

Chapter 4

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT, FOAM, AND FLUIDS

WHO CONTRIBUTES MORE to making a baby, men or women? Against the prevalent view of her time that men provided the essential elements for creating new life, Hildegard emphasized the complementary relationship between the sexes. She saw reproduction as a collaborative process where neither men nor women could create offspring alone, just as God and human beings were inseparable. While the woman's body is often represented as a passive entity, Hildegard's understanding is quite the opposite: the female body not only receives but also purifies and creates the living. At the same time, it also kindles, nourishes, and develops the reproductive materials. Additionally, the birth of a baby is comparable to God's creation of Eve. Just as God created the first human beings using the four elements and breath, the woman's body uses its four elements and humours and the soul sent from God. The woman's body is optimized for this because it is already acclimated to flow. The foetus's soul flows in through the womb just like God's breath flowed into Eve. The elements of the universe flow and are present in the form of the humours in a woman's body, which nurtures and grows the embryo. These processes occur only within the woman's body.

Women's and Men's Complementary Roles in Intercourse

Hildegard's writings maintain the view that men are stronger and women are subordinated to men.¹ However, a woman's relative weakness is an equal part of a complementary relationship, just like a man's virility. Men are stronger because women are weaker.² Eve is a reservoir of the prophetic knowledge that God sent to Adam in his sleep, and she is also the reservoir

¹ "The woman is subject to the man in that he sows his seed in her, as he works the earth to make it bear fruit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 84. "Mulier uiro subiecta est in qua ipse semen suum seminet, sicut etiam terram operator ut fructum afferat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 22, p. 29.

² Newman also points out the importance of Eve in enabling Adam to become aware of himself, having her as a mirror and reflection. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 94–98.

of future offspring.³ Hildegard describes women and men as so complementary that they cannot exist without each other.

Male and female are joined together, therefore, in such a way that each one works through the other. The male would not be called “male” without the female, or the female named “female” without the male. For woman is man’s work, and man is the solace of woman’s eyes; and neither of them could exist without the other.⁴

The interesting point here is that the relationship between women and men is compared to the relationship between humankind and God. Granted, hierarchy defines both the relations between men and women and those between God and humankind,⁵ since God (compared to human beings) and men (compared to women) are so strong that they can destroy the universe and other beings in irreversible ways, as indicated in Hildegard’s interpretation of original sin; if Adam had sinned first, then humankind would not have had any hope, because of his stubbornness. God and men are like fire.

3 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 68. “Nam cum deus soporem in Adam misit, anima eius in uera prophetia interim multa uidit, quia nondum aliquod peccatum habebat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §164, p. 121. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 111. “Cum enim Adam inspexit Euam, totus sapientia inpletus est, quia matrem, per quam filios procreare debebat, inspexit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §164, p. 121.

4 Newman’s translation, from Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 96. See Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 1, bk. 4, chap. 100, p. 243: “Quia uir sine femina uir non uocaretur, nec femina sine uiro femina nominaretur. Femina enim opus uiri est, et uir aspectus consolationis femine est; et neuter eorum absque altero esse posset.” Interestingly, this reciprocal relation is also applicable to God and his work, the human being, according to Hildegard’s explanation of the relation between the body and the soul. “The soul by no means is without the body, just as God in no way is without work. He hid his work in himself before the ages and eternally in the ages. In the same way, the soul lies hidden, invisible in the body.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 55. “Et sicut anima nullatenus sine corpore, sic et deus nullo modo sine opere est. Opus enim suum ante eum in euo eternaliter in ipso latuit, quemadmodum anima inuisibiliter in corpore latet.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §130, p. 101.

5 Hildegard attributes the creation to fire, and she compares God and men to fire. “He is that Fire from which every fire that provides for happiness is kindled, as sparks come forth from fire.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Campbell, 282. “Et ignis ille est, a quo omnis ignis qui ad beatitudinem respicit assenditur, quemadmodum scintillæ ab igne procedunt.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 14, p. 281.

It is only women and humankind that can mitigate the destructive power of men and God. In the *Book of Divine Works*, Hildegard says, “fire burns with such force that it would spare nothing if it were not tempered by the water. And as water attends to fire by sparing, so too humanity was joined to divinity to be spared”⁶ Of course, fire and water are both necessary. Fire gives humankind light and warmth, while water provides people with blood and flow. “Water manifests heat in a person’s blood, air in his breathing, moisture in his perfected state, inundation in cleansing, quickness in vivification, sap in strengthening, predilection in bringing forth fruit, vital force in erection, moisture in strength, and dampness in all joints.”⁷

Interestingly, men and God are similar in that they are fire. “For God, who is fire and light, vivifies the human person through the soul and moves him through rationality.”⁸ Men in Hildegard’s *Cause et cure* have sexual desire like fire, which is stirred inside the man’s body. The testicles attest to the heat, and the penis has fire, which can be overabundant or too violent.⁹ “Delectation in a man is similar to fire, which sometimes is extinguished, sometimes flames up; constantly burning fire would consume many things.”¹⁰ On the other hand, women and humankind are strongly characterized by water, which is often represented as purgative. The Great Flood in Genesis

6 Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Campbell, 284. “Et ignis in tanta ui ardet, ut nulli parceret nisi per aquam temperaretur. Et ut aqua igni parcendo adest, sic etiam humanitas diuinitati adiuncta est.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 15, p. 283.

7 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 37. “Sic aqua in sanguine hominis calorem, in spiratione eius aerem, in perfectione humorem, in purgatione inundationem, in uegetatione uelocitatem, in confortatione succum, in fructificatione gustum, in erectione uiriditatem, in fortitudine humiditatem ac in omnibus compaginibus ipsius humectationem manifestat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §82, p. 74.

8 Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Campbell, 285. “Nam Deus ignis et lux existens per animam hominem uiuificat et per racionalitatem eum mouet.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 15, p. 283.

9 Hildegard explains that the testicles might have issues such as an ulcer or swelling if a man’s sexual pleasure is excessive and causes dampness. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 83; Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §215, p. 140.

