very near way to come to perfection and life contemplative* in 1929, *The Coasts of the Country, An Anthology of Prayer drawn from the Early English Spiritual Writers* and Walter Hilton’s *Goad of Love*, both in 1952. In preparing her manuscripts she worked closely with academics and professional religious alike, particularly the Dominican and writer on mysticism, Father Conrad Pepler.<sup>178</sup> According to Edmund Colledge, her original translation of *Simple Souls* was published with a ‘certificate of episcopal approbation’, and was ‘altogether more perceptive and discriminating’ than Evelyn Underhill had been.<sup>179</sup> It follows from this that Kirchberger’s approach to her editing and translations was from an officially sanctioned and orthodox Christian, and to a large extent, Catholic, perspective. She is

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<sup>176</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. xii.

<sup>177</sup> *The Times*, June 27, 1912, p. 6; *The Guardian*, 26 June 1912, p. 5; Girton College, *Girton College Register, 1869-1946* (Cambridge: Girton College, 1948), p. 646; I have been unable to find out anything about this group, but it may be that it was inspired by a Catholic model of a mixed life.

<sup>178</sup> See acknowledgements, *The Coasts of the Country, An Anthology of Prayer drawn from the Early English Spiritual Writers*, ed. by Clare Kirchberger (London: Harvill Press, 1952), p. vii.

<sup>179</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. lxxx, lxxxii.

less concerned with conveying a true reflection of the Middle English *Simple Souls* for scholarly use than to provide the interested lay reader with a safe text for spiritual growth – in much the same way that MN himself was doing. Kirchberger’s translation (as with those discussed below), is a selective reading based on her theological knowledge, with the motivation of leading the reader towards an ‘orthodox’ understanding of the text and away from anything potentially dangerous.<sup>180</sup>

In 1946 the self-styled beguine, Dr Romana Guarnieri made the connection between the Marguerite Porete, who was burned in 1310, with extant texts of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, following this with the edition of the French *Le Mirour des Simples Ames* beside Paul Verdeyen’s Latin *Speculum Simplicium Animarum*.<sup>181</sup> Sister Marilyn Doiron produced an edition of MN’s text for her doctoral dissertation in 1964, in which she considers it orthodox, although it ‘does contain passages which could be interpreted heretically’ and in 1999 the Dominican Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant published their modern English translation. This was a collation of the French Chantilly, MS Condé F xiv 26 with Guarnieri’s edition from the same manuscript which included the ‘scribe’s marginal comments’ previously omitted by Guarnieri.<sup>182</sup> For Colledge, Marler and Grant, these annotations, along with MN and Richard Methley’s glosses, illustrate that *Simple Souls* ‘was accepted by men of the Middle Ages as a devout treatise, full of edification for the pious readers to whom they were concerned to transmit’, but they were also clear that in their own opinion it was ‘written by a teacher of false doctrine skilled in concealing her unorthodoxy behind ambiguity and

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<sup>180</sup> Kirchberger makes a point of explaining in her introduction and notes how some of the potentially heretical portions of the text are actually not pantheistic, quietist etc. in nature.

<sup>181</sup> ‘Ten Years After She Passed Away’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, December 2, 2013.

<sup>182</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii.

imprecision’ and that the text remains heretical and dangerous.<sup>183</sup>

Therefore, they are suspicious translators intent on the availability of a fixed text with a clearly defined meaning ascribed to the author, despite their own admission that this was not obvious, and having encountered medieval readers with a more flexible and accommodating approach. Michael Sargent has warned that this edition often has ‘ad-hoc’ notes from the ‘French, Middle English, continental Latin’ versions; that only a full collation of all texts, including the Italian, will provide the most accurate idea of Porete’s original text; and that any understanding of the text should therefore be aware of ‘its textual multiplicity’, ‘*mouvance*’ and ‘variance’.<sup>184</sup> As will be seen below, my own readings seek to take some of this into account while focusing mainly on how the ME text might have been understood in terms of its relevance to despair by its contemporary reader.

Ellen Babinsky – a professor at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Texas, and an ordained Presbyterian minister – published a translation of the Chantilly manuscript, based on Guarnieri and Verdeyen’s French and Latin edition, as part of the Classics of Spirituality series in 1993.<sup>185</sup> On the seminary website, Babinsky tells new students that she welcomes ‘multiple expressions of Christianity’, and finds ‘uniformity’

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<sup>183</sup> Colledge *et al.*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. lxxxiii; For a review of the mid twentieth-century historiography and a discussion of Colledge’s view of Porete as ‘pernicious’ while redeeming Eckhart, also accused of heresy for similar views, see Nicholas Watson, ‘Melting into God the English Way’, esp. pp. 23-25; Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri, ‘The Glosses by MN and Richard Methley to *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, in *Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta* ed. by Giuseppe De Luca, Romana Guarnieri (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1968), vol. 5, pp. 257-382 (p. 381-2).

<sup>184</sup> See Michael G. Sargent, ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*: The Manuscripts of the Continental Latin and Italian Tradition’, *The Medieval Translator Traduire au Moyen Age: In principio fuit interpres*, ed. by Alessandra Petrina (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 85–96 (p. 93, n. 27).

<sup>185</sup> ‘Austin Seminary professor Ellen Babinsky retires’, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Website <[https://www.austinseminary.edu/cf\\_news/view.cfm?newsid=117](https://www.austinseminary.edu/cf_news/view.cfm?newsid=117)> [accessed 20 March 2019].

ultimately ‘divisive and violent’.<sup>186</sup> She is of the opinion that Porete was burned not for espousing heretical views *per se*, but for being either ‘a symbol of a threat, real or perceived’ to the establishment; for writing in the vernacular; or for the burgeoning popularity of her text and the spread of the idea of antinomianism, where unity with God meant people were not subject to the law.<sup>187</sup> This stance may be reflected in her sometimes alternative translations to those offered by the other, professionally religious, scholars discussed here, and may partly explain Colledge *et al*’s complete silence on her work in their introductory comments.<sup>188</sup> It can be seen from this overview that all these translators view the texts from specific points of view and are all ‘doctrinally expedient’ in their own ways. The following analysis demonstrates how these theological perspectives affect their versions of a particularly obscure passage.

In a chapter headed in the French version ‘*Comment ceste Ame est empreinte en Dieu, ainsi comme est la cire d’un seel*’ (how this soul is printed in God, so she is as the wax of a seal), a discussion takes place between *Amour* (Love) and *L’Ame* (the soul) with a final word from *Personne de Dieu le Père* (the person of God the Father), himself.<sup>189</sup> *Amour* explains that the soul is an imprint of God, maintained in that state through the union of love and so taken a wax-like form from the true divine exemplar. *L’Ame* then explains that God shows how much He loves us through his divine works and human sufferings but that He does not love us contrary to Himself, but died for us and assumed human flesh as testament to His goodness and which He owed us because

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<sup>186</sup> Professor Emerita Ellen L. Babinsky, ‘Reading History While on the Lookout for God’, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Website <<https://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=1865>> [accessed 21 March 2019 but unavailable at 28 December 2020].

<sup>187</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. 24-6.

<sup>188</sup> Babinsky, ‘Reading History While on the Lookout for God’.

<sup>189</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le mirouer des simples âmes*, ch. 50, pp. 148-50.

the divine will willed it.<sup>190</sup> *L'Ame* ends her speech with a sentence which has caused confusion for translators and which I directly translate in the following way:

For all that the Trinity had created in his wisdom would have been damned without end, yet it would not have had Jesus Christ the Son of God taken/borrowed from the truth in order to save us all.

[Car, se tout ce que la Trinité avoit créé en son savoir deust avoir esté dampné sans fin, pourtant n'eust mie Jhesucrist le Filz de Dieu emprunté a verité, pour tous saulver].<sup>191</sup>

*L'Ame* immediately repudiates this, saying that everyone knows this can't be the case, but *Personne de Dieu le Père* tells her that she, as His first born daughter, will inherit His realm.

MN has translated the sentence on the Trinity by saying that even if everyone that the Trinity made in its wisdom should have been damned without end, Jesus Christ the son of God the Father has not in truth granted that everyone will be saved.<sup>192</sup> MN has, I think, deliberately interpreted this in order to correspond with the doctrine that universal salvation is not possible, an issue of concern in other English vernacular texts, such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, which warned against tendencies toward universalism in a laity concerned with their eternal damnation.<sup>193</sup> According to Nicholas Watson's thesis, some English vernacular texts were inevitably concerned with themes of universal salvation because the language itself symbolised community rather than hierarchy.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le mirouer des simples âmes*, ch. 50, pp. 148-50.

<sup>191</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le mirouer des simples âmes*, ch. 50, pp. 148.

<sup>192</sup> "loveþ he zou not azens him, for þoʒ alle þese þat þe Trinite haþ wrouzt in his witynge schulde haue be dampned wipouten ende, Ihesu Cris þe Sone of God þe Fadir, he haþ not in soþe ygraunted all to saue", Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 83.

<sup>193</sup> For a discussion of this see Nicholas Watson, 'Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-reformation England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* vol. 27 (1997), 145-188 (pp. 146-153, 166).

<sup>194</sup> Watson, 'Visions of Inclusion', see esp. pp. 169-171. As Watson points out however, Julian's long text shows a greater tendency towards universalism in this phrase: a theological development of the short text's 'alle that schalle be saffe', p. 162.

Here, however, MN distances his translation from the suggestion of universalism, bringing his stance more in line with Hilton's warnings than Julian's reassurances that all will be well.<sup>195</sup> MN's interpretation fits with God's assertion in *Simple Souls* that it is His eldest daughter's right to be 'prented in God' as He implies that only the metaphorical first borns, those of special value, will be able to rise high enough to pass successfully through all the stages necessary for divine unity.<sup>196</sup> 'God þe Fadir' assures the soul that this valuable thing should be done to his eldest daughter who is already part of his kingdom because she knows the secrets of Christ from the Holy Ghost who has given her this knowledge out of love.<sup>197</sup>

The possibility of being united with God is made less likely throughout the text, with constant references to the majority of readers being unable to adequately understand it, and consequently not being able to fully reunite with the divine either. Although the soul immediately reverses her views on universal salvation, God's comments cause further lack of clarity, leaving the reader to decide on the issue for themselves, but probably with the idea that God is highly selective about which souls he wills to be 'prentid' in Him. In contrast, Methley works to firmly proscribe possible reader responses by definitively stating that everyone should assume they are in 'in the darkness of the damned' since some people live 'wickedly' rather than 'rightly'.<sup>198</sup> In a

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<sup>195</sup> For a discussion of responses to Watson's idea of vernacular theology including their 'multiple, interlocking, and overlapping' nature see Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology' in *Middle English* ed. by Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 401-420 (pp. 405-7).

<sup>196</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 84.

<sup>197</sup> 'þis owip to be doon to myn eldeste douzter that is out of (from) my rewme (realm)', 'sche wite þe secres of my Sone þoruþ þe loue of þe Hooli Goost þat to þis soule þis o him hap zouen', Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 84.

<sup>198</sup> 'Omnes in tenebras dampnati qui homines sumus fuissemus, nisi per Christum redempti essemus. Sed quia omnes bene viuere nolunt, sed quidam male, ideo non omnes sed quidam saluandi sunt.' Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, gloss to ch. 75, p. 60, l 33-5.

clear warning against the idea of universal salvation, Methley is adamant that God willed that not everyone should be ‘redeemed by Christ’. Consequently, and in a tendency common to all his glosses, as Laura Saetveit Miles has observed, Methley emphatically prevents the possibility for doctrinal error among his professed readers which MN might have left open for a wider audience.<sup>199</sup>

This tendency of translators of Porete towards either confusion or doctrinal expediency becomes clearer on consultation of Babinsky’s and Colledge *et al*’s translations from the French. Where MN uses truth as a modifier to accentuate the idea that not everyone will be saved, Babinsky translates *verité* as a proper noun to say that all the Trinity’s creations ‘would have to have been condemned eternally if Jesus Christ the Son of God had not been taken away from Truth in order to save us all’.<sup>200</sup> For Babinsky it would appear that Truth is commensurate with God and the Holy Spirit and that it is because of Christ’s split from the Trinity, and human manifestation, that He was able to save everyone. She therefore implicitly indicates the idea of universal salvation in this passage, but in her notes she makes no reference to predestination at all, instead, she proposes that ‘whatever sufferings or deficiencies in the sense of things lacking were found in Christ’s life were the results of original sin’. In this way she indicates that the human aspect of Christ was in some way deviant and sinful by default but does little to provide further clarity.<sup>201</sup>

In contrast, Colledge *et al* appear to agree with MN and Methley as their translation reads: ‘if everything which the Trinity had ever created was in its knowledge

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<sup>199</sup> Miles, ‘Richard Methley and the Translation of Vernacular Religious Writing into Latin’, p. 460.

<sup>200</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 50, p. 128.

<sup>201</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 50, p. 231, n. 128.



to have been damned without end, still Jesus Christ the Son of God would never have departed from the truth, in order to save us all'.<sup>202</sup> For them, Christ would not have saved everyone even if the Trinity had known they were all damned because otherwise He would have to have deviated from the small 't' truth of Church doctrine. Like MN and Methley, Colledge *et al* emphasise the idea of predestination and the imperative for God's will to be fulfilled. They point out that God's reference to his 'eldest' daughter, 'aisnee' in French, becomes 'dilecta' or 'dear' in the continental Latin version, and that 'aisnee' may be a corruption of 'eslue' or 'elected'.<sup>203</sup> No further explanation is given, but the implication is that Colledge *et al* are hinting that God's words should be understood as saying that only the elect few are destined to be saved. If they are right, and the original word choice was 'elected', then Porete herself was denying the possibility of universal salvation, in line with her model of hierarchy throughout the text, and uses the ultimate authority, God, to make the point.

These variant interpretations demonstrate the extent to which readers will place their own pre-determined meaning within the text despite any authorial attempts to guide them in a different, perhaps more experimental, direction. Suzanne [Zan] Kocher has registered that Porete's French often 'plays on phonetically similar words' with 'threefold and fourfold repetition (*agnominatio*) of words with similar sounds' where 'she and her speaking characters do not seem content to interconnect just two registers of meaning; rather she and they often reach for three, four, five, or more'.<sup>204</sup> This layering of meaning, in addition to a corrupt text and an awareness of potential doctrinal

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<sup>202</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 50, p. 70.

<sup>203</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 50, p. 70.

<sup>204</sup> Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 139.

disturbance, will also be taken into account when considering MN's translation choices. As far as I am aware, the only other piece of scholarship which compares translations in the way I propose is Chantal Phan's grammatical analysis of the Medieval French, English and Italian versions.<sup>205</sup> As she notes, most work has 'not tackled the rich network of meaning arising from differences between the various medieval versions' of *Simple Souls*, and has therefore not found the new readings resulting from what Phan considers to be either 'linguistic divergence', 'a new conception of the images or ideas found in the original', or a 'poor understanding of the translated text', which her two examples reveal.<sup>206</sup> In regard to Julian's writing, Maggie Ross and Vincent Gillespie have made the point that 'she takes a nucleus word and winds around it strands of homonyms, grammatical variants, near-puns and half-rhymes' to form what they call 'word-knots'.<sup>207</sup> It is this layering which allows meaningful interpretation beyond the text, and for Ross, 'the failure of many modern translators and interpreters to allow this free play of resonances has resulted in texts that are flattened, texts that have lost most of their impact' and which cannot therefore 'work directly at the level of the deep mind'.<sup>208</sup> MN's translation of *Simple Souls* can be an example of this flattening even without the further ironing out provided by his glosses. When faced with a variety of potential connotations, MN had to decide which best fitted the general meaning of the passage, as well as make sense according to his own knowledge of both theology, which is secure,

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<sup>205</sup> Chantal Phan, 'Translating Annihilation: Remarks on Medieval French, English and Italian Versions of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*' in *Booldly Bot Meekly: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages in Honour of Roger Ellis*, ed. by Catherine Batt and René Tixier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 69–79.

<sup>206</sup> Phan, 'Translating Annihilation', pp. 78, 79.

<sup>207</sup> Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, "'With Mekeness Aske Perseverantly': On Reading Julian of Norwich", *Mystics Quarterly* (2004), vol. 30, issue 3-4, 122-137 (p. 131).

<sup>208</sup> Maggie Ross, *Silence: A User's Guide, Volume 2: Application* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2018), p. 20.

and the French language, which may have been less so.<sup>209</sup> But, as will be seen in chapter five of this thesis, whilst MN might not cover all the meanings available within the French, his word choices can convey a variety of other concepts for the creative reader to find.

The above example demonstrates the continuation of the medieval tendency of vernacular translation as a form of ‘appropriation’ and a tension between ‘their controlled use in clerical culture’ and others’ use ‘in ways which were foreign’ to their original milieu.<sup>210</sup> The social and textual contexts are therefore key to reader reception. Regardless of their best efforts, the author is powerless with regard to the autonomous reader who accesses an original text separate to, and in despite of, authorial direction. For Vincent Gillespie, the use of metaphor signals the ‘Poetic’ rather than morally didactic, and is therefore an invitation to the reader to ‘actively engage’ through a process of complexity and choice’.<sup>211</sup> The use of metaphor is central to the texts considered here, and requires, in Gillespie’s terms, the reader to undertake a ‘thought experiment’, to make comparisons and ‘ethical choices’ from their ‘real life’ moral system.<sup>212</sup> The ability of the reader to be autonomous in this way is, however, regulated not only by the textual directives but to a large extent by their own environmental context.

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<sup>209</sup> Sargent thinks MN is ‘slavishly literal’ like a student who doesn’t fully grasp the language. See Sargent ‘Medieval and Modern Readership of Marguerite Porete’s *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*: The French and English Traditions’ p. 67.

<sup>210</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 226; Ralph Hanna III, ‘*Compilatio* and the Wife of Bath: Latin Backgrounds, Ricardian Texts’ in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), pp. 1-11 (p. 10).

<sup>211</sup> Vincent Gillespie, ‘*Ethice Subponitur?* Imaginative Syllogism and the Idea of the Poetic’ in *Medieval Thought Experiments*, ed. by Philip Knox *et al* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 297–328 (p. 299).

<sup>212</sup> Gillespie, ‘*Ethice Subponitur?* Imaginative Syllogism and the Idea of the Poetic’, p. 300.

Michel de Certeau has argued that the ability of the reader to find a multiplicity of meaning in a text, to be ‘creative’, is in inverse proportion to the power of the controlling institution.<sup>213</sup> This idea has been expanded to include the internalised, institutional ‘structures’ of a reader already committed to a life of spiritual growth and contemplation, who may also be unable to be creative with the text, and therefore limiting, rather than widening the range of available meanings.<sup>214</sup> We have seen an example of a reader limited by her adherence to dominant ideology in Kirchberger’s reliance on ‘doctrinal expediency’ in her translation choices, which will make it harder, but not impossible, for a subsequent reader (even one not steeped in the same guiding doctrinal strictures), to play an active role in the text since the multiplicity of meanings have been often silently reduced. Consequently, while the original author may have expected her readers to be active co-authors of the text by providing the range and layers of connotations that she does, subsequent anthologists, translators, glossators, and critics have sought to suppress that agency capable of generating personally imaginative and intuitive, rather than circumscribed and prescriptive, meanings.

All translators and editors provide some form of annotation to guide the reader, and all of them are hoping to preserve whatever boundaries their own particular group adheres to. In Ralph Hanna’s terms, annotators ‘aggressively create’ both audience and author as well as a reading that will reinforce the power base of their ‘communities and institutions’.<sup>215</sup> In the cases discussed here, all of them seek to reinforce the established beliefs upon which their particular religious group wields their authority.

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<sup>213</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (California, University of California Press, 1984, pbk. 1988), p. 172.

<sup>214</sup> Perry, ‘Some Sprytuall Matter of Gostly Edyfiycacion’, p. 114.

<sup>215</sup> Ralph Hanna, ‘Annotation as Social Practice’ in *Annotation and Its Texts*, ed. by Stephen A. Barney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 178–84 (pp. 182, 184).

Vincent Gillespie's 2008 'Afterword On Allegory' points out how writers try to guide the reader's response and understanding through allegories and metaphors which are meant to have a concrete, specific meaning.<sup>216</sup> The response of the reader may be to passively accept the text's 'orthodox' meaning through the use of a pre-learnt allegorical understanding, but such meaning is not concrete and fixed for all readers at all times. As Gillespie points out, for Certeau,

The reader takes neither the position of the author nor the author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they intended. He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something unknown in the space.<sup>217</sup>

By comparing different versions and translations in chapter five, my analysis seeks to re-expose some of the multiple meanings available outside of the translators' own framework. It will not only consider the multivalence of meanings available in the ME text on its own terms, but will also compare this with how other translators have interpreted the text according to their own beliefs. This will highlight how Kirchberger and Methley have chosen to interpret, alter, or emphasise elements of MN's text which have a bearing on spiritual despair, as well as how MN adhered to, or altered from, other available readings of the Old French according to Babinsky and Colledge. It will investigate how a reader may be either gestured towards despair as in the example above, or simply thrown into confusion through having to deal with MN's text whenever it appears to be 'little better than gibberish'.<sup>218</sup>

This chapter has connected previously unrelated facts concerning the codicological

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<sup>216</sup> Vincent Gillespie, 'Afterword: On Allegory, Allegoresis and the Erotics of Reading' in *On Allegory: Some Medieval Aspects and Approaches*, ed. by Mary Carr, K. P. Clarke and Marco Nieveregelt (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 231–56.

<sup>217</sup> Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 169, as quoted by Gillespie, 'Afterword On Allegory', p. 246.

<sup>218</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. lxxxiii.

features of Bodley 505 and SJC C. 21. It has revised some scholarly opinion on the possible production and ownership contexts of the Bodley MS and C. 21, providing evidence for the plausible speculation that *Simple Souls* could have been read by a sophisticated lay, possibly female, audience similar to that originally intended by Porete, as well as a Carthusian one. Highly religious lay women probably had similar reading habits to their monastic sisters, but they will also have received, interpreted, and acted on the text in different ways to them, as well to a Carthusian reader.<sup>219</sup>

Determining the actual audience of MN's *Simple Souls* beyond the Carthusian one is harder than inferring his intended or imagined reader from the texts. Potential meanings and connections which might have been made are therefore much more nebulous and speculative. While we can know who, or at least which institution, owned a text, it is more difficult to know anything about their actual readers unless there is some marginalia, and even then the intention behind it remains unknown. We can only speculate on the possible lay audience for *Simple Souls*. As this chapter has demonstrated, and as Marleen Cré has pointed out with regard to the translator, a lay reader is likely to have been of high rank, spiritually inquisitive, and part of a like-minded network of readers or listeners.<sup>220</sup> We can also see the other sorts of material in which they were potentially interested and so the wider kinds of spiritual influence that would have impacted them. But ultimately, while we can take a view as to what the author or translator meant, we cannot know the exact intentions with which the real

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<sup>219</sup> Virginia R. Bainbridge, 'Syon Abbey: Women and Learning c. 1415-1600' in *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion c. 1400-1700*, ed. by E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 82-103 (p. 87); For a full discussion of this see also Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>220</sup> Cré, 'Further Thoughts on M.N.'s Middle English Translation of Marguerite's *Mirouer Des Simples Ames Anienties*', p. 247.

readers approached the text, or the connections which they went on to make. Even when the author clearly says to whom they are addressing, the language used and references made might point in a different direction entirely. As will be seen in the following chapters, speculation based on the available evidence is therefore a product of the particular text in question, the remaining extant material which can provide a frame of reference, and our own contextual readings and subjective connections.

## Chapter 4: Sin, Despair, and the Deepness of Darkness

The concept and language of sin recurs repeatedly throughout all the texts discussed in this thesis. In chapter one we saw that one's sins, while an inevitable aspect of being human, were often concrete actions requiring confession and penance. Acts of repentance which proved too difficult to accomplish could themselves be a cause for the sin of despair and, conversely, the act of despairing itself causes one's sins to increase in size and depravity. In chapter two we saw that Anselm focused on the putrid nature of sin as a means of persuading the reader to fear God, and that for Bernard the very fact of sin allowed for a cleansing ointment to take one closer to the divine. This chapter begins by considering the relationship between sin and despair in the writings of predecessors to Julian and *Simple Souls*. It then looks in more detail at how sin is conveyed in *Simple Souls* and by Julian; Julian's application of sin and despair; how scholars have identified despair in *Simple Souls* to date; and an examination of the paradoxical nature of the abyss.

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### 1. Before Porete and Julian – despair and sin in Bonaventure and Augustine

As we have seen, writers have addressed the theological concept of spiritual despair from early Christianity onwards. The monastic texts discussed in chapter two were concerned with the soul and its inward journey towards the divine. They demonstrated that honestly confronting one's sins might lead to distress in the first instance, followed by a greater knowledge of God thereafter. Porete's thoughts on loving God for His own sake are evident throughout the western Christian contemplative tradition, including in the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, pseudo-



Dionysius, and William de St Thierry (1085-1148).<sup>1</sup> Both Porete and Julian were clearly exposed to these ideas, if not the actual texts themselves. There are particular similarities for example between *Simple Souls*' categories of the perished, marred, and annihilated soul and William de St Thierry's 'purgative, illuminative and unitive' stages in his *Epistle to the Brethren of Mont Dieu* of around 1145.<sup>2</sup> Thierry also gives some reassurance in his *Expositio super Epistolam ad Romanos* that 'there be no despair about those who [...] have not yet believed, because they shall believe and shall be freed from the servitude of death'.<sup>3</sup> The despair here relates not to the self, but to others, which is resonant of Julian's many references to, and concern for, her fellow Christians.

There are also similarities between *Simple Souls*' seven stages and the steps toward the divine set out in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium ad Deum* and Augustine's *De Quantitate Animae*. While neither of these touch on despair, both Bonaventure and Augustine do explore its cause and nature elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Bonaventure uses the term 'despair' in a sermon explaining the stages of contemplation towards glorification. He describes and explains the seven stages required before glorification:

ignis, unctio, ecstasis, contemplatio, gustus, amplexus, requies, et octave

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<sup>1</sup> Sargent, 'Marguerite Porete', pp. 300-1.

<sup>2</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. xcvi; Migne, *P. L.*, clxxxiv, cols, 308-364 as cited by Doiron.

<sup>3</sup> "...de ipsis non est desperandum, qui nondum uocantur filii Dei, quia nondum crediderunt, sed tantum sunt creatura, quia et ipsi credituri sunt, et liberabuntur a seruitute interitus, quemadmodum nos qui iam filii Dei sumus, quamuis nondum apparuerit quod erimus," William de Thierry, *Expositio super Epistolam ad Romanos*, v.8.20-21 ed. by P. Verdeyen, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 86 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), p. 118, as cited by Rozanne E. Elder, 'William of Saint-Thierry and the Renewal of the Whole 'Man' in *A Companion to William of Saint-Thierry*, ed. by F. Tyler Sargent (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 109-130 (p. 129).

<sup>4</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, pp. xcvi-xcix; For a recent discussion of how Bonaventure approaches the idea of divine unification see Gustav Zamore, 'Bonaventure's Thought Experiment: The use of *Synderesis* in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, the Ineffability Topos, and Francis's Stigmata' in *Medieval Thought Experiments: Poetry, Hypothesis, and Experience in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Philip Knox, Jonathan Morton, and Daniel Reeve (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 173-196.

sequitur gloria.<sup>5</sup>

[consuming passion, anointment with holy oil, ecstasy, contemplation, digestion, union, rest and relief from suffering].

In a similar vein to Thierry, Bonaventure encourages his congregation by saying ‘you who are simple should not despair when you hear such [elevated] things, feeling that the simple person is not capable of this, for eventually you will be capable of it’.<sup>6</sup> In *Simple Souls* the idea of the term ‘simple’ shifts in meaning and connotation to become more highly regarded, and capable of inhabiting a higher spiritual plane. Not only is becoming a simple soul, a spirit unaware of what is and is not elevated, precisely the goal of the text, but the simple, non-learned person is also more likely to reach deification than the professional religious, probably male, learned elite ruled by reason.<sup>7</sup> But even for the non-professional, MN’s version of *Simple Souls* does not share Bonaventure’s reassurance with all its readers. In *Simple Souls* the noughted soul is rare, and only some readers will be destined for perfection, for those that ‘haue not be such, ne schulen be, ze payne 3ou in vayne if ze wole vndirestonde it’.<sup>8</sup> Counselling against despair therefore implies a universalism for Bonaventure’s audience which *Simple Souls* does not offer its reader in search of unification. Elsewhere, Bonaventure places the concept of spiritual despair firmly within the vices and virtues framework discussed in chapter one of this thesis. Some examples include despair as: a sin in the Holy Spirit; a deliberate act of the

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Sermo I de Sabbato Sancto’, Bonaventure, *Opera omnia* 9 (Rome: Ad claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882), p. 269 < <https://archive.org/details/doctorisseraphic09bona/page/268> > [accessed 16 August 2020].

