

Medieval Media Cultures

GENDER, READING, AND TRUTH IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

THE WOMAN IN THE MIRROR

by

MORGAN POWELL

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vivant et floreant

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WHERE TO BEGIN? Perhaps on this most personal of pages it is permissible to write out the simple question that plagues all writers, over and over again. This is a book that was long in the making, longer even than most others I know of, longer than I care to state. Many, many people have helped along the way; many have lent time and advice, intellectual and emotional or even financial support. Still, writing is in essence a lonely process, and great stretches of this process were very lonely indeed. In looking back, I see those who stood as bulwarks or life-rings in that process and without whom I must truly wonder if a book would be in this binding today. Out of care to do honour to these I am omitting many others, for which I beg understanding or forgiveness, as the case may be.

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ABBREVIATIONS

For full bibliographical entries, see the List of Works Cited.

AA SS	*Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur.* Antwerp and Brussels, 1643–
AP	*The Albani Psalter*, facsimile of Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1 (St Albans Psalter), with commentary
CCC	Rupert of Deutz, *Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum*
CCCM	Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus christianorum series latina
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
JP	Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200*
LA	*The Life of Alexis in the Old French Version of the Hildesheim Manuscript*, ed. and trans. Odenkirchen
LCM	*The Life of Christina of Markyate*, trans. Talbot, rev. Fanous and Leyser
LDMA	Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*
LVM	Bernard of Clairvaux, *In laudibus Virginis Matris*
MGH SS	Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Scriptores
PL	*Patrologia cursus completus: series latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne
Rule	Aelred of Rievaulx, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, trans. Macpherson
SAP website	www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/
SAP	Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell and Francis Wormald, *The St Albans Psalter (Albani Psalter)*
SV	*Speculum virginum*, ed. Seyfarth
VCM	*Vie de Christina de Markyate*, ed. L'Hermite-Leclercq and Legras
Verfasserlexikon	*Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*
VSA	*La Vie de Saint Alexis*, ed. Christopher Storey

Citations and translations from scripture retain, wherever relevant and as far as possible, the sense of the medieval source in which they are cited, paraphrased, or discussed. Thus, in translating my medieval Latin sources I have also translated the scriptural passages within them. For direct citation of scripture I have used Robert Weber's edition of the vulgate: *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). When citing an English translation directly I have used the Douay-Rheims-Challoner translation of the Vulgate: *The Holy Bible: The Catholic Bible, Douay-Rheims Version* (Fitzwilliam: Loreto, 2005, first published 1750). For translation of the Song of Songs I have also frequently relied on E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. xvi–xxxv.

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INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS THE MIDDLE of the thirteenth century in Amiens, Richard of Fournival, churchman, polymath, and poet, wrote an unusual, illustrated love letter to his recalcitrant lady. "All men naturally desire knowledge," he begins, quoting Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.[1] The didactic premise is more than a pose, for the content is in fact a treatise in the bestiary tradition, which uses animals as *exempla* to exhibit moral teaching, and Richard proclaims his most ardent desire is to penetrate and inhabit the lady's memory. Thus he will resort to a double appeal, or two different "paths," *painture* and *parole*, for "everyone knows that painted letters are returned to voice when they are read," and "a painting can render its subjects so immediate that the viewer believes herself placed before them."[2] The Old French text is accompanied by pictures; pictures and the vernacular word are taken as two aspects of one aesthetic experience because of the physical immediacy proper to each: "on fait present de chu ki est trespassé par ces ii coses, c'est par painture et par parole" (one renders present what has receded into the past through these two things, that is, through image and word).[3] Moreover, this same equivalency of aesthetic experience extends to the great literary invention of the latter twelfth century, the *roman* (romance), "Car quant on ot un romans lire, on entent les aventures, ausi com on les veïst en present" (For when one hears a *roman* read, one perceives the adventures just as if one could see them in the present).[4] Writing (*escripture*) "is both image (*painture*) and the spoken word (*parole*)," which "is only too obvious," in that writing "exists in order to manifest the word (*parole*)," to render it as physical presence.[5]

This is a remarkably concise and highly unusual statement of the nature and use of media in the European High Middle Ages; it also provides, seemingly by the way, a rare medieval statement on the mode of reception of romance narrative. What was "obvious" did not normally need saying to contemporaries; for us it serves to demonstrate how complementary and interchangeable the use and understanding of writing, pictures, and voices could be. Moreover, Richard's self-conscious play on this interchangeability defies reduction into oppositions between an "oral" and a "literate" mentality, between literate and illiterate

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1 *Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 3.

2 "Car quant on voit painte une estoire, … on voit les fais des preudommes ke cha en ariere furent, ausi com s'il fussent present" (*Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 5). The preceding passage is my paraphrase of Richard's text, which appears in note 5, below.

3 *Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 5.

4 *Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 5.

5 "Car il est bien apert k'il [cis escris] a parole, par che ke toute escripture si est faite pour parole monstrer et pour che ke on le lise; et quant on le list, si revient elle a nature de parole" (*Bestiaires d'amours*, pp. 6–7).

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education, or even between (sacred) scripture and (profane) love poetry—oppositions that routinely serve to situate texts and images of the Middle Ages in the eyes of modern readers and scholars.[6]

But there is still more to this configuration: the recipient, the lady, who figures both as the object of amorous desire and as human memory, the receptacle of the instructive message. On the one hand, it is only this double identity of his audience that allows Richard's bizarre hybrid of bestiary instruction and lover's seduction to exist. On the other, " 'she' is not an individual woman, but a figure available to and deployed by both female and male audiences."[7] This "woman" is to contemplate the *painture* and attend to its voice, to open "the twin doors" of her eyes and ears such that the author, or his instruction—but really both—will be indelibly lodged in her memory. What Richard has in fact done with his triangle of female memory, image, and word is to reduplicate a model of sacred reading for a purpose ostensibly profane. "Hear, daughter, and see, … and the king shall desire your beauty" (Psalm 44:11–12): thus *sainte escripture* spoke to every Christian, with the voice of the Spirit calling the bride to instructive seduction by the bridegroom. A woman's audio-visual "reading" figures the aspiration of every human soul to the embrace of its saviour, Christ. The prologue of Richard's "Love Bestiary" shows how the media of (secular) loving and (religious) reading, of (sacred) instruction and (profane) seduction, could be one and the same; namely, when the recipient was woman.[8]

This playful discourse on media poetics is only possible because of major transitions that had occurred over the preceding century and a half on all three corners of Richard's triangle, changes in the relationships between knowing in an experiential sense (which I refer to as gnosis), and, each in its turn, gender, visual art, and vernacular literature (Richard's text itself brings three different genres into play). Women and woman were centre stage in the twelfth century as never before, and this in conspicuous conjunction with innovative exploration of new ways of seeing, reading, and knowing. A striking individual example is Hildegard of Bingen, the first female visionary (or mystic) in the Christian tradition, whose audio-visual gnosis resulted in a voluminous Latin *oeuvre* and some of the most unusual visual art of the Middle Ages. More popularly celebrated is the role of Eleanor of Aquitaine: was she indeed the queen of a new cult of "courtly love" and sometime patron or inspiration of new vernacular literature? Eleanor's prominence is as tangible as her actual role is intangible—and in this regard, at least, she is typical as a figure of the female reader in the twelfth century. But women were likewise placed at the imaginative centre of the narrative world of vernacular romance, while the monastic imagination was captivated by a reading enterprise gendered as female, following the *sponsa* through the verbal imagery of the Song of Songs. And in devotional

6 Critique of earlier scholarship on the first two oppositions in Schnell, "Literaturwissenschaft"; Kiening, "Medialität"; Chinca and Young, "Orality and Literacy"; Green, "'Terminologische Überlegungen"; and, a decade earlier, Coleman, *Public Reading*.

7 Solterer, "Medieval Senses," 142.

8 For a full reading of the text in this vein, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 343–57.

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practice a spectacular expansion of the roles of visual art and pictorial narrative can be grasped primarily in psalters and prayer books known to have been commissioned or designed for women.[9] This visual turn in prayer brings up an all-important conjunction that subtends Richard's reflections: that between women's use of images and their use of books and literacy.

The visual turn proceeds in lock step, it would seem, with a turn to writing in the vernacular, and both have found an explanation in modern scholarship through a connection with women's use of prayer books. This conjunction in itself suggests that we are dealing with something other than an advance of literacy or literate instruments. It also points up a curious contradiction. The medieval sources most frequently justify the inclusion of images or writing in the vernacular as a concession to "illiteracy," whether for women or for laypeople in general. The modern argument on the literary turn, on the other hand, has repeatedly emphasized lay noblewomen's higher level of literacy relative to their male counterparts.[10] The contradiction is not irresolvable, but it goes largely unmentioned because modern reflection on the two has taken place in separate disciplines. Our distinction between the histories of "art" and "literature" and their several methodologies long ensured that visual and literary elements of one manuscript, even of the same work, were excised from their contexts and studied separately. For several decades now, text-image studies and new attention to the manuscript context in medieval culture have been at pains to correct this, but the consequences have not yet been intently applied to our question: the question of what happened around women, *painture* and *escripture*—that is, image and script(ure)—and thus around women and reading, in the lettered cultures of twelfth-century western Europe.

The object of study is as elusive as it is pervasive; hence the pages that follow may seem to proceed with some disregard for familiar divisions and boundaries. To study texts together with the images they accompany is a logical correction, but to read texts of monastic instruction together with those of courtly leisure, to read texts of biblical exegesis and those of romance narrative as reciprocally illuminating, and still more, to read texts from the German vernacular tradition as if intellectually imbricated with the literary culture(s) of the courts in what we now call France will seem less immediately justified. It is a given that the early Middle High German romances were adapted from Old French texts, but this relationship has generally been regarded as a kind of subordination and dependency in which the former emulates the latter and seeks to reproduce its cultural achievements from a position of relative isolation and linguistic separation. The texts considered here instead reveal self-assured manipulation of the same strategies of legitimization, the same claims to the mediation of truth—nevertheless differently staged and formulated—and finally even a form of intertextual and intercultural dialogue that would seem to flout the obvious linguistic barrier dividing their several audiences, if not their authors. The questions raised cannot, however, be dealt with in this volume. I see this work as part of a larger move towards translinguistic and transcultural study of the

9 Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," pp. 149–95.

10 Grundmann, "Frauen," 129–61; Green, *Women Readers*; along with many others in the seventy years between these two.

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Middle Ages—such as has been recently advanced among scholars of Mediterranean Studies—in that it suspends cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries long assumed to apply in search of insights that may have eluded us precisely because of the blind spots and disconnections such divisions impose.[11] The results, I hope, will prove in themselves a call to investigate more closely the mechanics on the ground.

As a case in point: the St Albans Psalter (ca. 1130), thought to have been made for the recluse and holy woman Christina of Markyate at St Albans Abbey just north of London, appears to embody Richard's media triangle as a historical event. It contains a first milestone and something of a fountainhead of pictorial narrative in its forty-page prefatory picture cycle portraying Christ's salvation of humanity. It also contains the earliest extant *escripture* of any complete work of literature in French, a vernacular *chanson* of the Life of St Alexis, which somehow interlopes between the picture cycle and the Psalms. Michael Camille made of this codex an object lesson in the way both pictures and vernacular text had been excised, removed from their contexts entirely to become protagonists in their respective histories of art and French literature.[12] The St Albans Psalter will be the subject of chapter 4; here I wish to draw attention only to the double page at the end of the Alexis, where the two histories meet, so to speak (figs. 4.11–4.12).[13] The *chanson* concludes there on the verso, and immediately following the scribe penned in two versions, one Latin, the other Anglo-Norman, of Gregory the Great's apology for pictures as the scripture of the illiterate. On the recto, another full-page picture cycle begins, a three-part cycle telling the story of Christ's appearance at Emmaus. Here then the visual and the literary turn both occur together, with testimony to the "illiterate reading" they serve inscribed (or "painted") in not one but two languages. Should the translation have been included for Christina, the inconsistencies only multiply, as her own vernacular was surely Anglo-Saxon.[14] But that is almost beside the point. The two pages ought to have shown us long ago that it is not our histories that matter here but a history that was being written even for the eyes of its contemporaries, one in which script is both word and image and reading is both viewing and listening (and possibly not the decoding of script at all), a history of new modes of mediating between *homo* and Logos. *Homo*, in this history, was frequently conceived of as a woman and a psalter-reader.

A word is needed here on the local and circumstantial manifestations of the vernacular(s) versus the idea of the vernaculars as languages of a culture apposite to that of the Latinate clergy. The St Albans Psalter manifests both the circumstantial and the conventional: its French texts appear in both continental and insular dialects, no doubt because the insular insertions were composed for the purpose, without an

11 See Akbari and Mallette, *Sea of Languages*, esp. chaps. 1–3.

12 Camille, "Iconoclasm," pp. 371–401.

13 Powell, "Media and Presence," 340–45, and Powell, "Making the Psalter," 307–15.

14 The term "vernacular" loses some of its categorical force here, as Anglo-Norman (or Anglo-French) served in English monasteries as a *lingua franca* of a sort one step below Latin and would most likely have represented to Christina a koiné of the ruling class.

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exemplar.[15] At the same time, the scribe appears oddly deficient in Anglo-French or at least its spelling, giving rise to the suspicion that he, too, may have been more comfortable in Anglo-Saxon.[16] Conversely, the pages manifest an equivalence of vernacular *estoire* and pictures as characteristic of lay culture and thereby appeal to a system of conventions (for example, Gregory's letter) that is translinguistic (and transcultural) in that it stems from and is legitimized by the Latin culture of the church.[17] As a rule, it is this latter system of conventions that is operative in the arguments used to present, situate, and legitimize the texts and images considered in these chapters.

The same interest in women's reading just pinpointed, as a figure of mediation between *homo* and Logos, somehow finds a culmination in Richard's bestial love letter, one so self-consciously aware of its origins and possibilities that it can assimilate several literary genres, sacred and secular reading, religious instruction, and literary seduction into a veritable vernacular poetics of image, word, and script; all figured as one parodic "assault" on the memory of his beloved. The story that leads from the one to the other, from Latin psalter to vernacular love literature, is in large part the story of the psalter-reading woman as a *chiffre* of the vernacular audience. Richard's triangle delineates something like the focal point of twelfth-century exploration of the role(s) of media in the reading enterprise. Women's devotional use of prayer books appears to have been both an imaginative and a factual matrix around and through which this took shape. The figure of the woman-as-reader, which signals a way of knowing gendered as female, thus determines the path taken in the chapters that follow; she is the woman in the mirror of my title. If her history has not yet been written, then it is clearly not for lack of important connections to issues and inquiry of concern in our time. In fact, it is not least because competing histories have obscured our view.

Modern Scholarship and Medieval Women Readers

The hypothesis that women's literacy triggered the emergence of vernacular literature, with its corollary that they were its primary readers, originated in German scholarship with the foundational work of Herbert Grundmann on literacy and medieval religious movements.[18] As Helen Solterer correctly observed two decades ago, this "long-standing link … is too fraught to allow for a one-to-one correspondence between textual figure and social role."[19] For Solterer, Grundmann's work "typifies the habit of interpreting the numbers of medieval women linked with bookish culture as proof of their decisive

15 These are two, the prologue to the Alexis and the translation of Gregory's letter; the *Chanson* itself was copied, it seems, from a continental exemplar. See Mölk, "Bemerkungen," 289–303, also the note following.

16 Mölk, "Albani-Psalter," pp. 53–56; paleographer Malcolm Parkes, however, identified the hand as typical of the northern French schools: see Nilgen, "Psalter," p. 162.