10 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 59. “Nam delectatio in uiro igni assimilatur, qui interdum extinguitur; interdum ascenditur, qui ignis, qui assidue arderet, multa consumeret.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §143, p. 106.

was created to wipe out sinful creatures. “and it [creation] is sustained by the water that washes all things clean.”¹¹ In particular, the female body is known for its strong moisture, while the male body is drier. And of course, women’s menstruation, the peak of blood, is a purgative process, stressing women’s watery nature.

Along the same lines, sexual desire and pleasure function differently according to sex and gender, and they have to be mutual. Hildegard sees the proper exchange of fluids and emotions as positive, and even necessary to health and reproduction. For Hildegard, sexual pleasure itself is not merely a necessary evil, as we saw above. Rather, Hildegard sees it as a necessary *good* for both men and women to have enough pleasure to emit semen or foam and conceive a child. Pleasure is important not just because it arouses but also because it affects the partners through their bodies. Without partners, sexual desire falls into nothing. There should be a consensus and mutual arousal between partners. If only one or the other enjoys sexual intercourse, or neither of them does, it does not provide the proper physical environment needed to produce healthy babies.¹²

According to *Cause et cure*, sexual pleasure is produced from the marrow; then, it travels around the body. The genitals of women and men receive it. However, the mechanism is slightly different in the two sexes. For men, lust is like a storm and fire, which are poured into the genitals.¹³ On the other

11 Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Campbell, 284. “Ipsique aqua adest, quę omnia mundat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 15, p. 283.

12 As for many other medieval theologians, sexual desire and pleasure are only for having offspring for Hildegard. However, this does not mean that she saw them as evil, as many male theologians did. For her, they are needed for reproduction and therefore necessary. Unless they go beyond the norm, they are encouraged. However, she sees that not every person is the same in having pleasure or sexual desire. For instance, melancholic women are not suitable for intense sexual pleasure. “If these women at any time have delectation of the flesh, it quickly ceases.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 73. “Et si iste ad horam aliquam delectationem carnis habuerint, cito tamen in eis deficit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §175, p. 128.

13 “When the storm of lust rises in a male, it circles around in him like a mill. His loins are like a workshop in which marrow sends out fire. That workshop pours the fire into the genital regions of the male, and makes him burn ardently.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 63. “Nam cum tempestas libidinis in masculo surgit, in eo ut molendinum circumvoluitur, quia etiam lumbi eius uelut fabrica sunt, in quam medulla ignem mittit, ita quod et fabrica illa eundum ignem in genitalia loca masculi transfundit ac eum fortiter ardere facit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §151, p. 114.

hand, women's lust is gentler and similar to wind, which is not dissimilar to Eve's airy nature.¹⁴ The female libido goes through a more complicated process because the womb into which it falls is "spacious" and resembles an "open space" (*apertum locum*) so that it can be expanded.¹⁵ It is to receive the flow of semen and hold the fertilized egg.

Hildegard argues that women's lust is more flexible and adjustable to circumstances. First, women's lust is weaker for physical and societal reasons. Women's bodies are smaller; therefore, their bodily desires are smaller. And women's desire is easily controlled "either through fear or shame."¹⁶ The physical needs of women are open to change more easily, according to their circumstances, and can result in a lack of ejaculation when there is no physical contact with men. Hildegard says, "Her wind is windy [volatile], her veins are open, and her body parts are more pliable than a man's," after asserting that "[t]he woman is only a vessel, so that she might conceive and give birth,"¹⁷ emphasizing flow.

These sex and gender differences are applied to the different sex and gender roles attached to women and men, still emphasizing women's role as vessels. However, this vessel imagery does not represent women

14 It is interesting that Hildegard brings up the notion of a cloud, which is a mixture of water and air, to denote Eve's creation from Adam's body. An illustration in the Rutenberg codex of her *Scivias* shows a cloud with stars above when Eve was born out of Adam's side.

15 "But, when the wind of delectation leaves the marrow of a woman, it falls into the womb, where it adheres to the navel, and moves the woman's blood to carnal desire. Because the womb is spacious around the woman's navel, and has something like an open spot, the wind in her womb swells." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 63–64. "Sed cum uentus delectationis ex medulla femine egreditur, in matricem, que umbilico adheret, cadit et sanguinem mulieris ad delectationem mouet, et quia matrix circa umbilicum mulieris amplum et uelut apertum locum habet, uentus ille in uentrem eius se dilatat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §151, p. 114.

16 "She is able to hold herself back from delectation more easily than a man, either through fear or shame." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 64. "Et ideo etiam aut pre timore aut pre pudore facilius quam uir a delectatione se continere ualet." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §151, p. 114.

17 "The woman is only a vessel, so that she might conceive and give birth. Her wind is volatile, her veins are open, and her body parts are more pliable than a man's." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 64. "Quia femina tantum uas est, ut prolem concipiat et pariat, ac ideo etiam uentus eius uentosus est ut uene aperte atque membra eius solubilia sunt quam uiri." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §151, p. 115.

as empty, passive entities, but as active in conceiving, moderating, and empowering God's words and new life.¹⁸ Men's sexual and reproductive roles are like summer, to effuse and fructify, just as because Adam was made of earth, so he produces from earth. Their sexual acts are circular, flowing constantly through each other in the same way that "[t]he air is moved by the wind, and the wind is mingled with the air, so that in their movement all verdant things are subject to their influence."¹⁹ Woman was created from the body of man, and men are born from women's wombs.²⁰ On the other hand, women's equivalent role resembles what winter does; women keep and save the elements produced by earth and men.²¹ While women's and men's roles are reciprocal, the female body functions more like a container. This container is physical because through it women bear

18 For more on the activeness of the vessel image in Hildegard of Bingen's writings, see Minji Lee, "The Womb in Labour," 1183–99.

19 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 78. "Aer de uento mouetur, et uentus aeri implicatur, ita quod in ambitu eorum quaeque uiridia illis subdita sunt." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 12, p. 21.