<sup>6</sup> ‘Modo non debetis desperare, vos simplices, quando auditis ista, quia simplex non potest ista habere, sed poteritis postea habere’, ‘Sermo I de Sabbato Sancto’, p. 269. Translation by Zachary Hayes, *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum* (NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002), p. 147 as cited in Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 109, n. 191.

<sup>7</sup> Discussed further in part two of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrour of Simple Soules*, p. 129.

will; an accumulation of evil; and the repression of desire.<sup>9</sup> Where for Bonaventure desire is central to the glorification process, MN's translation states that the perfect soul must be stripped or 'now3ted of all outward desires and of alle þe affeccions of þe spirit' if it is to achieve any form of unity with the divine.<sup>10</sup>

Augustine treats despair in several of his sermons, and as Snyder has noted, rarely does so without also referring to presumption.<sup>11</sup> He is particularly interested in explaining despair's role within the requirements of prayer and confession. Because the soul already 'possesses the will and the freedom to sin' it needs to pray to God to 'renew a steadfast spirit within' as otherwise it will 'damn itself through despair even more than it already has through its other sins'.<sup>12</sup> Augustine also invokes the devil who drives the guilty soul to despair by 'saying we can never be forgiven; or again, he persuades us that God immediately forgets everything, so that there's no need to mend our ways'.<sup>13</sup> The soul will be protected from despair by 'turning away from all the sins committed' as well as following God's law, but is then likely to 'fall victim to presumption', relying too much on God's promise of forgiveness.<sup>14</sup>

Augustine warns the soul that it has to 'hold the middle, the true, the strait way, as it were between the left hand of despair, and the right hand of presumption' by following

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<sup>9</sup> 'peccati in Spiritum sanctum', Bonaventure, *Speculum Animae*, chapter 4, *Opera Omnia*, v.7, p. 558; 'desperare est actus voluntatis deliberativae', Bonaventure, *Sententiarum*, Book 2, Dist. 4, art. 2, Quaestio 2, *Opera Omnia*, v. 2, p. 355; 'quia desperatio facit ad cummulum mali', Bonaventure, *Sententiarum*, Book 3, Quaestio 2, *Opera Omnia*, v. 5, p. 17; 'desperatio est voluntas gravedinem reprimens', Bonaventure, *Centiloquium*, Part 1, section 21, *Opera Omnia*, v.7, p. 363.

<sup>10</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, 'The Paradox of Despair', p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, Sermon 20, 1; *PL* xxxviii.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, Sermon 20, 2, *PL* xxxviii.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, Sermon 20, 3, *PL* xxxviii.

Christ's example.<sup>15</sup> The point here for Augustine was that the combination of Christ's humility and exalted status meant that his worth lay only in his being joined with God. Because of this, people should be like Christ and, like him, not despair of themselves through humility, nor have so much pride that they commit the sin of presumption.<sup>16</sup> In *de poenitentia*, Augustine writes that despair comes at the end of an increase in vices: from pride to rebellion, to disbelief, and finally despair. For him, despair is 'a doubt concerning God's power' where the pull of sin is stronger than that of God. Conversely, with hope comes humility and then faith.<sup>17</sup> As we saw briefly in chapter three, and examine in more detail in chapter five, Porete follows this trajectory in the fifth stage where the soul has to lose all pride in order to become truly meek.

Christ's sacrifice, as well as the human capacity for humility and pride, are also key concepts in *Simple Souls*. The reader has to determine whether complete humility – the conscious placing of one's will and pride entirely within God, directly before the point of divine union – equates to despair as some scholars indicate.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between sin and one's will is of paramount importance to all the writers discussed in this chapter. If the will is withdrawn from God and redirected to the self, if one's own light is considered sufficient without the need for God's light, then sin is the inevitable result.<sup>19</sup> But whereas directing one's will towards confession and repentance is central for

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<sup>15</sup> Augustine, Sermon 142, 1, *PL* xxxviii.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, 'Discourse of Augustine the Bishop against the Pagans', Sermon 198, 44 in *The Works of St Augustine A Translation for the 21st Century, Sermons Part 3, volume 11, Newly Discovered Sermons*, trans. by Edmund Hill, OP, ed. by John E. Rotelle, O. S. A (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997), p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> *de vera et falsa poenitentia*, cap v, *PL* 40, 1116-1118 as cited in Aerial Sachs, 'Religious Despair and Medieval Literature in Art', p. 232.

<sup>18</sup> As discussed below.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 138-9, 158-9; David Aers, *Salvation and Sin. Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), p. 144.

Augustine and Bonaventure, and still of importance to Julian, these works of virtue are of no concern to the soon-to-be-annihilated soul in *Simple Souls*. The reason for confession and repentance – that humankind is born sinful and continues to carry out sinful acts – is clear in all the devotional literature discussed here. However, this chapter explores how the definition of sin is itself open to interpretation – how its figurative weight and substance resists firm delineation by both Julian and within *Simple Souls*.

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### 1.1 *Simple Souls*, Julian, and sin

Vernacular works such as Walter Hilton's *Prickyng of Love* may have been designed to guide readers away from spiritual matters beyond their perceived capabilities, and towards authorised, practical forms of devotion. In contrast, Porete's *Simple Souls*, MN's translation of it, and Julian's texts purposefully stretch their readers' imagination and understanding to encompass the spiritual more directly than the pastoral manuals allowed for, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis.<sup>20</sup> Julian and *Simple Souls* draw on the *vita contemplativa* concept of the soul returning to its pre-created state of nothingness within the divine. The soul's capacity to cause damage, to sin, is an inevitable condition of being separated from God. The essential sinfulness of humankind cannot be denied, but for these two women confessing and repenting one's sins through an intermediary is problematic – a stance that is an anathema in the guidance manuals discussed in the first part of this thesis.

Julian and Porete intend the reader to expand beyond the self, discarding it as the

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<sup>20</sup> There is some debate as to whether Walter Hilton did compose *Prickyng of Love*. Most recently Allan Westphall has argued that Hilton, or someone with an intimate knowledge of his works, the language used, and the 'theological traditions that underlie them' is most likely to be responsible. See Allan F. Westphall, 'Walter Hilton's *The Prickyng of Love* and the Construction of Vernacular 'Sikernesse'' in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition* ed. by Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 457-502 (pp. 472-5).

centre point of life. It is striking that the essence of sin for these authors appears to be an inevitable consequence of the embodied soul being partly separated from God, or as Vincent Gillespie has put it, Julian does not ‘see pain as a state to be escaped from but as a condition of our humanity, deeply equated in her thinking with the corrosive and corrupting force of sin in the world’.<sup>21</sup> As we shall see, however, personal sin is also something which is not, rather than something which is, it is a vehicle for understanding the disconnected self and the cost of being separated from the divine goodness. It is also a catalyst for returning within His embrace. The relationship between sin, hope, and despair is therefore theologically re-calibrated by these women, a re-calibration which consequently shifts the role and extent of despair as a marker of the reader’s spiritual development. Where Anselm and Aelred invoke the idea of despair after realising the immensity of their sins, and immediately before a form of conversion or unity, Julian uses the word despair either when referring to her lived experience of spiritual difficulty, or when counselling her imagined reader through their own struggles. By doing this, she highlights the ongoing nature and possibility of despair within a spiritual life, something which Bernard also brings out for the spiritually mature reader of *Song* when explaining how the Bride gets simultaneously closer to, and further from, her Bridegroom with whom she will eventually reunite.<sup>22</sup> The route to the divine is not a linear process for Bernard and Julian, but a series of recurring realisations that the self should always place itself in a position of uncertainty before God’s final judgement.

But for both Porete and Julian, finally acknowledging one’s own sinfulness is the only means of clearly seeing God’s goodness, and in *Simple Souls* in particular, this self-

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<sup>21</sup> Vincent Gillespie, ‘Seek, Suffer, and Trust: “Ese” and “Disese” in Julian of Norwich’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 39 (2017), 129–58 (p. 150).

<sup>22</sup> Bernard, *Song*, vol. 4, Sermon 75, section 1, p. 98 as discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

seeing does not inevitably lead to the shame of formal confession. Here, the original prologue opens by addressing the soul who, because it has parted from sin and been touched by God, is in the first state of grace.<sup>23</sup> It is made clear to the reader that to be without the sin leading to damnation is only the first, most basic requirement for divine recognition, and that there are six more stages to go through before the small possibility that perfection can be found in the land of life (*pais de vie*) through God.<sup>24</sup> The definition of sin does not correspond with the teaching of the seven deadly sins and the ameliorative process of repentance. Instead, the perfect soul is nothing but sin, and once it recognises itself to be at the root of all evil it can finally be brought to nothing through true humility.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this self-knowledge and self-abnegation, the meek and perfect noughted soul (*Ame Adniente*) is able to return to the divine.

Although the perfect soul must recognise herself as the most evil of all sinners, she cannot reach this point if she has not passed through the first stage of grace and died the death of ‘mortifying sin’, that is the sin which led to damnation.<sup>26</sup> We have seen with Bromyard’s *exempla* that for the ordinary lay person confessing one’s sins before death is a sufficient step for ultimate salvation, but in *Simple Souls* it is only the start of a journey towards a connection with the divine, which goes beyond salvation and requires

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Ame de Dieu touchee, et denuee de peché ou premier estate de grace, est montee par divines graces ou septiesme estat de grace, ouquei estat l’Ame a le plain de sa perfection par divine fruicion ou pais de vie’, Guarnieri, ed., *Les Mirouer des Simples Ames*, Le Prologue, p. 10; ‘O soule touched of God, disseuered of synne, in þe first estate of grace, stize bi diuine grace into þe seuenþe estate of grace, where þat þe soule haþ her fulhede of perfeccioun bi diuine fruicion in liif of pees’, Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 6. Note that MN has added the idea of peace to the perfect life where Porete did not.

<sup>24</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> ‘C’est a dire que ceste Ame ne scet en elle que une chose, c’est assavoir la racine de tous maulx [...] car telle Ame est si adnientie par humilité [...] Telle humilité est vraye humilité et parfaicte en Ame Adniente, et nulle aultre’, Guarnieri, *Les Ames des Simple Ames*, ch. 11, pp. 36-8; ‘Þis soule wote of hir but oon Þing, and þat is þe roote of alle yuelis, and þe abudnaunce of alle synnes [...] Þis soule is so nouȝted bi mekenesse [...] Þis mekenesse is uerrei mekenesse and parfite in a soule nouȝted, and noon oþir but Þis’, Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 26; For a succinct summary of the three deaths see chapter three of this thesis and Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. lxxviii.

the death of the will and spirit in addition to sin.

The soul has to divest herself of mortal sin; recognise her essentially sinful state; reach a point at which her own sin and the sins of others can no longer be felt; and then be cleansed of sin through the depths of humility (*profondesse d'umilité*), emerging as free from sin as Jesus Christ with the ability to finally see the Trinity.<sup>27</sup> The death of the will, at this fifth stage, is the key moment when a soul can leave the pains of sin behind by realising just how all consuming they are. When she finally sees herself perfectly in this state it is because the soul is humble and meek enough to rule without any pride at all.<sup>28</sup> In *Simple Souls* then, sin is neither a cause for hope nor despair, but a simple truth which has to be fully understood as being the essence of a human soul before any true relationship with the divine can be possible. Ultimately, it is not the repentance of sin which is vital for the perfect soul to be reunited with God, but the achievement of a state of being where reconditioning the self is no longer the focus, where the self becomes beside the point, and the soul sees only that it is part of the divine. Both presumption and despair require a subjective self, and in *Simple Souls* self-seeing is ultimately about erasing that self.

Both *Simple Souls* and Julian describe sin in negative terms. In *Simple Souls* the perfect soul of

þe abundaunce of alle synnes wiþoute noumbre, wiþoute weiȝte, and wiþoute  
measure, and synne is nouȝt and lesse þan nouȝt, and afoundred of horrible

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<sup>27</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, pp. 328, 'Et donc, regarday la purté de la Verité, qui me dist que jusques ad ce ne verroie la divine Trinité, jusques ad ce que mon ame aussi sera sans tache de peché, comme celle de Jhesucrist', ch. 128, p. 370; 'depnesse of mekenesse', 'I schal not se þe diuine Trinite til þanne þat my soule be also clene wiþouten spot of synne' Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 174, 183-4. For further discussion on the deepness of meekness see sections two and three of this chapter, and chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> 'est profondesse d'umilité qui la siet en la chaere, qui regne sans orgueil', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 328; 'Þis is þe depnesse of mekenesse þat þere sittip in hir chaier and regnep wiþoute pride', Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 174.



defautes vnder lasse þan nouzt.<sup>29</sup>

The repeated use of negatives in this sentence makes the reader first consider that sins are weightless, and of no significance, before making the reverse leap that in fact the soul is so full of sins that they are too many and too heavy to quantify. This means that the soul herself is nothing, in the sense of being worthless, and so meek that she would willingly endure pain, be full of ‘torment and confusion wipouten ende’, if God decides to take vengeance on any of her many sins.<sup>30</sup> Julian also defines sin as a negative, but for her, as for Augustine, it is a no thing because God ‘doith no synne’, and as He is responsible for all that is done, it follows that ‘synne is no dede’.<sup>31</sup> Man’s sins are real, but the sin itself ‘hath no maner of substance ne no party of being, ne it myght not be knowin but by the peyne that it is cause of’.<sup>32</sup> So in the same way that the paradoxical phrasing in *Simple Souls* above suggests, for Julian, sin is also simultaneously a heavy, painful, experience and something insubstantial and weightless. These ideas of sin’s significance could be seen as a development of the *scintilla* discussed in chapter one of this thesis, where one person’s sin threatens to drown them in despair until they realise that it is a miniscule entity within the vast sea of God’s mercy. And yet the nothingness of sin in the texts discussed in this chapter bears an altogether heavier weight through its actual or anticipated consequence of pain. Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* emphasised the

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<sup>29</sup> ‘ceste Ame ne scet en elle que une chose, c’est assavoir la racine de tous maulx et l’abondance de tous pechez sans nombre, sans pois et sans mesure. Et peché est nient, et ceste Ame est toute effouldree et espoventee des horribles deffaultes d’elle, qui sont moins que nient’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 11, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouer of Simple Soules*, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 11, p. 17; Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, Oxford World Classics reissue, 2008), ch. 7, xiii (19), p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 27, p. 38.

idea of humankind being indebted to Christ for repaying its own debt to God.<sup>33</sup> The soul in *Simple Souls* also recognises this, but at one point considers it as a specifically personal gift. The soul goes so far as to hypothesise that even if no one else had sinned except her, Christ would still have laid his love on the cross for her, destroying her sin and saving her soul. She knows that she is greatly indebted to Christ, and beseeches God to free her of the debt through his all-powerful mercy. But the perfect soul, unattainable for most readers, demonstrates an assurance that Christ and God have a relationship with her as an individual and that they will – indeed, have already – saved her.<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, Julian is acutely aware that for her readers the pain of sin can too easily extinguish all prospect of salvation, and teaches them that, managed carefully with a proper understanding of God's love and Christ's Passion, the pain endured as sin, and from confronting those sins, is necessary for a fruitful outcome. God can see that someone has sinned by observing the healed 'wounds' which have been transformed through 'sorow and 'penance' into 'worships'.<sup>35</sup> This transformation means that God is aware of the 'peyne' experienced by those who love Him which pleases Him enough to 'assigneth no blame' to them.<sup>36</sup> This sleight of hand holds out the possibility of

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>34</sup> 'Mais, sire, encore plus mon entente et mon esperance est, et c'est verité, que, se nul n'eust peché sinon moy toute seule, si eussiez vous rachatee mon ame de vostre amour derrivee en mouant tout nu en la croix pour moi, en usant de puissance ordonnee pour peché destruire [...] Et oultre, sire vous dooy: c'est assavoir oultre ce que je n'ay vaillant, vous doy je de tant comme vous valez mieulx que moy, pour qui vous estez donné. Et toutesfoiz vous savez, sire, que je ne puis neant faire, et si m'avez ainsi vers vous endebtee; mais je vous prie, doulx amy et courtous, que vous me acquitez de ceste debte, vous qui avez le povoir de tout faire', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 34, p. 112; 'For, Lord, my wenyng is þis, & it is soþe, þat þouȝ noon hade synned but I aloone, ze wolde haue bouȝt my soule wiþ zoure loue late leide on crosse for me, in usynge of mȝtes ordeyned for to distroie my synne [...] Lord, al zis I seie zou for me oonli, so þat I seie zou, for as myche passynge þis þat I haue not of vailyng, as ze auailen better þan þe beste of myne, for whiche ze be zouen. And þis wel ze wite, þat I may nouȝt do and I am so greetli endettid. O Lord God, rizt curteis & large and free, aquiteþ me of þis dette, ze þat haue power al þing to do', Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouer of Simple Soules*, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 54.

extinguishing the burden of sin at a stroke and might therefore be considered a powerful antidote to despair for all Julian's fellow Christians.<sup>37</sup>

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## 1.2 Julian, sin, and despair

Julian mentions despair in the short text but the long text expands upon it in greater detail. While she mostly speaks of sin in a generic sense, Julian specifically singles out the sin of despair, devoting a significant amount of attention to describing her own capacity for despair, the remedies which might be effective against it, and, after these mentions, its definition and description. In chapter seventy-three, Julian explains that the joint 'sekeneses' of 'onpatience or slaith' on the one hand, and 'dispeir or doubtfull drede' on the other, are an especial threat to 'swich men and women that for God love haten synne and disposen hem to do Gods will'.<sup>38</sup> Watkins and Jenkins have interpreted this to mean that 'lovers of God are more inclined to impatience and despair than others, presumably because of their intense awareness of sin', and as we saw in chapter three, the idea of testing and proving God's chosen souls was of particular interest to compilers of this kind of devotional literature.<sup>39</sup> The idea of dwelling on sin for just the right amount of time before it leads to a twisted form of spiritual devotion is one which we have seen in both pastoral and contemplative texts. Sin, like despair, has a subtle and complex function for the spiritually sophisticated. For Julian, sin is experienced as pain which can either be transformed into worships which please God, or become so overwhelming that the soul might be 'enclynand to despeyr' and destined for

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on how God not blaming the sinner negates the need for Christ's Passion, see Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, chapter five, 'Sin, Reconciliation, and Redemption', pp. 133-71.

<sup>38</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 73, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 350.

hell.<sup>40</sup>

Like Augustine, Julian requires the reader to steer a middle path between presumption and despair in response to sin. On the one hand they must not be ‘over rekles as if [they] gove no fors’, so unconcerned by their sins that they fail to consider the consequences, and are instead certain that they will ‘redily risen’ with ‘the swete touching of grace’.<sup>41</sup> On the other, they should be careful not to ‘fallen overflow’ and be ‘enclynand to despeyr’.<sup>42</sup> The only acceptable means of navigating between these two routes is to ‘reverently cleven to God’ and to trust only in Him.<sup>43</sup> Julian’s tension between hope and despair brings to mind Chobham’s injunction to avoid sin’s inherent dangers:

we must not continue to persistently sin on account of hope, and we should not despair of a pardon because God rightly punishes sin. But danger is to be avoided in both directions, and you should avoid evil on account of the justice of God, and you should hope for the pardon by means of the same mercy.<sup>44</sup>

For Julian, the psychological condition of people struggling to balance between despair and presumption is of paramount importance. She imagines a possible self united with the divine at the same time as acknowledging that this ideal state is not constantly possible. Huber, too, finds that Julian places the idea of ‘a spiritually productive “parfit sorrow”’ between the spirit’s ability to reach the divine and a propensity for ‘excessive,

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<sup>40</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 52, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 52, p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 52, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 52, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Potest autem attendi quanta uirtus sit spes <per eius oppositum, scilicet> per desperationem. Sicut ait Gregorius: ‘nemo quamuis ingenti peccatorum pondere prematur, de bonitate diuine pietatis desperare debet; set spe certa, misericordie illius indulgentiam sibi cottidianis lacrimis deprecari. Verumtamen, nec propter spem uenie perseueranter peccare debemus, neque quia Deus iuste peccata punit, ueniam desperare debemus. Set utroque periculo euitato, et malo declinemus propter Dei iustitiam, et ueniam speremus propter eius misericordiam.’ Chobham, *Summa de commendatione virtute et expirtatione vitiorum*, p. 135.

damning melancholy'.<sup>45</sup> In another example of Julian treading an Augustinian middle path, Anna Minore points out that for Julian, knowing both 'God's goodness and one's own need and weakness' leads to the self-knowledge which prevents the soul from both 'pride and deep despair'.<sup>46</sup>

For Julian we need to remember that our pain, which is the outward evidence for our individual sins as well as our necessary state as sinners, will transform into worship through Christ's Passion, and will in turn 'save us from gruching and dispeir in the felyng of our peynys'.<sup>47</sup> Julian keeps returning to the Passion whenever she wants to either console or train the reader who is struggling. She foregrounds the pain suffered not only by the saved, but by their saviour, as a point of comparison for all other pain, and as a direct result of their own sin. By clearly positioning Christ as one who 'suffrid more peyne than al men of salvation that ever was', Julian makes the point that human pain and suffering is inevitable and just, so that when she discusses despair further on the reader is less able to draw a straight line between sin, pain and despair because no one can suffer more pain than that endured by Christ.<sup>48</sup> All 'peynys shal be turnyd into everlestyng passyng ioyes by the vertue of Crists passion', and the more we suffer in pain for our sins while Christ suffers for them on the cross, the 'more shall our worshippe be with hym in his kyngdom'.<sup>49</sup> At this point there is still a distance between Julian, Christ and God. She can feel his pain empathically, as if she is experiencing the same torture herself, but she is watching Christ rather than becoming dissolved in God.

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<sup>45</sup> Huber, "For Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys Y", pp. 14-5.

<sup>46</sup> Anna Minore, 'Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena: Pain and the Way of Salvation', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 40 (2014), 44-74 (p. 50).

<sup>47</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 28, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 20, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 20, p. 30; ch. 21, p. 31.

Julian knows, like Bernard, that fully understanding the Passion, and one's own culpability for Christ's constant pain, entails a similar acuteness of suffering. For her, this full knowledge is the route to salvation, more than the confessional process.

Although Julian is more subtle than Anselm, there are, I think, occasional parallels between the two in terms of taking the reader closer to the possibility of despair. As well as telling her readers that Christ was in more agony than they will ever be, she also tells them that their sins are vile in chapter forty, and in chapter sixty-three that they are 'very viler and peynfuller than helle'.<sup>50</sup> She is swift to apply an ameliorative poultice to this sting by saying that God will make the soul soft and mild through the sprinkling of Christ's precious blood, but it is possible that through the process of *lectio devina*, of meditating on the connotations of a word or phrase, there may be a lasting adverse effect on a soul with an entrenched propensity to fall 'overflow' into despair. While this process of spiritually chewing on their reading was intended to reveal a path to God for the contemplative, which Julian herself says will happen through prayer, it can also easily fall under the modern psychological heading of rumination – repetitively dwelling on negative and upsetting thoughts which over time lead to depression.<sup>51</sup> Julian's use of 'vile' is all the more obvious and memorable precisely because she seldom uses such negative, emotive language, and to fully comprehend what it is to be viler than hell entails some complex thought processes. Hell is for the damned, those God never intends to save, the ultimate destination of the obviously unrepentant sinner and the

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<sup>50</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 40, p. 55; ch. 63, p.103.

<sup>51</sup> Julian talks about the power of prayer throughout but specifically in chapter 41 in relation to having a dry heart: Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, pp. 56-8. For a recent study on the correlation between rumination and depression see Jonas Everaert and Jutta Joormann, 'Emotion regulation habits related to depression: A longitudinal investigation of stability and change in repetitive negative thinking and positive reappraisal', *Journal of Affective Disorders* 276 (2020) 738–747 (esp. pp. 741-2).

fitting home for demons. Julian links the ‘fends of Hell’ with ‘ghostly temptation’.<sup>52</sup> Hell is where ‘al the peyne and tribulation that [the fend] would a brought hem to shal endlessly goe with him’.<sup>53</sup> It is from where Christ’s Passion has ‘bawte [the saved] from endless peynys’.<sup>54</sup> The only other pain which can be compared to the saving pain of seeing ‘thy love suffir’ is hell beause it holds no prospect of the hope of salvation: ‘for there is despeyr’.<sup>55</sup> To be in hell shuts down all hope for Christ’s help, but the pain of seeing Christ suffer carries a hopeful assurance with it, even though Julian repents herself as a ‘wretch’.<sup>56</sup> In the short text after a similar description of Christ’s ‘deepe dying’, Julian says the only pain she felt was Christ’s, but does not call him her love as she does in the long text. Instead, she asks if any pain in hell is like it, going on to realise that ‘dispaire is mare, for that es gastelye pain’.<sup>57</sup>

Watson glosses Julian’s physical suffering as a form of empathy, and she does accept this joint suffering with Christ even though it is the worst pain, but also because it signifies hope, whereas the spiritual pain to be found in hell is worse than any physical torture because it is completely void of hope.<sup>58</sup> Julian shows that the path to salvation is itself an arduous and painful process, reflecting the long, drawn-out stages of Christ’s death as his blood ran and scabbed, and as his flesh gaped around the wounds of his hanging body, slowly drying through lack of moisture and the ‘blowyng of wind’.<sup>59</sup> To

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<sup>52</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 4, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 13, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 23, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 17, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 17, p. 26. For a discussion on the use of ‘wretch’ by Julian and in *Simple Souls*, see chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>57</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, gloss 34, p. 82.

<sup>59</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 16, p. 24.

sin against God while one still has the opportunity not to, and to do so through the act of despair, is viler than hell – a place where there is no hope of escape from continual torment – because it is a wilful act of aggression which causes Christ greater pain.<sup>60</sup>

Julian wants her reader to be aware of the acute suffering Christ endured throughout his Passion, not just as a ‘general sorrow for [his] agonies’ but so that they become aware of their own ‘role of sin in creating them’.<sup>61</sup> She does this by continually referring back to Christ’s agonies and their relationship to the reader’s pain. Daniel McCann has written that her ‘words reflect upon the importance of endurance, of patience in pain’ and that by being ‘tortured with Christ in Passion meditation’ the reader will become both fully self-aware and powerfully compassionate to the point that they will benefit from what has ‘become a therapeutic moment’.<sup>62</sup> While I broadly agree with this – Julian does constantly invoke and require compassion, leaving the reader with the overarching message that ‘all shall be well’ – I also think that by constantly raising the relationship between the reader’s sins and Christ’s torment, Julian purposefully takes the reader towards an understanding of the edge of despair, if not the edge itself. Her equally constant reassurances demonstrate a cognisance that irredeemable despair is a distinct possibility for the spiritually embodied struggling soul. Christ is also important in *Simple Souls*, where the perfect soul should not feel the same unease for her sins, nor for the ‘sufferaunce þat Crist Ihesu suffride for hir, ne for synne ne diseese þat her euen

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<sup>60</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 17, p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel McCann, *Soul-Health: Therapeutic Reading in Later Medieval England*, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages Series (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> McCann, *Soul-Health: Therapeutic Reading in Later Medieval England*, p. 87.



cristan have', as Julian similarly advocates.<sup>63</sup>

For Julian there is always a possibility of despair for the chosen, ordinary, soul who from the 'sharpest scorge' of sin might think themselves only worthy to 'synken in helle'.<sup>64</sup> She counters this by explaining the specific actions of contrition which will enable wounds to start healing: naked confession of sins; shame for having 'defoulyd the fair ymage of God'; and the carrying out of penances demanded by the 'domysman'.<sup>65</sup> This process towards forgiveness takes place firmly and publicly within Holy Church. This formal sacrament, the wielding of man's judgement and power, is not discussed further. Instead, Julian acknowledges that the process could leave us feeling God has forsaken us when in fact He still 'kepyth us'.<sup>66</sup> Even so, this sickness is sent by God and intended to make the reader experience sorrow and shame as well as 'reprove and dispyte'.<sup>67</sup> This is a full confrontation of the self designed to instil not the full abnegation of self-will found in *Simple Soules*' perfect soul, but a state of meekness that will not at this point dissolve the soul within the divine so that the two are indivisible, but instead will allow God's grace to raise it 'wol hey in [His] syte' as a still separate entity which can be 'sodenly delyveryd of synne and of peyne'.<sup>68</sup> This forgiveness is not projected into the day of judgement as we saw with Anselm's prayers, but is instead taking place constantly. Julian understands human nature and demonstrates that God

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<sup>63</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, pp. 41-2; 'C'est Ame n'a mesaise de peché qu'elle fist oncques, ne de souffrance que Dieu ait souffert pour elle, ne des pechez ne des mesaises esquieulx ses proemes demourent', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 16, p. 66. Note that MN has replaced Porete's God suffering with Jesus Christ instead.

<sup>64</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 53.

<sup>65</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 53.

<sup>66</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 53.