17 Powell, "Media and Presence," 343–45; Curschmann, "*Pictura*," pp. 211–19; more generally on such conventions, Curschmann, "Epistemologisches."

18 "Frauen," 129–61; also Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, pp. 452–75.

19 Solterer, *Master*, p. 3.

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activity."[20] In view of the groundbreaking position of Grundmann's essay in 1935, this charge is best levelled at all those who happily espoused his conclusions without further probing the question. As recently as 2007, D. H. Green enlarged what remains basically Grundmann's approach into a survey of women and reading that fills an entire monograph.[21] While Green's accumulation and categorization of the evidence is valuable, the methodological problem that Solterer singled out is only compounded by his tendency to speak of the European Middle Ages as a monolithic "society," which in turn reflects a failure to distinguish chronologically or contextually between examples or, most importantly, to untangle their figurative from their potentially factual dimensions.[22] This latter point is the one so fraught with difficulty; it is no less essential to a methodologically defensible treatment of the question.

There is no doubt today of the higher level of reading ability and widespread use of books among (noble-)women of the High Middle Ages so long as the discussion concerns the laity. But this in itself offers no explanation for why it became legitimate and desirable in the mid twelfth century to found a literary culture in the vernaculars. To begin with, the kind of devotional literacy that Grundmann singled out among women in this period was by no means a new development; women's use of psalters and other devotional works is well documented in earlier periods.[23] Beyond this, the basic assumptions behind Grundmann's argument are no longer accepted. For him, new vernacular writing represented the recording of works produced as oral compositions by lay poets; thus, the new texts were there to be read by recipients capable of perusing the pages themselves.[24] Both assumptions have since given way to a model that sees the texts as designed for some form of recitative performance (read aloud by one for many) and their composition as the highly literary work of clerics. The idea that women needed vernacular texts to be able to listen to them is not compelling. As work on the learning of the laity has by now adequately established (and Grundmann was among the first to document this), where such was desired, the knowledge base of the Latin written tradition was routinely made accessible through a combination of oral translation and instruction provided by the learned.[25] Vernacular texts did not arise as access to an otherwise inaccessible body of knowledge.[26]

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20 Solterer, *Master*, p. 3.

21 In *Women Readers*, Green makes much of a need to correct Grundmann's views on literacy in the Middle Ages, but refers only to a different and later essay and with criticism that is often misplaced. Cf. Grundmann, "Litteratus-Illitteratus," 1–65. Grundmann's earlier essay on women and the vernacular literary turn barely receives mention, still less are its conclusions questioned.

22 Unzeitig, Review of Green, 26–28.

23 Haubrichs, *Anfänge*, p. 50; McKitterick, "Frauen und Schriftlichkeit," pp. 111–18; Clanchy, "Images of Ladies," pp. 107–8.

24 In Grundmann's time, the great German romances were thought to be the work of knights or lay court officials.

25 Grundmann, "Litteratus-Illitteratus," 42–43 and 47–48; see also Clanchy, *Memory*, pp. 208–13, 221–22, 252–53; and Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, pp. 607–10.

26 Constable, "Language of Preaching," pp. 131–52; Sharpe, "Latin in Everyday Life," pp. 315–41.

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Neither can the difficulties be resolved by resort to an "intermediate" or "double model" of reception such as Green put forward, envisioning both public performance and individual or private reading as part and parcel of the conception of the new texts.[27] For one thing, such a construct is largely the outgrowth of a teleological view of the period as a "transition" between a primarily oral and a primarily written society or mentality. Green's "intermediate mode" finds very little basis in the sources other than the same problematic literary figuration, the reading woman, which is to be examined more closely here. For another, the manuscript record simply does not support the idea of a significant spread of vernacular literacy before the mid thirteenth century—when the texts of the German *Blütezeit* (literary "blossoming"), as it is known, were already on their way to becoming classics.[28] Green was a prominent Germanist and argued primarily on that ground. The situation in French, however, does not alter this picture.[29]

The literacy hypothesis, the idea that "Growing literacy brought vernacular literature onto the written page,"[30] should itself be abandoned as a fallacy where the crucial period of the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries is concerned. It was not new readers who triggered the composition of written texts but rather the existence of a written literature that only gradually called forth readers alongside a far larger body of listeners.[31] If the idea persists, then it is because Grundmann's question (one that, when he wrote, literary studies had barely posed, far less answered), the "why" of the twelfth century's vernacular literary turn, still lacks a compelling answer today.[32] In the third edition of his seminal study of the uses of literacy in medieval England between 1066 and 1307, Michael Clanchy formulates the question in a way that lays much of the groundwork necessary to a corrective approach: "The hardest question to answer precisely is why a growing number of patrons and writers in the twelfth century ceased to be satisfied with Latin as the medium of writing and experimented with [the vernaculars] instead."[33] Posed this way, the question does not pair writing with reading; it does not assume that vernacular texts make a literate culture of an illiterate one, whether directly or vicariously; it does not even assume that those interested in vernacular written texts are primarily laymen, or that they were previously without access to writing and a written tradition. It circumscribes a different reality than we have previously had in view as the

27 Green, *Medieval Listening*, pp. 169–233 and passim.

28 Bertelsmeier-Kierst, "Aufbruch," 157–74; esp. 160; 170–71; Palmer, "Manuscripts for Reading," pp. 67–102; Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 81–82 and 316–18.

29 Busby, *Manuscrits de Chrétien*, pp. 17–25, esp. pp. 17–18, 24; Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 79–81; Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 218–20.

30 Parkes, "Literacy of the Laity," p. 556.

31 Clanchy, *Memory*, pp. 79–80, 235–36, 249–50, 252–53 (writing of the situation in England); Coleman, *Public Reading* (on England and France); Curschmann, "Hören–Lesen–Sehen," 218–25 (on Germany).

32 Grundmann, "Frauen," 131: "die Bedeutung der Frage … die die Literaturforschung bisher kaum gestellt, geschweige denn beantwortet hat: wie, wann und wodurch ist aus dem Sprachwerk des Dichters (und des Predigers!), das vorgetragen und gehört, nicht geschrieben und gelesen wurde, Schrifttum geworden?"

33 Clanchy, *Memory*, p. 220. The passage first appeared in the second edition of 1993.

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parameters for inquiry and redefines these such that the new question is, appropriately, one that addresses not the uses of texts but the uses of writing.[34]

The argument pursued in this book reveals a much stronger case for the idea that it was not reading but performance itself that "brought vernacular literature onto the written page." What we see in the bilingual (or indeed, multilingual) culture of written texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is an expanded use of the stage, of the vernacular performance space, to accommodate new combinations of writing and performance, written texts and their oral delivery. At one end of the spectrum there were Latin texts to be orally translated and interpreted in the vernacular for a listening audience; at the other, there was the performance of memorized, orally recomposed or orally improvised vernacular poetry and tales. What begins to occur in the course of the twelfth century is the use of this space to perform poetic works with fixed vernacular texts. The opportunity involved was one doubtless felt first and foremost by the authors rather than the audience. New vernacular literature may be thought of as a hybrid or marriage of the art of the preacher and that of the *jongleur*.

Written composition in the vernacular offered the clerical author distinct advantages over oral translation of a Latin text. It gave him greater control over the content of the performance and allowed him to explore greater literary complexity; at the same time, the use of the stage (understood very informally) allowed him to exploit the appeal and entertainment value of the art of jongleurs and oral poets. But for him to be sure of the success we know followed, there must have been an equivalent advantage felt among the audience; that is, among the lay nobility and others who frequented their courts. The idea that these texts, romance narrative in particular, both affirmed and aggrandized the identity and social position of the lay nobility has been thoroughly explored in the past—but the answer must surely reach beyond this idea to one that comprises the hermeneutic value of the texts, the meaning they mediated to new audiences. Modern scholarship has located this added value in the idea of romance as the (re)invention of a poetics of fiction. As I will argue here, not least among the discoveries that lay behind the woman in the mirror of this audio-visual poetics is a new idea of how romance narrative could constitute an experience not of fiction but of divine truth. In this model, then, the layman's performance space and the layman's language were elevated to a position from which they could aspire to their own mediation of the Word.

The question of women's significance for new visual and verbal forms has been not only posited as a relationship of causal agency but also more recently and provocatively explored through the lens of gender ideology in cultural representation. In *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*, Roberta Krueger promises "a reconceptualization of the 'woman question' in the *theory* of romance as a genre," and successfully challenges the older assumption that the attention to women

34 See also Bumke, "Bestandsaufnahme," 490–91, also 485, 486. Foundational for my understanding of the culture of communication (written, visual, and oral) in courtly society ca. 1200 is Curschmann, "Hören–Lesen–Sehen."

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in the texts, whether as protagonists or audience, reflects their tastes or preferences.[35] She likewise dismantles the simplistic tendency to equate the narrator's cultivation of a female audience with women's patronage of the genre or of new vernacular poetry. But her analysis then becomes embroiled in a trap not dissimilar to that of the literacy hypothesis. Postulating as a "central claim of this study" that "the highly problematic presentation of the women readers within romance fiction reflects the problem of historical women's reception of the genre," Krueger sets out to recover this latter from the texts themselves.[36] Thus literary representation once again is mined for information on women's social reality and even their aesthetic responses; moreover, it is not a medieval understanding of "the *theory* of romance as a genre" that is to be discovered but rather our own that is to be redefined. That the representation of female reception of the texts might have been part of the textual articulation of a theory of the genre—such as I argue here—is a possibility Krueger does not entertain.

In another provocative study of women and medieval courtly literature, R. Howard Bloch recasts the question in the broadest terms, seeking the nature of the relationship between "the question of woman" and "that of reading in the literary history of the West."[37] Bloch analyses "the double bind of Christianity's founding articulation of gender," arguing that it leaves women trapped between "the polarized position[s] of seducer and redeemer," and thus "idealized, subtilized, frozen into passivity that cannot be resolved."[38] The two poles manifest themselves in medieval literature as the cleric's misogyny and the obverse idealization of women in courtly love poetry. Bloch offers a valuable review of the patristic rhetoric on woman, body and representation, arguing convincingly that the Christian "feminization of the aesthetic" extends the notion of the woman as flesh to the entire realm of signs and representations, and thus to art, poetry, and theatrical performance.[39] But his analysis of the way these ideas play out in the crucial twelfth century fails to conceptualize a history interior to the rhetoric and representations themselves, instead once again mapping the medieval discourse into a larger history of gender ideology (and even romantic love) so that its meaning is predetermined by a desire, as Krueger stated her objective, to "contribute to the dismantling of the pervasive myths of gender in our culture."[40] This largely external view of the workings of gender structures precludes inquiry into a manipulation of the same concepts that is internal to the staging of communication between text and audience.

Where applied not to (what we see as) secular literature but instead to religious texts, analysis of gender ideology has put forward fundamental correctives necessary to our understanding of the twelfth-century situation. The work of Caroline Bynum offers in itself the solution to Bloch's "contrary abstracted double," and it is one that she deduces

35 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 12.

36 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 30.

37 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 47–48.

38 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 196, 91.

39 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 44–46 and passim.

40 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 32.

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from the medieval texts. Bynum's work has taught us to "consider not just the dichotomy but also the mixing and fusing of the genders implicit in medieval assumptions" and, above all, that men might be just as likely as women were to assume and identify with roles and experiences gendered as female.[41] The position of woman that Bloch finds so paralyzing was one that, in religious discourse at least, men and women adopted and elaborated freely as an image of their own abject state before God. The opportunity hidden in such a debasement was contained in the most basic fact of the Christian faith, the Incarnation: God had required flesh from a woman, Mary, to manifest his love in human form; to identify with woman was to appeal for divine love from the only position truly available, that of human weakness. For Bynum and the medieval writers she studies, Bloch's conundrum becomes an opportunity expressed in remarkably similar terms: "the image of both a sinful and a saved humanity is the image of woman."[42]

Bynum's work has been extended since to areas that very much overlap with my own project. Rachel Fulton sensitively probes emergent Marian commentary on the Song of Songs in the twelfth century as a locus for men's reading through Mary as the biblical bride and human counterpart to Christ's unattainable divinity.[43] Elizabeth Robertson analyses the position of the female audience as constructed in English vernacular texts written for recluses by their spiritual directors in the thirteenth century and shows how the gendering of the audience also legitimizes the use of the vernacular as a medium appropriate to their affinity with the body and the senses, seen as a natural and thus insurmountable incapacity for learning.[44] This idea was deeply intertwined with contemporary understanding of the epistemological place of the vernacular and the image, in and through which the reader-as-woman was seen to experience the metaphors of scripture as literalized, located in the body, and continuous with her own biography. Robertson sees the beginnings of this alternative understanding of reading in the affective meditations of Anselm of Canterbury and as closely connected with a new emphasis on the human body of Christ, likewise the central focus of Fulton's work. Sarah McNamer in effect combines the two approaches to look probingly into the role of gender and women's devotional needs in "the invention of medieval compassion," and argues that it occurs from the beginning as the codification through male writers (Anselm and John of Fécamp) of patterns of devotion and emotional response in themselves understood as female.[45] Of particular interest is the way McNamer then reads devotional texts in Middle English prose from the fourteenth century onward as overtly cultivating a position of female reading identification and emotional response ("Feeling Like a Woman") for audiences of either sex.[46] Compassion, then, was articulated as a woman's pleading

41 Bynum, "Female Body," p. 205; Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 282–88.

42 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 265; also pp. 267–68.

43 "Quae est ista," "Mimetic devotion," and *JP*.

44 Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, see esp. pp. 181–94.

45 McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.

46 "To perform compassion is to feel like a woman. So pervasive is this tacit axiom that it is, I propose, a 'robust' feature of the genre" (*Affective Meditation*, p. 119).

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position before God that is projected into vernacular religious texts as a female response prescribed for lay people of either sex.

McNamer's work complements and develops ideas found in a stimulating essay by Nicholas Watson on the vernacular in England in the same period. Likewise focusing on Passion meditations produced for an audience of women and the "unlettered," Watson's "Conceptions of the Word" reveals an incarnational epistemology in vernacular texts, a theory of vernacular literature that sees their textuality as grounded in the idea of *kenosis*, the idea that Christ took human form out of love for humanity and so that he could be more fully understood.[47] From this perspective, affinity with the body could signal proximity to Christ and "contains the potential for a revalorization of … the role of the vernacular writer, the 'uneducated' reader, and the vernacular itself"; resulting even in "a view of the vernacular as equal, or superior, to Latin as an instrument of revelation, and a view of [its] readers as equal, or superior, to the learned in their capacity to receive such revelation."[48] Surprising though these conclusions are, they point directly to those that I will argue towards in my later chapters, and this not for the fourteenth but rather the late twelfth century, not in England but in France and Germany, not even necessarily in what we recognize as "religious" texts but also in courtly romance.

From Bynum by way of Fulton and Watson to McNamer, the studies just discussed have all pointed to the twelfth century as the intellectual incubator of the ideas that define the role of woman and women in a gendered recasting of epistemology.[49] Moreover, they suggest that it was the devotional *practice* of reading in the monastic sphere that placed the woman at the centre of a reading model for "unschooled" users of the vernacular. In this conception, the literary turn would—in a later period—share the same justification as has been identified for the twelfth century's visual turn in prayer. In such models of female knowing, the hierarchies of gender and learning not only posited or enforced exclusions, they also served as concepts through which to justify and articulate alternative inclusions, whether the factual "readers" were women or not.