20 Whether Hildegard intended to or not, she emphasizes the complementary positions of women and men by misquoting 1 Corinthians 11:8–9. According to Newman, while Paul states that "man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for man, but woman for man," Hildegard states instead in her exegesis: "As the woman is of the man, so is the man for the woman; but all are from God (1 Cor. 11:12)." In this part, Hildegard suggests that both women and men are made for each other. She presents reproduction as the most profound example of this mutual partnership: "The wife must cooperate with the husband and the husband with the wife in making children." Then she follows up with the sinful act of infidelity. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 78. "*Sicut mulier de uiro ita et uir per mulierem, omnia autem ex Deo....* Mulier uiro et uir mulieri in opere filiorum cooperatur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 12, p. 21. Newman also explained the woman's and man's complementary roles in the Hildegardian understanding of reproduction. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 94–99.

21 "For through winter and summer fruits grow and are brought forth, and without them no fruit could mature. It is also through the tree's root, which keeps viridity within itself, that flowers and fruits are nurtured, and they are from a single source. So are many produced by male and female, yet they come forth from a single Creator." Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Campbell, 332–33. "Per hiemem enim et estatem fructus crescunt et proferuntur, et absque istis nulli perficiuntur. Per radicem quoque arboris, quae uiriditatem in se continet, flores et poma enutriuntur, et ab uno sunt; ita per masculum et feminam multi procreantur, qui tamen ab uno creatore procedunt." Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Derolez and Dronke, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 43, p. 329.

offspring. At the same time, this container is spiritual in that women bear prophetic knowledge.²²

According to Hildegard, reproduction is possible only when absorption and release happen properly through the parents' bodies, in particular the woman's body. During intercourse, the male partner has to send his semen to the female partner, while the female needs both actions—bringing in and sending out.²³ In medieval physiology, it was controversial whether women have semen or not. Hildegard did not believe in women's semen. Instead, she argues that women release a kind of foam when they are aroused during intercourse. Sexual pleasure itself is also the result of sexual desire coming out of the designated organ. In fact, sexual pleasure itself is the aftermath of original sin, when the first human beings swallowed the forbidden fruit and received sin and its harmful effects in their bodies. As a result, women must endure the reproductive process, eventually sending a baby out from their bodies into the world.

In the process of intercourse, the woman's and man's affections and sexual fluids flow into each other so that they can intermingle and become one flesh. The woman's blood draws and embraces the man's seed by the power of love, so that it can mix with the semen. At the same time, the male partner's body is warmed by the female partner's arousal and drawn to the woman's body, while his blood, "liquified, flows about and is turned around

22 "When Adam looked at Eve, he was completely filled with knowledge, because he looked at the mother through whom he should procreate children. When Eve looked at Adam, she looked into him, as if she looked into the sky and, since her hope was in the man, just as a soul, which desires heavenly things, tends upward." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 111. "Cum enim Adam inspexit Euam, totus sapientia impletus est, quia matrem, per quam filios procreare debebat, inspexit. Cum autem Eua inspexit Adam, sic eum inspexit, quasi in celum uideret, et ut anima sursum tendit, que celestia desiderat, quoniam spes eius erat ad uirum." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §283, p. 176. It is also during Adam's initial sleep that he conceived Eve through a vision of prophetic knowledge, according to Hildegard. "Nam cum deus soporem in Adam misit, anima eius in uera prophetia interim multa uidit, quia nondum aliquod peccatum habebat. Ita et dormiente homine anima eius in uera prophetia multa uideret, si idem homo peccatis grauatus non esset." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §164, p. 121.

23 For this reason, Galenic physiology asserts that the female partner must have more pleasure than the male partner, as the woman performs two different actions, releasing and absorbing, while the man only ejaculates.

like a mill.”²⁴ This process of attraction, liquification, and blending is necessary to make the partners’ blood and body one, as the Scriptures describe: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). And this one flesh will be embodied as a baby with one flesh.

The fact that the man and woman have become, and are one flesh, was lying hidden in the man’s side, from which the woman, taken, was made his flesh. The man and woman more easily flow together for conceiving in their blood and sweat. The power of eternity, which brings forth the infant from its mother’s womb, makes the man and woman one flesh.²⁵

Eve flowed out of Adam’s body, becoming one body. A legitimate couple should become flexible and melt like water in terms of flesh and blood, which will enable them to flow into each other. Like Adam and Eve, if the partners are already one body, they can flow into each other more easily to become one flesh and one blood.²⁶ In this description, the flesh should be so softened and blood should be so flowing that both sexes can mingle with each other, when the images of softness and flow are much closer to the characterization of women. Eve and her female offspring have softer flesh than Adam and his offspring. Women also regularly experience the flow of blood during their fertile years: menstruation. Then, this softness and flow are required for two partners to become one blood and one body and produce children in Hildegard’s view.

24 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 57. “Sanguis eius liquefactus diffluit atque, ut molendinum circumuolutus.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §139, p. 104.

25 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 57. “Quod autem uir et mulier una caro sic fiunt et sunt, hoc in latere uiri latitabat, ubi mulier de latere uiri sumpta caro eius facta est, ac ideo uir et mulier tanto facilius ad conceptionem in sanguine et sudore suo sic in unum confluent. Sed uis eternitatis, que infantem de uentre matris sue educit, uirum et feminam sic unam carnem facit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §139, p. 104.

26 Hildegard insists that if either a woman or a man has coitus outside marriage, the resulting offspring is often unhappy, because the blood was drawn into the wrong partner. This psychological side effect in the children is caused by contamination and pollution that are compared to Adam and Eve’s first sin. In general, Hildegard refers specifically to Adam in connection with the pollution arising from original sin, or sometimes Eve, but this time Adam and Eve are both mentioned to emphasize that this can happen to both men and women. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 57–58. Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §§139–41, pp. 104–5.