<sup>68</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, pp. 53-4.

does too. He knows that his servants will continue to sin and that some may be worse than others, but He does not want them to ‘dispeir for often ne for grevous fallyng’ because their fall into sin does not stop Him from loving them.<sup>69</sup>

Julian also uses the term despair before and after her descriptions of the pain endured by Christians and Christ alike during His Passion. These instances are couched in personal terms, and in the certainty of a compassionate dispensing of grace. In chapters sixty-nine and seventy-nine for example, she explains that God’s grace will turn someone’s knowledge of despair and doubt into love, and that she will be safe from presumption if she remembers that His love is entwined in her soul.<sup>70</sup> This will also allow her to be meek enough to embody the true comfort and joy which can save her from despair.<sup>71</sup> Even when Julian really thought she might be tempted towards despair, she recounts the incident from the position of someone who knows that the devil is trying to ensnare her, and is equally sure that God will not let that happen:

After this the fend came agen with his hete and with his stinke, and made me full besy; the stinke was so vile and so peynfull, and also dredfull and travellous. Also I heard a bodily iangeling as it had be of two bodies, and both, to my thynkyng, ianglyd at one time as if they had holden a parlement with a gret bysynes; and al was soft muttering, as I vnderstode nowte what they seid. And al this was to stirre me to dispeir, as methowte, semand to me as thei scornyd bidding of beds, which arn seid boistrosly with mouth, failing devowte entending and wise diligens the which we owen to God in our prayors. And our lord God gave me grace mytyly for to trosten in him, and to comforten my soule with bodily speech as I shuld have done to another person that had ben travelled.<sup>72</sup>

Watson and Jenkins have likened this passage to Flete’s *Remedy of Temptations*: ‘talking to herself to drown out the stirring of demons, Julian follows a course of action

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<sup>69</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p.54.

<sup>70</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 69, p. 112; ch. 79, p. 127.

<sup>71</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 79, p. 127.

<sup>72</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 69, p. 112.

suggested in *The Remedy*, which recommends that the tempted person “strengthen himselfe and be mery [cheerful], though it be ayenst his herete [not in accordance with how he feels], and drede nothings the fendes malice”<sup>73</sup>. Flete and Julian are clearly advocating similar techniques, but Watson’s reading could be seen on a purely aural level, where noise counters noise. I would argue that both writers are suggesting something more than this, similar to Evagrius’ injunction for the soul to divide itself in two so that one can encourage the other. Julian too imagines a split consciousness which, through the channel of God’s grace, allows her to enact a process of self-soothing so that intrusive and fiendish thoughts can be redirected.<sup>74</sup>

The final time she uses ‘despair’, in chapter eighty, Julian goes a step further than acknowledging that loss of hope and trust in God is a constant temptation, to admitting that hopelessness, along with sin generally, is innate to the human condition:

what tyme I am strange to him be synne, dispeir, or slawth, than I let my lord stonden alone, in as mekill as it is in me; and thus it farith with us all which ben synners’.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike the pastoral literature which strives so hard to protect the laity from inclinations to despair from which they might never recover, Julian acknowledges not only that everyone will sin, but also that despair is highly likely at some point too. Even then however, any worries are allayed through her full trust in God, who she knows will tenderly excuse and shield all sinners from the blame of turning away from Him.<sup>76</sup> As

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<sup>73</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, gloss 9-10, p. 340, citing William Flete, *The Remedy Against the Troubles of Temptations in Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers*, ed. by Carl Horstmann (Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895. Reprinted with two volumes bound as one, and new preface by Anne Clark Bartlett, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 106-23 (p. 116).

<sup>74</sup> See the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 80, p. 129.

<sup>76</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 80, p. 129.

touched on in the introduction to this thesis, the conditions within which Julian was writing meant that reassurance and forgiveness were not always part of the penitential culture, leaving people to deal with the weight of their sins, and God's possible judgement, on their own.<sup>77</sup> By writing in the way she does, particularly in the two examples above, Julian does not lessen the magnitude of one's sins and the continual pain they cause to Christ, but she does give herself and the reader permission to consider themselves and their shortcomings with compassion and friendship. These references to despair near the end of her book make clear that self-kindness is more pleasing to God than repeatedly dwelling on one's sins, and is therefore more likely to lead to ultimate salvation. By doing so however, she does not negate the unflinching details of Christ's sacrifice and the need for all Christians to experience some form of self-abnegation and suffering.

In both *Simple Souls* and Julian's revelations, meekness is the path to finding the divine, but for Julian the will is also constantly required to act consciously by hating sin and wickedness.<sup>78</sup> In *Simple Souls* however, it is the acknowledgement of the soul's own sinful nature which allows it to see and comprehend God clearly so that the only possible next step is self-annihilation. Both texts require sin for ultimate salvation, but Julian always holds a need for active repentance in tension, allowing the possibility of despair to hover at the margins, whereas the ideal reader for *Simple Souls* does not synthesise self-knowledge through human sensibilities or capabilities. The perfect soul recognises herself as being wretched with an emotional detachment; she has not yet

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<sup>77</sup> See the Introduction to this thesis and Pennington, "All the Helth and Life of the Sacraments...I It Am", especially her summary on p. 245; See also Jill Sirko, "Making "Penance Profytable": Julian of Norwich and the Sacrament of Penance", *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41 (2015), 163–86.

<sup>78</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 95.

returned to the divine, but is inevitably drawn to the highest good because there is nowhere else for her to go. The perfect soul derived from nothing before it was anything, and returns to that same nothing without any sense of hurt pride, only the recognition that if she is not yet reabsorbed in the divine, she must still be in a state of sin and wretchedness.<sup>79</sup>

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### 1.3 Towards the abyss

In *Simple Souls*, self-seeing encompasses a hint of the decomposition and fetidness evident in Aelred's self-awareness against his knowledge of God, when he was close to despair.<sup>80</sup> However, as we shall see in the following sections, the perfect simple soul's self-awareness of its sin is a means of joining the positive and negative elements which are essential for the soul to become unified within the divine. The world is condensed to a perfect sine-wave, where the lowest low of the sinful soul, and the highest high of the goodness of God, are joined by a straight, undeviating line, and so directly depend on each other. Together they form a portal of paradox where opposite states are held in tension. As long as this state persists, the soul exists without self-consciousness, and at the sixth stage it is not in a state of 'willed-will-lessness', but in a complete focus of attention away from the self, where nothing created can affect the individual.<sup>81</sup>

As Michael Sells has pointed out, these elements of annihilation, of returning to

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<sup>79</sup> On the soul's return to 'precreated unity' see Joanne Maguire Robinson, 'Marguerite's Mystical Annihilation', in *A Companion to Marguerite Porete and The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ed. by Wendy R. Terry and Robert Stauffer (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 30–58 (p. 46).

<sup>80</sup> 'valde enim intus erat plaga mea, crucians, terrens, et intolerabili fetore omnia interiora mea corrumpens ; et nisi cito admouisses manum non tolerans meipsum, forte pessimum desperationis remedium adhibuissem.' *De Speculum Caritatis*, I ch. 28, section 79, p. 47.

'Very deep within me was my wound, crucifying, terrifying, and corrupting everything within me with an intolerable stench. Had you not quickly stretched out your hand to me, O Lord, unable to endure myself I might perhaps have resorted to the worst remedy of despair', Aelred, *Mirror*, I.28.79, pp. 134-5.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent Gillespie, 'Dead Still/Still Dead', *The Mediaeval Journal*, 1 (2011), 53–78 (p. 62).

the pre-created disembodied soul, and the need for a state of unflinching self-knowledge, were not unique to Porete, but can also be found in the writings of twelfth to fourteenth-century Sufism.<sup>82</sup> This, when mixed with the European and beguin idea of the naked soul being united with her divine lover, is where *Simple Souls* appears to tread new, and to Western Christian clerics, startling ground.<sup>83</sup> And for the reader, the idea of this paradoxical state of self and not-self might be the closest they can get towards the ineffable. It keeps the possibilities for interpretation open and fluid rather than closed and fixed, allowing the mind to consider truths and possibilities that can only exist on a non-material plane. By leaving a space for unmediated belief, which both Julian and MN's *Simple Souls* do, outside of the material and empirical and within the metaphorical, paradoxical and irrational, essential truths can be held, if only for an instant. And scholars have located the essential truth of spiritual despair within *Simple Souls*, usually with reference to either the original French or a Modern English translation of it. The following section goes on to discuss these before further investigating the paradoxical nature of the abyss as the place where the lowest low and highest high are able to meet in mutual acknowledgement and acceptance.

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## 2. Scholarship on despair in *Simple Souls*

In her thesis on Porete's French text and the work of Marguerite d'Oingt, Victoria Matthews asserts that *Simple Souls* 'frequently despairs over the fallen medium of human language as a tool with which to transmit Dame Amour's theology'.<sup>84</sup> This self-

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<sup>82</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 133.

<sup>83</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> Rachel Victoria Matthews, 'The Mystical Utterance and the Metaphorical Mode in the Writings of Marguerite d'Oingt and Marguerite Porete' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2014), pp. 173, 220.

aware and pseudo-Dionysian sense of the ultimate inadequacy of words to fully describe the essence of the free soul is also evident in the Middle English text, but although there may be frustration, this very inability is also used to signify whether the reader is destined to be one of the elite or not. The free, nougthed soul tells Reason that she can understand divine love without making a mistake because she is the same as that divine love.<sup>85</sup> The perfect soul can never put the truth of God into words even if

sche hadde al þe knowinge þat alle þe creatures haue þat ben and schulen be, it is nouzt, seiþ þis soule, as anentes [with respect to] þat þat is, whiche may not be seid.<sup>86</sup>

I would argue that this further strengthens the mystery of the divine state, emphasises the comparative rarity of a free soul even among the intended readers, and is a useful tool to denounce the earthly Church and its views based on reason. The inadequacy and slipperiness of language is both a frustration and a way of stretching meaning beyond the sayable, of opening out meaning and ceding control from the author and wider authorities to the imagination, intuition and faith of the reader touched by grace. It is not, I think, a cause for despair within the parameters of the devotional texts discussed in this thesis, but is instead a cause for hope for a reader who understands that union within the divine abyss can only ever be a mysterious, internal process instigated by grace and their own intuitive connection with language, rather than rational thought and logical explanations.

In a more direct connection with the definitions of despair discussed in this thesis, two other writers have detected a sense of despair at the fifth stage when the soul finally gives up its own will in exchange for God's. Francesca Bussey describes this as 'despair

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<sup>85</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 29.

brought by self-knowledge' as well as the inadequacy of language, and the sixth stage as the soul 'ascending from the 'abyss' of despair and self-knowledge [...] to utter freedom and absorption in God'.<sup>87</sup> Barbara Newman identifies despair in two distinct phases of *Simple Souls*: firstly, she agrees with Bussey that the fifth stage causes the soul to realise that enacting the virtues will never repay God, at which point she repents her prideful state, falls into 'moral despair', and returns to a state of nothingness by 'drowning in the abyss of humility'.<sup>88</sup> These readings on the disturbing effects of self-knowledge correspond with Bernard of Clairvaux's view that when someone is 'brought face to face with themselves, they are forced to see things which fill them with shame [...] they long to be what they are not, and fear that they will never be by their own efforts'.<sup>89</sup> As Snyder has noted, Bernard sees this self-knowledge as the beginning of salvation, but also warns that it can easily turn to despair unless there is an equal knowledge of God.<sup>90</sup> In *Sentences*, Bernard says that the human soul can only experience or think about God 'through her own being' and 'she cannot perceive God except through a mysterious reflection in a mirror' while she is still embodied. The soul can perceive God in the same way it sees itself because it is 'the image and likeness of God'. So if the soul sees itself clearly then it will perceive God in the same way, but 'if the soul is shrouded in fog' and in confusion God will be experienced in confusion too'. So 'God appears holy to one who is holy, and distorted to one who is distorted'.<sup>91</sup> As we shall see, *Simple Souls*'

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<sup>87</sup> Francesca Caroline Bussey, "'The World on the End of a Reed": Marguerite Porete and the Annihilation of an Identity in Medieval and Modern Representations-a Reassessment' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Sydney University, 2007), p. 84.

<sup>88</sup> Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', pp. 627, 619.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'On Humility and Pride', in *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works*, p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> Snyder, 'The Paradox of Despair', p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard, *Sentences*, 3.124, pp. 433-8 (p. 433).



abyss is the means by which both self and divine knowledge are able to occur, but it does not concur with Bernard's view that one should 'look beyond one's own needs to the needs of one's neighbors, and to know how to suffer with them in their troubles' as an antidote to despair.<sup>92</sup>

For the second phase of despair, Newman thinks that what appears to be a biographical account of Porete's own process of annihilation in the epilogue shows her as having been reduced to despair. This is when God asks her to consider whether she could love someone else more than Him; whether He could love someone else more than her; and if someone else could love her more than God does.<sup>93</sup> Newman recounts that Porete's 'wits failed' at this point, but decided that if it were really God's will she would carry out His wishes before completely surrendering her own will and love to Him. For Newman this 'is the closest Marguerite comes to a concrete depiction of how it feels to be annihilated'.<sup>94</sup> In this reading, ceding one's desire and will to another is seen as equal to an act of despair.

In addition to the traditional medievalist scholarship of Bussey and Newman, Porete's theology of annihilation has been used by Susan Shooter as a model for understanding modern-day spiritual experiences and how survivors of abuse – who faced despair in their own lives – subsequently relate to God and the Church. Shooter does not think that Porete herself recommends despair as the route to annihilation, but when explaining the 'evangelistic motive' of one of her interviewees she equates the soul's wretched state in the abyss of humility with a survivor's 'knowledge of the presence and

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<sup>92</sup> Bernard, 'On Humility and Pride', vol. 18, p. 118; See also chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>93</sup> Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', p. 622; Doiron, ed., *De Mirrour of Simple Soules*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>94</sup> Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', p. 622.

love of God [...] experienced in the depths of her despair'.<sup>95</sup> In this instance such wretchedness is a place where God can be encountered and may be one way in which people actually abandon self-will and turn to God.<sup>96</sup> They do this not in recognition of their own evil, as experienced by Porete's soul, but because no other option is open to them in a situation where all their agency and pride has already been taken. Shooter sees *Simple Souls* 'as a theological mirror which reflects in a positive frame the journey the survivors have made on the way home to God', but acknowledgement of total annihilation in God is markedly apparent in those who have experienced complete abjection and loss of all personal power.<sup>97</sup> Crucially, Shooter's emphasis is on the sinned against rather than the sinners described by Porete, an element which becomes more obvious in MN's use of 'wicked', and Colledge *et al*'s use of 'evil' rather than the 'wretched' employed by Babinsky (and used by Shooter), when describing the difference between the self and the divine.

As Porete explains throughout *Simple Souls*, this final step towards annihilation involves giving up all free will as well as every desire, including the ultimate desire to be with God. Again, it is this rejection of will and desire which has caused Bussey and Newman to read despair into the text. Logically, rejecting one's wish for something necessarily means that one has lost hope; as Joseph Pieper put it: 'in despair man actually denies his own desire'.<sup>98</sup> For Pieper, pride is the link which connects despair

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<sup>95</sup> Susan Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God: The Authentic Spirituality of the Annihilated Soul*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, Kindle Edition), p. 147. Shooter uses 'despair' only twice in her book and applies the term 'wretched' to both abuser and abused, but I have referred to her work here as it usefully opens up the wider meanings inherent in the word 'wretched'.

<sup>96</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 147. Shooter uses Babinsky's translation of 'wretchedness'.

<sup>97</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 114.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 52.

and presumption, considering them both as destructive as each other.<sup>99</sup> Although he does not refer to *Simple Souls*, it is an apt interpretation: falling into the abyss of humility could be predicated on the fact that God will be found there, in which case ‘the powdre of pride’ – which MN says does not apply because only true humility can reside in this alternative abyss to sin – might actually still be present.<sup>100</sup> Previously, in *Virile Woman*, Newman described Porete’s ‘self-fulfillment’ in God not as a form of ‘empowerment’ but as a rejection of her own ‘individual ego’, so that ‘the lover and her beloved are no longer two selves, but one’, a state which I would argue allows for pride to dissipate and both forms of despair to be avoided.<sup>101</sup> While Watson does not specify despair as part of Porete’s process, he does identify the paradox that the perfect soul can only become fully aware of God through experiencing the pain of not being with Him, and never being able to get beyond His ineffable nature. For Watson, the pain and absence, the soul’s ‘crippling sense of inferiority’, becomes a sign for God Himself before reaching the fifth stage of peace.<sup>102</sup>

The lack of a label to identify self-knowledge as a state of despair is an indication that there is never any question of losing hope in God’s love because of personal inadequacy or anything else. To be in a state of despair when confronted with the infinite extent of its wickedness, the soul would have to retain a sense of pride and self-centredness when it falls into the abyss, and in *Simple Souls* it does not. It does, however, acknowledge that potentially painful actions are involved in the process

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<sup>99</sup> Pieper, *On Hope*, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 174.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ. Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 159.

<sup>102</sup> Watson, ‘Misrepresenting the Untranslatable’, p. 126.

towards divine unity: the third stage for example is particularly difficult because the ‘creature’ devoted to carrying out ‘werkis of bounte’ has to ‘distroie’ her ‘wille of þe spirit’, something much harder to do than overcoming ‘þe wille of þe body’.<sup>103</sup> Paradoxically, the soul has to use her agency to ‘lede in brekinge hirsilf, for to enlarge þe place þere loue wolde haue his beyng’.<sup>104</sup> The verbs ‘distroie’ and ‘brek’ describe a violent act of dismembering the wholeness of something, but that violence is mitigated by the fact that the soul’s existing ‘whole’ embodied state is in fact warped, and that in breaking itself down in the next following stages it can make more space for God, goodness, and peace. MN appears to have softened the sense of violent agency given in the original French ‘*se esconvient il mouldre en deffroissant et debrisant soy mesmes, pour eslargir lelieu ouquel Amour voudra estre*’.<sup>105</sup> Colledge *et al* have translated this as ‘one must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which Love will want to be’, while Babinsky has ‘it is necessary to be pulverized in breaking and bruising the self in order to enlarge the place where love would want to be’.<sup>106</sup> Colledge *et al*’s imagery enhances the idea of the physical labour required to shape an obdurate object, enhancing the sense of wilful self-destruction of that very embodied will, but it remains clear that the soul has not given up hope in God or its ability to be joined with Him. As wicked as it may be, the soul knows it can reduce the non-divine part of itself in order to increase its capacity to be filled with divine love instead.

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<sup>103</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 171. This will be explored further in chapter five.

<sup>104</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 171. For the French see fn 35, p. 153.

<sup>105</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 322.

<sup>106</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 142; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 190.

As John Arblaster and Rob Faesen have pointed out, this process of hacking and hewing is not a ‘deepening of the divine-human relationship in terms of the pain caused by the human soul’s inadequacy and desire to equal the love received’, which, as we have seen, is at the root of despair. Instead the soul willingly enters into a reciprocal arrangement where lessening itself enables the divine to expand.<sup>107</sup> For Arblaster and Faesen, the ‘soul inflicts this pain upon itself, humbling itself to prepare a place where God would want to dwell’.<sup>108</sup> This sense of humility is perhaps more apparent in Babinsky’s translation where ‘bruising’ indicates a softening up and a wounding, leaving available the possibility that the bruises and broken elements could be healed and knitted together again by divine love, thereby transforming self-will into God’s-will. Whereas Colledge *et al* indicate a cutting off and throwing away of something which is no longer needed. In MN’s version, the ‘brekinge’ to ‘enlarge þe place’ for God can be seen as a generous gesture reflective of the redemptive qualities of Christ’s crucifying wound in His ultimate act of humility. Methley softens this even further to the extent that ‘it is necessary to lead in subjugating [*subigendo*] the self, to enlarge the place where love wants to have its own lodging [*mansionem*]’.<sup>109</sup> *Subigo* can convey a sense of violence, of overcoming and conquering something, but the breaking up can also be used to indicate ploughing and cultivating the earth in preparation for new life, as well as to train and discipline the mind.<sup>110</sup> Methley is therefore replacing the sense of physical self-destruction with a cerebral self-control followed by a rebirth of sorts of God in the soul:

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<sup>107</sup> John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, ‘The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Marguerite Porete: The Seven Manners of Love Revised’, *Citeaux*, 641/1-2 (2013), 41-88. This quote is taken from a pre-publication version downloaded from Academia.ed with different pagination: p.15.

<sup>108</sup> Arblaster and Faesen, ‘The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Marguerite Porete’, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> ‘et sic eam ducere oportet in subigendo seipsam, ad amplificandum locum vbi dileccio suam vellet habere manionem’, Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, vol. 1, p. 121.

<sup>110</sup> *Lewis Short*, *subigo*, I B, II A, II B.

the embodied will is placed in a state of humility and diminished to the smallest extent before it is finally annihilated altogether, and replaced by the Divine in the next stage.

For Newman, this humility is arrived at after an element of self-despair. She does see the soul's annihilation ultimately as a state which 'brings [the soul] peace', but only after 'reflecting on her boundless sins' where,

in tortured humility, she sees that she is the sum of all evils (*la somme de tous maux*) and, in fact, Evil itself (*toute mauvaistié*) [...] by being the greatest of sinners, she becomes an exemplum of divine mercy to all — “the salvation of every creature and the glory of God” (*le salut mesmes de toute creature, et la gloire de Dieu*). Such a Soul has been *abismé en humilité* (*abyssatam in humilitate*).<sup>111</sup>

It is worth looking particularly closely at the language used here. Where the French has '*suis je donc toute mauvaistié, et il est toute bonté*', Colledge *et al* 'I am all evil and he is all good', Babinsky 'I am total wretchedness and he is total goodness', MN has 'I am alle yuelis, and he is al goodness'.<sup>112</sup> In the same section MN goes on to use 'wickidnesse' and Methley follows his lead by using '*iniquitas*' after '*malum*', while Colledge *et al* continue to use 'evil', and Babinsky 'wretched'.

'Wicked' and 'evil' are cognates for each other, 'evil' descending from Old English, and 'wicked' in use from around 1275, with the Old English *wraecca*, the forerunner of 'wretch', being categorised as a name for a morally evil person.<sup>113</sup> It is easy when reading Babinsky's translation, as Shooter does, not to link wretchedness with wickedness, and yet 'wretched' can be used in both a passive and active sense. The first definition of the noun 'wretch' in the *OED* is someone 'driven out of or away from

<sup>111</sup> Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', pp. 619-20.

<sup>112</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, p. 312; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 139; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 187; Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 166.

<sup>113</sup> *The Historical Thesaurus of English*, <<https://ht.ac.uk/category-selection/?qsearch=wretch>> [accessed 29 September 2019].

his native country; a banished person; an exile' which in both Porete's and Julian's theology equates to fallen humankind being separated from the divine. The first meaning for the adjective of 'wretched' is someone 'living in a state of misery, poverty, or degradation; sunk in distress or dejection; very miserable or unhappy'. But a further definition reverses the sense of subject to object and so active agents are of 'base, vile, or unworthy character or quality; contemptible'.<sup>114</sup>

Returning to Shooter's study, her subjects are wretched in the first definitions given above, where lowliness is a route to being reunited with God. Her final contention is that, while a spiritual revelation of God's love and presence is revealed to those who had reached a point of total surrender due to abuse, a similar loss of identity and openness to uncertainty needs to be experienced by those who have not been violated, and especially by those holding structural positions in the Church.<sup>115</sup> The implication however is that such voluntary surrender is not possible for someone whose sense of self-worth has not been destroyed by either external or internal forces.<sup>116</sup> God is not challenging Shooter's subjects in the way Porete relates but is coming to the rescue of the previously disconnected wretched soul. Julian frequently uses the word 'wretched' as an appropriate description of an embodied soul separated from God. Similarly, the wretchedness described in *Simple Souls* does not equate to a state of despair after abuse, but is, as Shooter points out, a sign of the associated 'diminishment of boundaries and the relinquishment of will' required for a transformative event from human self into divine other.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *OED*, wretch, n. and adj. A. n. 1; wretched, adj. 1. a. and 3.a.

<sup>115</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 171.

<sup>116</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 133.

<sup>117</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 171.

Chapter five will further consider the ways in which ‘wretched’, ‘evil’, ‘wicked’ and other associated terms have been used by MN, Julian and other writers, and the extent to which they are imbued with connotations of despair. It will go on to explore through some case studies how MN’s translation of *Simple Souls* treats the concept of the abyss in relation to the soul. Understanding this will help to clarify aspects of the investigation into the semantic reach of despair-related devotional language later in the same chapter. But as it is the abyss which in Newman’s view appears to bring the soul to despair, the next section will consider how the nature of the abyss is an historical paradox and how Julian uses the idea of depth in her writing.

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### 3. The paradox of depth – a place of despair or hope?

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#### 3.1 Abyss – definitions and scholarship

Where Bussey and Newman used the idea of falling into the abyss as a shorthand for despair, I propose a more nuanced approach which takes into account not only the Middle English text itself, but also how other contemporaneous texts use the term to encompass a wider interpretation than the purely negative and morally repugnant abyss of despair.

In order to consider whether the soul is actually in an ‘abyss of despair’ it is necessary to look at how this abyss is presented as well as how the term abyss has been given contradictory meanings, and how the term is rendered in the ME as ‘depnes’. Susan Snyder noted that most images for despair ‘express only the negative side’, but even then, they are ‘mainly redeemable states’ which contain their opposites.<sup>118</sup> And we have seen in the straightforward pastoral advice given by Peraldus that ‘despair is an

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<sup>118</sup> Snyder, ‘The Left Hand of God’, p. 59.



abyss, from which hardly anything or nothing returns'.<sup>119</sup> Both Julian and Porete use a more complex lexicon where profound depth and the bottomless abyss is not solely the negative part of the hope/despair, heaven/hell, salvation/damnation binaries, but is a paradoxical space where both the positive and negative are combined. It is a moral and spiritual location where one's own sin can be seen clearly in the light of God's goodness, a place where one is finally able to realise the essential nothingness of the self. For Porete, the imaginary abyss represents a perfect soul finally free of all human traits from sin to free will, completely subsumed within the divine will. For Julian, the use of depth imagery is much more subtle, but by using it in connection with the agony of Christ's wounds (experienced both by Him and his compassionate lovers), she overtly encompasses the possibility of despair as well as salvation.

Although the route to heaven is also described as a stepped ascent in these texts (as encapsulated in works such as the vernacular *Scale of Perfection* and the ultimate monastic guidance, the *Rule of St Benedict*), for these writers, going down into the depths is, paradoxically, also a form of ascent because it allows the soul to be closer to God through a process of humbling, and ultimately annihilating or noughting, the self. In their analysis of Porete's 'apophatic mountains', Acosta-Garcia and Zamora recognise that the ascent to God is a common trope, and that the unusual descent to the divine is closely related to the idea of humility. For them the soul has to fall downwards in humility until there is nothing left of her self-consciousness, and having completed that descent, she can travel upwards again.<sup>120</sup> They do not, however, equate this fall with any

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<sup>119</sup> Peraldus, *Summa virtutum*, in *Summa virtutum ac vitiorum Guilhelmi Paraldi Episcopi Lugdunensis de ordine predicatorum*, vol. 1 (Paris: Johannes Petit, Johannes Frellon, Franciscus Regnault, 1512), f. 72r.

<sup>120</sup> Pablo Acosta-García and Anna Serra Zamora, 'Apophatic Mountains: Poetics of Image in Marguerite Porete and John of the Cross', *Viator*, 485 (2017), 253–74 (p. 270).

sense of despair, but rather as part of an ongoing path where ‘the notion of ascending and descending, the notion of a path to God and the notion of a gradation of that path’ are useful concepts to ‘teach a process, a rhythm, an effort, and a transformation’.<sup>121</sup>

Scholars have traced this process of annihilation back to Bernard of Clairvaux’s image of the drop of wine in water which ‘seems (*videtur*) to disappear completely’, so that the human part of the soul ‘must, in some ineffable way, liquify and be wholly transfused into the will of God’ but which avoids the heresy of an actual combination of human and divine by the judicious use of ‘*videtur*’.<sup>122</sup> In an expansion of Bernard’s image, women writers from the 1290s such as Mechthild of Hackeborn, Angela of Foligno and Porete use the verb *annihilare* not in its destructive sense, but in a ‘specialized mystical sense’ to denote ‘the merger or disappearance of a soul in God’.<sup>123</sup>

Bernard of Clairvaux also used abyss imagery to refer to the positive, light-filled depths of God as well as the darkness of human sin, but they remain two distinct and opposite abysses rather than one abyss with a dual purpose.<sup>124</sup> Michael Sells notes that Porete even inverts the idea of the Fall, playing with this image so that, having ascended through the first five stages, she falls back into herself at the sixth level, as she becomes truly annihilated.<sup>125</sup> William de St Thierry also wrote about the abyss in his own commentary on the *Song of Songs*. According to McGinn, he thought ‘the first abyss is the present embrace of the soul by the Holy Spirit that calls out for the perfected abyssal

<sup>121</sup> Acosta-García, and Zamora, ‘Apophatic Mountains: Poetics of Image in Marguerite Porete and John of the Cross’, p. 270.

<sup>122</sup> Juan Marin, ‘Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls’, *The Harvard Theological Review*, 103 (2010), 89–109 (p. 94).