It is my argument that the advent of vernacular literature in the later twelfth century takes shape as the transfer of a poetics of reading from monastic culture to the lay aristocracy by way of the intermediary position of women as alternative reading subjects. This transfer emerges from a larger field of experimentation in the monastic milieu with new ways of reading and knowing that focus from the beginning on the image, the voice, and the vernacular, performance and a new poetics of bodily media; and treats these as the appropriate means of engaging both the opportunities and the paradox that the woman-as-reader was seen to represent: the need for knowledge where exclusion from learning is an immutable condition. As a category, as essence, woman was body and as such always potentially held the place of a helpless humanity before the omniscience

47 See esp. 91–98.

48 Watson, "Conceptions," 104, 102.

49 Solterer ("Medieval Senses," 142) makes a complementary argument on the *Bestiaire d'Amours* and texts constellated around it, which she reads as effecting a "physical recasting of epistemology" around "the figure of the woman reader."

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and omnipotence of divinity. The woman-as-reader serves the intellectual and spiritual landscape of the twelfth century as the posited necessity for an alternative to reading as spiritual asceticism, reading as the separation of chaff from kernel, letter (as flesh!) from spirit, body from truth. In this "she" was the fulcrum of profound change: no less than an ontological reversal of the structure of Christian gnosis.

The final chapters of this book will propose a new understanding of the relationship between empathy, truth, and the emergence of fictional narrative around 1200, focusing on two capital achievements in romance narrative: *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, by Chrétien de Troyes, and *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach. One key to this understanding is a transfer of the devotional experience of *compassio* as articulated through Mary to the experience of romance narrative: the audience learns with the protagonist how to assume a compassionating attitude not to Christ but rather to the sufferings of his mother and "widowed bride," Mary; he or she learns to feel as a woman. Mary's experience at the cross represents a bodily knowing of the bodily sufferings of Christ and thus a bodily communion with divine love: feeling as knowing in the most profound sense.[50] Thus, to "feel as a woman" was also to "read" as she did, in and through the body. But the original image of identification with Mary's experience of bodily knowing was not the image of her *compassio*; it was rather that of her *conceptio*, the image of Mary at the Annunciation. Beginning with chapter 2, I will examine the way Mary's experience of the conception of Christ through the Spirit was imagined in twelfth-century male monastic culture as a reading act—that is, as the image of a perfect Christian gnosis communicated and received directly in the body. This act was imitable and Mary's experience was accessible by following the reading bride through the images of the Song of Songs. The same reading path is recast for monastic women, themselves seen as "illiterate" recipients of the Word, through the audio-visual (*audi filia, et vide*) delivery of their monastic instructors in the *Speculum virginum*, to be explored in chapter 3. There we observe how Mary's conception of the Word could be generalized for a female audience and expanded into a programme of "illiterate" and picture-assisted *lectio*. The special privileges of this female receptive position and the nature of its connection to vision and presence are explored over chapters 1, 2, and 4 through the figure of Hildegard of Bingen and the intricate construction (or commemoration?) of a holy woman's reading in the pages of the St Albans Psalter. Two intermediate chapters, chapters 5 and 6, trace the transfer, or really the *translatio*, of this woman's reading, Mary's reading, from the monastic to the courtly sphere, and thus from religious women to lay men and women, in three early Old French texts ranging from vernacular exegesis to one of the early romances of antiquity, the *Roman de Troie.*

This book is thus an investigation in search of a discourse always situated on multiple boundaries, those between the social estates of the clergy and the lay nobility and their largely separate educational and professional paths, between men and women, between the religious and the secular life, and between sacred and profane. The medieval terms of opposition that we associate with the historical uses of literacy and the

50 *JP*, see esp. pp. 195–203; 426–28.

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distribution of learning—*litteratus* and *illitteratus*, *clericus* and *laicus*—and those we see as the instruments of social and sexual oppression—*mulier* (woman) and *vir* (man)— fill the function of "theory" within this discussion; they become the rhetorical chess pieces for a field of epistemological reflection that mediates at once between tradition, orthodoxy and innovation, and between the text and its reception, author and audience. It was one of the singular advantages of these terms that they always retained the potential to play on identification with the real capacities and identities of members of their audiences. The terminology has no more obligatory correspondence to real audience or authorial capacities, the actual function and reception of text or image, than do the knight, the bishop, or the queen on a chessboard to the social reality from which they take their names. But this last boundary is no less consciously exploited than the others. This was a discourse, finally and above all about the boundary between reading experience and reality, the life of the body and eternal truth, and it developed, *had to develop*, its own polysemic terms appropriate to a position poised between the same. These did not derive from the methods of textual interpretation so avidly cultivated and discussed in the schools, nor can they be read as directly indebted to the tradition of theological authority on reading and knowing that gave birth to those same. They are instead the somewhat experimental result of reading experiences constructed and expounded upon *in statu nascendi*. As such, they can only be recovered through careful attention to the roles and functions assigned in each case to speaker, audience, and media in relation to the constitution of meaning. Each of the chapters to come must therefore reconstruct these elements within a new and shifted, or "translated" staging of the same and then attempt through close reading of the texts (understood to include visual constructs of pictorial nature) to understand their specific contribution to a history of media and knowing as explored for marginal audiences, guided always by the figure of the woman-as-reader.

The woman-as-reader is thus very much what Richard's text initially stages her to be: all humanity in its natural desire to know (*Toutes gens desirent par nature a savoir*). In the century following the composition of the *Bestiaire d'amours*, illuminators took their turns at rendering Richard's triangle of media poetics in iconic form as an opening miniature to the text. In one version we see the eye and the ear—the receptive counterparts to image and word—disembodied and placed as insignia on each of two doors to the castle of memory.[51] In another, the same sensory doors are "opened" to reveal the castle's inhabitant standing front and centre: a woman (fig. 0.1). Woman as memory and thus the mirror of our reception of *parole* and *painture*: some 200 years, it seems, beyond the initial developments considered here, one artist fixed the visual epigraph that stands no less suitably at this book's beginning.

51 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 412, fol. 228r. On these images, see Sears, "Sensory Perception," pp. 17–22.

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Figure 0.1. Memory in the *Bestiaire d'amour rimé*, ca. 1300, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS fr 1951, fol. 1. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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PART ONE

READING AS *SPONSA ET MATER*

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Chapter 1

MUTATIONS OF THE READING WOMAN

Pucele and *Sinnec wîp*

In Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, the protagonist of the same name is twice placed in the position of watching women "read," once in advance of his path through *aventure* and once near its conclusion. In the first scene, he voyeuristically observes Laudine's desperation as she prays from a psalter while mourning the loss of her husband, killed by Yvain.[1] The second occurs as part of the *Pesme Aventure*, the "most dire adventure," which is Yvain's penultimate trial and the last he accomplishes before returning to the Arthurian court. Here he becomes a third spectator and listener among a private group, a nobleman and his wife who, relaxing in their garden, "take great pleasure" (*mout esjoïr*) in "seeing and hearing" (*veoir et oïr*) their only daughter read from a vernacular text (*lisoit une puchele devant li / En un rommans*; cf. lines 5356–69). And well they should, for, as the narrator elaborates in an aside to his own audience, the reading girl is so "beautiful and noble" that the god of love, witnessing the same, would descend to earth in human form to claim and keep her for none but himself:

> Et s'estoit si bele et si gente
> Qu'en li servir meïst s'entente
> Li Dix d'amours, s'i le veïst;
> Ne ja amer ne la feïst
> Autrui, s'a lui meïsmes non.
> Pour li servir devenist hom,
> S'issist de sa deÿté hors
> Et ferist lui meïsme el cors
> Du dart dont le plaie ne saine
> Se desloiaus mires n'i paine.
> (lines 5371–80)

> (And she was so beautiful and so gracious that the god of love himself would have desired to serve her, had he seen her, and would have had her love no man if not himself. To serve her he would have changed himself into a man, would have given up his divinity and wounded his own body with the arrow whose wound does not heal unless a faithless doctor tend to it.)

Yvain is smitten with much the same desire—but not on seeing the eminently eligible courtly bride, the *pucele* of the *Pesme Aventure*. Yvain is inflicted with the wound of love while watching the suffering reading, the grieving devotion of his victim, Laudine:[2]

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1 *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Hult, lines 1410ff. Further references to this edition are parenthetical.

2 The description of Yvain's wound shows striking similarity to the later passage. See lines 1367–81.

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Et Mesire Yvains est encor
A le fenestre ou il l'esgarde;
Et quant il plus s'en donne garde,
Plus l'aime et plus li abelist.
Che qu'ele pleure et qu'ele list
Vausist qu'ele laissié eüst,
Et qu'a li parler li pleüst.
En chest voloir l'a Amour mis,
Qui a la fenestre l'a pris.
(lines 1420–28)[3]

(And my Lord Yvain is once again at the window where he beholds her, and the more he beholds her, the more he loves her and the more he is delighted, that she weeps and that she reads, these he wishes she would leave off and that it would please her to speak to him. Love had put him in this state, who befell him at the window.)

There, indulging his desire by spying through a window, he conceives an illicit love that launches his narrative path, while here, at its end, he refuses a bride legitimately won and all but forced upon him.[4] The narrative is constructed such that it displays this latter—an ironic inversion of the desire that structures the most basic narrative units of romance—as the appropriate response, even as it serves to demonstrate the depth of Yvain's own "wound" and his fidelity to and worthiness of Laudine and thus signals the *reformatio* of his initial illicit desire. But both are represented as responses to reading women.

For "Chrétien's male heroes, … nothing, it would seem, is more overpowering to a knight than the spectacle of a woman reading a well-wrought text." Thus Eugene Vance observed of Yvain's observation of Laudine.[5] To refer to Laudine's action—performed while also wringing her hands, beating her palms together, and apparently even attempting to strangle herself (lines 1416–18)—as reading may appear as ill-seeming as the unbridled desire it kindles in Yvain, but there are two reasons for doing so. First, images of psalter-reading women have long been the star witnesses to an idea that women could and did read not only as Laudine does, not only as the *pucele* does, "prelecting" a vernacular text,[6] but also as some hybrid of the two: enjoying vernacular texts as they read psalters; that is, "in private," or unto and for themselves. Laudine's reading would then correspond historically to a variety of female literacy that led, so the argument goes, directly to the composition of vernacular romances such as Chrétien's.[7]

3 This passage, its punctuation and translation are discussed in chap. 8, pp. 358–60.

4 The continuation of this episode sees, as it must, Yvain accomplishing the *aventure* associated with this castle and thus winning the bride for whose hand it was the precondition.

5 *Topic to Tale*, p. 7.

6 Joyce Coleman introduces the term, "prelection," borrowed from John of Salisbury, to describe the medieval practice of public reading for a listening audience (Coleman, *Public Reading*, pp. 35, 230, and passim).

7 See below, pp. 24–27.

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But more revealing and less disputable is another association: Laudine's action is placed in an analogous position not only, through Yvain, to the *pucele*'s reading but also—through the "reading" of the audience in parallel position to Yvain—to the narrator's performance of the text. The narrator continues his aside on the god of love by casting his own performance (or reading as illustrated by the *pucele*) as the potential cure for love's wound, in which case the interested parties, whether wounded or not, are his own audience:

> N'est droiz que nus pener i puisse
> jusque deslëauté i truisse,
> et qui an garist autremant
> il n'ainme mie lëaumant;
> de ces plaies molt vos deïsse
> tant qu'a une fin an venisse
> se l'estoire bien vos plëust;
> mes tost deïst, tel i eüst,
> que je vos parlasse de songe,
> que la genz n'est mes amoronge
> ne n'ainment mes, si con il suelent,
> que nes oïr parler n'an vuelent.[8]

> (It is not right that anyone take pains to cure it unless faithlessness be found there, and he who recovers from it otherwise does not faithfully love. I would gladly tell you more of this wound until I reached an end of it, if the story should well please you; but no sooner would I start than someone among you would say that I speak of mere dreams. There are no more true lovers; people no longer love as they once did, for they don't even want to hear of it anymore.)

Those who still truly love, the desired audience, would suffer the same wound and hear him out. But this allows Laudine's devotional reading, the *pucele*'s reading performance, and the performance of the narrator's text to overlap in one "reading" experience. The audience is placed in an analogous position to both Yvain—with whom they, too, spied on Laudine—and the god of love: all of them "read" the reading woman, and the love, or wound, thereby inflicted has no cure other than the completion of the story, Yvain's narrative adventure. Yvain's wounding at the sight of a woman's suffering and the narrative trajectory it initiates—one that also leads, in some sense, from a woman's devotional reading to the performance of vernacular texts—are the audience's as well. Chrétien's reading women are inseparable from an articulation of the experience of romance narrative, the poetics of the performance of the narrator's text.

In another passage frequently cited as evidence that women are anticipated as the "literal" readers of romance, Wolfram von Eschenbach interrupts the narration of his

8 *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Roques, lines 5379–90. On my preference for Guiot's copy of this passage (I have elsewhere relied on the edition of David Hult), see below, p. 351 note 69.

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Parzival at the conclusion of the sixth book and calls upon the women in his audience to judge for themselves how well he has represented their fictional counterparts:

> nu weiz ich, swelch sinnec wîp,
> ob si hât getriwen lîp,
> diu diz mære geschriben siht,
> daz si mir mit wârheit giht,
> ich kunde wîben sprechen baz
> denne als ich sanc gein einer maz.[9]
>
> (Now, I know, whatever woman of sensitive understanding—be she but of mind and body true—who should see this tale in writing, she will vouch for me in all truth that I've given a better account of women here than in the songs I sang of one.)

The narrator's proud stance is based on the claim that he has fulfilled a promise—made to the same women in an excursus some 3,500 lines earlier—to deliver a new and truer portrayal of women with his poem.[10] Here he invites them, it seems, to "see for themselves" what he has presented in his favour—portraits of bereft and suffering women that have peopled the poem to this point. And to jog their memories he recapitulates them: the beautiful Belakane, thoughtlessly abandoned by her much beloved foreign husband; Herzeloyde, left a young and pregnant widow after an even shorter marriage to the same husband; Ginover, mourning the loss of her murdered kinsman; Jeschute, mistreated by an intruder and then mercilessly punished by her jealous lover; and Cunneware, pummelled black and blue merely for laughing. Are the women "who see the tale in writing" to be seen as readers called upon to reconsider what they have read, or are they instead listeners who verify a claim to the effect of the performed text? The promise in question would require the latter: the point at which the narrator engaged himself to accomplish the task is the same one at which he makes his famous claim to illiteracy, says his "right" as narrator can be "seen and heard," and refuses to continue his tale for any who would "take it for a book."[11] There, launching his "new" narrative with the birth of the hero, Parzival (4,9; 112,9–12), he likewise announces it as his own knightly service to a suffering woman: "der lobes kemphe wil ich sîn, mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn" (I'll be the fighting champion of her praise; her grief is my heart's sorrow) (115,3–4). This profession of "militant illiteracy" may well be a literary pose, but the claims it stakes, as we shall see in a later chapter, are anything but tongue-in-cheek.[12] Here it is most notable that they are put forward with the pose and the language of a legal transaction.

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9 *Parzival. Studienausgabe*, ed. Lachmann, lines 337,1–6. Further references to this edition are parenthetical. Translations of the text, unless otherwise noted, are my own, for which I have consulted and compared those of Hatto, Spiewok and Kühn in addition to Knecht's in the *Studienausgabe*.