Women's Contribution in Re-creation

Hildegard does not think that women have semen like men, but there is nevertheless a feminine contribution to conception. For her, the woman's blood is too weak to produce seed. Instead, women make "a small thin foam."²⁷ However, she does not quite echo Aristotle and his followers, who thought that women simply provided the material for the embryo while men donated vitality and motion; it is clear that a woman's role matters in reproduction, affecting the outcome in various ways, even if Hildegard still accepts the popular image of sex as an agricultural process in which men are the farmers and women are the fields to be ploughed.²⁸ Even as women were traditionally regarded as having a simpler task, such as supplying materials to a baby or carrying a baby until delivery, Hildegard sees their contribution in various aspects, including their emotional state, making affection a condition of successful reproduction.

Even at the moment of conception, Hildegard relates the health of the baby both to the condition of the semen and to the affection of the partners. And she continues to focus on the importance of flow in this process as well. She describes the moment of conception in this way:

When a man, approaching a woman for pouring forth his strong semen, has correct loving esteem for the woman, and the woman at the same time holds the man in loving esteem, a male is conceived, because it has been so ordained by God. It cannot be otherwise, since Adam was formed from mud, a stronger material than flesh. This male child will be prudent and virtuous, because he was conceived from strong semen and correct loving esteem of both parents.²⁹

27 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. "Sed de recta natura mulieris sanguis eius, quia debilis et tenuis est, semen non habet, sed tantum tenuem et paruam spumam emittit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 96.

28 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 86. "Nam femina est nunc uelut terra aratro arata et semen uiri suscipit et in sanguinem suum inuoluit et calore suo calefacit, et sic illud crescit, dum spiraculum uite in ipsum mittitur et dum maturum tempus uenit, ut procedat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §225, p. 144.

29 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 30. "Nunc autem cum uir in effusione fortis seminis sui et in recto amore caritatis, quam ad mulierem habet, ad ipsam accedit, muliere quoque rectum amorem ad uirum tunc in eadem hora habente, masculus concipitur, quia sic a deo ordinatum est. Nec aliter fieri potest, quin masculus concipiatur, quoniam et Adam formatus est de limo, qui fortior materia est quam caro. Et hic masculus prudens et uirtuosus erit, quia sic in forti

She then continues to explain different cases according to these conditions. Whether the man's semen is strong or weak determines the sex of the baby. If the man's semen is strong, a male child is made; if the man's semen is weak, a female child is born. Likewise, the strength of the woman's love for the man during intercourse establishes the bodily condition of the child. Only if the woman truly loves her partner in coitus is a healthy child born. If the woman does not have strong affection and love for the man during coitus, the baby is weakened. A baby is born with a gender and character influenced by the different conditions of the parents.

If, however, love for the man is lacking in the woman, so that only the man has the correct loving esteem for the woman at that time, and if the semen of the man is strong, a male is nevertheless conceived, because the loving esteem of the man is pre-eminent. But that male child will be weak and not virtuous, since love for the man was lacking in the woman. If the semen of the man is weak, even if he has the proper love for the woman, and she for him, a virtuous [strong] female is produced. If only one parent has the proper love for the other, and the semen of the male is weak at the time, a female is born because of the debility of the semen.³⁰

It is interesting that Hildegard considers the feelings of the woman towards her husband as well as her physical condition as important factors in the character of the offspring. Whether or not the woman is fond of her partner is considered to be a critical aspect of the production of healthy children.

After noting that women do not have semen but a foamy fluid that is expelled when they are aroused during intercourse, Hildegard goes on to explain how women contribute to the formation of the embryo by providing a space for its development and nutrition until it develops into a baby. The

semine ac in recto amore caritatis utrorumque, quem ad inuicem habent, conceptus est." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §63, pp. 62–63.

30 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 30. "Si autem hic amor deest in muliere ad uirum, ita quod tantum uir rectum amorem caritatis in ipsa hora ad mulierem habet et non mulier ad uirum, et si semen uiri forte est: masculus tamen concipitur, quia amor caritatis uiri superexcellit, sed idem masculus debilis erit et non uirtuosus, quoniam hic amor in muliere ad uirum deficit. Quoniam si semen uiri tenue est, qui tamen amorem caritatis ad illum, ibi femina uirtuosa procreatur. Si uero amor caritatis uiri est ad mulierem et non mulieris ad uirum, uel si amor caritatis in muliere est ad uirum et non uiri ad mulierem, semen autem uiri in ipsa hora tenue; item femina ex hoc nascitur propter debilitatem seminis." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §63, p. 63.

uterus is not a motionless, functionless, empty room. Instead, a woman's body closely engages with the fertilized egg so that it can fully develop into a baby with new life. In this process, the four humours present in the woman's body (which originate from the four elements of the universe) surround the mixture of female foam and male semen, which will be more fully discussed later. The important aspect to note here is that Hildegard appreciates that the process takes place in women's reproductive bodies.

The mother's importance to the growing foetus is discussed by other medieval writers; however, the mother's function is often limited to contributing the matter from which the foetus is formed. Aristotle saw the mother's body only as a house for its storage and the father's semen as providing the generative power and form to the embryo, blaming the cold nature of the woman's body for its inability to produce a seed.³¹ It might be easier to find appreciation of women's reproductive role in medieval texts than in ancient ones,³² but medieval men still dismiss the life-giving part of women's contribution. For them, it was men who performed more essential work in giving life to a foetus. For example, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus seems to neglect the mother's role when he talks about the three stages of the embryo's development.³³ By contrast, Hildegard provides readers with detailed descriptions of what occurs during pregnancy, emphasizing the close connections between the mother and foetus. Hildegard argues that the womb is the place that provides the egg, foetus, and baby with physical modification, spiritual preparation, and God's power of eternity, and although Hildegard emphasizes the non-material functions of the woman's body in reproduction, she also acknowledges the importance of the womb as a provider of material contributions such as nutrition.

31 York, *Health and Wellness*, 62.

32 Vaughan, *Women, Food, and Diet*, 51.

33 A famous medieval physician who was active slightly later than Hildegard, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus stated that in the first stage the embryo develops with "the vegetative power of the soul, and this vegetative power is derived from the father or from the one who engendered by means of sperm," referring to Aristotle's *On the Soul*. In the second and third stages, the embryo acquires a sensitive power from its soul and an intellective power from heaven, but the author still does not mention any power originating from the mother. Instead, when he talks about the mother's role in the growing foetus, he focuses on the negative effects a mother may have, such as women who corrupt the embryo through menses, the arts of midwifery, evil deeds, and excessive sexual pleasure. See Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, trans. Lemay, 102–3. Pseudo-Albertus, *De secretis mulierum*, 83–85.