<sup>123</sup> Newman, ‘Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s’, p. 599.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Sells, ‘The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: “Unsayings” and Essentialism’ in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. by Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 114–146 (p. 122).

<sup>125</sup> Michael Sells, ‘The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister’, p. 122.

embrace to come in heaven'.<sup>126</sup> The abyss of despair appears at the start of the preface to Thierry's early work *On Contemplating God* where the soul finds mercy in the depths of wretchedness, and finds God within the part of itself that is love:

The hand of Thy just and secret judgments presses down so that I cannot rise. Nowhere in the pit is there any foothold for me to stand on so as to struggle out; there is nothing to seize hold of by which to pull myself out. The pit of hell is as deep as despair. The more of this bog, which is the corruption of nature, always has something wherewith to suck me down, but it has nothing to help me struggle out [...] But, Lord, deep calls unto deep. My deepest wretchedness calls to the unfathomable depth of Thy mercy. I search for some firm ground on which to stand, I look for something to catch hold of, and I find only Thee. Thou art the really firm foothold, for Thou dost subsist in Thyself and everything in turn, has its being from Thee [...] Now the disposition to love is natural to you, and the one you seek is within you if He is in your love. If He is not there, He is not within you at all. But you could not look for Him if you did not love, and so it follows that you have Him and that He dwells with you.<sup>127</sup>

The *MED* defines 'abissus' as the depths of the earth or sea; primordial chaos; and hell. The *OED* defines 'abyss' as 'the primal formless chaos out of which the earth and the heavens were created'; the 'vast subterranean body of water, source of terrestrial water and the flood in the Hebrew Old Testament'; and in the thirteenth-century Latin Vulgate it denotes the depths of wisdom, sin and grief.<sup>128</sup> Bernard McGinn has pointed out the use of the language of the abyss within the Latin Vulgate bible to denote both

<sup>126</sup> Bernard McGinn, 'Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism', *Franciscan Studies*, 72 (2014), 433–52 (p. 436).

<sup>127</sup> William de St Thierry, *On Contemplating God*, trans. by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (Akenside Press, online edition, 2017) <[http://akensidepress.com/books/william/on\\_contemplating\\_god/preface/](http://akensidepress.com/books/william/on_contemplating_god/preface/)> [accessed 20 August 2020], verses 1 and 2; 'Posuisti super me manum justī et occultī iudicīi tui, prementem super me, ne resurgam. Nec in lacu, nec in luto, nec in limo substantiam, Domine, invenio, cui innitar ut exeam, quam apprehendam ut extrahar. Lacus inferni non habet fundum, [Col.0365B] nisi desperationis profundum. Lutum faecis, corruptio naturae quo semper mergar, habet; per quod resurgam, non habet... Sed, o Domine, abyssus abyssum invocat: abyssus profundissimae miseriae meae abyssum altissimae misericordiae tuae. Quaerens substantiam cui innitar, quam apprehendam, nullam usquam invenio nisi te, qui vere certa et solida es substantia, non nisi ex te ipso subsistens, a quo etiam quae sunt, omnia habent esse... Amoris affectus in te naturaliter est. Quem quaeris, si in amore tuo est, in te est: si ibi non est, in te non est. Sed quem quaeris, non quaereris, si non amares. Habes ergo quem quaeris, et penes te est. Sed non eo frueris, nisi ego tecum tota adsim', Guillelmi Abbatis Sancti Theoderici Prope Remos, Postea Monachi Signiacensis *Tractatus de Contemplando Deo* in *PL* vol. 218, 233 Prooemium, Col. 0365A-0366A.

<sup>128</sup> *OED*, abyss, n., 1a and b.

heaven and hell. Derived from the ‘Greek a-byssos, without ground’, generally used in regard to the ‘underworld, or the abode of the dead’, the Vulgate translators used it several times with reference to God.<sup>129</sup> Among others, McGinn cites Psalm 103:6 where God is described as having ‘*abyssus sicut vestimentum amictus ejus*’ (the deep like a garment is its clothing), and in particular 41:8 where, as Thierry quotes, ‘abyss calls out to abyss in the voice of your cataracts’.<sup>130</sup> For McGinn, there are similarities with Porete's French *Simple Souls* when the soul is ‘in the abyss of humility’ from where in chapter 118 God can ‘see himself in her, for her, without her’, and also ‘himself in the vanished abyss of the soul’.<sup>131</sup> This is a place where the two abysses, the one divine, the other human, can merge together, where, after ‘the divine abyss calls out the abyssed soul’ they ‘become one with God’s own seeing’.<sup>132</sup> McGinn’s view is that abyss language is extensively used in mystical writing in two principle ways: to refer to the unknowableness of the divine; and as a means of signifying the relationship between the hidden depths of the divine and human entities which combine to become one simple abyss.<sup>133</sup>

For John Trevisa’s translation *On the Properties of Things*, *abissus* was God’s source material for creation:

‘þe primordial and firste matere, [...] þat bodilich þing þat god made to be matere of bodilich þinges, and þat mater was withoute ordre and wipoute lizte,

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<sup>129</sup> McGinn, ‘Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism’, pp. 434-5; McGinn, ‘The Abyss of Love: The Language of Mystical Union among Medieval Women’, pp. 95-6.

<sup>130</sup> Douay Rheimes; McGinn, ‘Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism’, pp. 434-5; McGinn, ‘The Abyss of Love: The Language of Mystical Union among Medieval Women’, pp. 95-6.

<sup>131</sup> McGinn, ‘The Abyss of Love: The Language of Mystical Union among Medieval Women’, p. 442.

<sup>132</sup> McGinn, ‘Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism’, pp. 433–52, 442, quoting from chapter 118 in Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*.

<sup>133</sup> McGinn, ‘Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism’, p. 452.

and so Abissus is þat [...] materia prima'.<sup>134</sup>

An Old English Homily of around 950, the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Thomas*, uses 'deepness' to gloss *abyssus* in a passage describing the first heaven:

þonne is þære dura nama þæs forman heofones Abyssus haten, þæt is, 'deopnis'.<sup>135</sup>

[the name of the door of the first heaven, then, is called Abyssus, that is, 'depth'].

The Homily is an example of heaven having seven parts, some of which are hell-like, with fiery furnaces and deep, treacherous streams, and which separate the sinful from the faithful, who pass through the painful terrain 'in a twinkling of an eye'.<sup>136</sup> This reflects the declaration in *Simple Souls* that the soul's journey through her seven stages are full of difficulty, and that the truly simple soul will understand her text intuitively, without struggle. The use of 'depth' as a cognate for a form of heaven (albeit as a chaos of precreation), as well as hell, was therefore clearly in use in English vernacular texts before MN was translating *Simple Souls*. This indicates that he was writing at a time when the Englished 'abyss' had not yet been absorbed into the vernacular. *Deopnes* continues in use until around 1502, with *abysm* occurring from 1495 onwards and the modern 'abyss' not until 1619.<sup>137</sup>

From these examples so far 'abyss' has three connotations: the depths of hell, damnation, and moral corruption; the primordial depths, the sea of chaos before creation

<sup>134</sup> *MED*, abissus, n. a, b, c; *John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum, a Critical Text*, ed. by M. C. Seymour, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 vols. 1 and 2; vol. 3, 1988), 156b/a as cited in the *MED*.

<sup>135</sup> Nicole Volmering, 'The Old English account of the Seven Heavens', in *The end and beyond: medieval Irish eschatology*, ed. by John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2014), pp. 285–306 (pp. 296, 298–9).

<sup>136</sup> Volmering, *The Old English account of the Seven Heavens*, p. 298.

<sup>137</sup> *Historical Thesaurus of Old English*, Hole/pit, 12. Abyss <<https://ht.ac.uk/category/?type=search&qsearch=deepness&page=1#id=775>> [accessed 27 March 2019].

in the light of a rational God; and the depth of God, paradoxically the height of moral goodness, as well as a symbol of divine omniscience. In addition to the more usual indication of hell and damnation then, Porete's use of 'abyss', and MN's 'depth' also refer to a state of heavenliness, the endless depths of God's love, and the depths of one's own soul – a recognition of which is the only route to God. A shallow understanding of the self must result in the unsatisfactory life of the 'lost' who can only attain the first level of grace because they are too focused on their own good works.<sup>138</sup>

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### 3.2 Julian and the depths of Christ's wounds

There is no chasm in Julian's paradox of high and low for the reader to visualise the sinful soul's exposure to the light of divine goodness. In the much-discussed chapter fifty-one however, a lord's loving servant falls into a *slade*, a valley or low-lying ground, possibly a pit, from which he cannot get up.<sup>139</sup> Julian describes the injuries to the servant's body, and the fact that he was 'blinded in his reason and stonyed in his mend so ferforth that almost he had forgotten his owne lufe', languishing with no possible help in sight.<sup>140</sup> What is particularly intriguing to Julian is that he fell not through any failing on his part, but because of his 'good will and his grete desire'.<sup>141</sup> Before the vision disappears, Julian notes that

in this an inward gostly shewing of the lords menyng descendid into my soule, in which I saw that it behovith neds to ben, stonyng his grete and his own worship, that his dereworthy servant which he lovid so mech shuld ben verily and blisfully rewardid without end aboven that he shuld a ben if he had not fallen; ya, and so ferforth [to this extent] that his fallyng and his wo that he hath taken therby shall

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<sup>138</sup> For more on this see chapters four and 5 of this thesis.

<sup>139</sup> *MED*, slade n. 1 a.

<sup>140</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 51, pp. 72-3.

<sup>141</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 51, p. 73.

be turnyd into hey and overpassing worship and endles blis.<sup>142</sup>

In one interpretation, the servant's fall is equal to falling into the abyss of despair, and his loss of discernment, together with his bewildered or frightened state (indicated by Julian's use of 'blinded' and 'stonyd') does lend credence to that reading.<sup>143</sup> It appears to me however that this fall, while a metaphor for Adam's fall, as Julian goes on to discuss, is also comparable with the soul in *Simple Souls* when she relinquishes her will and falls into the abyss. As we shall see in the following chapter, the perfect soul had to fall into the abyss in order to be reunited with the divine. And in Julian's example the servant will find a greater, endless bliss precisely because he has fallen through love, the only essence remaining for the annihilated soul. Whilst this episode acknowledges how easily someone might partially forget their love and trust in God, Julian does not overtly use the vision as a lesson in despair, possibly because she talks directly about it elsewhere. Nevertheless, for the reader this connection is certainly available.

Julian does specifically use the terminology and imagery of depth later in the text with regard to the reader's relationship with Christ's wounds. She is clear that the virtues, combined with divine grace and mercy, are the elements needed for the soul to become filled with humility. In chapter fifty-six Julian's soul does not see itself as wretched in comparison with God. She does not make a distinction between internalising the virtues and consciously enacting them in the way that Porete does, but keeps the reader focused on their living reality by assuring them that the virtues of 'mekehede, myldhede, patiens, and pite, and hatyng of synne and wickidnes' will allow them to

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<sup>142</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 51, p. 73; *MED*, fer-forth adv. 1.

<sup>143</sup> For further discussion on this see Kisha G. Tracy, 'Julian of Norwich and the Sin of Forgetfulness', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41 (2015), 148–62 (p. 150) and Pennington, 'All the helth and life of the sacraments', ch. 3, pp. 145–222; *MED*, blinden v 2 a and b; stonen v.(2) 1 c and d.

receive God's grace.<sup>144</sup> When Julian links the 'hey fader' with His 'depe charitie', she makes a metaphorical connection between the lowest level the soul can reach through humility and self-abnegation, and the furthest location that Christ's endless love can be found: down in the depths of humanity, at the brink of hell.<sup>145</sup> Julian emphasises the transformative power of grace and mercy in such a place by alluding to divine sensibilities, with 'depe charity' being a sign of intense emotion of the 'moderhede in God'.<sup>146</sup>

The 'higher beholding' keeps us in 'gostly solace and trew enioing in God', while the lower ensures that the love of God is tempered by dread and 'makith us ashamyd of ourself'.<sup>147</sup> The main emphasis, however, should always be on the higher where we will eventually 'ben fulfillid of joy and bliss without end'.<sup>148</sup> Paradoxically, the depths of Christ's wounds ensure this higher focus:

After this I saw, beholding, the body plentiously bleding in seming of the scorgyng, as thus: the faire skynne was brokyn ful depe in the tender flesh with sharpe smyting al about the sweete body; so plenteously the hote blode ran oute that there was neither sene skynne ne wound, but as it were al blode.<sup>149</sup>

The deeper the wound the more saving blood, grace and redemption there is. In the short text Julian describes Christ's death, paying attention as the 'fleshe turnede mare deepe dede' and his lips changed as the 'deepe dying' progressed. She puts particular focus on the physical change of his flesh, thinking that 'the dryinge of Cristes fleshe was the

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<sup>144</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 96.

<sup>145</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 96.

<sup>146</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 96; See *MED*, dep(e) adv. 5.

<sup>147</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 82, p. 131.

<sup>148</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 82, p. 132.

<sup>149</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 12, p. 19.



maste paine of his passion and the laste'.<sup>150</sup> Later in the long text, Julian gestures towards falling towards despair when she notes that she, together with the reader, might be lacking in enough 'sekir troste' in God to the extent that we are 'as barren and dry oftentimes after our prayors as we wer afor'.<sup>151</sup> She then indirectly circles back to Christ's dry dying and the fact that it was not a sign of God's neglect, but of his saving love, by relating God's own exhortation that prayers in 'dryhede and in barrenhede' are 'wele pleasant' to him even though 'thy thynkyth it savowr the nowte but lital'.<sup>152</sup> The dual process of remembering his Passion and goodness and of 'enjoying and thankyng inwardly', especially when the heart is dry and cannot feel the divine, will quicken the heart so that it can be open to God's grace.<sup>153</sup> This goes with an understanding that God is the progenitor of those prayers, that our will should be His, and that the point of them is to 'be onyd and lyk to our lord in althyng'.<sup>154</sup> The repetitive use of dryness with the suggestion that prayers seem useless when there is no obvious 'sensible' effect echoes Psalm 101 when the poet's 'bones are grown dry like fuel for the fire' (*ossa mea sicut cremium aruerunt*) when he 'forgot to eat his bread' (*oblitus sum comedere panem meum*) and so further ossified that dryness because it was not nourished by trusting in God's love and mercy.<sup>155</sup>

At various points Julian tells the reader that God is already working within them and that we need only to look 'into our owen soule where our lord wonnyth (dwells)'.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 35.

<sup>151</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56.

<sup>152</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56.

<sup>153</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56.

<sup>154</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56; ch. 42, p. 58.

<sup>155</sup> Psalm 101: 4-5, <<http://www.drbo.org/drl/chapter/21101.htm>> [accessed 15 August 2020].

<sup>156</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56; ch. 62, p. 102; *MED*, *wonen* v. (1) 1 a.

Earlier in her revelations, Julian counsels the reader to regard the soul as a separate entity which we need to love as God does, thereby indicating that it is not of a fleshly, sinful nature, but has a quality of, and belongs to, the divine rather than ourselves.<sup>157</sup> This sense of an internalised God separate from Holy Church and integral to the self has overtones of *Simple Souls*' nougthed self melting into God from the fifth stages onwards, albeit that Julian's soul always retains a separate will and consciousness, even when it is united with God, because it always needs to remain busy, continuing to pray and long for Him. The paradox is that we should find it easier to know God than our own soul because the soul is so 'deepe grounded in God' while at the same time we need to know Him, the maker, to whom we are still 'onyd' before we can truly know ourselves.<sup>158</sup> In order to do this, we need to be constantly longing and carrying out penance until we are led so deeply into God where God himself leads us until we reach the high deepness, which is 'the same love that he bowte us be mercy and grace throw virtue of his passion'.<sup>159</sup> This 'hey depnes' corresponds with *Simple Souls*' 'deepnes of mekenes' where the soul falls into the divine, falling upwards, and there is correspondence again when in the long text 'we may never come to full knowyng of God till we know first clerely our own soul', and we cannot be 'ful holy' until we do.<sup>160</sup> When we do fully understand our own soul we will then reap the 'profitts of our tribulation that our lord shall make us to gettyn be mercy and grace' gained by 'the virtue of Christ's passion'.<sup>161</sup> This takes us back to the naturalness of pain and suffering, that we cannot suffer more

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<sup>157</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 41, p. 56; ch. 40, p. 56.

<sup>158</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 56, p. 89.

<sup>159</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 56, p. 90.

<sup>160</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 56, p. 90.

<sup>161</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 56, p. 90.

than Christ, and that the depths of God into which we want to be immersed, and the means of getting there, are thoroughly interconnected and entwined with the ‘depe-dying’ and deep wounds of Christ during his Passion. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Porete also requires the soul to see itself in its wretched state, but first the soul must visualise itself as disconnected from God in the darkness of the abyss, before it can fully see and appreciate the light of God with whom it wants to be reunited.

## Chapter 5: Exploring the Language of Despair

As discussed in the introduction to part two, this chapter looks in more detail at how Middle English writers use language as a part of their devotional method, deploying it in creative ways so as to meet their own needs and agenda. It also considers how the reader might creatively interpret the text, independently of authorial intention, and sometimes with reference to the paratext which indicates some versions have been written for different purposes. By looking at some of the lexical fields, together with how they are presented on the page, this chapter therefore demonstrates how readers might have had difficulty even with a carefully crafted text.

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### 1. Porete, MN, and the abyss – case studies

This section follows on from chapter four's exploration of the abyss to examine some excerpts from the Middle English *Simple Souls* concerning 'the deep'. It looks at the possible referents available in the Middle English, as well as how it and other translations compare with the French. An aspect relevant to my analysis is Chantal Phan's point that the French texts could sometimes present their contemporary reader with difficulties because the 'grammatical structures of negation' found in Old French are different to those in Middle French.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Porete's text was being written at a time when these structures were still in flux has consequences for MN's translation, and therefore potentially for his readers' understanding of God's treatment of those close to despair.

#### **Excerpt One**

In the first excerpt the soul explains that she has neglected God and therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Phan, 'Translating Annihilation', p. 72.

dwells in darkness:

O lattest loued in alle momentis for me. O curteis wipouten mesure, þis owiþ me wel seme, seiþ þis soule, whanne þe wole mekeli suffre. O Lord, ze wole suffre more gladli and mekeli þan eny creature may seie it, notwipstandinge my desertis þat ben wipoute nombre and wipoute recoueringe of þis losse, for mercy þat is in zou, for it bihoueþ zou to kepe zoure riztwisnesse. It may not be þat tyme ylost may euere be zolden, and as ofte as I haue aloynged [Amherst: absteyned, f. 167r] me or wipdrawe me zou to loue and knowe, laude and þanke, so many momentis of tyme I haue ben ydel, and in þese greete defautes I am ynne yfalle. O Lord, I am a depnesse of derknesse, and in þis derknesse ze wole putte so in me ne dwelliþ þe zifte of þat grace þat loue us haþ deuysed.<sup>2</sup>

There are several factors in this short section which raise questions.<sup>3</sup> Key elements of concern are: i) whether the lost time is gone forever; ii) whether God's grace can be given even when one is in the 'derknesse'; and iii) whether the soul herself is a 'depnesse of derknesse'. What might the difference be in effect on the reader between MS SJC C. 21's 'in þis derknesse ze wole putte so in me' and Amherst's 'in this darknesse ze wille putte so me in'?<sup>4</sup>

#### **i) Whether the lost time is gone forever**

For Kirchberger, MN's 'it may not be þat tyme ylost may euere be zolden' reads that 'it may not be that time lost may ever be regained'.<sup>5</sup> For Colledge *et al*, the French '*pourtant ne se peut il faire que le temps perdu me soit jamais rendu*', becomes 'it cannot be that this lost time will ever be restored to me' which agrees with Kirchberger,

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<sup>2</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 166; This passage in SJC SC. 21 has been marked up by the *quere* annotator next to the lines 'þat ben wipoute nombre' and 'in þis derknesse ze wole putte so in me'; and by the trefoil annotator, with three of them against the two lines 'bihoueþ zou to kepe zoure riztwisnesse. It may not be þat tyme ylost may euere be zolden'.

<sup>3</sup> Doiron notes that MN's translation of 'abysme de toute pouvrete' as 'a depnesse of derknesse' instead of 'abyss of poverty' is 'very interesting' but, beyond implying that the two are cognates for each other, she does not expand on why this is the case. Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Amherst, f. 167r.

<sup>5</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 62.

and both Latin versions.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Babinsky translates the French with a double negative to arrive at the positive of Modern English rather than the intensified negative of Middle English and French: ‘it cannot be that the lost time might never be returned to me’, implying a trust in God’s forgiveness for the Soul’s time spent elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> This sort of certainty, that God will forgive someone who turns away from Him, is very similar to the trust Julian expresses in chapter eighty of her long text when she says He will excuse all sinners from blame of despair or sloth.<sup>8</sup> There might therefore be a disposition on Babinsky’s part to want to find that same compassionate God in Porete’s text.

Crucially for the Medieval English reader however, Kirchberger has rendered ‘golden’ as regained, but the primary definitions in the *MED* are ‘to relinquish’ and ‘surrender’, while the idea of restoration is relegated to the fourth meaning.<sup>9</sup> Readers could therefore decode MN’s text as ‘it may not be that time lost may be forever surrendered’. They could decide that the time spent away from God does not necessarily entail dire consequences, and that it is never too late to turn towards Him, even after long periods of abandonment. Alternatively, there is still the possibility that the reader might respond by edging further towards despair, in the thought that time spent away from God, and therefore in wickedness and sinfulness, is unforgivable. Or of course the two meanings could be held in tension, with the reader able to consider the possibilities of both outcomes, a tension which is central to the Christian dichotomy of having to

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<sup>6</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 38, p. 58; ‘quia esse non potest quod tempus perditum mihi unquam reddatur’, Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum simplicium animarum*, ed., p. 123; ‘fieri non potest quod tempus perditum reddi possit’, Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Chantal Phan has noted that the instability of grammar between Old and Middle French results in ‘some cases [where] the presence of the pre verbal *ne* clarifies the meaning and in others where it causes confusion’, Phan, ‘Translating Annihilation’, p. 78; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> *MED*, yelden v. 1a (a); 1b (b); 4a.

balance God's judgement with His forgiveness.

**ii) Whether God's grace can be given even when one is in the 'derknesse'**

In the following clause the Soul goes on to berate herself for the amount of time spent 'aloynged' or turned away from God, even though she has spent as much time in efforts 'to loue and knowe, laude and panke' Him.<sup>10</sup> This combination of actions is at the core of Julian's long text where 'feythfully knowing his everlasting love, him thanking and prayseing' is the salve for seeing one's own sin.<sup>11</sup> For MN, this estrangement from God leads to the Soul becoming 'a depnesse of derknesse' herself, as well as being put in a place of darkness by God where there are no gifts of grace. Methley maintains the sense of darkness by using the noun *tenebra*, and while Colledge *et al* agree that the Soul is herself an abyss, and not that God has put her in there, they translate the French *pouveté* using the direct equivalent, 'poverty'. Colledge *et al* also maintain the idea that God is willing to put His grace within the soul's abyss as long as the soul does not offer any resistance.<sup>12</sup> For Babinsky however, the soul is 'in the abyss of total poverty', rather than being the abyss herself, and God has 'willed to place the gift' of grace there freely, without any mention of resistance.<sup>13</sup>

Both Kirchberger and Methley have either read MN's excerpt of this passage in the way that makes most doctrinal sense to them, or Methley was translating from a version similar to MS SJC C. 21 rather than Amherst. In addition, the differences

<sup>10</sup> *MED*, *aloinen* v. 1 (a) to remove; 1 (c) *aloined*, estranged; 2 (c) be far away or distant.

<sup>11</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 82, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> 'And nonetheless, it is into this abyss of poverty that you are willing to put, If I do not offer any resistance, the gift of that grace which you have described above', Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 38, p. 58; 'Et neantmoins en telle abysme de pouveté vous voulez mettre, se en moy ne tient, le don de telle grace que vous avez dessus devisee', Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 38, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 118.

between the two could be a product of the scribes' own doctrinal understanding as well as an unconscious action of transposing the text. For Kirchberger, MN's slightly confusing line 'and in þis derknesse ze wole putte so in me ne dwelliþ þe zifte of þat grace þat loue us haþ deuysed' becomes 'and in this darkness you will put me in, there dwell not the gifts of that grace of which love hath devised us'.<sup>14</sup> In this reading, God is putting the soul in either despair or hell, the two places where, according to the vices and virtues schema, grace cannot be found. In the next sentence however, there is a return to the Augustinian doctrine that in order to be damned the soul has to actively turn away from the proffered grace. In this passage the soul has spent too much time being 'ydel' so that 'in þis greete defautes I am ynne yfalle'.<sup>15</sup> In Methley's translation, this requirement is made more explicit, making it clear that God will put the soul into the abyss Himself if grace cannot endure there, and therefore implying that the soul retains some agency to accept or refuse God's grace.<sup>16</sup> By maintaining the passive voice, Methley is less emphatic than Colledge *et al*'s phrase that the soul must not 'offer any resistance', which squarely places the onus on the soul to be actively receptive to God's grace.<sup>17</sup>

In his *Confessions*, Augustine pours out his soul in praise of God only to find that he is still 'sad because it slips back and becomes a 'deep', or rather feels itself still to be a deep' – that he has not yet climbed out of the natural state of deep darkness decreed by

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<sup>14</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 70; Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 62, she notes that *deviser* is Old French for to recount or narrate.

<sup>15</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> 'in hacque abisso me ponere vultis; sic in me non manent dona huius gracie quam dileccio descripsit nobis' [and in this abyss you wish to put me, if in me there remains no gifts of this grace that love described to us], Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, vol. 1, ch. 63, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 38, p. 58.



his sinful nature.<sup>18</sup> He knows God is there, but His light has not yet reached into the depth of Augustine's sinful state. As we saw in the monastic contemplative literature, writers varied on whether God would pull someone out of despair itself or only pull them away from the brink. For Bernard, when addressing the spiritually mature, God was likely to 'win back the pusillanimous soul from the abyss of despair [...] with the sweet caress of his faithful promise', whereas for Aelred it was important that God rescued him before he fell into despair.<sup>19</sup> The implication here is that Aelred is afraid that despair is a final turning away from God, and that once there the divine will never be able to reach him.

### iii) Whether the soul herself is a 'depnesse of derknesse'

As we have seen, *depnesse* can be cognate with the abyss as both the depths of hell and the unending extent of the divine, but MN's use of 'depnesse of derknesse' to translate 'abyssme de toute pouvreté' requires further investigation, as does the continental Latin text's use of *diluuium*, or flood, of poverty.<sup>20</sup> Colledge *et al* translate the phrase as 'abyss of utter poverty', and Babinsky similarly as the 'abyss of total poverty'.<sup>21</sup>

The French *pouvreté* literally translates as misery, and the *OED* glosses poverty as destitute as well as with reference to Matthew 5:3 where poverty is reason to rejoice:

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<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 281.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard, *Song*, 11.2, p. 70; 'non tolerans meipsum, forte pessimum desperationis remedium adhibuissem'. Had you not quickly stretched out your hand to me, O Lord, unable to endure myself I might perhaps have resorted to the worst remedy of despair, Aelred, *Mirror*, I.28.79, pp. 134-5. For further discussion on this see chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 166; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 38, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 38, p. 58; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 38, p. 118.

‘blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.<sup>22</sup> The Middle English poem *Patience* glosses this verse and the next to emphasise that happiness, rather than misery, and ultimate riches in heaven will result from poverty:

Thay arn happen that han in hert pouerté, / For hores is the heuencyche to holde  
for ever. / Thay ar happen [fortunate, blessed] also that haunte [practice the virtue  
of] mekenesse, / For thay schall welde [rule] this worlde and alle her wylle  
have.<sup>23</sup>

The abyss of poverty in these terms is clearly taking the soul towards the light, a direction which is extinguished by MN’s decision to translate it as *derknesse*. In a more straightforward use of poverty as the opposite of wealth, albeit in spiritual terms, MN does provide the English poverty, which indicates a deliberate alteration, and understanding of the general sense, of the above passage.<sup>24</sup>

It may be that MN chose *derknesse* instead of poverty for its alliteration, or to ensure that the reader did not associate it with the poverty of spirit which does lead to humility and the divine – Aquinas, for example, argues that poverty of spirit relates to submitting oneself to God.<sup>25</sup> Equally however, the use of *derknesse*, with its connotations of spiritual and moral lack, of sin and despair, underscores the dangers of being departed from God.<sup>26</sup> In the *Parson’s Prologue and Tale*, Chaucer has Job refer to hell as ‘the lond of derknesse’ where ‘the derknesse of deeth been the synnes that the

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<sup>22</sup> Search the *OED* for ‘poor’ however, and the first meaning is ‘mentally or morally inferior’, and ‘lacking in courage and spirit’ *OED*, poor, adj. and n.1. 2c.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Patience’ in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. by J. J. Anderson (London: Everyman, reprint 2004), p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> ‘þe tone of þese potentis þat þis soule restiþ on to kepe hir from hir enemyes is þat sche kepþ þa ziftes of hir richesse, þat is, þe uerrei knowinge þat sche haþ of þe pouert of hirsalf. þis is þe lift potente, þe whiche sche leeneþ on alwei at alle tymes. þis is to hir a greet strangle’, Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Respondeo dicendum quod timori proprie respondet paupertas spiritus... Cum enim ad timorem filialem pertineat Deo reverentiam exhibere et ei subditum esse, id quod ex huiusmodi subiectione consequitur pertinet ad donum timoris.’ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II<sup>a</sup>-IIae q. 19 a. 12 co.