10 A contrast is intended with the Minnesang, recalling polemic from the earlier passage, lines 114,5–116,3.

11 Cf. 115,8–9, 25–26; also pp. 319–20, below.

12 The term "militanter Illiterat" was coined by Bumke in *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, p. 6.

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As the earlier passage makes clear, the women evoked as addressees in either case are the figments of a fictional, or "original," performance of the text. They are conjured at several points in the text as audience members to whom Wolfram directs pointed remarks on the legitimacy of his narration and its relationship to truth.[13] It would be singularly inconsistent then, at the later juncture, to figure the same women as readers; it would be a glaring contradiction, should the renewed "contract" for continuation of the story depend on its being a book, and not only this but also on book-reception to guarantee its claim to truth.

The resolution of these seeming contradictions can be found in two aspects of the contemporary meaning and experience of written text and the use of books. First, whether between books 2 and 3 or at the end of book 6, Wolfram's challenge turns around seeing as believing or witnessing; in fact, it need not be taken as reading in the second case at all. Studying the process whereby written documents began to assume a role within traditionally oral legal practice, Michael Clanchy finds that documents of a legal transaction initially filled the same function as did objects that symbolized its completion, typically a knife or turf from the parcel of land exchanged. "Witnesses 'heard' the donor utter the words of the grant and 'saw' him make the transfer by a symbolic object."[14] This audio-visual witnessing made the transaction a manifest reality. As charters came to replace the exchanged object, they also became the visual (and audible) manifestation of truth: Clanchy cites a number of charters that preserve in writing the call to witnesses to see and hear the transaction, in effect extending the act of witnessing through time and space.[15] The act of visually displaying a charter—at times on the church altar—then served to authenticate the validity of a transaction. The viewer became as if a witness of the original transaction by viewing the charter that was its record. Seeing, then, may or may not be reading. Seeing is believing and, called upon in this way, signals an appeal to pre-literate conceptions of juridically empowered communication predicated on physical presence.[16] Rather than reflecting an expectation that women could or would read his text, then, Wolfram's remark makes the women in his audience into the decisive witnesses to the truth of his narrating performance.

The second point is suggested by Wolfram's appeal to the women's memory of the suffering of their fellows in the narrative. This gesture evokes an act of visual *memoria*, an association between participation in a performance, visual perusal of its script, and the remembering or recalling to presence of the speech and actions of others. This is the

13 These passages, which also include the prologue, 2,23–3,24, and the epilogue, 827,25–30, are necessarily among the most disputed in the text and are treated in detail in chap. 7, below.

14 *Memory*, p. 256.

15 *Memory*, pp. 255–62, see also Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, pp. 356–65, and the literature cited there; Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 308–9.

16 Clanchy, *Memory*, p. 259; also Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, pp. 48, 59. Green, *Medieval Listening*, p. 141, argues that *geschriben sehen* was used to mean 'read' by recalling examples in which Wolfram and his contemporaries use the phrase to speak of consultation of a written source. These examples as easily prove my point: the gesture is again one of visual witnessing, in which a text source now stands in for the authority of the author as eyewitness.

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basic relationship of medieval devotional reading to the performance of the mass. As Horst Wenzel observes, "Script, image and sculpted figure are understood in the Middle Ages as memorials serving the re-presentation, the recall to presence of persons in their speech and actions, and their significance in the court sphere resided in this function even as it did in the sphere of the Church."[17] We encounter this mirroring of the culture of *memoria* between the courtly and religious spheres specifically described as reading practice in a passage from the prologue to the Life of Saint Margaret of Scotland. The life of Margaret was commissioned by Matilda, her daughter, during her reign as queen of England (1100–1118) and is dated between 1104 and 1107.[18] Margaret's exemplary devotional reading and its effect on her husband will be discussed below. It had an effect on her daughter as well—herself a *litterata* of some renown.[19] As Lois Huneycutt convincingly argues, the *vita* was not composed as hagiography so much as it was "a didactic tool for Matilda, to instil in her an ideal of queenly behaviour, and to provide a pattern which she could follow in her daily activities."[20] Either way, however, the reading practice was the same. This is what the author has to say about Matilda's reasons for commissioning her mother's *vita*:

> Venerandae memoriae matris vestrae placitam Deo conversationem, quam consona multorum laude saepius praedicari audieratis, ut litteris traditam vobis offerem et postulando jussistis et jubendo postulastis. … Vobis congratulor, quae [i.e. Matilda] a Rege Angelorum constituta Regina Anglorum, vitam matris Reginae … non solum audire, sed etiam litteris impressam desideratis jugiter inspicere; ut quae faciem matris parum noveratis, virtutem ejus notitiam plenius habeatis.[21]
>
> (You have both entreated and commanded me to offer you, committed to writing, that way of life, pleasing to God, of the revered memory of your mother that you have so often heard publicly and unanimously praised. … I congratulate you, who, made queen of the English by the king of the English, had desired not only to listen to the life of your mother the queen but also to inspect its impression in letters continually; so that, having too little known your mother's face, you might have ample experience of her virtue.)

As envisioned by the text, Matilda's "reading" is an ancillary, additional act to that of hearing the same content recited (*non solum audire*), evoked with a conspicuous circumlocution, *litteris impressam inspicere*. Matilda is to contemplate visually the memory of her mother, the *impressam*, "in the letters," a practice that serves to compensate for her too brief acquaintance with her mother's face. The auditory and visual "impresses" are thus complementary ways for Matilda to recall her mother's presence and "know" her virtue—just as Wolfram's female audience is called upon to recall to memory the

17 Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 323: "Schrift, Bild und Figur gelten im Mittelalter als Denkmäler der Vergegenwärtigung, als Memorialfiguren sprechender und handelnder Personen, und in dieser Funktion sind sie für den Raum des Hofes ebenso wie für den Raum der Kirche wirksam geworden."

18 Huneycutt, "Perfect Princess," 81–97; on its significance for women's literacy and devotional reading see Gameson, "Gospels of Margaret," pp. 149–71.

19 Thompson, *Literacy of the Laity*, p. 171; Bumke, *Mäzene*, pp. 234–35.

20 Huneycutt, "Perfect Princess," 88–89.

21 *Vita S. Margaritae* 2, 328 B–C.

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experience of his female protagonists, an experience they encounter in the performance of the text.[22] If this experience was "true," the way Margaret's life is a true exemplum of Christian virtue, then this will be verified in the women's response, in their act of *memoria* performed by contemplating the vestiges of those "lives" on the written page, the script. Image, performance, and script all serve one purpose; all are vestiges of the absent life. As we shall see over and again, women (or the woman) represent human memory in the experience of image and word as this recalled presence.

For the authors of these texts and their audiences, the act of perusing letters on a page was, first and necessarily, one of contemplating a visual representation of sounds and presence.[23] Whether and to what extent it involved the decoding of script as language is seldom a point of interest. Matilda was certainly capable of reading her mother's life, but, as the biographer tells us, her father Malcolm of Scotland was just as decidedly incapable of the same.[24] And yet (as we shall see) his love of his wife, Margaret, moves him, too, to listen to and to similarly contemplate (*inspicere*) and leaf through the pages of her books.[25] What counts is exactly what both texts say: seeing, looking at, inspecting the letters painted on the page. In either case, the reading involved is not the site of primary contact with the content, and such is not its object. The object is meditation and *memoria*, and it relies on an idea of reading as commonly practised by women with prayer books.[26]

This type of "memorial reading," which would see the written recording as a sort of relic of the performance, offers an explanation for the luxury copies of medieval romances that begin to appear in the second quarter of the thirteenth century; that is, no earlier than one or two generations after the arrival of the texts themselves. For the preceding period we possess only the most modest and functional working copies, and this in only the rarest cases.[27] Such memorial reading copies testify, I would argue, more

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22 As Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 330, writes, "Die Buchstaben gelten primär als materielle Repräsentanten der Sprache, sekundär—über die Sprache—als Representanten von Dingen und Personen, auch und gerade wenn dieselben nicht anwesend sind."

23 This act could include touch, a haptic experience of letters and pictures on the page as a kind of secondary material presence. See Borland, "Unruly Reading"; Kay, "Original Skin"; and Rudy, "Kissing Images." On the one hand, such should not be overemphasized, as pictorial evidence of reading practice reveals striking care and respect in the handling of prayer books in particular, and a manuscript such as the St Albans Psalter (see chapter 4) could never have been preserved such as it is, had its users regularly stroked its images or letters (its paintings, for instance, were originally covered by silk screens sewn in to protect them). On the other hand, touch—as the affirmation of complete physical proximity—would constitute the ultimate object of religious reading, which seeks to conjure presence. It is in this latter sense that touch is relevant to my inquiry.

24 "ille [Malcom], ignarus licet litterarum" (*Vita S. Margaritae* 2, 330C).

25 The effect of this vicarious reading is not left in doubt: "Fateor, magnum misericoridiae Dei mirabar miraculum, cum viderem interdum tantam orandi regis intentionem, tantam inter orandum in pectore viri saecularis compunctionem" (*Vita S. Margaritae* 2, 330C). On the rest of the passage, see below, pp. 34–35.

26 Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 61–63.

27 As reviewed in detail by Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 72–87, 316–21.

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to the power of the experience in performance than to a desire to read rather than to witness that experience. The layout, in particular of illustrative material, in these new manuscripts shows striking parallels to luxury psalters designed for high-ranking nobles, most prominently women, the production of which increases markedly around 1200.[28] The psalters, too, had a highly representational function coupled with an aura bordering on the numinous, which resided in their capacity to render the experience of the monastic office as something akin to a personal possession.[29] This idea does not at all exclude the literate use of the codices by their owners; it shows, however, that neither their value nor their use depended on such skills.

Finally, then, Wolfram's stylization of this memorial response as a way of guaranteeing the veracity of his text, its true-to-lifeness, suggests in itself that not women's literacy but their response to performance is what is held up and acknowledged as characteristic of romance and even made imperative to its genesis and meaning. The ploy relies on audience acknowledgement of such a female response as typical and also exemplary for the audience as a whole. Women were the representative practitioners of the use of books as sites of *memoria*, the relics of an experience of presence, a "witnessing" of the spoken word to which reading was an ancillary act performed after the fact. The response envisioned suggests a sort of symbiosis between the experience of liturgy and literature that revolves around women as representative viewers and listeners—and "readers," if this last term is understood to apply as much to the illiterate Malcolm as to the literate Matilda.[30]

The narrator of Wolfram's *Parzival* plays throughout the poem on the idea of his performance as a "ride." He is himself a knight-protagonist whose adventures the audience follows, just as narrator and audience equally observe and follow the adventures of Parzival. When this narrator launches his performance as the champion of the suffering widow, Herzeloyde, when he interrupts the story once again to insist that his promise to portray women in her image is at least partially fulfilled, he is not speaking to women alone: the narrator models a path of proper orientation to images of women's suffering that is offered to his audience as a whole and possibly to men in particular. The same path, the same task is also Parzival's: his oblivious childishness deals the final blow to his mother's, Herzeloyde's, suffering heart; he is the blundering ignorant who manhandles Jeschute; with an ignominious spear-throw he kills "the flower of chivalry," Ginover's kinsman, Ither; even Cunnewâre laughs only for his sake. The women both inside and outside the story have crucial, authenticating roles to play in this poetic construct, but they do not represent new readers, nor are they its only or even its primary audience. The "reading" they represent, it seems, models something that is essential to the constitution of meaning in the performance, just as in Chrétien's *Yvain*.

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28 Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 91–100; Wolf, "Psalter," pp. 165–66; see also Clanchy, "Images of Ladies"; and Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 114–15.

29 Lentes, "Psalter," p. 335; see also below, pp. 32–33, 35

30 Katharina Mertens Fleury argues that *Parzival* and the luxury psalters created for Sophia, the wife of Wolfram's patron, Hermann of Thüringen, had a complementary function in instilling *compassion* as a religious ideal in their audience and readers: Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, pp. 80–83 and passim.

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Parzival's path, too, is punctuated by the appearances of a psalter-reading woman. The mourning and remorse of his cousin, Sigune, another bride bereaved, are made into a counterpoint and even a parallel apotheosis to his search for the Grail. She reads in only one of these appearances because her devotional use of a book is only one image, one attribute, of the larger idea she represents both for the male observer and for Wolfram's poetic project.[31] The same is true of Laudine: Yvain observes her desperation and grief in three distinct situations, and only the last—though crucial one—shows her reading from a psalter.[32] What is primarily portrayed is her grief and devotion as such, into which a psalter, a book, has been incongruously inserted. The book functions to assimilate Christian devotion to secular grief and not to distinguish the lady for her literate skills or model the historical use of texts. Laudine's grieving reading is an image of human weakness seeking the presence of the divine, a moment in which, as in the case of the reading *pucele*, "the god of love" (or God-as-love?) might be inspired to "give up his divinity," "wound himself," and descend to earth incarnate. For the male protagonists as for the audience who "sees" through their adventures, this moment is one in which they read woman—and learn to read as women, much as Malcolm of Scotland did. That is, they manifest, in the moment of loving identification that they learn in response—the moment of identification that authenticates the truth of the performance—an authentication of meaning that is identified, as Wolfram attests, with the judgment of women as (devotional) "readers."

The complexity of the relationships evoked in these two brief accounts we cannot begin to resolve here. It is rather the task of the following chapters to trace the development of a model of the mediation of knowledge and truth (understood as "reading") that is gendered as female from its articulation in monastic sources to its implementation in early vernacular texts and thus to uncover the rhetorical building blocks that serve its construction and manipulation. I have introduced these examples in this suggestive and unresolved way to make a point: their complexity points far beyond the factual representation of a relationship between women's literacy and the historical use of written texts. They have something to communicate that lies quite outside the boundaries of such documentary interest and requires a different approach entirely to the relationship between women and reading than has prevailed to date.

Readers and Representations

To a great extent, Herbert Grundmann's argument on "Women and Literature in the Middle Ages" is a reverse extrapolation of phenomena that can be much more readily historically documented for religious literature from the later thirteenth century onwards.[33] In other work, Grundmann used his unmatched acquaintance with the

31 In Parzival's third encounter with her (cf. lines 435,23–25; 437,20–21; 438,1).

32 Lines 1144ff, 1286ff. The text makes clear that it is the sight of Laudine's tearful psalter prayer that finally strikes him with love's wound.

33 "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter"; see pp. 5–8, above.

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literature of religious reform from the early to the late Middle Ages to show that the emergence of vernacular religious texts in the later period is persistently associated with religious women.[34] And in this period vernacular devotional literacy indeed became widespread among the laity and led, increasingly, to a "personal" perusal of vernacular texts alongside the continuing practice of prelection; that is, women's use of vernacular texts in the religious life served a facilitating and even exemplary role in the introduction of such texts as lay reading material.[35] But these later developments are not part of an inexorable march of literacy that has its beginnings in the vernacular texts of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. They may well be in part a later manifestation of the equivalence between the "reading" of monastic women and that of laymen, which is a persistently recurrent feature of medieval cultural representation.

Whatever their level of literacy, there is no evidence that women (or anyone else) in the later twelfth century desired to read rather than to see and hear vernacular texts performed.[36] In fact, excluding Chrétien's reading *pucele* and Wolfram's address to women who may "see" his performance "in writing," there are very few passages in Old French and Middle High German literature of the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries that might be seen to envision lay men or women as the readers or even prelectors of this new written vernacular poetry.[37] But both *Yvain* and *Parzival* display the connection between reading women and their prospective audience quite differently: as an analogy embedded in the narrative structure and manifest in the performance of texts. My argument is that these mutations of the reading woman are essential to a new poetics of vernacular writing, that is, to the way these authors communicated with their audience on the value, function, and meaning of the scripted, vernacular performance. In this function, the woman-as-reader serves not to portray literate subjects but rather as the mirror of a layman's gnosis and the embodiment of an interface between sacred and secular reading, the clergy and the laity, and monastic and courtly ideals.