In her section on conception, Hildegard describes how when men's semen is intermingled with women's foam, semen's toxic properties are neutralized by women's foam and the four elements surrounding it, and as a result, it becomes an embryo and eventually a baby with bodily members and organs. Here, a woman's reproductive role is important in providing not only the place for development but also the foam, elemental composition, and nutrition for the embryo. Although Hildegard refers to a woman's body as a "vessel," it is not just that: it is an active entity that has a crucial role in developing the mixture of semen and foam and forming it into a substance that will become a fully formed baby.

From the mother's heat the fetus, not yet alive, develops in the rich matter of coagulation, while staying in the already mentioned heat. This is the work of one month, namely the time during which the moon waxes and wanes. The coagulation grows and becomes fatty. If it were not animated in this rich matter, it would be totally dried up. From the mother's dryness it would become slow and sorrowful.³⁴

Hildegard emphasizes the interactions between the mother and the embryo. The mother's condition is important in providing the necessary care.

First, the woman's body is responsible for detoxifying the poisonous nature of semen to generate new life. Contrary to the theologians and medical theorists of her time, Hildegard finds pollution in the man's body, not the woman's, as God's punishment. In medieval medicine and religion, it was commonly believed that women's menstrual blood was not only polluted but also polluting, a belief that originated in ancient Greco-Roman medicine. For example, Pliny the Elder lists the harmful effects that women can cause with their periods. Possible consequences of this "venom" in women's menstrual fluid include a predisposition for epilepsy and leprosy in children conceived during menstruation. When Pseudo-Albertus Magnus advises men not to have intercourse with women during their periods (after providing tips for recognizing whether a woman is menstruating or not), he offers the following cautionary information:

And let any man watch out that he does not have sex then [at the time of menstruation], because children who are conceived during the menstrual

34 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 52. "De calore enim matris in pinguedinem coagulationis proficit nondum uiuens, sed in prefato calore persistens, et hoc opus in uno mense est, scilicet quo luna crescit et deficit. Et sic etiam predicta coagulatio crescit et pinguescit, quoniam, si in hac pinguedine non uiuificaretur, tota siccaretur, de qua siccitate mater multum tarda et dolens efficeretur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 97.

flow will have a greater tendency to epilepsy and leprosy. And these sorts of infirmities are inflicted more quickly than any other leprosy, for which reason due to the toxicity of such women it is harmful to go to bed with them.³⁵

Commentary B supports Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's view in detail, explaining that menstrual substances are composed of pure and impure elements. While pure elements have no issue of pollution and can feed the foetus, impure menses are dangerous, as they are made from a certain superfluity and impurity caused by non-digestion of food. Menstruation occurs because of the woman's inferior body, which lacks dryness and, above all, heat. The menstrual fluids are excrement produced after the humours have gone through physical processes. As Pseudo-Albertus Magnus emphasizes in his popular book, which was circulated among men, menstrual blood is known for its power to cloud mirrors and kill plants, animals, and even young babies.

Hildegard argues quite the opposite, although she does not list all of the side effects that noxious semen might bring. She suggests that the first human transgression had a much greater impact on the male body, turning semen poisonous. Hildegard justifies this argument by reminding readers of God's creation. God creates Adam with four elements, including earth with its hard nature, while Eve is born out of Adam's flesh. Therefore, Adam ends up with the stronger body, which comes with hardness and stubbornness. Due to this virile obstinacy, Adam receives the full blow of the aftermath of original sin in his body. Just as Eve's daughters inherit God's punishment of menstruation, Adam's sons inherit the punishment of polluted semen: "[p]artaking of evil, the blood of the sons of Adam transformed into poisonous semen, from which the sons of men are procreated."³⁶

In order to create new life from this polluted semen, Hildegard suggests that detoxification is needed. For her, reproduction is repeated creation. Recalling the pure state of the first human beings, the fertilized egg should be

35 My translation of "Et caveat sibi quivis quod tunc non coeat, quia pueri qui in menstribus fluentibus concipiuntur maiorem inclinacionem habent ad morbum caducum et ad lepram. Et tales huiusmodi infirmitates qua alia cicius inficiuntur lepra, quare propter talem venenositatem mulierum nocivum est coire." Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *El "De secretis mulierum,"* trans. Barragán Nieto, chap. 8, §§27–28, p. 448n.

36 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 31. "Nam de gustu mali uersus est sanguis filiorum Ade in uenenum seminis, de quo filii hominum procreantur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §64, p. 64.

pure to receive a soul and fully develop. This essential process happens in the womb, immediately after intercourse when the semen falls into the woman's body. Here, the woman's heat cures the man's problem, inherited from Adam.

These [uprisen humours] all create a tempest, from their excessive superfluity. From the blood, they bring forth a poisonous foam, which is semen. When it falls upon its place, the blood of the mother joins with it, from which it will be bloody.³⁷ The same degeneration did not happen to Eve because her flesh was not strong enough. In Adam's transgression, the strength in the male's genital member changed into a poisonous foam, and the female's blood changed to a *contrary* effusion. Because man's flesh was made from earth, his blood has semen of a strong and correct nature. A woman's blood is also of a correct nature.³⁸

While both Adam and Eve once had a correct nature, Adam was the one whose reproductive power became degraded, due to his strong semen. Eve could avoid this degradation because she did not have semen, but instead, she ended up with menstrual and reproductive flows.

In the following paragraph, Hildegard provides additional explanation. Semen's poisonous nature originated when Adam committed the first sin. Semen is produced from the blood when it is stirred by pleasure, which originates from the forbidden fruit offered by the serpent. According to Hildegard, the disturbed blood sends out a "cold foam,"³⁹ which contains pol-

37 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. "Et hec omnia de nimietate superfluitatis quasi tempestatem faciunt et de sanguine uenenosam spumam, quod semen est, educunt, quod, cum in locum suum cadit, sanguis mulieris illi se conuinit, et hoc sanguine erit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 95.