<sup>26</sup> *MED*, derknes(se n. 3b., 4., 6.

wrecched man hath doon, whiche that destourben hym to see the face of God'.<sup>27</sup> By retaining the term *derkness* in the sentence 'in þis derknesse 3e wole putte so in me ne dwellip þe zifte of þat grace', MN therefore strengthens the connotations of hell and despair.<sup>28</sup> However, it is useful to now read these passages alongside *Simple Souls*' textual neighbour in Amherst, *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* (hereafter *Treatise of Perfection*) where all references to depth and associated darkness are positive.<sup>29</sup>

Like *Simple Souls*, *Treatise of Perfection* too describes a union with God, but there are some distinct differences. When talking about being joined with God's love, the English translator includes the reader in a charge

to grouwnde oure lyfe vpon a profounde depenesse; and so we maye in euerlastyng loue drowne, and alle of oure selfe into inserchable depnesse be drown(d)e, in þe whiche loue we schall be alterate into ane incomprehensible heyght. And also with that loue whiche is wantyng maner we schalle grope, and it schalle lede vs and bryng vs agayne into the gate of the incomprehensible depnesse of charite, in the whiche we schalle flowe frome oureselfe, and flow(e) agayne in vnknawyn swetnesses thorowe the spirit of the goodnes of god, in the whiche we schalle be made liqued and stable euerlastyngly be the ioie of god.<sup>30</sup>

The watery depths signify the soul being overcome by a more powerful natural force, depriving it of all agency and imposing total submission. It also alludes to the idea that once something is immersed in water it will eventually change state, becoming part of the larger whole. Amongst all this water, the idea of grounding is important, and often

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<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Pardoner's Tale' in *The Riverside Chaucer third edition, with a new foreword by Christopher Cannon*, ed. by F. N. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 291.

<sup>28</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> Amherst, ff 115r-130r; Michael Sargent has noted that Ruusbroec's texts were a favourite of the Carthusians. See Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings', p. 227. See also chapter three, section 5 of this thesis on Textual Policing for a discussion of *Treatise of Perfection* in relation to *Simple Souls*.

<sup>30</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 233; See also Cré, 'We are united with God (and God with us?)', pp. 29-31.

occurs in Julian where, for example, Christ is the ‘ground of al our hole life in love’<sup>31</sup>. It can mean the foundations of something, to ‘set on a firm basis’, and yet in *Treatise of Perfection* there is the paradox of firmly placing one’s love in a deep chasm which is not firm or stable, but a bottomless, liquid-like substance in which the reader’s love can be indistinguishably dissolved.<sup>32</sup> It is this very instability, the ineffable nature of the divine, which is the only means by which the soul can ever achieve true stability.

A few verses later in *Treatise of Perfection*, the self is aware of ‘the Spirit of god of oure self’ above, which is drawing the self towards it until it becomes nothing within Christ.<sup>33</sup> Having soared so high, the self is then in a position to see the

insaable [unsayable/indescribable] depnesse of alle goodness and of euerlastynge lyfe, in the whyche taste we are made wyde, owtetake þat resoun passes into þe most depe vnmeuable euerlastynge rystfulnesse of dyuynyte. Of the whiche the verre trewthe allonlye teches experience; for whore, howe or whate it is, nowþer resoun ne exercyse may serche or knowe.<sup>34</sup>

There are similarities with *Simple Souls* in the idea of a direct connection with God rather than through the Church, and that reason can neither illuminate nor articulate His essential truth. But like Julian, reason is retained right up until the point of unity, rooting and routing the reader back to doctrine. The way in which *Treatise of Perfection* draws towards a joint annihilation with Christ is however arguably less traumatic than both *Simple Souls*’ and Julian’s accounts, where, as we shall see below, the soul has to confront its own wretchedness first.

In *Treatise of Perfection*, there follows an apophatic reference to God as the ‘hye dyrknesse [...] with oute ende’. This links the metaphors of height and depth, while

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<sup>31</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 39, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> *OED*, ground v. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 247.

<sup>34</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 247.

leaving no room for the moral associations of either depth or darkness with despair, damnation or death. The depths into which the narrator of *Treatise of Perfection* is taken is the 'kynges' cellar. It is a vast space where things can be hidden, and so it is an appropriate name for the 'depe derkness of the loue of god'.<sup>35</sup> *Treatise of Perfection* also uses pseudo-Dionysian thought in that although 'the derknessys of god be comforth with alle lyghtes' these lights are hidden from us even when we are blissfully united with God.<sup>36</sup> This is when 'we fele vs sunken into ane infynyte depnesse of oure euerlastynge happenesse' which can only be experienced when 'we are lyfte vp into the hiest felynge than we be raveste'.<sup>37</sup> In a reversal of the *Simple Souls*' figure of God's light only being available from the bottom of the abyss, here, the everlasting bliss is of infinite deepness, and can only be experienced when lifted by strength of feeling. Again, this opposes *Simple Souls*' premise in that in *Treatise of Perfection*, the retention of the senses, and of emotion, is important.

Like Julian's requirement for constant desire and the ultimate inability to comprehend God fully, the will is important in *Treatise of Perfection* too since as the

devourynge appetyte of oure desyre synkis in to hym the more we desyre to taste and the more that we be made depe and thyrld [pierced/diffused] be loue the more clerely we knowe the incomprehensible swetnesse of god to be infynyte.<sup>38</sup>

But this is not the highest state the soul can reach, greater still is clarity of God after death, but before then the shade of sin occludes it from the full sight of, and inclusion within, the divine.<sup>39</sup> Again, this is in opposition to *Simple Souls* where recognition of

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<sup>35</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 248.

<sup>36</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 248.

<sup>37</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 249.

<sup>38</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 251; *MED*, thirlen v. 1. (a), 2 (b).

<sup>39</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 252.

one's own sin takes one closer to God, and for Julian, sins are both a cause for wretchedness, and a form of worship to God when repented. In *Treatise of Perfection*, the soul has a 'devouring appetite' for God's love, which it wants because it tastes good and provides nourishment. Therefore the will is associated with hunger and the needs of the body, the visceral crossed with the spiritual. Conversely, God also becomes a flowing river of love which makes a channel in the self, getting deeper and deeper over time, until we are permeated with it. At this point, even though we know that God is infinite and ineffable, we cannot fully grasp His essence even though we are filled with His love, precisely because it is so vast. The idea of the river carving away parts of the self to make room for God is similar to the description of parts of the soul being cut away in *Simple Souls* as discussed in chapter four of this thesis. In *Treatise of Perfection* however, it is God who carves out His own space within the soul, rather than the soul having to carve away at itself.

### Excerpt Two

Excerpt Two relates to the fifth stage towards perfection where the soul relinquishes her free will to God – a key element in Newman's discussion of despair.

Now is þis soule not, for sche seep bi abundaunce of diuine knowinge hir nouzt, þat makip hir now to putte hirsilf at nouzt. And sche wote al, for sche seep bi þe depnes of þe knowinge of hir nouzt, þe whiche is so great to hir sizt þat sche fyndeþ neiþir begynnyng, mesure, ne ende of it, but a deep derknesse wiþouten ground or botme. And þere fyndip sche hir wiþouten fyndinge eny grounde or eende. He fyndeþ not þis þat may not to þis atteyne. And þe more þat sche seep in þis knowinge bi trouþe þat sche may not knowe hir wick[id]nesse of þe leeste poynt in which sche is yfalle bi wickidnesse. And nakid curued of þis herborwe [*haberger*], and of þis garnyson, þat is þe derknesse of þis þat is synne, þat conteneþ in him al perdicion.<sup>40</sup> Þus sche seep hirsilf, þis soule, wiþoute hir sizt.

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<sup>40</sup> *MED*, herborwe n. 1. (a) a temporary dwelling place; (b) the camp of an army in the field; (c) fig. the dwelling of God in man; lodgings in heaven; 2. (a) lodgings in general, shelter for a traveler, a place to stay.

þis is þe depnesse of mekenesse [*profondesse d'umilite*] þat þere sittip in hir chaier and regneþ wiþoute pride. þere may not þe powdre of pride pleie, siþen þat sche seep hirsilf, for þis vnsittinge vntrue maketh hir se parfitli hirsilf.<sup>41</sup>

### i) The connotations of noughting

What does it mean when the soul puts herself at nought? The language of noughting and nowting is common to both MN's *Simple Souls* and Julian's texts. In this passage it is clearly a presage to unity with God, and when the soul is on the edge of such a great change, the positives and negatives are equally apparent. As Vincent Gillespie has put it, 'liminality is marked by anxiety and uncertainty as much as by joy and bliss'.<sup>42</sup> For Newman, noughting involves giving up the wrong way of seeing, of emptying the self of 'false power, false riches, and false knowledge', and I think both aspects pertain here.<sup>43</sup> This can be seen by looking at *The Cloud of Unknowing* [hereafter *Cloud*], which tells the reader to give themselves completely to God when they are in enemy hands. This should be like melting into water, but also

it is not elles bot a trewe knowyng & a felyng of þi-self as þou art, a wrecche & a filþe, fer wers þen nouzt : þe whiche knowyng & felyng is meeknes.<sup>44</sup>

This has similarities with the paragraph at issue here, as well as the phrase 'synne is nouzt and lesse þan nouzt' discussed in chapter four of this thesis, but in *Cloud*, where the reader is told that they are filthy, wretched and worse than 'nouzt', the connotations

<sup>41</sup>Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 174 - 5.

<sup>42</sup> Vincent Gillespie, 'Postcards from the Edge' in *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern: The J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 137-65 (p. 157).

<sup>43</sup> Newman, 'Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s', p. 609.

<sup>44</sup> Hodgson, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 32, p. 67.

can go from the idea of being non-existent to being worse than evil.<sup>45</sup> The question then is whether the use of ‘nouȝt’ in the *Simple Souls* paragraph above has the same range of connotations. If the soul realises that she is no thing, no longer an individual self, or in Gillespie and Ross’ terms, experiences ‘the progressive loss of self-consciousness’, the statement becomes a foreshadowing of her unification with God. In this sense, to be nothing is a positive and productive state to be in. If, on the other hand, ‘nouȝt’ is taken to mean that the soul realises her wickedness, an idea explicitly stated a few sentences further on, then the full force of this passage is reminding the reader that they have no essence of goodness within them. And both are true: seeing the self as God sees us, rather than the way we see ourselves, is a losing of false-consciousness and a coming to terms with human vulnerability necessary for returning to God.

## ii) The soul’s harbour of sin

A further point for discussion in this passage is the idea that after the soul has fallen through wickedness it is then ‘nakid curued [circued] of þis herborwe, and of þis garnyson, þat is þe derknesse of þis þat is synne, þat conteneþ in him al perdicion’.<sup>46</sup> Kirchberger has translated this as ‘and she is naked encircled of this harbour and of this garrison which is the dark sin, that containeth in him all perdition’. This gives the idea that the soul is surrounded by, possibly hiding in, a place of sin which could be a step to hell, and the naked soul is fully exposed in all her sinfulness.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Colledge *et al*’s translation of the French

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<sup>45</sup> *MED*, nought adj. 1. (a) immoral, evil; (b) of human beings: unworthy; (d) weak, impotent; bereft of power; (e) unavailing, useless; nought n. 1 (a) evil, an evil act; worthless or evil conduct; (b) nothingness, non-existence; negation; (d) an insignificant person.

<sup>46</sup> The ME ‘curued’ or ‘cicrued’ is a fore-runner of the modern circuit: *MED*, circūit(e (n.)) Also cerc-. 1. (a) Circumference; (b) periphery, outer edge or margin (of an area); (c) in (the) ~, all around, round about.

<sup>47</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 164.



dont ceste Ame est abysme de mauvaistie, et gouffre de tel haberge et de telle garnison, monne est le deluge de ce que peche est, qui contient en luy toute perdition

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this soul is an abyss of such evil, and a gulf which can shelter and protect in it as much as can that flood of what is sin, which contains within it all perdition'.<sup>48</sup>

Colledge *et al* very clearly consider that at this point the soul is evil without end, with the capacity to contain further waves of sin. As the following analysis will demonstrate however, another translation is possible which supports the idea that the soul should not be in despair at her sinfulness as she falls into the abyss.

Rather than translate 'curued' as circumference, periphery or encircled, it is possible that it could be read as a variant of 'carued' due to shifts in the vowel sounds at this time.<sup>49</sup> The fifth meaning for carved in the *MED* is 'to cut something away or off; to remove something by cutting', a sense used in a Wycliffite sermon: 'Comunli in holy writt is swerd clepid word; And þis is a swerd sharpe on boþe sidis, boþe to kerve away synne and to nurishe virtues.'<sup>50</sup> If that is the meaning in the excerpt above, then, together with the next phrase 'þus sche seep hirsilf, þis soule, wiþoute hir sizt', this difficult passage conveys the idea that through the process of self-annihilation the soul can be cut away from the edifice of sin within which it has been hiding. Up to that point the soul has fused itself within the place of sin as a defensive position: while cowering in a fortress containing sin it never has to confront its bottomless depth of wickedness, and by hiding from itself it is also avoiding the prospect of coming face to face with God. Once hewn from the rock of sin, and so without human pride placing the self at the

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<sup>48</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 328; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 118, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> My thanks to Professor Jeremy Smith for pointing this out; *MED*, karven v.

<sup>50</sup> Wycliff, *Sermons on the Gospels (Bod 788) Select English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. T. Arnold, vol. 1 (1869); vol. 2 (1871), as cited in the *MED*.

centre of its existence, the soul becomes meek enough to inhabit another – divine – space.

Alternatively, the very essence of the soul itself could be carved out of a solid mass of sin, where at the point of self-recognition, and the consequent understanding that only damnation is possible in this state, the hard, abrasive matter transforms into a softer substance: self-regarding pride turns into God-facing humility. Whether the soul is carved from, as in cut away or freed from, or carved out of sin, both convey the idea that a sharpened implement and some force is required to separate one from the other. The act of fully comprehending one's wickedness becomes a suitably honed instrument for such a procedure. When looking at the French, '*gouffre*' is an abyss and deep hollow, which in English took on the meaning of bay or gulf, a deep cavity or large expanse of water.<sup>51</sup> It is possible therefore that MN was thinking of a curved bay as the shape of the harbour, protecting the shelter that it offers.

Meanings for '*herborwe/haberge/hospicio*' include 'a temporary dwelling place' and 'shelter for a traveler, a place to stay', which conveys the sense that the place of sin was always only a short stopping point on a longer journey.<sup>52</sup> The final destination is always in God; He is the ultimate refuge, a harbour. In French, '*haberge*', or '*herberge*' is sometimes an encampment, or somewhere to stay overnight.<sup>53</sup> '*Herberge*' was also in use in Middle English from the late fifteenth century, and appears in Caxton's edition of *Chronicle of England*: 'a wyse man [...] that was herberged a nyght in his house', before it became current in modern English in the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Other synonyms include

<sup>51</sup> *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, s. 1.; *OED*, *gouffre*, n; *MED*, *goulf* n. 1. (a) (c).

<sup>52</sup> *MED*, *herborwe*, n., 1. (a) & (e), 2. (a).

<sup>53</sup> *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, *herberge*, s. 1 and 2.

<sup>54</sup> *OED*, *harbinge*, v. 1. a and b, 2.

harbour, sojourn, lay, sojour, to take up one's lodging, and pilgrimage, all related to staying somewhere on a temporary basis, where one can find shelter while resting from one's main purpose. The French '*garnison*' can be a place of defence and protection, a fortified castle as well as a store of provisions like food.<sup>55</sup> The same word, as used by MN, occurred in English from the fourteenth century with connotations of a means of defence; stores for an army camp; the people stationed somewhere to defend it; and the fortress itself.<sup>56</sup> Methley's '*vallo*' also has the sense of fortifications and ramparts.<sup>57</sup>

MN's sentence could therefore be translated as 'And, naked, carved from this refuge, and from this garrison, that is the darkness of this sin, that contains in it all perdition'. I am not convinced that this interpretation of 'curued' as carved is what MN meant to convey in his translation of the French, but given the non-standardisation of spelling, along with the shifts in vowel sounds and usage, this could be an available meaning, especially since the text has previously discussed the soul hacking and hewing away at herself and her sin to make space for God.<sup>58</sup> And a reading of Methley can support the separation of the soul from sin. Methley's use of '*et nude circumdata ex hoc hospicio et ex hoc vallo*' supports the view that, at this point, the soul is not only taken out of the sin-filled edifice leading to damnation but firmly shut out of it, since variations for *nude* include clearly, plainly, and simply.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps more straightforwardly '*nude*' also has connotations of unclothed, exposed, and unprotected, indicating that the soul is no longer protected by a veil of self-justifying sin, even as she realises how

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<sup>55</sup> *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, garnisun s. 1, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *OED*, garnison, n. 1, 2, 3. a and b.

<sup>57</sup> *Lewis Short Dictionary*, vallo, 1, v. a.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter four of this thesis: Scholarship on despair in *Simple Souls*.

<sup>59</sup> *DMLBS*, nudus, 9. a. My thanks to David Rundle for his help with this passage.

wicked (*iniquitatem*) she is. Methley's '*circumdo*' for 'curued', retains the idea of enclosing or surrounding something, separating it off from something else, and what is being closed off is the place of sin – away from the soul.<sup>60</sup> The whole phrase can therefore be translated as:

The soul sees itself more in this understanding through truth, that it cannot know its own sinfulness from the smallest point in which it falls through sinfulness, and [is] unequivocally enclosed out of this lodging house and out of this defensive fortification, this profound darkness which is sin, that which contains in itself all perdition.<sup>61</sup>

The depths are concurrently a literal darkness, the absence of light and goodness, and a foretaste of hell. *Simple Souls* reduces the soul's choices to the binary of light and dark since anything which is not of God's goodness must be its absolute opposite. In *Simple Souls*' pursuit of a more meaningful connection with the divine, there is no room for greyness, modulation or mitigation. Contrary to Chobham's advice to his pastors, there is no intermediary to shape the penitent's response and protect their psychological state. *Simple Souls* requires an unadulterated clarity of the self in its 'abyss of wretchedness' so that when the 'soul sees herself [...] without seeing', she recognises how sinful she is, which in pastoral writers causes self-disgust. But here, while she knows that there is enough sin to damn her, she is saved because she no longer sees herself as a subjective entity, laden with memories of sinful deeds, but as a created being which by its nature is everything that God is not, making it easier to return to her original, uncreated state.

The use of paradox is especially evident here, requiring the reader to contemplate

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<sup>60</sup> *Lewis Short*, *circumdo*, I and II.

<sup>61</sup> 'Et eo amplius in hac videt cognitione per veritatem, quod non potest cognoscere suam iniquitatem ex minimo in quam cecidit puncto per iniquitatem, et nude circumdata ex hoc hospicio et ex hoc vallo, hoc est tenebrositas huius quod peccatum est, quod in se continet omnem perdicionem', Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, ch. 166, p. 123.

how something can be everything and nothing, positive and negative, light and dark, in a simultaneous state outside of linear time. When the soul sees God from the abyss because its field of vision is reduced to focus only on the light, it compares with Julian's physical experience as an anchorite whose view of the outside world is circumscribed and reduced to a concentration on the altar and crucifixion. This narrowing of space physically, internally, and metaphorically through focused attention is the state that *Simple Souls* describes as necessary for the perfect soul.<sup>62</sup> Nearly every sentence in the paragraph under discussion here presents a paradox requiring the reader to find meaning beyond the text. As we have seen, different translators' reinterpretation of this paradox, and *Treatise of Perfection's* use of the King's dark cellar, provides an additional layer for the reader to accept or reject. Any tendency to understand through scholastic reasoning is therefore slowed down until it becomes clear that there is no clarity, no single, unassailable meaning. Where the abyss can be both heaven and hell, when it can simultaneously encompass both all the wickedness of man and all the goodness of God, then its use lacks force as a place of despair, hell and damnation, from where there is no return. Instead, it becomes a place where the depths of God and the self can recognise each other and re-combine, and where good and evil, hope and despair are as inevitable in the created state as each other.

Returning to Newman's view of despair in *Simple Souls*, she explained the soul's annihilation within the abyss as the result of realising that she could never repay her debt:

Her beleaguered will is incapable of repaying its infinite debt to God, so it can escape the treadmill of its endless attempts at virtue only through despair, abandoning those efforts in a final act of resignation. Then, as in Buddhism, by

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of this see Huber, 'For Y am sorwe and sorwe ys Y', p. 187.

stamping out desire the soul puts an end to suffering as well. Her account can be deleted once and for all, marked “paid in full”.<sup>63</sup>

But Newman also recognises that the soul has to lose herself back within the substance from which she was created, the divine goodness of God. For Newman, Porete’s main purpose is to show the ultimate paradox: that ‘annihilation is the soul’s starkest self-destruction and ultimate achievement; it is both due punishment for sin and the supreme, beatifying act of grace’.<sup>64</sup> My contention is that instead of despairing of the self, of thinking it will never be good enough for God, and giving up hope of His grace, the soul’s resignation is a form of acceptance of its sinful state. Instead of running away from God in despair, the soul chooses to leap into Him. The self-destruction in the abyss is I think the destruction of conscious pride and of no longer wanting to be a separate entity from God. And this self-destruction is done in the hope, or knowledge, of its home-coming within the divine. I concur with Michael Sells’ view that to reject all sense of self and purposeful activity, to abandon one’s safe harbour of sin and present oneself fully naked to the divine, ‘can only occur in a context of absolute trust’.<sup>65</sup> The soul can only relinquish her will through her own volition – it cannot be taken from her by force. Her rejection of free will is therefore not an act of despair but a complete acceptance of something more valuable than the self. But as we discussed at the start of this thesis, the intention of the author may not match the reception by the reader and translator. The following section considers how the connotations of particular word choices by MN, modern translators, and Julian either ramp up the possibility of despair for the reader, or mitigate and ameliorate their concerns.

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<sup>63</sup> Newman, ‘Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s’, p. 627.

<sup>64</sup> Newman, ‘Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s’, p. 627.

<sup>65</sup> Sells, ‘The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister’, p. 125; See also Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 130.

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## 2. The Web of Despair

This section looks in greater detail at some of the words associated with negativity and despair and their connotations. It compares how MN's usage of key terms corresponds with, or differs from, the way Julian uses and integrates them within her own texts. This section also reflects on the type of devotional work the words are doing and how they contribute to the reader's spiritual practice. It analyses how language has the potential to take the reader further away from a state of emotional and spiritual balance even though that might not be the authors' aim. This propensity for a lack of equilibrium is reflected in the ability of the word clusters discussed in this section to connect and point towards all meanings across the hope-despair continuum. Occasionally, the connotations of a word have been altered to fit a particular approach to the sinful soul. For both Julian and in *Simple Souls*, the language used sheds an alternative light on the human condition, allowing the reader the possibility of practicing forms of self-acceptance as part of their daily devotional life.

As we shall see, both medieval and modern translators sometimes sought to channel meaning in directions commensurate with their own view of orthodoxy and their idea of what their readers should believe, rather than what the source text itself might to be pointing towards. This section therefore reflects on the potential for words to gather semantic interpretation, to become utilised in particular ways by writers concerned with the same issues, and for these different uses of language to become embedded within their devotional practice. In a thesis which consistently returns to ideas of paradox and ineffability however, this section also opens out the range of possible meanings. It

considers the propensity for theological and devotional language to contain all potential meanings and therefore their capacity to be accepted or rejected in equal measure, depending on the reader's or translators' perspective.

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## 2.1 Evil, wretched, wicked

As we saw in the previous chapter 'wretchedness', 'evil' and 'wickedness' are all referents for each other and in *Simple Souls*, most of these uses are translations of variations on the French '*maulx*' or '*mauvais*'. Definitions of '*mal*', the root of '*maulx*', are '*mauvais, méchant, difficile, désagréable, redoubtable*'.<sup>66</sup> The *Anglo Norman Dictionary* gives the first meaning as 'evil, wicked' and the second as 'bad, harsh, painful', and those for the Latin '*malus*' are 'unpleasant, distressing, painful, nasty', also 'bad, evil, wicked, vicious'.<sup>67</sup> This section explores how the Middle English usage of each term varies slightly and alters their associated meanings. In MN's *Simple Souls* all instances of 'wretched' and 'wicked' are concentrated towards the end of the text, but the fewer occurrence of 'yuel' are spaced throughout the dialogue. The position is reversed in Julian's long text, with many mentions of wretchedness and only a handful of 'evil' and its synonym 'yll'.<sup>68</sup> I will address the uses of evil first, followed by wretched and then wicked and consider how the language associated with despair is deployed by the various authors and translators in ways that fulfill their own devotional understanding and agendas.

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<sup>66</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, 1. Mal, maul, mau ma, mel mol.

<sup>67</sup> *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, mal I a. 1, 2; *DMLBS*, malus 1.

<sup>68</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 11, p. 18; ch. 33, p. 46; ch. 35, p. 48; ch. 53, p. 85; ch. 37, p. 51; *MED*, meschef n. (4); *Historical Thesaurus of English*: 'ill' is listed under 'moral evil n.'



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## 2.2 Evil

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### i) Evil in comparison with good

The most common way *yuel* occurs in *Simple Souls* is where there is a comparison between good and bad, which is matched in Julian's long text. In chapter thirty-three she says that the fifth revelation was made of goodness, with little mention of evil, and in chapter eleven that, 'a man beholdith some dedes wele done and some dedes evil' even though the Lord does not.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, near the beginning of *Simple Souls*, MN uses 'yuel' with the injunction that the perfect soul should not be affected by either positive or negative influences. Love explains that the soul without will is not interested in being certain of her fate whether that be purgatory, salvation, or paradise.<sup>70</sup> To will anything would take her further away from Love, but the only way to be close to Him is to be entirely unconcerned about herself:

þese soules þat suche ben, kunne not fynde þe goode ne þe yuel [*bonnes ne mauvaises*], ne haue knowynge of hem to make iugement wheþir þei ben conuerted or peruertid.<sup>71</sup>

According to the *Historical Thesaurus of English* 'bad' was in use from 1300 onwards, and so available to MN, but he never uses it at all. The word 'evil' or 'yfel' carried over from Old into Middle English and might have been preferred by MN as the most direct translation.<sup>72</sup> By often referring to the perfect soul not being able to notice and acknowledge either good or bad, the reader is made aware that responding to these vicissitudes is a normal part of the human experience and can only be let go by the rare,

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<sup>69</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 33, p. 46; ch. 11, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 20; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 9, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> In the *Historical Thesaurus of English* both good and evil occur under 'badness/evil adj.' which is listed under the heading of 'goodness and badness'.

perfect soul.

This perfection is highly prized and impossible for many. However, by repeating throughout *Simple Souls* that neither positive nor negative should impact the perfect soul it is implicit that ordinary embodied souls do suffer and become distressed at the realisation of their sin. Porete's solution, like Julian's, is to focus on loving God for His own sake rather than for whatever outcome might result for the soul herself. So MN's *Simple Souls* shows an awareness of the propensity to despair at one's evil and inability to please God, but the overriding message is that a focus on the needs, desires, and emotions of the self – whether for good or ill – will keep the soul further away from the divine. The language of evil used here therefore, encourages the reader to practice their devotion with a focus purely on God rather than the self, or what He thinks of that self.

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## ii) The soul as evil by nature

The other way in which MN uses 'yuel' in *Simple Souls* is to describe the sinful state of the soul. Near the beginning of the text Love explains to Reason that the contemplative reader should realise that the only thing a noughted soul knows about herself is that she is saturated with sin to the extent that she is 'þe roote of alle yuelis [*maulx*], and þe abundaunce of alle synnes wiþoute noumbre, wiþoute weizte, and wiþoute mesure'.<sup>73</sup> All modern and medieval translations of this quotation also use 'evil' or its Latin cognate '*malum*', and MN makes no comment upon the views expressed.<sup>74</sup> But this is not always the case. There are some instances where MN's use of 'yuel' in

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<sup>73</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 26; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 11, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 11, pp. 88-89; Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 18; Colledge et al, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 11, p. 23; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 11, p. 36; Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum Simplicium Animarum*, ch. 11, p. 37; Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, ch. 20, p. 18.

connection with the sinful soul is not a straightforward translation. We saw in chapter three how Kirchberger sometimes altered parts of the text out of ‘doctrinal expediency’ and without always drawing attention to the fact that she was doing so. Her stated aim was to make the text suitable for potential heretics who would otherwise go against authorised Church teaching. In a similar vein, even though he usually draws attention to his explanatory glosses, MN sometimes makes a silent, surreptitious intervention which therefore purports to be as originally presented and intended, even though it is not.<sup>75</sup> In this section, for example, he deviates from the original by giving greater weight to the idea of evil, and shifts the subject with which the idea of ‘yuel’ is associated. He often does this where the soul’s sinfulness is used as a justification for God’s love and where the seemingly least worthy person is especially loved by God. This indicates that he either conflicted with Porete’s seemingly tolerant view of human sin in these passages, or he made the best sense he could according to what he thought they should say.