In more recent scholarship, the "evidence" for women as the special readers (and not only audience) of vernacular texts has seen itself appropriately reduced from Grundmann's over-eager inclusion of all manner of references to women in the texts to the historical evidence of women's use of psalters, juxtaposed with Chrétien's reading

34 Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, pp. 452–75.

35 Now reaffirmed in Wolf, *Buch und Text*, pp. 190–99.

36 "Ausserhalb der höfischen Dichtung selbst führt die Suche nach entsprechenden Zeugnissen jedoch fast immer ins Leere. Belege fehlen, Nutzungsszenarien lassen sich kaum zuverlässig rekonstruieren" (Wolf, "*vrowen*," 176); previously also Bumke, *Mäzene*, p. 257.

37 One of these stands out in that it claims to document real events. In the epilogue to Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman*, the Duchess of Cleves is said to have borrowed his unfinished manuscript "ze lesine und ze schawen" (352,36); the phrase cannot be assumed, however, to mean, "to read it for herself," *pace* Green, *Medieval Listening*, p. 164; cf. Curschmann, "Hören–Lesen–Sehen," 243, 253–54. The private reader in Gautier d'Arras's *Eracle*, lines 4240–44, is possibly a remonstrative exception that proves the rule; see Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 220–21. A last instance, a scene from *Wigalois* by Wirnt von Gravenberc, lines 2710–22, in which the "daughter of the King of Persia" has a beautiful maiden read to her from the story of Eneas and Dido is doubtless, like Chrétien's reading *pucele*, a playfully idealized representation of the genre itself.

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maiden or her counterpart from the German adaptation by Hartmann von Aue.[38] Further complicating the situation is the fact that medieval writers alternately and persistently present the woman both as book-user and as non-reader, as exemplum of lay literacy (and sometimes learning) and veritable pariah with respect to clerical learning. Both observations lead straight to the heart of the problem, because in both cases the evidence is reduced to the problem of the value of representations. As she occurs in the sources from the mid twelfth century onward, the reading woman is always potentially an ideologically loaded image. One meaning or "valence" of this image was, in fact, *illiteracy*, the incapacity to engage and process the written words on a page. Another was religious devotion. A third, and new valence of the same image that emerges in the twelfth century, is that of an alternative gnosis, a communion with God that *bypasses* letters.[39] This last is the focus of my argument in this chapter. It is the result of a conflation of the first two possibilities and, as such, represents a characteristic habit of medieval thought, the conjunction of opposites, *collatio contrariorum* or *discrepantis naturae coniunctio*. If the woman's presumed incapacity for letters is collapsed into her status as a figure of lay devotion, she *signifies* the necessity of unlettered access to wisdom, a layman's gnosis. The insistence on paradox forces recognition of a gap and thus of a necessity to redefine the terms that prohibit its negotiation.

In the remainder of this chapter and in the next I hope to illustrate, primarily through the figure of Hildegard of Bingen, the ideas that were associated with or accrued to a "female" apprehension of the Word in the twelfth century and were increasingly represented through the verbal and visual metaphor of women's devotional reading. This woman reader thus becomes a figure through which clerico-monastic ideas of religious perfection could "translate" into laico-courtly social practices and ideals.

Reading, Gnosis, and the "Weak Sex"

Something profound and far-reaching occurs around the questions of woman, women and reading in the course of Hildegard's long lifetime (1098–1179). The Annals of the Premonstratensian monastery Pöhlde records it as an event fixed in the year 1159, in which the divine descended into the female sex: "In these days, God showed signs of his power in the weak sex in two of his handmaids, namely, Hildegard in Rupertsberg near Bingen and Elisabeth in Schönau, whom he filled with the spirit of prophecy, and he revealed many kinds of visions to them."[40] The year chosen by the author (for choose he did) and the idea of the two women's revelations as (nearly) simultaneous betray manipulation to a purpose.[41] Hildegard and Elisabeth are taken together to *represent*

38 Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, lines 6455–70. Appropriately, then, the most recent research has concentrated on examining the evidence of readership in the corpus of late twelfth-century and thirteenth-century psalters: Wolf, "Psalter," and Wolf, *Buch und Text.*

39 Poor, "Mechthild," 230–38; and Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 38–41.

40 *Annales Palidensis*, 16:90; as translated in Clark, *Elisabeth*, p. 5.

41 Hildegard dates her visionary turning point to 1141 (though she revealed it only five or six years later); Elisabeth's first visions are reported from 1152. See Clark, *Elisabeth*, p. 5; and Newman, "Visions," 173–74.

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the female and the weak; God's "descent" is manifest as a privilege accorded them as representatives of these human characteristics. It is curious, indeed, that a writer in the last quarter of the twelfth century could have had such uncanny knowledge of the future: Hildegard and Elisabeth are today acknowledged as the first in a long and rich tradition of women's visionary and mystical writings that comes into full flower by the mid thirteenth century. They stand on nothing less than a chronological gender divide in the history of Christian mysticism. The distribution of such experience shifted dramatically from men to women beginning at this point, and with it the nature of the experiences and the understanding of their significance.[42] But, as Kurt Ruh described it, Hildegard and Elisabeth do not so much initiate the experience that was typical of later women mystics or of mysticism generally; rather, they initiate a paradigm of women's perception and recommunication of the divine that is of epochal significance: "the visual and auditory mediation of the *contents* of mystic vision" is for the first time effable, not only comprehensible to the receiving subject, but recommunicable through her. This subject is "unlearned" and female.[43]

As I will discuss further in chapter 3, Hildegard's and Elisabeth's voices emerge within a broad contemporary context of interest in and literary activity around women's religious lives that brings into high relief the question of women's relationship to scripture, their apprehension of the Word. Through the figure of Hildegard in particular we can observe the way gendered categories are brought into play in the authentication of an alternative "reading," that is, an alternative gnosis, and the way this latter is then reassimilated to the categories themselves. This process exhibits at the same time clear points of intersection with the articulation of a female path to knowledge within the commentary on the Song of Songs, such that Hildegard's visionary experience and prophetic knowledge *could be received as* an avatar of Mary's experience, or the idea of reading the Song of Songs as one woman, the woman who is *sponsa*, did before her. The latter point is the subject of the next chapter. Here, by examining the way Hildegard positioned herself with respect to reading, in particular to psalter-reading, and the way this position translated into a commonplace of medieval thought, I wish to illustrate a process by which all these ideas become part of the copiousness that could be evoked ca. 1200 through the image of the psalter-reading woman.

But first, what was psalter literacy? What did it entail and enable the "reader" to accomplish? Primarily the recitation of texts from memory, the repetition for purposes of personal devotion of a set canon of prayers.[44] The practice of learning to read these texts was one and the same as the practice of memorizing them; it was not training in the cognitive processing of writing for its own sake. The written text was used as much or more to cue pronunciation; vocalization of the words served the mnemonic process, which was regarded, always, as operating through the ear and the mouth as well

42 Dinzelbacher, *Vision*, pp. 226–29.

43 "Was jetzt mit Hildegard und Elisabeth und allen späteren Visionärinnen einsetzt, ist die visionäre und auditive Vermittlung der *Inhalte* der Schauung, "Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, p. 68, s.a. pp. 66–67; also McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 333–37.

44 Saenger, "Reading Habits," p. 142; also Lentes, "Psalter," pp. 340–41.

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as the eye: one ate or drank the text, masticated as one produced the sounds that the memory recorded. This form of literacy has the objective of rendering obsolete the tool of its training—the written text. In visual and verbal representations of prayer with the psalter, the open book may serve primarily to represent the content of the devotee's memory, the spoken texts that cannot be otherwise easily visualized. (Thus Laudine can "read" her psalms despite eyes full of tears and dramatic gestures of grief.) The primer of this form of recitation of texts comes to be the visible attribute that represents its successful assimilation to the person portrayed.[45] The laywoman (or, later, the layman) with her psalter *does not need to read* (in our sense) the book in front of her—if she were not understood in this way, then she would be an incomplete, a deficient exemplar of the very piety she represents. Her reading does not, in itself, imply any aspiration beyond this practice to other books and "higher learning"—it does aim beyond its book to a higher objective: the ear of God.[46]

Beginning in the late twelfth century, women's psalter-reading is associated repeatedly, and by several different writers, with Hildegard's extraordinary visions, prophetic writings, and musical compositions. The conjunction between a less-than-literate reading and communication with the divine in the idea of the woman as psalter-reader explains at once why it was so useful as a *representation* of Hildegard, and why it comes to be a preferred clerical *representation* of a layman's use of books: it maintains a clear distinction between what clerics called reading, *lectio*, and a use of texts that, for whatever reason, is placed outside its bounds.

Two chroniclers, Alberich of Troisfontaines and Albert of Stade, offer nearly identical witness to the idea that Hildegard's (self-professed) rudimentary reading ability could be represented through the image of psalter-reading noblewomen:

> Repente intellectum expositionis librorum, videlicet psalterium, ewangeliorum et aliorum catholicorum, tam veteris quam novi testamenti voluminum, sapiebat. Non autem interpretationem verborum textus eorum nec divisionem sillabarum nec cognitionem casuum aut temporum habebat; solum psalterium legere didicerat more nobilium puellarum a quadam inclusa in Monte sancti Desibodi.[47]
>
> (She suddenly acquired an understanding of how the scriptures should be expounded, that is, the psalter, the Gospel, and other sacred books, both of the Old and New Testaments. However, she had no understanding of the vocabulary of their texts or ability to divide syllables, or knowledge of cases and tenses; she had only learned, from a woman recluse at Disibodenberg, to read the psalter the way girls of the nobility do.)

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45 Clanchy, "Images of Ladies," pp. 112–18, esp. 113; likewise Gameson, "Gospels of Margaret," p. 163.

46 The secondary literature has witnessed an over-eagerness to conflate the use of prayer books and "a hunger for learning"; for example, Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 332–38; Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, p. 474; Scholz, *Hören und Lesen*, p. 207; Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners," 754; and now Wolf, "Psalter," and Wolf, "*Vrowen*."

47 Alberich of Troisfontaines, *Chronica*, 834; the translation is modified from Millett, "No Man's Land," p. 90.

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That is how Alberich put it; Albert's version says the same thing in fewer words and using the same key phrase: *psalterium [legere] more nobilium puellarum*.[48] Their interest in this phrase—and that of others who use the same phrase to characterize Hildegard's level of learning—lies in authenticating a claim to gnosis *without* letters. By playing on an assumption that women's reading inside the religious life was the equivalent of that of women outside it, they mobilize the noblewoman's reading as a convincing image of Hildegard's inability to have read scripture herself, that is, to have composed what she did without divine inspiration. A commonplace of women's "illiteracy" thus authenticates her visionary experience. Rhetorically, women's incapacity for book-learning—laywomen's "reading"—becomes a precondition for a miraculous gnosis.

One of the major arguments of this book is that the woman in this image is just as potent a sign as her psalter is. If she holds the psalter because it is the symbol of illiterate reading, it is also true that the layman's reading is represented through her because she cannot be *clericus*.[49] There is no term for female cleric, as Philip of Harvengt noted in his contemporary critique of twelfth-century usage, and while he tells us that a woman who excelled in the literate arts could be called—"improprio sermone" (improperly speaking)—a *bonus clericus*, this, too, was a rhetorically charged statement: Philip thus illustrates what he sees as the absurdity of contemporary usage, which doggedly equates *litteratus* with *clericus* and *illitteratus* with *laicus*.[50] And though he claims often to have heard this malapropism, I have found no instance in which such usage was applied. Even Heloise, whose learning was famous in her own time, is never termed *bonus clericus* (or *clerica*). Woman was necessarily non-cleric, and thus she could serve to represent non-reading, or the extra-literate use of books.

Two different poles of rhetorical association can be readily identified for the image of the psalter-reading woman in the period around 1200 and will be discussed below. The meaning of the image depends entirely on who is using it, on its rhetorical value to the idea at stake. What we observe in the articulation of Hildegard's persona is the way a contradiction in terms, or the meeting of opposed valences of one and the same figure, could be manipulated to speak new possibilities with and within orthodox terms. The extraordinary is expressed through a commonplace as a way of placing it in social memory, or assimilating it to types.[51] This process could result, however, in the displacement of the commonplace towards the formerly unique, or the reassimilation of the unique to the category such that the category itself acquires new rhetorical value. To

48 Albert of Stade, *Annales Stadenses*, 330: "Haec cum quadraginta duorum esset annorum, magnae choruscationis igneum lumen aperto coelo adveniens totum cerebrum eius transfudit et totum cor et totum pectus eius, et sic eam sanctus Spiritus inflammavit, ut statim omnium katholicorum librorum seriem, tam novi quam veteris testamenti, ad integrum intelligeret, cum tamen nichil umquam didicerit, nisi solum psalterium more nobilium puellarum."

49 Duby, *Three Orders*, pp. 131–33; Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 286.

50 Philip of Harvengt, *De continentia clericorum* 110, 816–17. See also Landgraf, " 'clericus' im 12. Jahrhundert," 74–78.

51 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, pp. 44–46; and Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 180–83.

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overhear this process, it is essential to read the topoi as figures open to differing, but nevertheless fixed, possibilities of rhetorical inflection.

Sicut mulier legit psalterium: Women as Illiterates

The association between women and psalter-reading occurs with some frequency from the mid twelfth century to the mid thirteenth in contexts that witness its use among clerics for clerics. Used this way, the image serves a derisory intention: woman is the antipode of the cleric's self-definition through reading. The writer Saltimbene reports in his chronicle for the year 1248 a public debate between two monks, Hugh of Digne and one Peter, over Joachimite teachings. Because the latter, reported to be a "lector et litteratus homo et magnus prolocutor," had expressed his disdain for these teachings, Hugh challenged him to a debate that he began by asking whether Peter had even read Joachim's writings.[52] Peter replied, "Legi et bene legi," to which Hugo retorted:

> Credo, quod sic legisti, sicut una mulier legit Psalterium, que, quando est in fine, ignorat et non recordatur, quid legerit in principio. Sic multi sunt legentes et non intelligentes, vel quia contemnunt que legunt, vel quia obscuratum est inscipiens cor eorum.[53]
>
> (I believe you read it, just as a woman reads the psalter: when she reaches the end, she neither knows nor remembers what she read at the beginning. There are many who read without understanding, either out of contempt for what they read, or because their heart is obscured by foolishness.)

The woman is in neither of the last categories that Hugh mentions. These apply to those who should be able to make better use of books than they in fact do, that is, clerics who use their schooling poorly. By comparing such monks or clerics with psalter-reading women, Hugo says they might as well not read at all, or, to be more precise, they might as well use books after the fashion of illiterates.

A satiric verse from the thirteenth century captures just as vividly the way clerics used women's psalter-reading to evoke a use of books that is discontinuous with their own, this time also reflecting the existence of separate schools in which this use was learned—independently of training in *grammatica*:

> Si vero grammaticam nequis scire plene,
> Defectu ingenui, defectu crumene,
> Horas et psalterium discas valde bene,
> Scolas si necesse est puellarum tene.[54]
>
> (If you cannot fully master grammar, whether for lack of ability or lack of money, learn the canonical hours and the psalter well, and if necessary you can keep a school for girls.)

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52 Saltimbene, *Cronica*, 239–40.

53 Saltimbene, *Cronica*, 240.

54 Rudolf Peiper, "Beiträge zur lateinischen Cato-Litteratur," as cited in Thompson, *Literacy of the Laity*, p. 115, no. 154, and described as "a thirteenth-century poem in praise of study and the clerical life." See also Ferrante, "Education," p. 12.