38 Modified from Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. Modification is in italics; Throop translated "contrarium" as "dangerous," which is not incorrect but which could be misunderstood as suggesting that the woman's menstrual flow is dangerous to others. Unlike many medieval elites, Hildegard does not emphasize the poisonous nature of menstruation, although she refers to many cases in which women's health is endangered by medical issues related to menstruation. So here, "contrary" is more "dangerous" to women, which can be translated as "hurtful, injurious" to women themselves. Hildegard uses "contrary" as the opposite of "correct, right," still implying degeneration and the aftermath of original sin. "Nam in transgressionem Ade fortitudo uiri in genitali membro uersus est in uenenosam spumam, atque mulieris sanguis uersus est in contrariam effusionem. De forti enim et de recta natura uiri sanguis eius semen habet, quia de terra caro factus est. Sed de recta natura mulieris sanguis eius." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, pp. 95–96.

39 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 95.

lution. Fortunately, however, this cold is mitigated by the female partner's heat, which is relatively secure from the degenerate nature that the male partner gives to the egg. Moreover, it is not just the woman's heat that helps conception. The four elements and the humours in the woman's body are all engaged with the semen. After warming the semen and making it bloody, the woman's heat (derived from fire) warms the fertilized egg, while her breath (derived from air) dries it. Her liquid (derived from water) sends pure moisture to the egg, and her membrane (derived from earth) constrains it.⁴⁰ This process represents the important role played by the various aspects of the female body in conception.

As many ancient and premodern theorists assumed, Hildegard also believes that menstrual blood provides the necessary nutrients to the foetus. The menstrual substances are commonly described as food for the foetus, which also explains why menstruation does not occur during pregnancy. Interestingly, however, Hildegard describes this process as mediated by flow. The pregnant woman's blood is drawn all the way to her breasts and turns into milk, supplied by what she eats and drinks.⁴¹ The woman's body is described as the vessel itself, through which different fluids and ingredients travel vertically.

Hildegard also notes that the womb is the place where the soul enters into the embryo so that it can grow as a human being. The soul does not accompany men's semen. It is the second month when the soul, the "breath of life," contacts the fertilized egg in the womb. The soul's work is fundamental at this point, because the soul divides the egg so it can progress into a more developed form. Therefore, this description implies that the man's semen was not entirely equipped with all of the required elements:

Then, as God wills and has arranged to happen, comes the breath of life and, without the mother's knowledge, it touches that form, as a strong, warm

40 "It is as if a poisonous foam until fire, that is heat, warms it; and until air, that is breath, dries it; and until water, that is liquid, allows pure dampness to enter; and until the earth, that is a membrane, constrains it. And then it will be bloody—not totally blood, but combined with a bit of blood." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. "Et tam diu quasi uenenosa spuma est, usque dum ignis, uidelicet calor, illud calefacit, et dum aer, uidelicet spiramen, illud exsiccat, et dum aqua, scilicet fluor, illi puram humiditatem admittit, et usque dum terra, scilicet cutecula, illud constringit. Et tunc sic erit sanguineum, id est non totum sanguis, sed aliquantulum sanguine permixtum." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 96.

41 The same logic was applied to nursing women, as Hildegard also suggests that menstrual blood is used to produce mother's milk.

wind; just as a wind noisily blowing against a wall. It pours itself in and dashes against all the joints of its limbs. The separate parts gently divide from each other; just as flowers divide themselves in the heat of the sun. There is still great weakness in this form. It cannot be moved, but lies, so it might sleep, and breathes slightly.⁴²

After this section, Hildegard gives readers a more detailed description of how the embryo grows each month once the soul enters it. According to her, even after the embryo receives the soul, it cannot survive alone, since it is rather a formless lump. Therefore, the embryo continues to have a close connection with the mother until it fully develops and is released from her womb:

Because the soul is sent into the body, it is breath. Sent by God, it receives merit through physical works, whether good or bad. These works are like a framework of merits. Just as, at first, a child does not know what *they* understand; when *they* are more mature, *they* receive intellect, which understands all things. And just as *they* embrace their works, examining and kissing them, and later are fatigued by old age; so the soul, advancing toward a more perfect state, goes forward. It is encircled by good deeds, as if by a royal cloak, and obscured by bad deeds, in the same way the earth is suffused with waters; and the same way waters flow in certain places, so the soul suffuses and excels the baby. The soul often sees future events through prophecy, when the outer eyes are closed, since it remembers it lives without the body.⁴³

42 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 52. “Deinde sicut deus uult et sicut fieri disposuit, uenit spiraculum uite et formam illam matre nesciente tangit ut uehemens calidus uentus, uelut uentus, qui in parietem cum sono flat ac se infundit et infligit in omnes compages membrorum forme illius. Et sic omnes diuisiones membrorum eiusdem forme a se suauius ita diuiduntur, ut flores ad calorem solis se diuidunt. Sed et adhuc tanta imbecillitas in eadem forma est, quod moueri non potest, sed iacet, ut dormiat, et modice spirat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §130, p. 97.

43 Modified from Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 38. “Cum enim anima in corpus mittitur, spiramen est, et a deo missum est, ac per corporalia opera, siue bona siue mala sunt, meritum accipit. Et hec opera quasi compago meritorum sunt. Sicut enim infans primo nescit, quod postea intelligit, quia, cum maturior erit, intellectum, qui omnia intelligit, capit, et sicut tunc opera sua considerando et osculando amplectitur et sicut postea de senectute fatigatur: sic anima per opera proficiendo procedit. Et de bonis operibus uelut regali amictu circumdatur, de malis uero obfuscat, quemadmodum etiam terra aquis perfunditur; et quemadmodum aque in quibusdam locis fluunt, ita anima corpus perfundit et ipsum corpus excellit, sed et ipsa oculis exterioribus clausis cum prophetia multotiens future uidet, quia sine corpore se uiuere recordatur.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §87, p. 76.