In the first example of this, Love tells Reason that the soul which has been ‘dipped in mekenesse’ knows that they ‘in noþing haue wrong and knowen þat þei haue in noþing rizt’.<sup>76</sup> Because of this the soul realises that she is

in filþe of synne and þat þe enemye is seruaunt to synne. And this soule hap offern seyn þat sche is vndir synne and serueþ to synne and wiþouten comparison passynge alle creaturis is nouzt, and þat sche is lasse þan nouzt vndir hem wiþouten eny comparison as of hirself anentis hem, so myche it is of hir and of hir werkis of yuelis.<sup>77</sup>

However, where MN’s comparison with other creatures defines the soul’s works as ‘yuel’, this is not the case in the French which has ‘*sans nulle comparayson d’elle*

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<sup>75</sup> For a brief discussion on this in relation to MN see chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>76</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 72. This passage is also discussed in chapter four of this thesis in a different context.

<sup>77</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 73.

*envers eulx, tant comme est d'elle et de ses ourvres*'.<sup>78</sup> Here, the context implies that the soul's works are naturally bad, and while it acknowledges that the soul is beneath all creatures without comparison, there is no explicit use of the word evil. MN's use of the term shows that he wants the reader to be in no doubt, that he wants to emphasise precisely what it is which makes the soul so full of filth. This is the refrain throughout *Simple Souls*; whenever 'yuel' appears the perfect soul is worthless, does evil deeds, and is beneath all other creatures in quality, but what might slightly unsettle MN is that even with this knowledge the soul remains undisturbed because she trusts in God's goodness.

The second time MN emphasises that sin is 'yuel', without drawing attention to his differing view in the usual clearly marked gloss bearing his initials, is when the soul sees that by using her God-given free will to consent to sin she has deprived God of his own will as many times as she has drawn breath:

no more þan men may nowmbre hou often I haue drawe my / breeþ, no more ne mowen myn yuelis be noumbred, hou oftentymes I haue binome God his wille.<sup>79</sup>

Again, the French does not specifically mention that going against God's goodness involves the enactment of evil, but MN leaves the reader in no doubt that this is the case. And if the perfect soul does something evil all the time then there is little hope for the imperfect reader. The next few pages work up to show that the only resolution to this is for the soul to relinquish her free will when she enters the abyss at stage five, as we saw above. On the lead up to this, the idea is repeated that God gave the soul her free will 'bi pure bounte' and that it cannot be taken from her against her will. So MN not only inserts the idea of evil when it is not in the source text, but also changes the sense of the

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<sup>78</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 40, p. 126.

<sup>79</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 156.

text more fundamentally.<sup>80</sup> In the French, and as translated by both Colledge *et al* and Babinsky, the soul explains that even though Love has given the soul her free will out of nobility and goodness, not even He can take it away again if the soul does not wish Him to do so.<sup>81</sup> In MN's translation however it is not Love but 'the strength of evil' which poses a threat to the soul:

þis noblesse haþ þe uppressure of þe loue of his bounte bi loue yzouen me. þanne may not the strengþe of yuel benyme [steal/take] me þe fredom of my wille if I wille not. þus 3e may se hou freli he haþ 3oue me my wille.<sup>82</sup>

It appears that MN wanted to emphasise that free will is a valuable gift from God, who would not go against His own will and goodness by taking away His gift once given, and which not even the strength of the most malignant force could steal. The devil, for example, could not take away the soul's will to love God against her wishes, demonstrating that if the soul ultimately chooses to relinquish her will back to God, the decision to do so can only be entirely through her own volition.<sup>83</sup> The question then arises as to what it is which finally makes the soul cede her will, and on the one hand it could be seen as a sense of despair at her own capabilities, while on the other it is a joyful recognition that she is nothing without God. It appears that MN wants the reader to be aware of their own responsibility to enact their free will for good.

This tension lies at the heart of the Augustinian doctrine of predestination, where

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<sup>80</sup> Jessica Lamothe has also found this tendency in an English vernacular translation of Flete's *Remediis* where the translator has followed the original closely but elaborates on the material in places. See Jessica Lamothe, 'An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete's *De Remediis Contra Temptaciones* (*Remedies against Temptations*), p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 103, pp. 282-4; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 103, p. 176; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 103, p. 127.

<sup>82</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 152.

<sup>83</sup> Earlier on however, MN translated a similar passage without any alteration: 'Whanne he 3af hir of his bounte, þanne he made hir lady. þis was of fre wille, þe whiche fre wille he may not binyme hir wiþoute þe plesynge of þe soule.' Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 139.

the concept of free will is precariously balanced with the idea that all things are divinely preordained. Predestination, and the worry that one might not be saved, is recognised as a cause for despair in texts like *The Prickyng of Love*, where the reader is advised ‘not to be occupied aboute sekyng of hyze sotel þynges’.<sup>84</sup> The perennial difficulty with predestination is the problem of whether anyone can truly exert their own free will. While this was an issue of much debate for fourteenth-century scholastics such as Thomas Bradwardine and William Ockham, it was not usually addressed in sermons for the ordinary laity.<sup>85</sup> The issue of predestination was, however, discussed beyond religious and scholastic works within secular literature. As Watson and Kerby-Fulton have pointed out, Langland’s *Piers Plowman* is particularly worried about not just whether he was one of the many to be called by God, but also one of the few to be chosen in an ‘autocratic, unpredictable way’.<sup>86</sup> However, while *Prickyng* does consider and address how predestination might lead to despair for its spiritually ambitious audiences, *Simple Souls* and Julian are less overt and detailed in their recognition of it. The emphasis is instead on the power and value of God’s gift of free will, the significance of which lies in the fact that each person has to choose for themselves whether to give that will back to God, and that not even He can remove it unless they give specific ascent for Him to do so. In MN’s version of *Simple Souls*, the soul has to follow the Augustinian concept of actively turning towards grace (and therefore away

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<sup>84</sup> Harold Kane, ed., *The Prickyng of Love* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und amerikanistik, 1983), p. 142.

<sup>85</sup> I have discussed this in detail in Celia Mill, ‘The Fourteenth-Century Predestination Debate and Non-Scholastic Audiences’ (MA dissertation, University of Kent, 2014), and see for example William Ockham, *Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, trans. and ed. by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1983), and Heiko A. Oberman, *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine: A Fourteenth-Century Augustinian*, (Utrecht: Kemmink & Zoon, 1958).

<sup>86</sup> Watson, ‘Despair’, p. 354; Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 344. Watson discusses this further in relation to Flete’s *Remedy*, and Kerby-Fulton in comparison with Chaucer’s *House of Fame*.

from their own wilful sinfulness), in order to proceed to the ultimate goal of unity within the divine.

There is a fourth, silent insertion of ‘yuel’, also connected with the will, which prompts MN to provide his own explanatory gloss afterwards, indicating that a version of it was possibly in his source text rather than an invention of his own. Here, after Reason describes contemplatives as those who ‘alwei desiren to encrease in diuine knowinge’, Love replies that those who listen to him are ‘yuel constregyned’.<sup>87</sup> MN’s gloss supports Love’s view, foreshadowing later discussions about where the soul’s will properly belongs and that ‘contemplatiues schulde haue no desire, but plaunte it al in diuine wil of God, and knytte her willes al hoole in him to his wil’.<sup>88</sup>

By repeatedly linking the idea of the will with various permutations of ‘yuel’ MN’s *Simple Soules* emphasises the message throughout the text that the only acceptable work of virtue for a noughted soul is to totally relinquish all desire and will to God. The other effect of MN distributing ‘yuel’ throughout the text is that it does not come as a surprise when the sense of evil, wicked and wretched is intensified when the soul finally realises it must plunge into the abyss. The soul’s natural state is that it exists in evil and sinfulness and yet despite, and sometimes because of this, she is still in union with the divine. Without her baseness, she would not be separate from God, her sin and evilness is an inevitable sign of that disconnection. The soul is constantly being told that she should feel nothing even in the light of her sinfulness, so that when she is finally faced with the boundlessness of that sin in the abyss it is not despair she feels but a full

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<sup>87</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 25

<sup>88</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 25. This idea that no one can sin once they have fully planted their will in God was also of particular interest to a reader and annotator of SJC C.21, briefly discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

recognition of God. There may have been points of near despair along the way when experiencing ‘drede’ and ‘heuynesse’ but that disappears when she sees herself in the darkness and is consequently able to see the light of God’s boundless goodness – which she would not have been able to see otherwise. Unlike Anselm, the soul is not in torment at its sin, it does not call out to Christ to save it, and does not need to be pulled back from the brink of the abyss but to fall into it, to accept its true nature in order to lose it within God, but this is done in humility rather than despair.

The use of the word ‘evil’ is usually connected with hell and damnation. God is the source of goodness and it is counterintuitive for him to accept an evil soul. But this accepted usage is held in tension with the theology in *Simple Souls*, where the soul can only ever be evil up until the point of immersion in the abyss and re-unification within God. Indeed, it is her recognition that she is the opposite of God’s goodness which allows the soul to see Him clearly. This means that MN’s use of ‘evil’, rather than signifying an irredeemable soul, is subverted to denote instead her value to God.

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### 2.3 Wretched

Where Julian almost never used the word ‘evil’, the position is somewhat reversed with respect to ‘wretched’. MN uses ‘wretched’ only four times, twice in his translation, and twice in his own prologue and gloss, but he uses it in the same way as Julian’s many mentions of ‘wretch’ and ‘wretched’, as a shorthand for the innately sinful nature of the self and the human condition generally.<sup>89</sup> With respect to MN’s translation,

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<sup>89</sup> Devotional text *Jacob’s Well* also links wretchedness and sinfulness when the soul fully recognises itself: ‘zyf þou, in equyte, haue þis zyfte of knowynge, þanne seest þi-self wel wrecchyd & synfull, þanne moornyst þou, & wepyst sore’, *Jacob’s Well, An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man’s Conscience*, ed. by Arthur Brandeis. EETS OS 115. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1900), p. 275. For a discussion of how *Jacob’s Well* in particular, and salvation handbooks in general, are concerned with the link between self knowledge, the spiritual mind and the corporeal body see Wolf, ‘The Art of Arts: Theorising Pastoral Power in the English Middle Ages’, pp. 116-7.



in both cases the French word he is translating is linked with the word ‘nature’: ‘*car sa nature est maligne*’ and ‘*malerueuse Nature*’.<sup>90</sup>

Now seeþ þe wille bi þe spreðinge illumynacion of diuine lizt, þe whiche lizt ziueþ hir þis wille for to azen putte in God þis wille, whiche may hir not wiþouten þis lizt zilden, þat may of him profiten, but if it departe from hir propre wille. Sche seeþ also hir wrecchid (*maligne*) nature bi enclinacion of nouzt, to þe whiche nature sche is enclined, and hir wille haþ put me in lasse þan nouzt.<sup>91</sup>

Colledge *et al* and Babinsky, translate ‘maligne’ as evil, and the continental Latin as ‘*maligna*’.

And þanne, seiþ þis soule to hir caitif wrecchid (*malaheureuse*) nature þat so many a day haþ made hir in seruage to dwelle: Dame nature, seiþ sche, I take leeu of zou. Loue is me nyz, þat holdiþ me fre of him azens alle wiþouten drede.<sup>92</sup>

Colledge *et al* and Babinsky translate ‘*Adonc dit ceste Ame a la maleheureuse Nature qui par maintez journees l’a fait demourer en servage*’ as ‘So this Soul says to unhappy Nature, which has kept her in bondage these many days’.<sup>93</sup> The word ‘caitif’ has dual meanings of being a captive, prisoner or slave, and ‘a) a miserable or unfortunate person, a wretch; a poor man, one of low birth; (b) a wicked man, scoundrel, one who is cowardly or covetous’, both of which apply in this sentence.<sup>94</sup> MN therefore emphasises that the soul cannot help but be a prisoner of its own human nature, which, due to it being separated from God is spiritually wicked by default. Through the use of both ‘caitif’ and ‘wrecchid’, MN links spiritual poverty, the need to divest oneself of performing good works and place one’s whole will within God instead, with its opposite:

<sup>90</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 118, p. 326; ch. 22, p. 82.

<sup>91</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 173.

<sup>92</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrouir of Simple Soules*, p. 49.

<sup>93</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 22, p. 82; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 22, p. 41.

<sup>94</sup> *MED*, caitif n. 1, 2 (a); (b).

the natural state of being in bondage to sin. While still being a slave to Dame Nature, the soul is consequently wicked and necessarily separated from the divine.<sup>95</sup>

Synonyms for ‘wretched’ in the *OED Historical Thesaurus* after its first appearance of around 1200 to about 1440, include ‘misease’, ‘miseasy’, ‘wrackful’, ‘unblessed’, ‘caitiff’, ‘unhappen’, ‘miserable’, and ‘unhappy’.<sup>96</sup> All of these signify a sense of someone being in unfortunate circumstances, suffering from a form of adversity, discomfort or discombobulation. Someone in this condition may also of course be wicked, but as we shall see, Julian’s usage allows for the former reading. *The Historical Thesaurus of English* also places ‘wretched person’ under the heading of ‘adversity, tribulation/trouble/affliction, giving the synonyms ‘caitiff’ and ‘miserable’ for between 1325 and 1484.<sup>97</sup> The ‘miseasy’ person is therefore unable to maintain the internal state of equilibrium required for the perfect soul. As we shall see, devotion which repeatedly reveals this uneasiness is therefore both a normal consequence of being human and potentially a cause for spiritual concern.

Pennington has pointed out that Julian’s reference to herself as ‘a wrechid sinfulle creature’ is a familiar penitential topos found in devotional texts but that in the long text ‘internal voices use these words to goad the soul to despair’ when they say ‘Thou wittest wele thou art a wretch, a synner, and also ontrew; for thou kepist not the command’, although these words are in fact manifest not from the self alone but through ‘the stering

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<sup>95</sup> For more on spiritual poverty and its equivalence to annihilation, see Justine L. Trombley, ‘The Master and the Mirror: The Influence of Marguerite Porete on Meister Eckhart’, *Magistra*, 16 (2010), 60–102 (pp. 86, 90).

<sup>96</sup> *OED*, Historical Thesaurus, under: adversity [adjective], miserable or wretched.

<sup>97</sup> *The Historical Thesaurus of English*, The world Action/operation, 01.15.18 n. [Adversity](#) | 12 [tribulation/trouble/affliction](#), 12.04 [wretched person](#).

of our enemy, be our owne foly and blyndhede'.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Julian refers to wretchedness in respect of humanity's time on earth, where 'Adam fell fro lif to deth into the slade of this wretchid world, and after that into Hell'.<sup>99</sup> To be on earth is to be wretched by default, and there is no sense at this point in the text in which the reader is encouraged to feel personally wretched or guilty. For Julian there is always a necessity for positive and negative, hope and dread, to exist as opposing forces – which nevertheless also facilitate each other. This paradoxical opposition resonates for many of the writers discussed throughout this thesis. We have seen for example that Evagrius found value in *tristitia salutifera*, later related to Margery Kempe and Julian in terms of 'parfit sorrow', and that *Moralia* viewed *tristitia* as both virtue and vice.<sup>100</sup> Chapter two discussed how all the monastics, but particularly Anselm, invoke traumatic emotions in their reader before going on to provide the possibility of salvation and comfort. And for Julian this order of events is encapsulated in her statement that 'it is know that afor miracles comen sorow and anguish and tribulation' – in this case the torments of knowing one's true state of sinfulness before crying out for God's redeeming grace.<sup>101</sup>

Elsewhere in *Simple Souls*, MN's translation speaks of those who are overly 'encombred' and troubled like Martha, unable to access the positive effects of Mary's life of peace. Unlike Mary, Martha has too 'many ententes' which lead to 'oftetymes vnreste', and is unable to maintain the balance of opposites posited by Julian and

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<sup>98</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 76, p. 122, Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 73; ch. 56, p. 92; Pennington, "All the Helth and Life of the Sacraments...I It Am": Julian of Norwich and the Sacrament of Penance', p. 147-8.

<sup>99</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 51, p. 78.

<sup>100</sup> See the introduction of this thesis on Evagrius, Margery, and *Moralia* and chapter four's section on Julian, sin and despair.

<sup>101</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 36, p. 50.

required for *Simple Soul*'s perfect soul:<sup>102</sup>

Martha is myche encombred, moost wise is sche not for hir encombringe hir troubleþ. Sche is fer from þe liif of pees, for witeþ it forsoþe, þat þei whiche encombrementis troublen ben ful fer from þis liif þat we haue spoken of.<sup>103</sup>

*Simple Souls* also uses the example of John the Evangelist to show that sinners who do not encumber themselves with either 'schame or glorie' can be shown God's 'priuteis' or secrets.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, it says 'þat þei ne hadde for þis þat God dide hem neiþir schame ne worschip ne wille of hem to answeere for noon': because God was working through them they did not feel either shame or worship or the will to answer to anyone who is not divine.<sup>105</sup> If they had been, they would have been 'vncombred of hemsilf', that is blocked, burdened, tempted and overpowered by evil assaults on their sense of self-hood.<sup>106</sup> These are very similar points to those made by the writers examined in the previous chapters as remedies to despair, and it may be that where MN and Porete write of shame and glory that they are to be understood largely as synonyms for despair and presumption. The idea of the soul not experiencing either positive or negative emotions in order for it to love God fully occurs in Evagrius' *Praktikos* where *apatheia* or disinterest, rather than the apathy associated with acedia and sloth, is the conduit.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 114, 133.

<sup>103</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 114.

<sup>104</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 116; *MED*, *privete* n. 3 (b); Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* makes the point that ordinary people should not try to know or understand God's secret knowledge. See Chaucer, 'The Miller's Prologue' in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. by Larry D., ll. 3163-6 via <<https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/milt-par.htm>> [accessed 9 January 2021]. In *Simple Souls* however, the perfect soul is spiritually elite enough to do so.

<sup>105</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 116.

<sup>106</sup> *MED*, *encombren*, -ien v. 1; 2. (a); 4; 5 (a).

<sup>107</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos*, prol. 8 <[http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01\\_Prak/00a\\_start.htm](http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm)> [accessed 26 September 2020].

*Simple Souls* goes on to make the point that ‘þis booke [is] wrien but for hem pat vndirstonden’ this point, in other words, those who understand that no matter what their sins, they should neither feel shame which might lead to despair, nor worship of God leading to presumption.<sup>108</sup> *Simple Souls* is concerned with those who are troubled, encouraging them to be alert to the fact that Love might be speaking to them, and that if they refuse that love ‘þei schulen be take & troubled in knowinge & encombred of hemsilf for defaute of trist, for loue seip þat in greet neede men may knowe her frend’.<sup>109</sup> This last line bears marks of intertextuality with previous definitions of despair in this thesis. We saw in chapter one, for example, that Grosseteste was aware that some people are so concerned with their own inability to either repent fully or place their trust in divine mercy, and here Porete is gesturing to the same difficulties. The difference is that the souls in *Simple Souls* are already assured salvation in the next life, but not the life of peace that comes with being united with only God’s will in this one.

These states of wretchedness discussed in this section are what we saw Shooter pick up on, but I think in her thesis it does not carry the same weight of being full of sin, which is inherent in MN's and Julian's usage of the term. Instead, I think her concept of wretchedness is more akin to a feeling of despair and loss of hope, or of someone experiencing an emotional difficulty, be they either victim or perpetrator. If she had used Colledge *et al*'s translation, where all these instances of *mauvaistié* in the abyss are translated as ‘evil’, rather than Babinsky’s ‘wretched’, the comparison would have been harder to make. The implication is that one can live with the self-knowledge of one's own wretchedness – of an essential sinfulness – in the background but that it causes a

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<sup>108</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 116.

<sup>109</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 117.

sense of psychological fracture if used as an accusation. ‘Evil’ is used as an abstract entity, but to be wretched can also entail someone being wicked, evil, and sinful, and to be wretched is a way of subtly signifying this.

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## 2.4 Wicked

Julian’s long text assures the reader that they can reach a state of bliss precisely because ‘God had ben contraried’ in the Fall. This wickedness was itself ‘contraried’ by the ‘goodness of mercy and grace’ allowing ‘these that shal be savid’ to turn to ‘goodness and to worship’ because God and Christ will always ‘doith good agen evill’.<sup>110</sup> By using the passive voice in the phrase ‘wickednes hath ben suffrid to rysen contrarye to the goodnes’, Julian attaches no individual blame on the reader, allowing wickedness to be seen as a natural, externalised, state which has to exist for grace and mercy to rise above it. It is the ‘kind [beingness/selfhood], mercy and grace’ filling the soul with ‘mekehede, mildehed, patience and pitte’ that enables it to recognise and hate ‘sinne and wickednesse’ as an objective entity rather than an internal warping which can only lead to shame.<sup>111</sup>

MN’s use of ‘wicked’ and ‘wickedness’, all of which are *mauvaistié* in the French, and consistently translated as ‘wretched’ by Babinsky, and by Colledge *et al* as ‘evil’, starts just before the detailed description of the seven stages of the soul, gradually increasing in number towards the end, until the reader might become overwhelmed by a sense of their own wickedness. After having gone through the abyss however, soul and reader alike are now fully aware of what of what happens at that fifth stage: that it is

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<sup>110</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 95.

<sup>111</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, p. 96.

only through experiencing human sin and understanding its unbounded wickedness, that one can then only truly start to comprehend God's true goodness. And this is what is repeated again and again in the next few pages. Nearly every use of 'wicked' is balanced by mention of God's goodness. This comparison is also present in the only chapter where Julian uses 'wicked' as well:

For wickednes hath ben suffrid to rysen contrarye to the goodnes, and the goodnes of mercy and grace contraried ageyn the wickidnes, and turnyd al to goodness and to worship to al these that shal be sauid [...] For in these iii is all our life – kynde, mercy, and grace; whereof we have mekehede, myldhede, patiens, and pite, and hatyng of synne and wickidnes, for it longith properly to vertues to haten synne and wickidness.<sup>112</sup>

Compare this assurance that mercy and grace can transform wickedness into goodness and grace with *Simple Souls'* idea that the soul's wickedness itself provides comfort and hope – indeed, the greater the wickedness the greater the consequent goodness:

More haue I not of auantage to haue his bounte þan for þe cause of my wickidnesse. Þanne may I no more be wiþoute bounte for I may not my wickidnesse leese. And þis poynt he haþ me of his pure bounte / wiþouten doute ensured. And þe oonli nature of my wickidnesse me haþ also of þis zifte araied. Not werk of bounte þat euere I dide nor þat euere I myzte do, þat ziueþ me neiþir counfort ne hope, but myn aloone wickidnesse, for I haue bi hem þis certifiyng [ ... ] Now may ze vndirstande hou my wickidnesse causeþ to haue his bounte, for encheson of my necessite. For God suffriþ sumtyme sum yuel to be do for gretter good þat aftirward schal growe, for alle þo þat ben plaunted of þe Fadir & comen into þis world ben descendid of parfite into vnparfite for to atteyne to þe more parfite.<sup>113</sup>

The specific use of the word 'wretched' by both MN and Julian therefore usually conveys a state of personal feeling and existence, whereas 'evil' describes something disconnected from the subject. For Middle English writers of devotionalia, the associations of evil and wretched part ways. Although they both come from the same

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<sup>112</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 59, pp. 95-6.

<sup>113</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirrour of Simple Soules*, p. 168.

root they have different semantic implications. Where wretchedness is a state experienced by humans, evil is an entity which humans recognise as being separate from, and external to, the self. Julian's greater usage of 'wretched' demonstrates the extent to which her devotional practice is predicated on an acceptance of the flawed self, something which MN's occasional insertion of 'evil' works against in *Simple Souls*, thereby demonstrating that his own devotional agenda is sometimes in tension with his source text.

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### 3. Fear and madness

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#### 3.1 Drede

Watson has characterised the medieval response to despair as 'readily treatable by a mixture of fear and hope, the virtues best able to infuse the soul with the energy to seek forgiveness', and Augustine too sees 'a fruitful tension' between the two as the 'ideal spiritual state for a Christian' to be in.<sup>114</sup> To some extent however, fear can be equated with despair itself through the Middle English word 'drede' which the *MED* defines as 'fear, fright, terror'; 'anxiety, worry, uneasiness'; 'awe, reverence'; 'doubt, uncertainty'; and 'danger, peril, hazard, risk'.<sup>115</sup> The *Historical Thesaurus of English* also connects 'dread' with expectation and apprehension, of being afraid that something painful might happen.<sup>116</sup> In the long text, one of Julian's four definitions of 'drede' is a clarification that it is a 'doutfull drede' where the 'bitterness of doubt' questions God's

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<sup>114</sup> Nicholas Watson, 'Despair' in *Cultural Reformations*, p. 343; Snyder, 'The Paradox of Despair', p. 22.

<sup>115</sup> *MED*, dred(e n. 1-4).

<sup>116</sup> *The Historical Thesaurus of English*, The mind, Mental capacity, 02.01.14 vt., Expect | 01 with apprehension, dread.



goodness so that the soul ‘drawith to dispeir.<sup>117</sup> For Julian, this entails dwelling on past and daily sins which traverse the ‘covenants’ and ‘clenes’ set by God.<sup>118</sup> She further warns that this kind of dread is a false virtue as it can ‘be taken sumtime for a mekness’, but is instead a ‘foule blyndhed and a waykenes’ which cannot be recognised and despised the same way as other sins as it stems from an innate ‘enmite’ towards God and is ‘agens truth’.<sup>119</sup> This ‘despair or doutfull drede’ is one of two types of sickness (and the only specific sins) which God shows her, the other being ‘onpatience or slaith’ from bearing ‘trevell and [...] peynes hevily’.<sup>120</sup> Flete’s *Remedies* also makes the connection between dread, bodily frailty and despair. Here, Flete ties other negative maladies of the spirit to ‘drede’:

angres, troubles, taryenges, and diseses of dredes þat it semeth to h\|e/m her lif a torment and here deth an ease, in so moche þat somtyme for disese þei begynnen to dispeire bothe of here | lyf of body and of here soule. And thei wenen þat þei ben forsaken of God, whiche asayeth and proueth his chosen frendes be temptacyons and angres.<sup>121</sup>

This sense of dreadful heaviness, of being sorrowful and sluggish in mind and body also occurs in *Simple Souls*:

zhe soopeli, seiþ þis soule, my body is in feblenesse and my soule in drede, / and often I haue heuynesse, saiþ sche, wole I or nyle I, of þese two natures, þat þe far

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<sup>117</sup> *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 119. See Watson and Jenkins, eds., p. 354 for other ME examples of the four kinds of fear; *MED* affraien v.(1) b, to frighten. The *MED* provides nineteen instances of ‘drede’ being used in the sense of doubt, dred(e n. (4) a and b. ‘Drede’ is also used in this way in a ME recension of *Flete’s de Remediis*: ‘And if a man seiþ þat bodily tormentes ben medeful and not gostly tormentes, he seiþ nouzt right, for dredeles [doubtless] þe gostly tormentes ben werse, more peyneful, and more azens wil þan ben the bodily toormentes, and in so moche thei ben þe more medeful.’ See Lamothe, ed., ‘An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete’s *De remediis contra temptaciones* (*Remedies against Temptations*)’, *ME3*, p. 289.

<sup>118</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 118.

<sup>119</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 118.

<sup>120</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 117.

<sup>121</sup> Lamothe, ed., ‘An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete’s *De remediis contra temptaciones* (*Remedies against Temptations*)’, *ME3*, pp. 248-9.

fre I may not haue.<sup>122</sup>

Although this dread is linked with the same psychological and physical frailties as Julian and *Remedies* describe, it does not then draw out the same connection between these signs of the burdens of sin with the stage of despair. Nevertheless, there is potential for a reader to do so since it stops the soul from becoming perfect in the divine and therefore one of the ‘far fre’.

In Julian and *Remedies* these troubles and torments should be acknowledged but withstood as they are signs that God ‘asayeth and proueth his chosen frendes’.<sup>123</sup> In the long text it is the ‘men and women that for God love haten synne and disposen hem to do Gods will’ who are most ‘travelin and tempesten’, possibly because of their ‘intense awareness of sin’ which Julian may have encountered in her ‘devout circle’.<sup>124</sup> MN too uses similar language towards the end of *Simple Souls* when the ‘author’, intent on becoming a noughted soul, is being assailed by God to tell Him how she would respond if He loved another more than her, if another loved her more than God did, and if God wanted her to love another more than Him.<sup>125</sup> Although the ‘author’ is ‘in angwissche of deep’ by these questions, God would not be satisfied until ‘he haue assaied þis poynt’

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<sup>122</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 119. Where MN uses ‘heuynesse’, Babinsky translates the French ‘crainte’ as ‘burdened’ and Colledge *et al* as ‘troubled’, Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 77, p. 152; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls* ch. 77, p. 100; Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 77, p. 218.