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Both these examples post-date the identification of Hildegard as a woman who "reads the psalter in the fashion of young noblewomen." In the only example of similar "clerical" usage known to me from the twelfth century, women's psalter-reading is implemented in a way that comes much closer to the way it is applied to her; that is, it expresses the idea of complete contradiction between psalter literacy and knowledge of scripture, this time exploited not by God to reveal his prophetess but by the Devil to display his disdain for the church and its learning. The life of Norbert of Xanten recounts how the Devil, who has possessed a girl, demonstrates his contempt for the efforts of those who would exorcise him by reciting and then explicating the Song of Songs, first in Latin, then in German:

> Tunc igitur, ut vere superbus est daemon, scientiam suam volens ostentare, Cantica canticorum, a principio usque ad finem, per os puellae edidit, et iterans verbum ex verbo, in Romanam linguam usque in finem interpretatus est; et reiterans verbum ex verbo, in Teutonico totum expressit; cum illa puella, dum adhuc sana esset, nihil nisi Psalterium didicisset.[55]
>
> (Then, as a sign of his insolent contempt, and desiring to demonstrate his knowledge, the Devil recited the Song of Songs from beginning to end through the girl's mouth, and then commenting on the Word, he interpreted it to the end in the romance tongue, and repeating his commentary, translated it all into German; while this girl, so long as she was healthy, had learned nothing but the psalter.)

The image of sublime knowledge of scripture coming from a girl's mouth authenticates the presence of the Devil in her body—even as it will authenticate the presence of the Spirit in Hildegard. It is an image of the impossible, an inversion of order that, here, instils horror, there, instils awe. The assumed contradiction on which it relies is manipulated in either case to force recognition of the supernatural: the Devil incarnate, the woman imbued with the Spirit. Both images represent the rhetorical manipulation of paradox, or *collatio contrariorum*.

Litterata, deo cultrix: Woman as Mirror of Lay Devotion

Evidence of the layman's perspective on women's psalter-reading has to be collated from different sources, but it is plentiful enough. The advent of courtly ideals brought with it an image of the psalter-reading woman as an ideal of lay piety and feminine perfection. Felix Heinzer, a specialist in codicology of the High Middle Ages, writes of the psalter as no less a "signature" of courtly culture ca. 1200 than was the courtly lady herself.[56] Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204), a figure who, for her contemporaries, epitomized both glory and infamy of the courtly ideal, is portrayed on her tomb (ca. 1200) at the monastery of Fontrevraud holding an open book that doubtless represents a psalter (fig. 1.1).[57]

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55 *Vita Sancti Norberti*, 8.45, 1288B.

56 Heinzer, "Psalter," 158; also Wolter-von dem Knesebeck, *Elisabethpsalter*, p. 84.

57 The tombs of the Plantagenets at Fontevraud are "among the first fully sculptural, life-sized effigies of contemporary or recently deceased monarchs," and Eleanor's is likewise the earliest of many sculpted examples of a psalter-reading woman. See Nolan, "Queen's Choice," pp. 377–405 at p. 382. Nevertheless, Eleanor's open book is more likely the result of an idealizing and generalizing representation than a personal decision or a reflection of Eleanor's personal tastes, as argued in Clanchy, "Image of Ladies," pp. 115–18.

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Figure 1.1. Tomb effigy of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Abbey of Fontevraud, France, ca. 1200. © Abbaye Fontevraud/Anne-Sophie Asher.

In his detailed accounts of medieval courtly culture, Bumke pointed out the increasing frequency of such representations in visual art of the thirteenth century and argued generally that they monumentalize a courtly ideal.[58] Around 1200, the production of lavishly ornamented and illuminated manuscripts shifted dramatically from the Gospels to the psalter—in connection with patronage of high-ranking noblewomen.[59] The practice among the nobility of sending their daughters to monastic or other schools to learn the psalter seems to have increased to the point that by the early thirteenth century there was a shortage of available places.[60] Prayer and psalmody figured prominently in the sections dedicated to women in Vincent of Beauvais's treatise on the education of young nobles (ca. 1247), while he makes no mention whatever of vernacular literature and is clearly against introducing women to Latin learning.[61]

This evidence has been noted often enough. But it is neither sufficiently nor even appropriately addressed by the idea that it documents a new or expanded use of books. As noted above, women's use of psalters and other devotional works is not lacking in earlier periods.[62] What we see in the elevation of the psalter-reading woman to a courtly ideal by the late twelfth century is the creation of a new image of lay piety. It is not simply the result of greater numbers of literate or even psalter-literate women, nor does it, in itself, imply a growing prestige of literacy; rather, the visual monumentalization, the numbers, the fetish value of the codices: *all attest to a dramatic increase in the representational value of a well-established social practice*. Just as she suddenly appears in visual

58 Bumke, *Mäzene*, pp. 242–43; Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, p. 474; now also Wolf, "Psalter," pp. 145–46.

59 Bumke, *Mäzene*, p. 161; Heinzer, "Psalter," 158; Wolf, "Psalter," pp. 156–57, and Wolf, "*vrowen*," 176–80; also Stirnemann, "Women and Books," pp. 247–52. The shift is so marked and the books so lavish, that Lentes, "Psalter," p. 335, speaks of an "Auratisierung des Codex."

60 Specht, *Geschichte*, p. 294; and Ferrante, "Education," p. 12; Wolf, "Psalter," pp. 144–45.

61 Rosemary Bartin Tobin, *Education of Women*, pp. 33, 71, 79, 90–91, 143.

62 See p. 6 note 23, above.

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art at around this time, the psalter-reading woman "becomes an image"—or rather a mirror—during the later twelfth century.

This image can include the attribution of learning, a cleric's grammar literacy, to particular women. But even where a woman's more general learning gives occasion for the rare term *litterata*—denoting, no doubt, real expertise in letters—it occurs within a catalogue of her courtly perfections, cited alongside features of physical beauty, admirable comportment—and, most inseparably, devotion to God. Thus Otto Morena extolled the perfections of Beatrice of Burgundy (d. 1184), wife of Frederick Barbarossa:

> Beatrix vero coniunx ipsius imperatoris fuit, et ipsa de nobili genere orta de provincia Burgundie, … facie pulcherrima, dentibus candidis et bene compositis, erectam habens staturam, … suavibus et blandis sermonibus pudica; pulcherrimis manibus, gracilis corpore; viro suo plenissime subdita eumque timens ut dominum et diligens omnifariam ut virum; litterata, Deo cultrix; et cum Beatrix nominaretur, re vera summe beata erat.[63]
>
> (Beatrice, of noble descent from the province of Burgundy, was the wife of this emperor, … with a beautiful face, teeth white and well formed, an erect stature, reserved in her pleasant and charming speech, with most beautiful hands and a graceful body; completely obedient to her husband whom she feared as her lord and loved in all ways as her husband; a learned woman, worshipping God; and just as she was called Beatrice, so truly was she blessed above all.)

Beatrice is the mirror of both the perfect wife and the perfect queen, blessed in all things, and this image culminates with her place as a devout literate: *litterata, Deo cultrix*. Her prayer serves the same representational purpose as do her beauty and courtly manners, reflecting well on her husband and modelling an ideal for her subjects. The idea of women's learning, when it appears at all, is assimilated to their role as models of devotion, and the latter function is readily fulfilled without it.[64]

The same assimilation and the role of the woman's reading as a mirror of lay devotion are documented with remarkable poignancy in Malcolm of Scotland's use of his wife's books, mentioned earlier. Queen Margaret's devout reading and learning is extolled in no uncertain terms by her biographer; she outdoes even the most learned doctors. And this had consequences "not only for her own salvation, but also for that of others, first among them the King himself." Margaret brings Malcolm to keep even the nocturnal hours of prayer and teaches him to pray "with a sighing heart and abundant tears."[65] The biographer then describes how Malcolm's love of his wife, causing him "to love all that she loved," brings him to take up her books, and, although he was "ignorant

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63 Otto Morena, *Historia frederici*, 167–68. Morena and the two other authors of this history were contemporaries of Frederick Barbarossa.

64 Beatrice was also a patron, or at least the addressee, of Gautier d'Arras's *Ille et Galéron* (1170–1184), where she is likewise extolled in the highest terms. Gautier, however, overlooks the idea of literacy entirely; see lines 2–3.

65 "Nec in his solummodo suam, sed etiam aliorum quæsivit salutem: primoque omnium ipsum Regem, ad justitiæ, misericordiæ, eleemosynarum, aliarumque opera virtutum, ipsa, cooperante sibi Deo, fecerat obtemperantissimum. Didicit ille ab ea etiam vigilias noctis frequenter orando producere; [et marito Regi omnis boni hortatrix erat;] didicit, ejus hortatu et exemplo, cum gemitu cordis et lacrymarum profusione Deum orare" (*Vita S Margaritae* 2, 330C).

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of letters," to inspect them and turn the pages, and even to kiss and fondle them affectionately. The account culminates in the production of a lavish codex: "Once he ordered a certain manuscript to be adorned with gold and jewels, and gave it to the queen as a token of his devotion."[66] For the biographer, Malcolm's physical affection for books is neither a misguided form of idolatry nor an aspiration to literacy but rather the means by which the benefit of his wife's reading transfers to him, by which he identifies his salvation in her devotion. It matters nothing that he cannot read the texts, the benefits of her devotion accrue to the books as its attribute, and in loving them, Malcolm loves his wife, yes, but also God and God's word. This presumably could all have occurred even had Margaret's reading itself been little more than psalter-literate. From the lay perspective, the psalter-literate woman has access to books, but the degree of this access is not at issue, only the degree of her devotion.

The remarkable concentration of evidence associating prayer with lay noblewomen in this period is characteristic of a function that other scholars have underlined: women take on a mediating position both between monastic and lay culture and between their male counterparts and the service of God.[67] Women are the "pray-ers" of lay courtly culture, just as, within the social order of "preachers, prayers, fighters," monks and nuns are those who pray for humanity as a whole. Seen from this perspective, women's use of psalters could represent a layman's aspiration to monastic intimacy with the divine, an emulation of monastic practice that singled out the backbone of the monastic office, the psalter, and made it into an attribute of the courtly noblewoman. Such representation no more reveals how literate these women were than Eleanor's effigy at Fontevraud reveals a sincere conversion to a pious monastic life. It does, however, reveal the aspirations of the lay nobility to the spiritual privileges of the monastic elite.

The recognizable social connection between women and their psalters thus serves either as a topos of *illiteracy* or as an ideal of lay devotion. Both valences of the image in effect acknowledge that this is how laymen pray, how they obtain God's ear. But in neither case is the woman's reading any indication of nascent literary ambitions, and in the clerical usage, at least, the image expresses exactly the opposite idea: there is no skill continuum between this use of books and the cleric's.

The two representations in fact belong to two entirely separate frames of reference, despite their use of one and the same figure. But they have this in common: each side is using the woman's psalter-reading as a form of self-representation, a mirror in which the respective beholders define *themselves* in relation to an ideal. While the usefulness of the image to fulfil this function can be taken as evidence neither of women's literacy nor of their illiteracy, it does begin to illuminate the frequent appearance of psalter-reading

66 "Quæ ipsa respuerat, eadem et ipse respuere; et quæ amaverat, amore amoris illius amare. Unde et libros, in quibus ipsa vel orare consueverat, vel legere; ille, ignarus licet litterarum, sepe manuversare solebat et inspicere; et dum ad ea quis illorum esset ei carior audisset, hunc et ipse cariorem habere, deosculari, sæpius contrectare. Aliquando etiam advocato aurifice ipsum codicem auro gemmisque perornari præcepit, atque perornatum ipse Rex ad Reginam, quasi suæ devotionis indicium, referre consuevit" (*Vita S Margaritae* 2, 330C–D).

67 Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," p. 187.

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women in literary representation in the same period, and most particularly the appearances of Laudine and Sigune as images that initiate, or accompany, a reorientation of their male "readers' " lives. Moreover, this Janus-faced relationship to the ideas of literacy and access to God displays exactly the position of the woman reader into which Hildegard would insert herself, the real woman whose miraculous gnosis proceeded without reading. This simple substitution has the effect of embodying the paradox that is already latent in the overlap between the two representations. The woman now speaks this paradox: a "reading" without letters, a knowing without learning. Rather than simply serving two separate fields of representation, the *incapacity* for reading now fuses with access to sublime knowledge. The result is an inversion of the cleric's understanding, based nevertheless on the terms it endorses. The idea of a woman's "illiteracy" thus potentially becomes the mirror of a layman's *lectio*, or a different, unlearned path to the cleric's gnosis. And precisely this Janus-faced image is what Wolfram von Eschenbach bears on the rhetorical shield he proudly displays for his female audience: the illiterate reading of women. But that is another—and not a different—story, to which I will return in due course.

Hildegard's *Persona* and the Psalter-Literate Woman

There is a discrepancy, rarely noted, between the way Hildegard's reading was represented by her contemporaries and the way she represented it herself. Hildegard never used the phrase *more nobilium puellarum* or the image of psalter-reading or training in reading the psalter to represent her own position. Nowhere, moreover, does she call herself *illiterata*, and only rarely does she say anything specific at all about the extent of her training in *litteris*, that is, in the ability to read the alphabet. She does make statements about the nature of her reading and compositional abilities, and these concern not literacy as we think of it but the interpretation of texts.[68] In these statements, Hildegard clearly represents her use of written texts and the Latin language as acquired without any training in the *ars grammaticae*. Her shorthand term for this is *indocta* (untaught). Thus she stated her position in 1141, when she presented it, for the first time, to the scrutiny of male spiritual authority, writing to Bernard of Clairvaux: "sed tantum scio in simplicitate legere, non in abscisione textus … quia homo sum indocta de ulla magistratione cum exteriori materia, sed intus in anima mea sum docta" (rather I am able to read only in a simple way, I cannot analyse and interpret the tex … or I am uninstructed, without any exposure to exterior teachings, but I am instructed inwardly, in my soul).[69]

In this way, Hildegard makes clear that she has no formal schooling, and thus her ability to interpret scripture and to write about its meaning must come from outside herself—without the aid of any human intermediary. Her use of the term *indocta* is

68 On Hildegard's positioning vis-à-vis church authority and male learning and letters, see Newman, "Visions"; and Ferrante, "Hildegard," pp. 103–35.

69 *Epistolarium*, p. 4.

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entirely consistent with her representation of herself otherwise as a prophetess.[70] *Indoctus* was a term with a rhetorical tradition of its own, in which it generally served literate authors as a way of throwing off the mantle of literacy in favour of a claim to inspiration directly through the Spirit.[71] As I will argue below, Hildegard most likely takes over this term, or the position it designates, in emulation of Rupert of Deutz, who—certainly *litteratus*, but no *doctor*—used the same idea to introduce a radically new and experiential form of scriptural exegesis. But the identity of the *indocta* could not conceal the difference between Hildegard and others—men—who had used it before her. If they were *litteratus* but composed *indoctus*, she remained *indocta* because her sex required that she could not compose in any other way.