This section may remind readers of God's creation story: God sent his breath into Adam to vivify his creature. In *Cause et cure*, the soul is often identified with breath in this way. This is just one instance of how Hildegard views women's re-creation process (not just conception but also childbirth) in relation to God's creation. In particular, the moment of childbirth resembles the moment when God created Eve from Adam's body:

With childbirth imminent, the vessel in which the infant had been enclosed, is split. The power of eternity, which brought forth Eve from Adam's side, arriving soon, is present and overturns every corner of the dwelling place of the woman's body. All the joints of the woman's body become involved with that force and they assist it and open themselves. They hold themselves while the infant emerges, and then resume their former arrangement. While the infant emerges, his soul feels the power of eternity, and is happy.⁴⁴

Hildegard emphasizes that it is the "power of eternity" which opens and closes the mother's whole body. This power not only releases the baby but also restores the compactness of the woman's joints after birth. Additionally, this power is felt by the newborn and makes the infant happy. It is the same power that God used to create Eve from Adam's body. This scene was the prototype of the birth that happens to every human being. However, once the power of eternity enters Eve's body, it is passed on to her female offspring. Here, Hildegard suggests that women are conduits of God's eternal creative power through the birthing process.

Woman's Life-Giving Body

Hildegard's descriptions of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth thus present the idea that a woman's body is active in receiving life-giving substances: semen and the soul. This active role should also be understood in relation to her concept of *viriditas*, which represents regenerative and salvational qualities embodying the moisture, flow, and fecundity essential for conception and growth. While this concept was adapted by other theolo-

44 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 56. "Sed cum iam partus instat, uas, in quo infans clausus est, scinditur, et uis eternitatis, que Euam de latere Ade eduxit, mox ueniens adest atque omnes angulos habitaculi corporis mulieris de locis suis euertit. Et omnes compagines corporis mulieris fortitudini illi occurrunt et eam suscipiunt ac se aperiunt. Atque ita se continent, dum infans egrediatur, ac deinde iterum replicant se, ut prius fuerunt. Sed et anima infantis, interim dum infans egreditur, sentit uim eternitatis, que eam misit, ac interim leta est." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §134, p. 102.

gians before Hildegard, it is so central and widely accepted in Hildegard's theology and medical treatises that it becomes an overarching category for regenerative and salvational qualities.⁴⁵ She viewed *viriditas* as a regenerative and salvational quality, embodying the moisture, flow, and fecundity essential for conception and growth.⁴⁶ This contrasted with the male-centred gynaecological explanations of her time, which often reduced women's role to a mere container.

For Hildegard, *viriditas* often appears in opposition to *ariditas*, "dryness" or "being withered."⁴⁷ Like the medical theorists who preceded her and those of her own day, Hildegard also related moisture and humidity to women and dryness to men. This moisture, along with the flow of blood, which I regard as a highly characteristic feature of women in her view, was a guarantee of female fecundity.

Here, I argue that man's poisonous nature and woman's therapeutic role work together to make reproduction possible. Although Françoise Charmaille insists in her analysis of intersex in *Cause et cure* that the engendering power of *viriditas* is more closely attached to men,⁴⁸ I see the opposite in

45 *Viriditas* is related to the colour green and was used to refer to the greenness of healthy plants. Moulinier lists the famous premodern authors from classical antiquity onwards in whose writings *viriditas* appears. For further information, see Moulinier and Berndt, "Introduction," xi–cxiii, especially lxxxv. McAvoy and Newman argue that even before the concept of *viriditas*, there were some views, including in the writings of Bernard Silvestris of Tours (d. ca. 1148), according to which woman's power brought ideas into reality as material entities. McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden*, 154; Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 64.

46 McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden*, 154.

47 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 11. "Et ita cum eo incedunt usque ad signum libre, ubi uiriditas et ariditas quasi in libra sunt, ita quod uiriditas absedit et ariditas accedit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 1, §31, p. 36.

48 Charmaille, "Intersex between Sex and Gender." In this article, Charmaille argues that *viriditas* is related to the earth; therefore, it is more about Adam, whose nature originated from the earth. Charmaille explains *viriditas* as a "manly vigor," but I argue that this *viriditas* is only possible when heat from men and moisture from women are combined with each other. Charmaille interprets the concept of *viriditas* as the combination of greenness and vigour. For her, vigour and its adjective form "vigorous" are related to virility and to man's earthly nature as well as to the phlegmatic temperament. While I agree with Charmaille that Hildegard's notion of gender is rich and related to phlegm, I argue that *viriditas* is closely related to woman's reproductive power. On the other hand, there is a place in Hildegard's homilies where *viriditas* appears in association with "virile vigour" to emphasize God's great power of generation, in the homily on Luke 14:16–24 for the Third Sunday after

Hildegard of Bingen's gynaecology. I agree with Charmaille that the concept of *viriditas* is related to greenness and vigorousness,⁴⁹ but I do not see it as necessarily limited to *virtus*, the manly quality. Hildegard's interpretation of *viriditas* is closely tied to women's reproductive power and the Virgin Mary, rather than solely associated with men or virility. For Hildegard, *viriditas* was closely associated with the feminine power that nurtures babies in women's bodies.⁵⁰ This power extends to the Virgin Mary and is directly linked to the motherly Ecclesia that contains and saves sinful souls in Hildegard's visions. Moreover, Hildegard introduced herself as "*materna viriditas*."⁵¹