<sup>123</sup> Lamothe, ed., ‘An Edition of the Latin and Four Middle English Versions of William Flete’s *De remediis contra temptaciones (Remedies against Temptations)*’, *ME3*, pp. 249.

<sup>124</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, Ch. 73, p. 117; Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 350.

<sup>125</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 190-1. Watson and Peter Dronke draw particular attention to this passage, seeing it as having ‘extraordinary power’ and being ‘an apotheosis of the courtly theme of the love-test’, Watson, ‘Misrepresenting the Untranslatable: Marguerite Porete and the Mirouer Des Simples Ames’ in *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies*, vol. 12, 1991, 124–37 (p. 132). See also Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (d.203) to Marguerite Porete (d. 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, reprint 1987), pp. 219-20 (pp. 225-6).

and she is determined to ‘proue [herself] of alle poyntes’.<sup>126</sup> This theme of divine ‘prouing’ and testing is one which interested the compilers (and possibly their intended audiences), of many other manuscripts in addition to Amherst, an example of which is Oxford, Bodley 131 (the MSS includes *Remedies*, *Love’s Mirror*, ‘The 12 Points’ from St Bridget’s *Revelations*). Showing that God wanted to test people for their spiritual improvement rather than as a sign of anger and punishment was of interest to patrons and compilers. This demonstrates an interest in helping their spiritually ambitious readers to learn how to respond when assailed by spiritual or emotional difficulties and temptations. *Remedies*, *Love’s Mirror*, and Bridget’s *Revelations* also require the reader to consider whether their actions are actually spiritually pure or whether they might have been warped by the devil into an extreme form of worship based more on self-pride than true devotion.<sup>127</sup> Snyder has pointed out that *Chastising* alludes to despair as being a particular problem for the predestined.<sup>128</sup> As discussed above in this section and elsewhere in this thesis, predestination was recognised in devotional literature as being a particularly problematic issue for the spiritually elite.<sup>129</sup> A problem which is intimately connected with a personal sense of dread:

Bus it farith bi hem also þat wolen imagyne of predestinaciouns, and of the prescience or of þe foreknowynge of god; and such men sum tyme bien dredeful for synnes don bifore, and sum tyme to dredful. Wherfor sum bien in poynt to falle in dispeir: sum azens hir wil bien traueiled wiþ dispeir, natwiþstondynge þei knowen wele oure lordis mercy passiþ al her synnes.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Doiron, ed., *Pe Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>127</sup> For further discussion on the theme of testing exemplified in Bodley 131 see Perry, “Some spyrytual matter of gostly edyfication”, p. 101.

<sup>128</sup> Snyder, ‘The Paradox of Despair’, p. 18.

<sup>129</sup> See especially chapter three of this thesis regarding Colledge *et al*, MN and Methley’s emphasis on predestination in their own translations.

<sup>130</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Chastising*, pp. 119-20.

This difficulty is returned to later in *Chastising*, with a whole chapter dedicated to ‘of predestinacion and prescience of god; and of remedie for hem þat bien trauelid wiþ suche matiers’.<sup>131</sup> One of the suggested remedies reflects the ethos found throughout *Simple Souls*: that the reader should focus on a selfless love of God rather than their own difficulties.<sup>132</sup>

These issues are apparent in *Simple Souls* early in the text when the perfect soul ‘is alwei in sizt of God’ and therefore need have no ‘drede’ of ‘þe fleisch & þe enemye, þe feend’ or any of the earthly elements or beasts which ‘tormentiden hir and dispisiden hir and deuouriden hir’ because she is safe in the knowledge that ‘God dwellide wiþe hir’.<sup>133</sup> The perfectly noughted soul then fears nothing. However, the French includes a phrase which MN left out of the main translation: ‘*certes elle ne pouroit ne devoit rien craindre ne doubter*’.<sup>134</sup> Colledge *et al* have translated this rather tautologically as ‘indeed there is nothing which she could or should fear or be frightened of’, while Babinsky has retained the word ‘doubt’ (*doubter*) along with ‘fear’ (*craindre*) with ‘she would neither be able nor need to fear anything or to doubt’. In the light of Julian’s definition, the idea of doubting God’s goodness is raised and along with it the potential for despair.<sup>135</sup> The Middle English ‘dout’, a direct borrowing from Old French, encompasses both the questionable and the dangerous, which is an instigator of fear.<sup>136</sup> After the declaration that the perfect soul no longer needs to follow the virtues upon

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<sup>131</sup> Bazire and Colledge, *Chastising*, pp. 155-6.

<sup>132</sup> Bazire and Colledge, *Chastising*, pp. 160; Brown, ‘Origins of the Puritan Concept of Despair’, p. 110.

<sup>133</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>134</sup> Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 5, p. 22.

<sup>135</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 5, p. 15; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 5, p. 83.

<sup>136</sup> *MED*, dōutāble adj. 1a, 2a, b, c.

having internalised and becoming mistress of them, MN's gloss explains that for the perfect soul 'alle peynes and bittirnesse and alle doutes and dredes' are driven out by the 'swete taastes of loue' which resonates with Julian's 'reverent drede' where 'love and drede are brethren'.<sup>137</sup> These pains and troubling conscience refer to a sense of scrupulosity where sins are too large or heinous to be forgiven, as we saw in various definitions at the start of this thesis.<sup>138</sup> At this point in *Simple Soules*, MN's interjection hints at despair both through his use of 'doute' along with 'drede', and by his reference to the 'werre' between the vices and virtues which incur 'many scharpe peynes and bitternesse of conscience'.<sup>139</sup>

*Treatise of Perfection* too finds the idea of dread problematic, but for the hypocrite, those who, although they 'kepe the lawes and the commawmdementys of god and of the chyrche, zit thay kepe not the lawe and the bande of charite' and only keep God's law so that they will not be 'dyspsyed or slawndret'.<sup>140</sup> These people do not dread God so much as 'þe payne of helle', they love themselves and the comfort of their experiences more than God and are therefore 'vntrewe mercenaries' rather than 'trewe seruandis'.<sup>141</sup> *Simple Soules* also makes this distinction, where those who are 'deed from deedli synne and borne to þe liif of grace' are still 'merchauntes' in comparison with those who are 'deed of þe deep of nature & lyuen of þe liif of spirite'.<sup>142</sup> In *Simple Soules* dread is considered to be one of the 'false' virtues which keeps the soul driven by her

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<sup>137</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 15; Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 119.

<sup>138</sup> See chapter one of this thesis.

<sup>139</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *The Treatise of Perfection*, p. 238.

<sup>141</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *The Treatise of Perfection*, pp. 238-9.

<sup>142</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 99-100.

own will and therefore still in ‘þraldom’ without actually realising that she is still a servant.<sup>143</sup> This is because she ‘folwen þese two uertues, reson & drede, for þei norische wille’.<sup>144</sup> The soul can only be free if it is driven by faith and love rather than by its servitude to fear or desire, ‘for þei resten of alle seruages wiþouten hauynge drede of þinges doutables (*choses doubtables*) or desire of eny rizt delitables’.<sup>145</sup> The French ‘doutables’ can mean terrible, or to be feared as Babinsky, Colledge *et al* and the Medieval Latin has translated.<sup>146</sup> However, the Middle English ‘doutables’ has both meanings, with the first of ‘doubtful, questionable, uncertain’ and the second ‘fraught with danger’ or ‘inspiring fear or awe’.<sup>147</sup> So MN’s translation could be interpreted as the perfect soul not having any fear of those things which may lead to doubting God, whereas the others limit the available meanings to a more general fear of anything frightening. Methley’s version retains both senses with ‘*sine timore rerum dubitabilium vel desiderio alicuius valde delectabilis*’ where ‘*dubitabilium*’ retains the meaning of ‘open to doubt’.<sup>148</sup> Rather than shutting down meanings then, MN and Methley retain the idea of a generalised fear of the original French while extending this to doubting the divine.

Drede also appears twice as a minor character. The first appearance occurs in the earlier sections of the text when Love (the divine), explains that the wise soul simply

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<sup>143</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 82

<sup>144</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 82

<sup>145</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 82; Guarnieri ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 48, p. 146.

<sup>146</sup> ‘faith and love...remove such a one from all servitude, without fear of frightening things, without desire of delectable things’, Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 48, p. 127; ‘*timore*’, Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum simplicium animarum*, ch. 48, p. 147; ‘no fear of what is fearful’, Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 48, p. 68.

<sup>147</sup> MED, *doutable* adj. 1 (a), 2 (b) (c).

<sup>148</sup> Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, ch. 73, p. 59.

owes it love, and not any works of virtue because she ‘ben updrawe of loue and meued in loue’.<sup>149</sup> The soul motivated by, and pulled towards divine love is ‘dipped in mekenesse’, is ‘lasse þan nouzt’, and ‘deed to alle felinges boþe inward and outward’ so that she no longer carries out good works either for herself or for God.<sup>150</sup> All these things mean that the soul is ‘not wiþ hirsilf’, and on asking where ‘is þis soule þanne?’ Drede is told that she is where ‘sche loueþ’ and because she is without ‘witynge’ (which can encompass certainty, knowledge and awareness), the soul can live without ‘vndirnymyng of conscience’, that is without internal rebuke or censure.<sup>151</sup> The wise but unaware soul is therefore not impacted by the usual sequence of cause and effect, is uninterested in the self, and ‘felip neiþer reson ne nature’.<sup>152</sup> Being outside of herself, the soul is beyond the usual community structures of censure and control, and Drede or Fear may have been chosen to question this aspect as well as the altered view of the virtues (which include good works and taking the sacraments), because it is afraid of going against the teachings of ‘hooli chirche þe lasseir’ who soon enters the discussion.<sup>153</sup>

The second and last time Drede appears is towards the latter part of the text, when the soul explains that God has given her free will and cannot take it away again unless it pleases her for Him to do so. God has given her His ‘al’ and ‘holdeþ noþing’ from her if

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<sup>149</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 72. In the French this character is ‘*Crainte*’, Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 41, p. 128; the continental Latin has ‘*Timor*’, Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum Simplicium Animarum*, ch. 41, p. 129; Babinsky has translated the character as ‘Fear’, Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 41, p. 121; and Colledge *et al* have used ‘Dread’, Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 41, p. 60.

<sup>150</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>151</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 73-4; *MED*, witen v.(1), 1. (a), 2. (a), 4. (a); *MED*, undernimen v. 8.

<sup>152</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 74.

<sup>153</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 75.

her ‘wille wole it’.<sup>154</sup> Drede overtly doubts that God has given her everything, asking ‘hou for God?’ with the response that God has given the soul her free will ‘wipouten eny wipholdinge, pureli for his bounte and for his oonli wille, so as he zaeue it me of his zifte for a profite to me of his diuin bounte’.<sup>155</sup> Given that in this theology fear and dread nourishes the will and therefore helps to ensure that the soul holds onto her own will, the implication is that Drede has to be assured God will give the soul all His goodness precisely because God is all goodness and will not be swayed by any past sins. To do this, Drede’s doubt and questioning of the divine has to be completely relinquished and fear has to be annihilated along with reason as they both ‘gouerne desires, werk, and wille’ which are no longer necessary upon the soul’s own annihilation.<sup>156</sup>

When the soul is filled with divine ‘bounte’ or goodness it has more worth than could be accomplished ‘wipynne an hundrid þousynd zeer or al hooli chirche’. At this point the soul will always be ‘knyt to þe wille’ of God and is completely without

drede and wipouten ioie, for sche is noon in þis oon and þanne haþ sche no more to do of God þan God of hir. For he is, and sche is not. Sche haþ noþing wipholden in nouztynge of hirsilf.<sup>157</sup>

By relinquishing all knowledge of her sins to God along with her will, the soul becomes nothing and no longer has to, or is capable of, feeling either fear or joy, as holding onto them until this point has meant that a full connection with God was not possible. In psychological terms, the soul has reached a state of equilibrium, but one which Julian

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<sup>154</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 152. The same terms are used by all as for the previous translation of the character ‘Crainte’, except for the continental Latin which has replaced it with ‘*Amor*’ presumably by mistake. See Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 104, p. 284; Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum Simplicium Animarum*, ch. 104, p. 285; Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 104, p. 177; Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 104, p. 127.

<sup>155</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 152.

<sup>156</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 179.

<sup>157</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 196.



always makes sure the reader knows is not constantly possible in terms of an embodied, lived experience.

As well as being a route towards despair, dread can also have more positive functions. In the short and the long texts Julian describes three additional dreads, one of which, ‘reverent drede’, is a positive fear which can only be felt alongside the love of God, ‘for the more it is had, the less is it felt for swetenes of love’ and neither love nor dread ‘may be had without other’.<sup>158</sup> Watson and Jenkins have pointed out that Julian differs in her treatment of the four dreads between the long and short texts, with the short text saying that all but ‘doutfull drede’ can be profitable, which in the long text has changed to saying that all ‘are not so tru’ apart from reverend dread.<sup>159</sup> This may be because the two dreads in doubt are ultimately based on self-interest. The first is fear of pain, ‘of bodily deth and of gostly enemyes’ which occurs when someone is ‘wakid fro sleepe of synne’ but not yet able to ‘perceivyn the soft comfort of the Holy Gost’, a position which correlates with *Simple Souls*’ stage four and the category of the lost.<sup>160</sup> The second, dread of ‘afray’ or attack, occurs when someone is suddenly alarmed and so denotes an automatic reaction based on physical safety.<sup>161</sup> Julian was not the first to divide fear in this way. Following scholarly debate of the time, Thomas Chobham also broke the ‘virtue’ of fear down into four categories: ‘natural fear, servile fear, initial fear and chaste or filial fear’.<sup>162</sup> Filial fear is further broken down into the fear of ‘separation

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<sup>158</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 119.

<sup>159</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., p. 356.

<sup>160</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, pp. 118-9.

<sup>161</sup> Glasscoe, ed., *A Revelation of Love*, ch. 74, p. 119. See Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 354 for other ME examples of the four kinds of fear; *MED*, affraien v.(1) b, to frighten.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Hasenfratz, ‘Terror and Pastoral Care in *Handlyng Synne*’ in *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care*, ed. by Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (York Medieval Press, 2009), p. 141.

from God, giving offence to God, and reverence in the awe-inspiring presence of God', the last of which will survive alongside love, which replaces all the other fears, after bodily death, and is therefore most closely aligned with Julian's 'reverent drede'.<sup>163</sup> Robert Hasenfratz makes the point, however, that this complex graduation is rejected in Chobham's *Summa de Arte Praedicandi* in favour of presenting the lay congregation with a straightforward combination of love and fear, the latter 'in heavy and frightening detail' of the punishment awaiting unrepented sins.<sup>164</sup> For a non-spiritual listening audience Chobham therefore advocated a non-nuanced fear of hell – the more forceful partner to love – as the best means of being able to reach salvation. In *Simple Souls* this is precisely the problem as it produces only servants of God and nothing more.

In *Treatise of Perfection*, dread serves a similar purpose to that proposed by Chobham. If one knows one has sinned to the point of possible damnation then dread will ensure the sinner carefully considers their fate. Without dread and repentance God is neither worshipped, loved, nor respected as 'thame [...] withoute drede or schame lye in the denne and the fylthe of dedely sin'.<sup>165</sup> *Chastising* too uses 'drede' to show that the reader should be afraid of taking pride in their virtues as they can lead toward sin as 'in al suche vertues the whiche enspire us to ony vainglory or ipocrisie we have grete nede to drede and sette ourselves evermore in lowness and mekenes in love and charite'.<sup>166</sup> The more we display outward virtues, the more we need to embody a true meekness, and not the false meekness of Julian's 'doutful drede':

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<sup>163</sup> Hasenfratz, 'Terror and Pastoral Care in *Handlyng Synne*', p. 142.

<sup>164</sup> Hasenfratz, 'Terror and Pastoral Care in *Handlyng Synne*', p. 143.

<sup>165</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *Treatise of Perfection*, p. 236; see also Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse*, p. 143.

<sup>166</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *The Chastising of God's Children*, ch. 21, p. 10.

We sholde also drede in al [in every way be in fear of] suche special gifte. For as I said befor our holy faders for a litill trespace to our knowing outwarde our lorde chastised hem sore and for a time withdrewe his giftes and his special grace fro hem.<sup>167</sup>

The message here, as with *Simple Souls*, is that the reader has to realise that they are nothing in and of themselves and that any virtues have to be seen as wholly given by God's grace, but in *Chastising* dreading any 'special gifts' will provide protection against pride and vainglory. Where Julian's complex language of dread allows for both a step towards despair and a full embrace and return of God's love, devotional texts like *Treatise of Perfection* and *Chastising* employ dread in a way that more straightforwardly encourages humility which is, nevertheless, focused on the self rather than God. In *Simple Souls*, where the aim is to expunge the self, a devotional practice in pursuit of spiritual perfection ultimately requires no dread at all.

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### 3.2 Woodnesse

The word 'woodnesse' appears just the once in MN's *Simple Souls* and not at all in Julian. It is of interest here because it encompasses ideas of despair, with several different interpretations available. To understand this it is useful to look at the French and continental Latin contexts first. The passage of concern here is chapter 102 entitled, according to Colledge *et al*, 'Here Understanding of the Soul brought to Nothing shows what a pity it is when evil has the victory over good'.<sup>168</sup> In this short chapter the character 'Understanding of the Soul brought to Nothing' explains that although both

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<sup>167</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *The Chastising of God's Children*, ch. 21, p. 11.

<sup>168</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 102, p. 125; Babinsky's translation is slightly different with 'Here the Intellect of the Annihilated Soul shows the pity there is when wretchedness has the victory over goodness', but they agree in the fundamental meaning, see Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 102, p. 175. The French text reads '*Icy monstre l'Entendement de l'Ame Adnientie <la pitié> que c'est, quant mauvaistié a victoire sur bonté*', see Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 102, p. 280. No titles are given in the continental Latin.

body and spirit are made by God, the combination of the two is corrupt. This embodied soul is cleansed upon baptism, but is still faulty and liable to act in ways that do not reflect the goodness of its constituent parts, with evil overcoming goodness. At this point Colledge *et al* and Babinsky diverge in their interpretation, with Colledge *et al* saying:

And these two natures are good, by the divine justice which has made them, and when some fault overcomes this constitution and this creation, which are made by the divine goodness, there is no such pity as this, however small the fault be. Then we rouse to bitterness and compel to anger against us him who does not wish for this. No fault is small: since this is not pleasing to the divine will, it must be displeasing to it.<sup>169</sup>

Babinsky's translation runs:

Hence these two natures were good by the divine justice which has made these two natures. And when defect took over this constitution and this creation, who were made by the divine goodness, no piety united this creature, however small the defect might be. Therefore we are distressed in bitterness, and we strive to force against ourselves what this creature does not will. There is no such thing as a small defect; since any defect is not pleasing to the divine will, it must displease Him.<sup>170</sup>

Of particular interest are the last two sentences in each paragraph.<sup>171</sup> Colledge *et al* have interpreted the French 'adonc destourbons nous en amertume, et contraignons a forcener contre nous celluy qui ce ne veult' as saying that God Himself is roused to bitterness and anger in reaction to even the smallest of the soul's faults. While divine righteous anger is expected and doctrinally correct, the idea of His bitterness is perhaps less usual. Possibly because of this, Babinsky attributes the distress and bitterness to the soul, and appears to be saying that the soul fights against its innate faultiness, and that the resultant defects are against its own will. Colledge *et al*'s translation of 'amertume'

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<sup>169</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 103, p. 126.

<sup>170</sup> Babinsky, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ch. 102, p. 175.

<sup>171</sup> The French text of these reads: 'Adonc destourbons nous en amertume, et contraignons a forcener contre nous celluy qui ce ne veult. Il n'est nulle petite deffaulte: puisqu'il ne plaist a la divine volenté, il convient qu'il luy desplaie', see Guarnieri, ed., *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames*, ch. 102, p. 280.

and *'forcener'* appears to be the most accurate, with the former including bitterness, sadness and anguish, and the latter has connotations of being mad, out of one's mind, enraged, and furious.<sup>172</sup> The continental Latin supports Colledge *et al's* use of 'anger' here, with its use of *'furendum'*, or rage, but whether this should be attributed to God or the soul is a moot point.<sup>173</sup> For example, the Latin *'tunc turbamus in amaritudine et cogimus ad furendum contra nos illum qui non uult'* could be translated as 'then we disturb into bitterness and we compel towards rage against us that which is not being willing', in this case 'that' being God, but could also be 'then we are disturbed into bitterness and we are compelled towards rage against ourselves that which is not being willing', whether 'that' is God, a part of the soul, or another external entity, is still unclear. The first option indicates that the soul rouses bitterness and anger within an external divine entity which does not consent to these defects, and then, as the following sentence makes clear, that the divine is displeased by them. The second option attributes these negative facets to the soul which is also conflicted by them and might also be unable to prevent them. And the third assumes that bitterness, rage, anger and despair are discrete forces with a power of their own. All three readings could I think be held at the same time.

Turning now to MN's version we will see that he has translated *'forcener'* in yet another way, but that he agrees with Babinsky's attribution of it to the soul rather than to the divine. Another difference is that the Bodley 505 text has given this section the heading label 'Of iii beholdyngs þat on schould have to com to pees. And how we

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<sup>172</sup> *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, amertume, s., 1, 2; *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, forsener, v.

<sup>173</sup> 'Tunc turbamus in amaritudine et cogimus ad furendum contra nos illum qui non uult. Nullus est defectus qui paruus sit, et ex quo diuinae uoluntati non placet, oportet quod sibi displiceat', see Verdeyen, ed., *Speculum simplicium animarum*, ch, 102, p. 281.

should not sett lytyl by a defaute don agenst god'.<sup>174</sup> The section does include the line about the pity of wickedness over goodness, but clearly the scribe thought this less important than the speech by 'this soul' which in the French and continental Latin versions is part of the previous chapter. The soul tells 'vndirstandinge of þe soule nouzted' that it should behold what god 'haþ don and what he doiþ & what he schal do' as then it shall have peace and stillness.<sup>175</sup> The noughted soul laments that the joined body and soul means that it is in a 'cart of correccion' and then MN renders the section concerning us here as:

And whanne defaute ouercomeþ þis complexion and þis creacion pat ben made of þe diuine goodnesse, it semeþ not litel þis hou litel þat þe defaute be. And þanne it troubleþ us into bitternesse and hurtleþ to a woodnesse azens us. þis þat haþ not of wille, it is not litel þis, siþen it plesip not to þe diuine wille but displesip him.<sup>176</sup>

'Hurtleþ to woodnesse' has been glossed by Doiron and translated by Kirchberger as 'drive to a madness'.<sup>177</sup> Methley agrees with Doiron and Kirchberger, translating the phrase as 'urged into insanity/madness against us' (*hortatur ad insaniam contra nos*), retaining the idea of being 'of unsound mind', of acting like a madman, raging and raving.<sup>178</sup> *MED* definitions of 'woodnesse' also include 'despair' and 'a fit or state of grief or despair' alongside 'severe emotional distress or agitation; mental agony', but can also refer to 'intense or unreasoning anger, rage, fury', and 'hostility or rage against

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<sup>174</sup> Bodley 505, ff. 187r.

<sup>175</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 150.

<sup>176</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 150.

<sup>177</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 212; Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 143.

<sup>178</sup> Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, ch. 143, p. 106. The whole passage reads 'Et quando defectus superat istam complexionem et istam creacionem, que ex diuina creantur bonitate, non apparet paruus, quantumcunque paruus sit defectus. Et tunc nos in amaritudinem turbat, et hortatur ad insaniam contra nos, iste qui de voluntate non habet. Iste non est paruus, cum diuine non placeat voluntati, sed ei displiceat' which I translate as 'And then we are troubled into bitterness and urged into madness against us, that which does not have will. This is not small, since it would not be pleasing to the divine will but displeasing to him'.

(God)'.<sup>179</sup> MN's rendering of this passage can be interpreted as what happens to the embodied soul when it is taken over by faults against its own will, and consequently understands that even the smallest sin might not be forgiven. In this reading the soul is so disgusted with these defects that it turns on itself, with the term 'woodnesse' leaving room for all the responses from rage at what has happened, to mental instability at not being able to comprehend how and why even such small defaults can occur, to despair at knowing that it will incur God's wrath and may not be either forgiven or properly repented. This concurs with the next statement by the 'knowing of diuine Ligt' saying that it is angry the soul might think any defect is small, demonstrating that the soul has reason to be in despair at the prospect that it will never be 'wel enlumyned', since the divine light is so offended and displeased at 'such recheleshede' (recklessness/negligence).<sup>180</sup>

There is one further issue to deal with however. Doiron's transcribed sentence construction, based on SJC C. 21, attaches the clause 'þis þat haþ not of wille' to the following sentence about what does and does not please the divine, rather than the previous one concerning the soul's distress. Kirchberger, translating from Bodley 505, which has the least punctuation, agrees with Doiron:

And then, this fault troubleth us into bitterness and driveth to a madness against ourselves. [Though] it is not wilful, it is not a little thing this, since it pleaseth not the divine will, but displeaseth him.<sup>181</sup>

In this, she has chosen not to be guided by Methley who has attached the clause to the soul, and whose translation can be rendered as 'and then we are troubled into bitterness

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<sup>179</sup> *MED*, wōdnes(se n., 2a, b, and c.

<sup>180</sup> Doiron, ed., *De Mirroure of Simple Soules*, p. 150.

<sup>181</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 143.

and urged to madness against us, that which is not from will'.<sup>182</sup> Here, I think 'that' is the defect that comes upon the embodied soul regardless of its will and it is perhaps because the soul does not seek sin but embodies it anyway, that it is so greatly distressed. Conversely, Kirchberger has emphasised the fact that the divine is displeased even though the soul has not consented to any defects. Both are plausible and could be simultaneously true. The following brief look at the ME punctuation might shed some light on this, but it is not conclusive. Since there was no standard convention, scribes often used punctuation marks in a variety of ways, depending partly on how they were taught as well as according to the text's intended use. Something written for an orator to perform to an audience may, for example, emphasise certain areas and allow for variations in order to make the content more interesting and memorable. Some of this might explain the slight punctuation differences in the examples below:

SJC C. 21: and þanne it troubleþ us in to bitternesse and hurtleþ to a woodnesse azens us : þis þat haþ not of will / it is not litel þis : siþen it plesip not to þe diuine wille. but displesip him [paraph]<sup>183</sup>

Amherst: And than it troubles us into bitternes // & hurteles to a woodnes ageyns us : þis þat hase not of wille / it is not litel this : sithen it pleses not to the diuine wille · but displeses hym<sup>184</sup>

Bodley 505: / and þanne it troubleþ|us in to bitternesse and hurtleþ to a woodenesse azens us þis þat haþ not of wille / it is not litel þis · siþen it plesip not to þe diuine wil but displesip him [paraph]<sup>185</sup>

<sup>182</sup> 'Et tunc nos in amaritudinem turbat, et hortatur ad insaniam contra nos, iste qui de voluntate non habet', Clark, ed., *Speculum Animarum Simplicium*, ch. 143, p. 106.

<sup>183</sup> SJC C. 21, f. 77v. Doiron's edition is based on this text. The punctus on the last line is attached to the end stroke of the 'e' in wille, but other final 'e's do not usually have this mark.

<sup>184</sup> Amherst f. 203v.

<sup>185</sup> Bodley 505, ff. 187r-187v. The words 'to a woodenesse azens us' are corrections where the previous text was scraped away and replaced with a darker black ink. Kirchberger's translation is based on this text which she describes as 'unpunctuated', which it is not, though it does have fewer punctuation marks than the others. See Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. vii-viii. The fuller punctuation in SJC C. 21 and Amherst might indicate that the exemplar they were copied from was intended for reading out loud.



The Bodley 505 version clearly includes ‘þis þat haþ not of wille’ as part of the ‘woodnesse’ clause, and the virgula appears to denote a longer pause than the punctus. The combined punctus and virgula, /·/ and ·/, in Amherst however is puzzling. The final one obviously denotes the end of the sentence (the divine light takes over after this), but the first one appears in the middle of a thought. M. B. Parkes describes a version of this sign, with the dot on rather than beside the /, as ‘used by Humanist writers of the fourteenth century to indicate disjunction greater than that indicated by / and less than that indicated by [a punctus elevatus].<sup>186</sup> Even though this is a fifteenth-century scribe, however, I think that is what is happening here, with the sign having greater weight than the double punctus. This indicates a shorter pause and shows that the phrases either side are linked. When Amherst is rendered in modern punctuation : would be shown by a comma, and the ·/ by a full stop, and I think the same is true in SJC C. 21, although in that case the virgula on its own is used.<sup>187</sup> So in contrast to Doiron, and in agreement with Methley, I think the section with modern punctuation should probably be:

and þanne it troubleþ us in to bitternesse and hurtleþ to a woodnesse azens us, þis þat haþ not of will. It is not litel þis, siþen it plesih not to þe diuine wille, but displesih him.