Hildegard also foregrounds her sex in her introduction to Bernard and does so in a circumlocution that is typical of her other writing: "Ego, misera et plus quam misera in nomine femineo" (I pitiful and more than pitiful in my female person).[72] Elsewhere, this became, in several variations, her favoured self-identification as *paupercula feminea forma* (insignificant womanly form).[73] Hildegard represents her relationship to both literacy and gender through linguistic displacements, terms that are no doubt intentionally defamiliarized. In this way, she occupies the cleric's commonplace of the illiterate woman while simultaneously attempting to reshape its terms. Characteristic of this strategy is likewise the careful denial in her letter to Bernard that she receives her knowledge in the vernacular or through her "bodily eyes"—even though her most urgent concern is whether she should "speak what she has seen and heard," "quatenus dicam quod vidi et audivi."[74] The woman, the vernacular, and learning through the corporeal senses form a field of association from which she borrows the terms in which to articulate her persona, but she clearly wishes at the same time to escape definition through these same categories. That is, Hildegard, whose careful circumscription of her own position always aims solely to establish the authority of her prophetic voice, necessarily carved out a position that was instantly reversible into the image of the female reader, the reader who cannot read, who is, *ipso facto*—as the first witness to the reception of Hildegard's *persona* reveals—"laica et illiterata" (a laywoman and illiterate).[75] These were the terms in which, for a Cistercian monk in the 1170s, Hildegard's position—that of a renowned religious superior and author of voluminous Latin works—translated into recognizable categories. The same is exactly what occurs when her twelfth-century biographers and then early thirteenth-century chroniclers recast her description or rather translate it into an equivalent commonplace: that of the psalter-literate woman.

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70 Newman, "Visions," and Newman, "Hildegard-Bilder," pp. 126–52.

71 Ohly, "Wolframs Gebet," 6–17; and more generally, Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 25–66.

72 *Epistolarium*, p. 3.

73 Others include *paupercula et imbecillis forma* (insignificant and feeble form) and *paupercula mollis forma*, with a suggestion of a feminine, fleshly softness; cf. *Liber divinorum operum*, p. 46.

74 *Epistolarium*, pp. 3, 4–5.

75 See below, p. 38.

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One telling example suffices to see this process at work. One of the only other specific statements Hildegard makes on her education—as opposed to statements on the source of the knowledge she writes down—is a passage from one of the autobiographical sections of her *vita*. It follows there on the description of her visionary illumination that is lifted from the *Protestificatio* of the *Scivias*, her first work:

> In eadem visione scripta prophetarum, evangeliorum et aliorum sanctorum et quorundam philosophorum sine ulla humana doctrina intellexi ac quedam ex illis exposui, cum vix notitiam litterarum haberem, sicut indocta mulier me docuerat. Sed et cantum cum melodia in laudem Dei et sanctorum absque doctrina ullius hominis protuli et cantavi, cum numquam vel neumam vel cantum aliquem didicissem.[76]
>
> (In that same [experience of] vision I understood the writings of the prophets, the Gospels, the works of other holy men, and those of certain philosophers without any human instruction, and I expounded certain things based on these, though I scarcely had literary understanding, inasmuch as an untaught woman had been my teacher. But I also composed, with their melodies, songs which I also sang in the praise of God and of the saints without the teaching of any man, although no one had ever trained me in either musical notation or voice.)

One valuable witness of this passage lies in the way it represents women's monastic learning—in this case that of recluses attached to a male monastic community. Instruction given by a woman is not "human teaching," and the "untaught" woman can teach. Hildegard implicitly endorses an idea that women's learning follows a different trajectory than men's; it is not simply at a lesser level on the same scale but rather a different kind or mode of instruction altogether and delivers a different body of knowledge. And yet, to state this does not seem to be her interest; she appears rather to endorse the categories through her experience, not to use them to define that experience. Moreover, the details of her education receive only cryptic description; they do not serve her purpose beyond being another apodictic statement that her knowledge comes from God.

Within the same text, the final author and redactor of the *vita*, Theoderich, offers his account of the same process in a passage which he no doubt composed using Hildegard's own:

> Recluditur in monte sancti Disibodi cum pia Deoque dicata femina Iuttha, que illlam sub humilitatis et innocentie veste diligenter instituebat et carminibus tantum Daviticis instruens in psalterio dechacordo iubilare premonstrabat. Ceterum preter psalmorum simplicem notitiam nullam litteratorie vel musice artis ab homine percepit doctrinam, quamvis eius extent scripta non pauca et quedam non exigua volumina.[77]
>
> (She was enclosed in a cell on the Disibodenberg with the pious woman Jutta, also dedicated to God, who, under the mantle of humility and innocence, diligently instructed her, teaching her enough of David's songs that she could rejoice along with the ten-stringed psalterium. Beyond this simple knowledge of the Psalms she received no human instruction in the literary or musical arts, although there exist many writings by her, among them several weighty volumes.)

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76 *Vita sanctae Hildegardis* 2.2, lines 10–17; translation taken, with my addition, from Dronke, *Women Writers*, p. 145.

77 *Vita sanctae Hildegardis* 1.1, pp. 86–88.

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The comparison could hardly be more revealing: Theoderich "translates" Hildegard's account into one that associates her firmly with women's devotion and psalter literacy. This training is described so as to suggest a foundation of both her exegetical and her musical compositions, the same two activities she mentioned. When one recalls the clerical understanding of reading *sicut mulier legit psalterium*, it becomes clear that this description is in fact synonymous with the one expressing the same ideas, but using different terms, by the Cistercian chronicler who had visited Hildegard in 1172:

> Hoc anno vidi in Alemmanie partibus feminam provecte etatis, virginem, cui tantam gratiam contulit virtus divina, ut, *cum ipsa laica et illiterata sit*, mirabiliter tamen ab hoc mundo rapiatur frequencius et in summis discat non solum quod postea in imis dicat, sed pocius, quod satis mirabile est et unauditum, etiam scribendo Latine dictet et dictando libros catholice doctrine conficiat.[78]
>
> (In this year I saw a woman of advanced age in German territory, a virgin on whom divine power has conferred such grace that, although she is an illiterate laywoman, she is miraculously taken from this world on many occasions, and not only learns in the heights what she afterward tells here below, but also—which is most wondrous and unheard of—composes writings in Latin and delivers her books thus composed to the teachings of the church.)

In his own unfinished account of Hildegard's life, Guibert of Gembloux, her last secretary and one of her most inveterate admirers, hits upon the formula that would stick: "Indocta quippe quantum ad eruditionem artis grammatice erat … instar mulierum psalterium solummodo discentium simpliciter scripturas in usu habens legere, non sensus earum acumine ingenii" (She was uneducated as to learning in the art of grammar … used to reading scripture only in the simple way of women who have learned the psalter, without their minds being sharpened to its meanings).[79]

Finally, this "press-release" version of Hildegard's relationship to reading was taken over in the first half of the thirteenth century by Alberich of Troisfontaines and Albert of Stade, who both seem to have used Hildegard's passage from the *vita* as their source, in that both report it in the context of the description of her illumination taken from the *Scivias*. But they "translate" following Theoderich, and both using, either independently or following a predecessor unknown to us, the phrase *solum psalterium [legere] more nobilium puellarum*.

All these descriptions, whether from Hildegard or her male observers, agree on a basic idea: Hildegard's use of books was radically discontinuous with the clerical arts. She could not have written what she did unless by divine inspiration. But the men's descriptions accomplish something that Hildegard avoided: they reassimilate her alternative, miraculous gnosis to the commonplace, the image of the psalter-literate (or "illiterate") woman. Hildegard's *indocta* and *paupercula feminea forma* were novel ways of circumnavigating an equation between gender and illiteracy that was tantamount to a prohibition of women's involvement in letters such that an outlet emerged for a woman's voice that was not previously there—and would never again be fully stopped

78 Pseudo-William Godellus, *Chronicon*, 198.

79 Guibert of Gembloux, *Epistolae*, 38, p. 377.

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up. This much is undeniable. But at the same time, this unique and lexically unconventional description was "packaged" for public consumption in terms of images that could be more readily and broadly understood—without, in the cases cited, any intention of diminishing Hildegard's claim to prophetic wisdom.

Two developments are documented with unique clarity here: the clerical valence of women's psalter-reading acquires an entirely positive articulation, even while it remains a portrayal of the illiterate use of books, and the lay valence of the same image, the woman as image of a layman's devotion, becomes associated with an alternative gnosis. By the time Alberich and Albert can express the irrefutability of Hildegard's divine illumination by reference not to the psalter-training of recluses, and not to women's psalter-reading generally, but to the current ideal of young noblewomen's education, Hildegard's gnosis has become potentially a facet of a layman's devotion, the devotion of those who are *laica et illiterata*, that is, of the noblewoman with her psalter.

In her own use of this new image of the illiterate woman's wisdom, Hildegard proclaimed nothing so often and so persistently as the *means* by which it was received: *audivi et vidi*. The woman's prophetic voice proclaims an audio-visual apprehension of the Word. In terms of the same topoi on learning and social groups that she otherwise manipulates, the emphasis on seeing and hearing is another that aligns Hildegard's gnosis with a layman's learning in obligatory opposition to the cleric's reading.[80] To defamiliarize this image, Hildegard can do little more than to deny, as she did in the letter to Bernard, that she speaks of the physical senses. But the massive repetition of the verbal pair, in her treatises as in her correspondence, has the opposite effect: this sensory mode of apprehending knowledge comes to denote her prophetic authority in itself, similarly to the way the incapacity for letters becomes inseparable from her access to the divine. She sets this up already in the *Protestificatio* of the *Scivias*, where the phrase occurs no fewer than six times.[81] It abounds in her letters, often as a form of address: "In vere visione hec verba vidi et audivi" is the basic formula, and she uses variations of it over and over again.[82] The synaesthesia suggested by this phrase receives real emphasis in the more elaborate descriptions Hildegard offered of her moment of apprehension. As she described it late in life (ca. 1175) to Guibert, "Et simul video et audio ac scio, et quasi in momento hoc quod scio disco" (And I see and I hear and perceive all at the same time, and almost in the same moment as I perceive, I also learn).[83] A letter to Odo of Soissons from the beginning of her career (1148–1149) reveals the same understanding.[84] Hildegard redefines the idea of learning through the eyes and ears as a moment of apprehension that is not reducible into its composite sensory elements and that surpasses all knowledge delivered by means of representations. Its authority resides in an experience

80 On the significance of the same verbal pair to designate the layman's learning, see Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, pp. 25–37.

81 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, pp. 3–6.

82 *Epistolarium* 33, p. 90.

83 *Epistolarium* 103, pp. 261–62.

84 *Epistolarium* 39, p. 101.

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of presence, of face-to-face communication, and in this sense it is inescapably "sensory" and "physical." As I will argue in chapter 3, this use of the audio-visual moment exploits an understanding of women's religious instruction, or "reading," that was articulated as a picture-text method in the *Speculum virginum* in the decade preceding Hildegard's public career—a work widely used, if not also composed, in the monastic world of the middle Rhine. The same ideas take the form of an audio-visual theatre as the basis for the embodied reading life of another psalter-reading woman: Christina of Markyate.

Hildegard's *persona*, the packaging of her identity, documents the accretion of habits of thought, commonplaces, to a historical identity; the embodiment, one could say, of an image such that its opposing rhetorical valences coexist as a historical fact. This *persona* serves my argument as a historical illustration of the mutations of the reading woman in twelfth-century discourse. Hildegard's self-positioning situates her voice on a seam, a boundary between literate and illiterate, monastery and "world," Latin and vernacular—and between God and humanity—in a way that offers a sensational reflection of ideas that were increasingly being associated with women's position in lay society. All these thus become part of one image, manifest and broadly disseminated through the figure of the living woman, Hildegard. As Theoderic put it:

> Igitur dum ad hunc modum bonorum operum rivis affluentibus quasi paradysi fluminibus irrigaretur non modo tota vicinia, verum etiam omnis tripartita Gallia atque Germania, confluebant ad eam undique utriusque sexus populorum examina, quibus per gratiam Dei utriusque vite affatim accomoda impendebat exhortamina.[85]
>
> (When therefore not only the entire surrounding area but also tripartite Gallia and Germany in their entirety had been irrigated with the full streams of good works as if with the rivers of Paradise, crowds of people of either sex flowed in turn from all directions to her, to whom she gave appropriate advice for every walk of life.)

Whether or not Theoderic exaggerates the numbers of visitors who sought Hildegard's advice, he had no need to exaggerate the extent of her fame. As her extraordinary correspondence vividly demonstrates and John Van Engen has shown, word of her visionary gifts was spread abroad "on an unprecedented scale. … Talk in cloisters, chapters, courts, marketplaces, even church councils, turned her person, story, and writings into the buzz of high-level gossip and intrigued religious interest."[86] Letters were sought from her with a fervour otherwise reserved for the relics of a saint.[87]

Nonetheless, it is not my argument that the developments I have outlined could not have occurred without Hildegard; they are by nature only the articulation of possibilities latent in the topoi she manipulates. It is the process itself that is most revealing: Hildegard's *persona* emerges from a broader context of interest in the relationship between the gendered other and apprehension of the Word, and it accumulates or reassimilates to ideas associated with this interest because she is so readily recognizable as their embodied voice. The categories within which she carefully manoeuvres

85 *Vita sanctae Hildegardis*, 2.4, p. 132.

86 Van Engen, "Letters," p. 395.

87 Van Engen, "Letters," p. 412.

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were the building blocks of widespread activity exploring the innovative use of media in the interest, ostensibly, of reaching the receptive capacities of the reading other, that is, non-clerics, or laymen and women. The woman and the layman represent to this project just what they do to Hildegard and those who represent her: a justification for an alternative gnosis, the posited necessity of a "reading" that proceeds without the use of writing. The association of women as representative "readers" with an alternative audio-visual gnosis is one that will resurface repeatedly in the vernacular texts analysed in the later chapters of this book. This is where we discover the surprising complicity between Hildegard's esoteric Latin treatises and the emergence of vernacular literature; this is "what happened" in the twelfth century with regard to women and reading—and not the sudden emergence of women as vernacular readers, or, for that matter, the emergence of vernacular literacy.

In the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the figure of a woman reader posing as the memory or receptive faculty of the audience is repeatedly mobilized to articulate a poetics of the vernacular text such that not reading but witnessing, not clerical learning but identification with feminine desire and suffering are meant to bring about the descent of the divine to human apprehension. This is where the mutations of the woman reader lead to the reading women of Chrétien's *Yvain* and Wolfram's *Parzival*. These reading women are not literary mirrors of social practices; they are rather signposts that relate the experience of the narrative (both the protagonists' and the audience's) to the concept "women's reading," situating it somewhere between a sacred and a secular performance and between the "illiterate's" and the "literate's" apprehension of the Word.

We are still far from resolving the complexity of these representations within their respective narratives; the point to be retained here is that a historical coincidence between the prevalence of the psalter-reading woman and the inscription of vernacular poetry has long been recognized, but the assumption that she represented book-learning rather than gnosis, that she articulates literacy rather than poetics, has itself precluded consideration of the overlap between sacred and secular ideas of what "reading" is and that the transition from Laudine to the *pucele* might imply.

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Chapter 2

READING AS MARY DID

MY DISCUSSION OF the image of women engaged in devotional reading has to this point ignored the most outstanding and best-known representative of the type: the image of Mary before an open book at the Annunciation. While the concern of the previous chapter was with images of women's reading as an activity defined (in part) through exclusion from higher learning, this idea does not preclude Mary as its archetype and model. As "handmaiden of the Lord" (Luke 1:38), Mary was a figure of humility comparable to the manger in which Christ was laid in the stable in Bethlehem; in this aspect, she represented a simplicity and purity of faith that, to the medieval imagination, is preliterate and extra-clerical. It is in this aspect of the unwitting Annunciate that we find her as a model of women's prayer. In the illumination of Books of Hours and other prayer books, beginning in the later thirteenth century, Mary's reading at the Annunciation is frequently represented as a visual model of the owner's act of prayer or use of the book in question.[1] In fact, the visual representation of Mary engaged in devout reading at the Annunciation—so familiar today that with hindsight we easily forget that it is an invention of medieval anachronism—establishes itself in Western art at a conspicuous moment, a moment that witnesses, as I will argue in this chapter, several other pivotal developments: the emergence of the psalter-reading woman as an ideal of lay piety, the meditative exploration of Mary's experience of the Passion, and the feminization of the monastic reading subject as the bride of the Song of Songs. "Mary's reading," as I will explore it here, effectively reveals the relationship between these developments as features of a larger effort in the twelfth century to redefine the relationship between the reading subject and the Word.