Pentecost, where Jesus uses the analogy of a great man hosting a banquet. However, this manly expression, "virile vigour," seems to be used to emphasize God's ability in every aspect, and the image of a woman's womb is also mentioned in the same passage: "Adam 'said' to creation: 'Go *out* in servitude into every circle and ambit of human deeds and into the bending of plants. Bind the earth fast so that it opens itself and may sprout everywhere with greenness [*viriditas*] and fruit, and even with the vigor of the most vigorous sap, namely wine. For the vine is more a plant than a tree, and like a plant it is both planted in the earth and nourished, so that the womb of complete comprehension may be full, which I comprehend in the world.' . . . 'I assert to all creatures "that none" of the virile vigor that dwells with creatures will touch the world, with the sense of touch in a way such that creation would obey them as it has obeyed me and will bring them such easy fruit as it did for me.'" "39. The Third Sunday after Pentecost," in Hildegard of Bingen, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 158–61. While virtue was traditionally related to manly vigour, McAvoy rightly indicates that the role of Virtue in Hildegard's *Symphonia* and the *Ordo virtutum* were composed for and performed by nuns in the Rupertsberg monastery, which can be read to highlight these virginal women's important roles in re-creating Eden as "flowers flourishing within the 'nobilissima viriditas' of Christ." McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden*, 162. "O noble verdure, which grows from the Sun of splendor! Your clear serenity shines in the Wheel of Godhead, Your greatness is past all earthly understanding, And Heaven's wonders surround you in their embrace." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 528. "O nobilissima uiriditas quae radicas in sole et quae in candida serenitate lucet in rota, quam nulla terrena excellentia comprehendit, tu circumdata es amplexibus diuinorum mysteriorum." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 3, bk. 13, chap. 7, p. 620.

49 Mark Bradley explains the colour green and the related terms *viridis* (adjective) and *virens* (noun) in relation to vigour. Bradley, *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome*, 7–9.

50 McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden*, 160.

51 "Now therefore, look to the Fiery Giver who endows mankind with discernment. What person can pit his voice against that which thundered above the heavens and overcame the abyss, ornamenting it with the covering of maternal fruitfulness [*materna uiriditas*]?" "Hildegard to Bernard and Gregory, Cardinals" in Hildegard of Bingen, *Letters*, trans. Baird and Ehrman, no. 7, 1:40. "Nunc ergo aspice in igneum datorem, qui infundit bonum intellectum hominibus. Sed et quis homo potest conari

While Charmaille see the airy as the opposite of vigour and considers both airiness and lack of vigour to be female characteristics, I suggest that air is not far from vigorous power. In explaining the moon's effects on crops, Hildegard categorizes winds according to the different powers they receive from the moon. On the one hand, there is the wind that dries up plants in winter; on the other hand, there is the wind that brings forth *viriditas*, the greening power of growing plants.⁵² Air is essential in germination, which is also connected to the airy nature of women in reproduction.

Air has four powers: emitting dew, stirring up all greenness [*viriditas*], moving the breeze with which it brings forth flowers, and spreading heat with which it makes all things ripen, in the same way air itself is spread through the four parts of the world.⁵³

This fecundity of the air is also related to Hildegard's emphasis on the relation between air and soul. After mixing earth, fire, and water, God blew air into the human form to vivify it with the spirit. Therefore, air functions to give vigour to plants: "[a]ir is the breath which, in dew, pours forth moisture to budding things, so that they all turn green. Through its breeze, it brings forth flowers and, through its heat, strengthens all things for maturity."⁵⁴ Even in her description of air's fecundity, Hildegard highlights flow. Air should blow and flow to make things germinate. The air whose nature it is to dry up trees and plants is an obstacle to fecundity in the same way as women whose bodily conditions are desiccated.

contra vocem illam, quae tonuit, ascendens supra alas, et quae abyssum superavit, sonans per tegmen maternae viriditatis?" Hildegard of Bingen, "Epistola XXXIV," 520. McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden*, 175.

52 "Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 14. "Luna autem in se excipit feditatem inutilitatis aurarum et calorem puri aeris, stabilitatem utilis aure, pericula tempestatum, fortem aerem, qui omnem uiriditatem profert, aerem, qui pomifera educit, aerem, qui exsiccatur et defectum infert, qui hyemps est." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 1, §37, p. 39.

53 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 17. "Sed aer quatuor uires habet, uidelicet rorem emittendo, omnem uiriditatem excitando, flatum mouendo, cum quo flores educit, calorem dilatando, cum quo omnia maturescere facit; uelut et ipse per quatuor partes mundi dilatatur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 1, §43, pp. 43–44.

54 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 17. "Aer enim spiramen est, quod in rore humorem germinantibus infundit, ita ut omnia uirescant, et quod per flatum flores educit et per calorem omnia ad maturitatem confirmat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 1, §43, p. 44.

Just as the Hildegardian understanding of physical flow is closely connected to its salvational role, her concept of *viriditas* extends to the spirit, which is again related to air. Beverly Mayne Kienzle examined Hildegard's references to *viriditas*, which Kienzle translates as "the life-giving and animating force of greenness," in the *Homilies*.

A taste of this richness can be savored in a brief summary of how the Homilies on the Gospels portray the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's circular motion guides all of salvation history with its life-giving power (Hom. 34). It directs the creation, moving with God across the waters (Hom. 34), tracing circles like the flight patterns of birds (Hom. 1), moving into the fastenings of the human body (Hom. 23) and whirling in the tempests of the soul within (Hom. 56), and, in several homilies, sending the virtues to rescue the sinful soul. The Spirit's light works miracles (Hom. 9), the small as well as the major events of salvation history. It animates the power of greenness in the universe, touching and kissing the sinful soul in need of healing (Hom. 19). Hence the Spirit participates in the work of creation and redemption. It also directs the transformation of history, which Hildegard saw as the transformation of the Scriptures from the Old Law to the New, accompanied by their interpretation according to spiritual understanding (Hom. 47).⁵⁵

As seen in this concise overview of *viriditas* in Hildegard's teachings, this green power is deployed by the Holy Spirit to stimulate movement and regeneration in the bodies and souls of creatures. For Hildegard, *viriditas* is both renaturing and salvational, which I consider the power of the woman's reproductive body.

Hildegard's medical descriptions of conception and pregnancy provide the foundation for her theological claim that women are active, transformative participants in divine creation. Where male medical authorities emphasized women's passivity, Hildegard's careful attention to the womb's purifying and nurturing capacities reveals how physical processes embody broader spiritual truths. This medical-theological synthesis is central to her unconventional understanding and representation of women's bodies.

55 Kienzle, "Introduction," 7.