Clearly then, the reader of MN’s version of *Simple Souls* can interpret the text, words and phrasing, in several different ways, but all involve extreme emotional responses, from anger to madness to despair, even within the intellectual part of the annihilated soul – which is supposed to feel neither shame nor worship about anything. The implication here is that the soul is not only thrown into such great distress at its own willed sins, but

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<sup>186</sup> M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), p. 307.

<sup>187</sup> This practice is not unique and is similar to that found in other manuscripts such as Bodley 131.

at the fact that it is innately defective and displeasing to God, even after baptism. The smallest fault mars divine creation and is painful to acknowledge because it wounds God. The unwilling for bitterness and ‘woodnesse’ are also faults however, and it may be these that Knowing of Divine Light is so offended by, since they will drive the soul even further away. The combined madness and despair here therefore has an internal rather than outward-facing manifestation, but the whole passage might remind the reader that even their smallest willed sin is a grievous injury, and such thoughts could be visibly seen in others.

As we saw in the introduction, for example, Huber argues that Margery Kempe’s madness is actually ‘a specific bout of terrible despair’.<sup>188</sup> Margery ‘goes “owt of hir mende”’ after her confessor was too harsh with her and Huber thinks her ‘madness is characterized by a remarkable rage, “woodness” which targets her community and support system, both domestic and spiritual’, and is all part of her experience of despair.<sup>189</sup> Huber points out that it is precisely because of the actions of ‘spiritual authority’ towards her that causes Margery to fall into such ‘madness/despair/sinfulness’, a danger which Chobham warned against in his advice to confessors as we saw in chapter one, and the same authority which *Simple Souls* dismisses in favour of an internalised higher authority.<sup>190</sup> Huber interprets Margery’s ‘performance of madness and despair’ as a way of questioning and ‘subverting the master discourses of theology and psychology’ by not following the social contract with the normal behaviours of confession and penance.<sup>191</sup> Reading material could be equally problematic for the

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<sup>188</sup> Huber, ‘For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe Ys Y’, p. 182.

<sup>189</sup> Huber, ‘For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe Ys Y’, p. 186.

<sup>190</sup> Huber, ‘For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe Ys Y’, p. 189.

<sup>191</sup> Huber, ‘For Y Am Sorwe, and Sorwe Ys Y’, p. 214.

layperson, as Natalie Calder has shown with texts like William Flete's *Remediis contra temptaciones*. Concerned with 'the mental health of readers who were exposed to the complexities of late medieval vernacular theology' it counsels the reader on how to mitigate tendencies toward despair.<sup>192</sup>

The link between uncontrolled passions such as anger and intense sadness with despair and madness is therefore apparent across the centuries in both enclosed orders and for the spiritual layperson.<sup>193</sup> Both antique and medieval writers have referred to despair as a form of insanity, noting its links to sadness and depression. Evagrius for example, wrote a guide on how to pray effectively even when goaded by the devil. In *On Prayer* he grouped together the ideas of anger, sadness, and madness by warning that 'no one yearning (erô) for true prayer who also becomes angry or remembers injuries can be anything but insane: it is like wishing for good eyesight while tearing at your own eyes'.<sup>194</sup> Peraldus' *Summa de virtutem* directly links despair with madness by saying that it does not merely 'bend the mind/soul towards evil' but actually breaks it, citing Jeremiah 30:12 'thy wound is incurable'.<sup>195</sup> Likewise, Snyder has pointed out that *The Cloud of Unknowing* connects excessive sorrow to the possibility of ideations of suicide and madness.<sup>196</sup> The person who is trying to find 'a felyng of his God in purtee of spirit'

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<sup>192</sup> Natalie Calder, 'Remedies for Despair: Considering Mental Health in Late Medieval England' in *Medical Paratexts from Medieval to Modern. Dissecting the Page*, ed. by Hannah C. Tweed and Diane G. Scott (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 93-109 (p. 97).

<sup>193</sup> See Mary Begley, 'The Middle English Lexical Field of Insanity: Semantic Change and Conceptual Metaphor' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Manchester University, 2018), pp. 193, 201 for the lexical relationship between despair, being on the edge, falling into something, and the connection with insanity.

<sup>194</sup> Evagrius, *On Prayer*, trans. by Luke Dysinger <[http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03\\_Prayer/00a\\_start.htm](http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm)>, ch. 65, [accessed 10 July 2020]. For a discussion of Evagrius' approach to *acedia* see Reinhard Clifford Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 43-5.

<sup>195</sup> 'Cum cetera peccata sint inflexiones cordis ad malum, peccatum desperationis fractura cordis est. Ieremie xxx: Insanabilis fractura tua, pessima plaga tua. [Jer 30:12]' in Peraldus, *Summa de virtutem*, f. 76v.

<sup>196</sup> Snyder, *The Left Hand of God*, 1965, p. 23.

might only find that they are ‘fillyd wiþ a foule stinkyng lumpe of him-self’.<sup>197</sup> Even though this might cause them to ‘go ni wood for sorow’ such that they ‘wepiþ and weiliþ, striuiþ, cursiþ and banneþ’ they will not desire ‘to vnbe, for þat were deuelles woodnes & despite vnto God’.<sup>198</sup> This suggests that the *Cloud* author is sanctioning a degree of anguish in response to self-knowledge, but with a warning that it must stop short of complete despair.

All these examples of *woodnesse* demonstrate that with an irreparably broken mind and soul, one is not only immediately outside the norms of human behaviour of any given community but also completely unable to worship God correctly. The constant message in the remedial literature is that the spiritual person will experience tendencies of madness and despair but they can always be countered by loving God and trusting in His power. Even in *Simple Souls*, distress at one’s sins should not completely unbalance us, or as Kirchberger glossed it, ‘should not be allowed to drive us to a “bitter spirit against ourselves”’.<sup>199</sup>

The issue of doctrinal expediency raised by Kirchberger is a hallmark for all the translators discussed in this thesis, and is also a truism for most religious writers. The translators’ different versions reflect their own understanding of what the text is intended to be used for, and the extent to which they needed to reflect the orthodox position of their own religious communities. A translation which was intended to aid devotion for the modern reader reflects the original reason for which the text was written in the first place, as well as the near-contemporary medieval translations. To a great extent, the

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<sup>197</sup> Hodgson, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 84.

<sup>198</sup> Hodgson, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 84.

<sup>199</sup> Kirchberger, ed., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. 143, n. 323.

twentieth-century religious scholars discussed here are grappling with their own understanding of authorised doctrine, in combination with any agenda of their own, in very similar ways to how MN and Methley would have done. Like the medieval writers, translators, and inquisitors before them, some of the twentieth-century translators also wanted to find one clear, immutable meaning from the text. Any explosion of paradoxical meanings was seen as suspect, with Colledge *et al* using such contradictions to prove how Porete was really a despicable heretic underneath seemingly acceptable prose.<sup>200</sup>

However, *Simple Souls* does encourage the reader to disrupt the dominant theological and pastoral discourse within society. It not only allows but expects the reader to be creative with the text itself and to apply their own gloss, available to those perfect souls who arrive at a direct understanding independently of the text. At the same time, Porete writes with an authority which places the reader as well as ‘clerks’, churchmen and the professed in the role of Reason, a character who repeatedly interrogates the teachings and statements of Love and the Soul. Reason finally appears to disintegrate after realising he will never be able to grasp the essence of being a simple soul within his own logical discourse. The corollary is that the reader too has to divest herself of her own identity – a process made explicit in the fifth stage towards perfection. Counterintuitively, the freedom which *Simple Souls* allows the reader to interrogate the text for themselves has the possibility of inducing anxiety not only within the forces of authority which condemned both book and author, but also for the reader. By saying that the perfect soul is in a state of equilibrium, the implication is that the imperfect, embodied, soul – and therefore the reader – is unlikely to be able to reach it for most of the time. In addition, the very act of finding several different meanings

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<sup>200</sup> Colledge *et al*, eds., *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. liv-lv.

within the same text might be a cause for despairing that no ‘true’ meaning is to be found at all – and therefore no reunification within the divine.

Of the two main texts discussed here, Julian always shows a willingness to relate to her audience while still expecting them to do some complex, imaginative, work. Her repeated use of wretchedness softens sinfulness, allowing the reader to feel forlorn and disconnected rather than objectively evil, and her use of language allows access to self-compassion and unity with one’s fellow Christians as well as with the Divine. In contrast, *Simple Souls* sets the ambitions of the reader at a higher level. The reminders that not everyone will understand what it is to become perfect sets the tone of her text as aspirational, whereas Julian’s writing appears to be more achievable. Both are willing to suffer on the cross with Christ, but in *Simple Souls* the reader is encouraged to go beyond suffering towards a definitive and lasting spiritual state of unfeeling. Towards the end of the text, when the author has to consider the three questions of whether she could love someone else more than God; whether He could love someone else more than her; and if someone else could love her more than God does, she demonstrates her own pain in deciding to cede her will to Him when on the brink of the abyss.<sup>201</sup> The fact that she has to make a decision to do so reinforces the original, and MN’s covert, message that neither God, nor a force of evil, can take the soul’s will without its conscious consent. The time spent pondering this question resonates with Aelred’s turbulence when on the edge of despair, and Anselm’s premonition of doomsday. And shows the huge (impossible) struggle involved in divesting the self of everything which makes it fully human.

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<sup>201</sup> As discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

In contrast, for Julian, suffering is always a part of life. She recognises that the perfect sorrow between presumption and despair is a necessary step towards placing one's hope in the divine. Julian does not ask her reader to make a final choice in the way *Simple Souls* does. Instead, she guides them on their daily journeys where the pain of sin is continually present. The choice to accept and return God's love has to be made again and again, even when it does not seem available and the reader is struggling under the weight of a debilitating spiritual heaviness. No large gesture is demanded of the reader with the promise that they will never have to return to a state of sadness and looming despair. She knows that for most ordinary people, living their lives within society with all the distractions and potential for sin that entails, that promising a state of continual peace could be a cruelty. Her readers will never be able to attain it and she does not burden them with the thought of its possibility. For *Simple Souls* however, the reader must be prepared to enact their devotional practice on a more metaphysical plane where the perpetual peace the text proffers is akin to that found in Buddhism and Sufism.<sup>202</sup> If this higher spiritual level can be achieved, perhaps it is possible to maintain a sense of inner peace while also acknowledging, but not fully reacting to, all of life's vicissitudes.

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<sup>202</sup> As discussed by Newman and Sells in the discussions on the abyss in this chapter and chapter four of this thesis.

## Conclusion: The Contemplative Life and a Modern World in Tumult

In drawing to a close I would like to reflect on the extent to which ideas relating to despair and mutability of language discussed in this thesis might have some relevance today. At the time of writing, the world has been struggling to respond to a global pandemic – COVID-19 – for nearly a year. It has also been a year in which the competing ‘truths’ people hold have been brought into sharp focus, whether that be in terms of health, politics, racism, misogyny, or other areas where minority voices have not been heard, respected, or taken seriously by those who control the narrative.<sup>1</sup> In these tumultuous times many people have joined together in support and validation of each other, both conceptually and emotionally, even though they are forced to be physically distant. Strict lockdowns have meant that people are confined within their homes, often alone and unable to meet with their usual networks of support, for long periods of time.

In the first part of this thesis, I mentioned that the desert monks, confined to their individual cells, and the recluses Aelred’s wrote for, needed advice on how to maintain their spiritual enthusiasm for prayer and devotion to God. They were advised to guard against the noonday demon, and the temptation to explore beyond their confining walls,

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<sup>1</sup> On the 45th US President, his relationship with the media, and the US 2020 election see Eliza Bechtold, ‘Fox News, Donald Trump’s cheerleaders and the journalists who challenged his narrative’, *The Conversation*, 10 November 2020 <<https://theconversation.com/fox-news-donald-trumps-cheerleaders-and-the-journalists-who-challenged-his-narrative-149575>> [accessed 3 December 2020]; On the correlation between an increase in prejudice and hate crimes since the 2016 referendum to leave the European Union in 2021 see Daniel Devine, ‘Discrete Events and Hate Crimes: The Causal Role of the Brexit Referendum’, *Social Science Quarterly*, 18 November 2020, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12896>>; On the Black Lives Matter movement in the US see Shalonda Kelly, Gihane Jeremie-Brink, Anthony L. Chambers, and Mia A. Smith-Bynum, ‘The Black Lives Matter Movement: A Call to Action for Couple and Family Therapists’, *Family Process*, 20 November 2020 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12614>>, and on its relevance to the UK see Lambros Fatsis, ‘Why the UK needs its own Black Lives Matter moment to wake up to police racism’ *The Conversation*, 7 August 2018 <<https://theconversation.com/why-the-uk-needs-its-own-black-lives-matter-moment-to-wake-up-to-police-racism-100998>> [accessed 3 December 2020].



by changing their occupation regularly. For many, enforced lockdown has led to a similar sense of torpor and distress. Conversely, for Julian, who lived through the Black Death, being confined in a small space with a limited view enabled her insights into the limitless expanse of the loving divine and to find compassion for herself and her fellow suffering Christians. Because of this, in the first British quarantine period she was used as a comparable example and source of comfort by the media, bloggers, priests, and medievalists.<sup>2</sup> Godelinde Gertrude Perk, for example, wrote about how Julian's words, and manuals for anchorites such as the *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, provided similar coping strategies to those found in modern survival psychology.<sup>3</sup> These include acknowledging one's own vulnerability; keeping in mind the wellbeing of others; protecting oneself from adverse sensory input such as gossip gleaned at the anchorite's window, or the fake news of today; and the need for a routine of manageable but absorbing activities in order to avoid attacks from the devil which might lead to a fractured mind.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately however, instances of anxiety and depression have increased as a direct result of the virus. A recent review of the scientific literature on the effects of the pandemic and enforced isolation has found that:

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include: Nic Rigby, 'Coronavirus: Mystic's 'relevance' to self-isolating world, *BBC News, East* <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-52020227>> 29 March 2020 [accessed 20 November 2020]; Ian Black, 'Looking up while locked down - lessons from Julian of Norwich, 3 May 2020 <[canonianblack.wordpress.com](https://canonianblack.wordpress.com)> [accessed 20 November 2020]; Matt Gardner, 'Julian of Norwich: 'A theologian for our time'', *Anglican Journal*, national newspaper of the Anglican Church in Canada, 7 May 2020 <<https://www.anglicanjournal.com/julian-of-norwich-a-theologian-for-our-time/>> [accessed 20 November 2020]; For a humorous take in comic form see Ernesto Priego, 'The Lockdown Chronicles 1: Julian', *Everything is Connected: Ernesto Priego's blog. Technology. Politics. Design. Comics. Literature. Society. The Lot*, 7 April 2020 <<https://epriego.blog/2020/04/07/the-lockdown-chronicles-julian/>> and another on Richard Rolle: 'The Lockdown Chronicles 2: Richard', 8 April 2020 <<https://epriego.blog/2020/04/08/the-lockdown-chronicles-richard/>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Godelinde Gertrude Perk, 'Coronavirus: advice from the Middle Ages for how to cope with self-isolation', *The Conversation*, 27 March 2020 <<https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-advice-from-the-middle-ages-for-how-to-cope-with-self-isolation-134585>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>4</sup> Perk, 'Coronavirus: advice from the Middle Ages for how to cope with self-isolation'.

A high prevalence of adverse psychiatric symptoms was reported in most studies. The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented threat to mental health in high, middle, and low-income countries. In addition to flattening the curve of viral transmission, priority needs to be given to the prevention of mental disorders (e.g. major depressive disorder, PTSD, as well as suicide). A combination of government policy that integrates viral risk mitigation with provisions to alleviate hazards to mental health is urgently needed.<sup>5</sup>

Part of a solution could be for people to learn techniques for reaching and maintaining the state of equilibrium expounded by Julian and Porete. Their texts, and the cenobitic writing discussed in this thesis, have points of connection with the current interest in mindfulness and meditation as a means of calming and mending the distressed mind. A recent study has shown that if one can develop a ‘distant, cold, and non-judgmental perspective’, then there is an increase in the brainwaves which induce a more relaxed state.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, if someone is fully focused and in a state of flow, which could be during meditation but also when concentrating on an absorbing task, then different networks in the brain are activated so that ‘low self-awareness and speeding of subjective time occur’.<sup>7</sup> But the struggles and dangers the medieval writers address are also of relevance to today, and effective support structures are still necessary. As Michael Sells has noted, the language of unsaying

demands a rigorous and sustained effort both to use and free oneself from normal habits of thought and expression. It demands a willingness to let go, at a particular moment, of the grasping for guarantees and for knowledge as a

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<sup>5</sup> Jiaqi Xiong, Orly Lipsitz, Flora Nasri, Leanna M.W. Lui, Hartej Gill, Lee Phan, David Chen-Li, Michelle Iacobucci, Roger Ho, Amna Majeed, Roger S. McIntyre, ‘Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health in the General Population: A Systematic Review’, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 277 (2020), 55–64 (p. 62).

<sup>6</sup> Simone Sulpizio, Alessandro Grecucci, and Remo Job, ‘Tune in to the Right Frequency: Theta Changes When Distancing from Emotions Elicited by Unpleasant Images and Words’, *European Journal of Neuroscience*, 2020, 00:1-13 (pp. 8-9) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejn.15013>>. This was an early view online version of this paper accepted for publication on 13 October 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitri Linden, Mattie Tops, and Arnold B. Bakker, ‘Go with the Flow: A Neuroscientific View on Being Fully Engaged’, *European Journal of Neuroscience*, 2020, 00:1-17 (pp. 11-12) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejn.15014>>. This was an early view online version of this paper accepted for publication on 13 October 2020.

possession. It demands a moment of vulnerability. Yet for those who value it, this moment of unsaying and unknowing is what it is to be human.<sup>8</sup>

Those interested in freeing their minds do so with a sense of curiosity about what it means to be fully alive, looking outside their own sense of self and any external constructs placed upon them. We have seen how Julian was responding to the difficulties of confession and repentance, of being responsible for one's own path to salvation, and the potential consequences of sin. She sought to provide solace and practical actions to sooth the internal struggle created by an institutional need for introspection. The parallel with today is that, while mindfulness and meditation are often touted as the modern panacea for the anxious and depressed, people struggling to learn these practices on their own often find that the process of confronting themselves causes even more pain. And it needs to be borne in mind that mindfulness and deep meditation are not necessarily the same.

Studies have shown that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), a form of mindfulness which includes noticing what is happening outside of the mind and in the present moment, can relieve symptoms of anxiety and depression. In one study, the online delivery of CBT through workbooks and the setting of various tasks, while being monitored and responded to by a real person, proved to be generally as effective as face-to-face interaction.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the knowledge of an abbot would have been helpful in guiding each brother in the best way for their temperament, adhering to doctrine but altering delivery as required, it is possible that this mode of remote mentoring might be similarly helpful for people needing to remain in solitary isolation.

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<sup>8</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> Meredith S. Pescatello, Tyler R. Pedersen, and Scott A. Baldwin, 'Treatment Engagement and Effectiveness of an Internet-Delivered Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Program at a University Counseling Center', *Psychotherapy Research*, 2020, 1–12 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2020.1822559>>.

However, it is when one goes beyond mindfulness into deep meditation where difficulties are likely to arise. As one therapist has put it, meditation is ‘not a means to achieve happiness but a route to an understanding of why no self exists that can be said to be suffering in the first place’.<sup>10</sup> This clearly resonates with the message of annihilation which *Simple Souls* addresses, where the soul no longer reacts to stimulus of any kind, but for this to happen the soul has to go beyond the first stages of mindfulness into a meditation which can involve an honest self-seeing sometimes similar to despair. Just as Bernard warns that despair is likely when a monk is unable to replicate the experience of divine union, the same is true if one’s expectations of mindfulness are that unwanted thoughts will disappear. On the contrary, the purpose is to consciously face one’s difficulties, to interrogate the feelings they invoke, to observe them without judgement, just as the perfect, simple soul is meant to do. The accomplished practitioner who can confront themselves in this way recognises their affinity with the universe, and that they are a small part of it, without despairing, but they might have to reach a point close to it first.<sup>11</sup>

Studies have shown that when patients with physically painful symptoms have been taught mindful-based stress reduction techniques in the right way, they will learn to ‘cultivate kindness, acceptance, generosity and patience towards life’s unavoidable vagaries, whether unpleasant, pleasant or neutral’, and are likely to go on to report either

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<sup>10</sup> Duncan Barford, ‘Dark Night of the Soul: Duncan Barford Explains Why Mindfulness Is Associated with Risk of Severe Negative Psychological Effects’, *Therapy Today*, 29 (2018), 34–37 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=jlh&AN=131269670&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 November 2020] This has been accessed from an online source with no page numbers.

<sup>11</sup> Yvonne M. Y. Han, Sophia L. Sze, Queenie Y. Wong, and Agnes S. Chan, ‘A Mind-Body Lifestyle Intervention Enhances Emotional Control in Patients with Major Depressive Disorder: A Randomized, Controlled Study’, *Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 20 (2020), 1056–69 <<https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-020-00819-z>>

improved symptoms, or an improvement in their ability to cope with them.<sup>12</sup> These are the same principles and practices we saw employed by Chobham in chapter one, and the *vita contemplativa* writers discussed in chapter two of this thesis. These twelfth and thirteenth-century writers consciously altered their approach to be one of loving kindness when encountering people who were tempted by despair, even though in the vices and virtues framework it was condemned as the worst of all sins. The role of the confessor, abbot, and each brother, is to ensure that spiritual needs, sometimes inseparable from emotional needs, are understood, and Robert Swanson has made the point that pastoral care for the laity was as much a Christian duty for the whole community as it was for the pastor.<sup>13</sup> The problem of despair was therefore not only an issue of concern between the individual and their confessor. Someone's low moods and bodily heaviness, described in texts from *Perambulavit* to Julian's *Revelations*, could affect everyone around them on both a psychological and spiritual basis. When one is drawn towards despair in a monastic setting however, there is a structure in place to help, but in the lay community that structure sometimes had to be constructed by the penitent themselves – and as Margery Kempe found, if one is in a hostile environment that can be particularly hard to do. Catherine Beaumont's theory of scapegoating might be useful here: people transfer their own sins onto one person and then expel them from the community as a way of removing their own guilt. She notes that this is usually an unconscious process but the person is often marked by several factors: guilt, which is foisted upon them by the group; difference, where they are seen as part of the group but

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Grossman, 'Serious Illness, Overwhelmingly Unpleasant Feeling Tone of Life, and How Even Incipient Mindfulness Training May Sometimes Help', *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19 (2018), 127–44 (pp. 134, 138).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Swanson, 'Pastoral Care, Pastoral Cares, Pastoral Carers: Configuring the Cura Pastoralis in Pre-Reformation England', in *Pastoral Care in Medieval England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. by Peter Clarke and Sarah James (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, Kindle edition, 2020), pp. 134–53 (p. 134).

on the margins of it so that they can be blamed for any problems; and isolation, where no one is willing to speak up for them.<sup>14</sup> This resonates with some of what happened to Margery Kempe and Marguerite Porete, and demonstrates how one's surrounding community can be a powerful influence on whether one continues in hope or gets stuck in despair.

As found in several of the texts discussed in this thesis, the cultivation of mindful benevolence towards the self and to others within one's community is perhaps the intervention required in modern pastoral care too. As we saw in chapter four of this thesis, Susan Shooter describes the relaxation of rigid boundaries and sense of self-will as a step towards a healing process between those in positions of power and the abused members of their Church. When giving the inaugural lecture to launch the Bible, Gender and Church Research Centre, set up in 2019 to interrogate Bible stories from the non-dominant point of view, she advocated that research should include the voices of the disempowered and the silenced so that any current damage is not compounded by trying to make the dominant narratives fit.<sup>15</sup> Her research has been summarised by saying

that people who had gone through traumatic events like sexual abuse and retained their faith developed a really profound understanding of spirituality. Their level of faith and engagement with God was potentially comparable to people who partook in advanced spiritual practice. There seems to be something about traumatic events that either makes us lose faith or draws us dramatically closer to God, but rarely leaves us the same.<sup>16</sup>

The Church of England has published two fairly succinct guidance documents for local

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Beaumont, *Supporting Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A Mimetic Theory Approach for the Local Church* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, Kindle edition, 2020), location 82 [no page numbers given].

<sup>15</sup> Reverend Dr Susan Shooter, *Inaugural Lecture for The Bible, Gender and Church Research Centre*, Cliff Festival, Cliff College, 27 May 2019 <<https://cliffcollege.ac.uk/about-cliff-college/the-bible-gender-and-church-research-centre>> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>16</sup> Aneka James, 'Bible, Gender and Church Research Centre - The First Year', Cliff College website <<https://oldcc.thehopecollective.org.uk/bible-gender-and-church-research-centre-the-first-year>> [accessed 22 November 2020].

churches on how to respond to people who have been abused, both of which refer to Shooter's research. In the initial publication her book is only mentioned as further reading under the heading of 'going deeper (more specialized and/or may presume more academic knowledge)'.<sup>17</sup> In their second publication, her work is directly referred to, but there is no mention of one of Shooter's central messages: that those with the responsibility for pastoral care need to find a way of dissolving their own boundaries in a similar way to the abused so that they work *with* them, rather than provide pastoral care *to* them. Instead they say:

In a more overtly theological vein, Susan Shooter writes about the 'annihilation of the soul', using a metaphor from medieval mysticism to articulate the depth of the evil done through abuse.<sup>18</sup>

They appear to have missed the point that the 'annihilation of the soul' also led to an increased spiritual connection with the divine which was dismissed by the Church authorities in these women's cases.

The implication for Shooter is that the usual narratives of harm, where the dominant discourse has silenced the voices of the abused, needs to be challenged. In her own work, her choice of Porete's translator was a factor here. Babinsky's translation allowed Shooter to make smoother insights between her research and Porete's theology because Babinsky's approach was inclusive and compassionate where Colledge *et al*'s was more combative. By using Babinsky's 'wretched' (instead of Colledge *et al*'s 'evil'), for both perpetrator and survivor, Shooter was more able to apply Porete's theology of annihilation and self-noughting to the experiences of the abused person. Shooter was

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<sup>17</sup> The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Theological Resource for the Local Church*, 2016 <[www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)> [accessed 22 November 2020], p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse*, 2017 <[www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)> [accessed 22 November 2020], p. 46.

certainly aware of the Colledge *et al* translation, and aware too that Colledge wholeheartedly accepted the conclusions of Porete's trial: 'the tragedy is that the hostility of the historical documents has been repeated in recent scholarship. Edmund Colledge called Porete the 'High Priestess of Free Spirit heresy'.<sup>19</sup> Colledge *et al* demonstrate a male-centred authority which gives little room to the curious, and especially not the inventive and imaginative, woman. But as chapter five has shown, just as Julian and MN used the term 'wretched' in relation to human nature, thereby diffusing the idea of wickedness, so terms previously used in relation to sexuality and race, for example, have been creatively reappropriated and subverted by specific groups today. And sometimes these new usages have become understood by society to the extent that words previously in common parlance are now no longer tolerated by the many, not just the few.

An understanding of the creative process for writer, translator and reader is therefore important. Michael Sells has noted the tendency for academics to want to find the 'true meaning' from a text, and that

apophatic texts have suffered in a particularly acute manner from the urge to paraphrase the meaning in non-apophatic language or to fill in the open referent – to say what the text really meant to say, but didn't.<sup>20</sup>

My research has not sought to close down, or reveal one 'true' meaning, but to demonstrate the multiplicity of processes involved in the creation of meaning, and to highlight the vital role of the reader, translator and interpreter. By looking at the interpretations of a range of translators, both medieval and modern, I hope to have demonstrated that the readers of medieval devotionalia cannot be considered as an

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<sup>19</sup> Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*, p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p. 4.



homogenous group, reading the same text in the same ways. My thesis has shown that apophatic literature in particular can simultaneously provide the reader with the possibility of creativity and hope as well as restriction and despair. Which path is chosen will partly depend on someone's own self-identity and their need for community validation.

I have said out as far as I can think it,  
but words do not touch the thing I am saying, not yet.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 'Si enim dixero quidquid potero cogitari nondum ad id quod res est poterit compari?'. As quoted and translated by Pranger in M. B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity*, p. 122. Pranger does not provide a reference for this quote, but it appears to be from Bernhard von Waging, *Tractatus de morte necnon de preparatione ad mortem seu peculum mortis*, 1458, f. 55v. [Treatise on Death as well as the Preparation for Death or Savings against Death]. See <[http://gwi-exist2.gwi.uni-muenchen.de:8081/exist/apps/bvw/works/Tractatus\\_de\\_morte.html](http://gwi-exist2.gwi.uni-muenchen.de:8081/exist/apps/bvw/works/Tractatus_de_morte.html)> [accessed 2 December 2020].

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