The persistent misunderstanding of images of women with books as indicators of literacy and learning arises essentially from a failure to replace the social and intellectual context in which reading is embedded in our world with one that is appropriate to the time and place in question. The points of intersection between texts, reading, and the lives of the lay nobility of the twelfth century were largely determined by the liturgy or religious instruction. Still, it is not the idea that literacy emerged from or was limited to religious reading that I wish to evoke but rather the idea that, though the use of letters was only one rather technical aspect of the relationship between the Christian soul and the Word, reading was the prevailing metaphor, both visual and verbal, for this larger

1 This emulation of the Annunciate is not limited to her devout reading but rather extends to the entire experience of Mary's encounter with the angel, into which the devotee was often visually inserted. See Büttner, *Imitatio pietatis*, pp. 70–77; further, Clanchy, "Images of Ladies," 112–13; Watson, "Conceptions," 85–124; and Miles, "Annunciation as Model." I am grateful to Laura Miles for sending me the manuscript of her study, "The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation," which has since appeared in *Speculum*; see also below, pp. 28–29 note 23.

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relationship.[2] Reading, *legere*, signified the process by which the Word was apprehended, understood, and put into action, and in this sense it was the object of every Christian life, regardless of training in letters. It could, and necessarily did, occur through listening or viewing, through observation and imitation, far more often, in fact, than it did through the decoding of letters.[3]

The master task of learning in the church was the exegesis of scripture, its proper understanding and implementation, a negotiation of the hermeneutic distance between sign and signified, letter and spirit, humanity and God, and in this the learning of monks and clerics was the alchemy of human salvation.[4] As one such monk, Rupert of Deutz, wrote in the early twelfth century, "While it is true we do not yet see the Lord face to face when we read and understand the scriptures, nevertheless, the revelation of the divine, that is one day to be entirely fulfilled, begins here below in the reading of scripture."[5] Sacred scripture, theology, and doctrine were habitually regarded as one thing and used as synonyms.[6] Thus, the ability to decode letters, our reading, was understood to afford a greater proximity to God, but it was no object in itself. The science it served was, traditionally, the affair of a specialized and highly trained elite, but its fruits were for the benefit of all, and the work of salvation required they be extended to all.[7] To the extent that other media and methods were implemented and explored as ways of bringing the Word to the larger body of the church, these could be understood as forms and variations of, or alternatives to, *lectio*, the monks or cleric's reading. The terms *laicus* and *auditor* were used as near synonyms in the sense that laymen received through sermons what the *doctores* could gain by reading;[8] equally common was the identification of laymen

2 The following have most influenced my thinking in this area: Carruthers, *Memory*, esp. chap. 5, "Memory and the Ethics of Reading"; Clanchy, *Memory*, esp. pp. 192–98, 268–72, 285–89; Leclercq, *Love of Learning*; and Morrison, *History*. See also Robertson, *Lectio divina*.

3 The various metaphors for sacred reading, such as gathering flowers in a field (whence the term *florilegium*), the bee collecting pollen to produce honey, or the pervasive emphasis in monastic culture on reading as *ruminatio* (the remastication of partially digested food); are more than poetic embellishments; they are pregnant visual and sensory models for inward experience. *Legere* originally meant "to gather, to collect"; the same is true of the German verb for 'read' or *lesen*, which still means 'to harvest, to choose or select today. The images thus visualize the larger process of collection and memory as the true objective of *legere*, in which literacy was only one useful technical skill. See Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 15–17, 182–85; and Robertson, *Lectio divina*, pp. 57–71, 104–7, and passim.

4 See Henri de Lubac's introduction to "Scripture and Revelation," in *Medieval Exegesis*, pp. 24–39.

5 Rupert of Deutz, *In Apocalypsim*, 825; the introduction is also printed in *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe*, p. 14. On Rupert's and contemporary views of scripture in the contemplative life, see Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 69–70, and more generally Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 71–86.

6 Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1, pp. 27–29.

7 Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1, p. 28, summarizes Augustine's teaching in *De Doctrina Christiana* with the words, "Knowledge of the faith amounted to knowledge of Scripture"; and cites St Julian of Toledo as stating that "All doctrinal teaching was 'an explication of the Scriptures.' " Such statements become all but commonplace in the twelfth century, when scripture is seen as the mirror or measure of all things Christian.

8 Grundmann, "Litteratus-Illitteratus," 43–44.

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as viewers, for, as it was put in the favourite authority on the use of images in worship, Gregory the Great's reply to Bishop Serenus of Marseille:

> what writing offers to those who read it [*legentibus*], a picture offers to the ignorant [*idiotis*] who look at it, since in the picture the ignorant [*ignorantes*] see what they ought to follow, in it they read who do not know letters; whence especially for the gentiles [*gentibus*] a picture stands in place of reading [*pro lectione*].[9]

The justification for this equation appears to have resided for Gregory himself in the idea that *legere* constitutes access to deeper understanding of a sign, successful negotiation of the distance between sign and signified. The *idiotae* of which he spoke became *legentes*, and thus qualified members of the Christian community, when they properly apprehended "through a picture's story … what must be adored."[10] But the layman's visual reading could take place only exceptionally through actual visual art; far more common and in any case more forward in the twelfth-century mind were the role of the visible *exemplum* and a learning through the visible presence of moral models.[11] To receive moral instruction in this way could likewise be seen as an alternative form of reading.[12] Just as scripture was synonymous with all Christian teaching, one was engaged in *reading/legere* whenever Christian teaching was assimilated to the self.

In keeping with these contours of the medieval culture of the written word, I apply the term "reading" in this book not only, and not even primarily, to the activity of meditating on and interpreting written texts; I take it instead to comprise potentially the broad spectrum of mediary practices that served the larger objective of which the monk's or cleric's reading was the masterwork: the assimilation of the Word to the self. Understood in this way, all reading points to Mary's experience at the Annunciation as its archetype and enabler. But before I return to this subject, some attention to the broader context of the developments addressed in this chapter is in order.

Few are the moments in the history of the church when the pastoral obligation just evoked was felt so acutely and engaged with such innovative fervour as in the twelfth century. The advent of a new, interiorized piety—most especially the emphasis on devotion to the humanity of Christ and the corollary role of Mary as *mediatrix* between man and God—the intensity and fervour with which the various orders renew the ossified enterprise of biblical commentary, most specifically and remarkably with respect to the Song of Songs, the diverse experimentation among authors of religious instruction with new ways of implementing images in combination with text, the renewal of musical composition and liturgical innovation undertaken by the Victorines, and, independently

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9 As translated in Chazelle, "Pictures," 139–40. The Latin text reads: "Alius est enim picturam adorare, aliud per picturae historiam quid sit adorandum addiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa ignorantes vident quod sequi debant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est" (Gregory, *Registrum epistularum*, p. 874).

10 Chazelle, "Pictures," 145–50.

11 Bynum, *Docere*.

12 Mulder-Bakker, "Metamorphosis of Woman," pp. 117–19.

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of them, Hildegard: all these projects can be understood as the exclusive province of a monastic or semi-monastic elite, but they are no less expressive of a redefinition of the relationship between humanity and the Logos, a media revolution accomplished through monastic reading. The nature and understanding of this "elite" was itself in transformation in this period, part of what Giles Constable has described as "the reformation of the twelfth-century." The diversification and intensification of the monastic search for spiritual perfection that is so evident in the founding of the various reformed orders beginning in the late eleventh century is part of a broader effort "to monasticize the world and interiorize monastic virtues [that] ended by consecrating everyone and all human activities."[13] The innovative uses and combinations of media evoked here were understood in their own time as various means of "translating" the Word, that is, of rendering the *experience* of scripture accessible to new audiences both inside and outside the cloister walls. This reading experience, from its monastic understanding, is one of entering into the presence of the divine. In the discussion of the exegesis of the Song of Songs below, the task of interpreting the biblical text is to be understood in this way, as the lexical alchemy of divine presence.[14] The new interest among the clerical elite in the jongleur's art of performance, which will concern us in later chapters, is another aspect of this larger project: performance translates presence.

Hildegard offers here a case in point. As Margot Fassler has argued, the innovations represented by Hildegard's music, dramatic compositions, and theological works—that is, her extraordinary breadth of production in sound, image, and text—can be understood as parallel and interdependent attempts at a multi-medial translation of the Word; an educational programme for her nuns, to be sure, but one that saw them as being taught and transformed through the act and experience of listening and singing, viewing and performing. Moreover, as both Fassler and Bruce Holsinger have emphasized, Hildegard "defined the rendering of communal song as an incarnational act."[15] In song, as in their reading lives as a whole, her nuns understood and experienced their performance of the monastic office as a continuation or re-embodiment of Mary's conception and bearing of the Word.[16] This idea is central to Hildegard's understanding of her compositional powers, and it is only further underlined in the way contemporaries saw these powers in relation to their own lives. Hildegard became herself a *mediatrix*, an avatar of Mary's function as the body that gave flesh to the Word. As I will argue here, this understanding of her relationship to Mary effectively places Hildegard's creative activity at the point of intersection between two major wellsprings of twelfth-century religious renewal: the articulation of a feminine position for the reading subject, which is at the centre of a redefinition of monastic *lectio*, and the "pastoral revolution," which witnessed

13 Constable, *Reformation*, p. 326.

14 Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 88–89 and passim; Robertson, *Lectio divina*, pp. 163, 167–68.

15 Fassler, "Composer," p. 149; Holsinger, *Music*, pp. 87–136, esp. pp. 93–94 and 126.

16 Fassler, "Composer," pp. 166–68. Holsinger, *Music*, p. 125, argues similarly, but the idea is secondary to his attempt to elucidate the "homoerotics of Marian devotion" in Hildegard's musical compositions.

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"a radical transformation of the catechesis based on the valorisation of the word as an instrument of mediation and seduction," the attempt to deliver the Logos as presence to the entire church.[17] Equally, the descent of the divine into the "weak sex," as recorded in the Annals of Pöhlde and manifest in the writings of Hildegard and Elisabeth, was not a renegade new idea of middle-Rhenish female monasticism. It belongs within a context of intense activity around the female religious life that comprises both French and German-speaking Europe beginning in the late eleventh century and includes the recasting of the monastic reading life for religious women—the subject of the next chapter.

It is my argument in what follows that Hildegard's visionary exegesis and her own understanding of her position as the untaught and unworthy female body that serves as vessel of God's word constitute the embodiment—one woman's experience—of an epochal development in monastic reading: the invention of Mary's life as the perfect (female) act of Christian reading. This invention is first fully articulated by Rupert of Deutz in his commentary on the Song of Songs. Hildegard takes the authority for her visionary persona from Rupert's definition of his own exegetical persona as *altera Maria*. His commentary defines the position and experience of the *sponsa*, the bride, as fully realized in Mary's life, and thus as an object of reading *imitatio* accessible directly, not through the learned arts of exegesis but rather as human experience that was also inescapably female. From Rupert's conception of his reading self to Hildegard's prophetic persona—first as she, the woman, formulated and understood it, and then as others, men, received and recorded it—we see exemplified how one woman's experience of God, Mary's, inimitable and ineffable, becomes nevertheless a model for reading as a feminized soul; how the same could be re-embodied as a living woman's auditory and visual reception and "bearing" of the Word, and, finally, how this woman's gnosis represented the singular embodiment of the reading of the "non-reader": the woman, the layman, and the illiterate. Women, once again, become the focal point, the living exemplars, of an illiterate *lectio*, here offered them as the embodied bride.

Both Rupert and Hildegard are in this regard at once extraordinary innovators and merely the voices of much larger phenomena in twelfth-century spiritual renewal. My concern is not to treat these phenomena in a comprehensive way but rather to explore—as in the preceding chapter—the way the reading identities of key figures articulate and embody latent possibilities such that these solidify as the commonplaces of a new discourse on reading and gnosis.

The Annunciation as a Reading Moment

There was and could be no more perfect example of the assimilation of the Word to the self than Mary's experience of the Annunciation, where this was understood as the moment in which she conceived.[18] A human body conceived the Word and gave it flesh,

17 Vauchez, *Laity*, p. 100; see also Watson, "Conceptions," 102.

18 Despite competing opinions and moments of dissent, the two moments had been taken as identical since patristic times; see Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, p. 20. On the idea of Mary's experience as a model of perfect assimilation of the Word, see Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, pp. 77–85, esp. pp. 77 and

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later to bring it forth as life. The hermeneutic leap from letter to gloss, from the prophetic images of the Old Testament to their fulfilled meaning as God-made-flesh, was completed by Mary one time for all, in such a way as to enable Christ, the Book of Life, to become accessible to all. Still, the potential analogy between this moment and an idea of reading in the Christian life does not seem to have been truly discovered and exploited in the Latin West until the late eleventh or early twelfth century. Moreover, the importance of this discovery, the significance of Mary's experience to the redefinition of the reading subject in twelfth-century monastic thought, has yet to be recognized as such by modern scholarship.[19] It is no surprise then, that the same is true of the significance of the introduction, around 1100, of an open book into the iconography of the Annunciation.[20]

In the Eastern church, Mary, when given an occupation, was generally shown spinning thread for the veil of the temple, and this representation persisted there into modern times. The Western iconography of the Annunciation at times also used this motif (fig. 2.1) but more often showed Mary standing, often in *orans*, facing Gabriel as he delivered his message (fig. 2.2). This representation is increasingly displaced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by one of Mary interrupted in devout reading, which dominates the late-medieval iconography.[21] In 1960, Otto Pächt, as part of his analysis of the St Albans Psalter (ca. 1120–ca. 1140), which contains a reading Annunciate that stands near the beginning of this last development (fig. 4.3; see p. 147), noted that although "this motif revolutionized the pictorial treatment of the Annunciation," it had at the time of his writing scarcely even been identified as a problem in the scholarship.[22] More recent work has considered the function of the instruments of literacy within medieval iconography of the Annunciation in some detail, but it has neither addressed Pächt's findings nor adequately accounted for the moment at the turn of the eleventh century when, as his evidence indicated, the idea of Mary's reading at the Annunciation appears to acquire a special meaning and becomes broadly established as both a verbal and visual image. Instead, subsequent scholarship has concentrated on late-medieval examples as evidence of developing literacy and a literate mentality.[23] What has been

81. On the same idea in the later Middle Ages, see Miles, "Annunciation as Model"; and Guldan, "Verkündigungsbild," 145–69.

19 *JP* constitutes a comprehensive corrective in this regard; see esp. pp. 464–66.

20 Miles "Origins," 632–33; but see below, note 23. For a general overview of the Annunciation in church doctrine and iconography, see Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, pp. 271–301; and Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, esp. pp. 77–87 for the period around 1100.

21 Emminghaus "Verkündigung," pp. 423–31; Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, pp. 279–80; Künstle, *Ikonographie*, pp. 336–41; Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, p. 129.

22 *SAP*, p. 63.

23 Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 314–68; Schreiner, "Konnte Maria lesen?" 1437–64; Wenzel, "Verkündigung," pp. 23–52; Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, pp. 270–91. Schreiner's work in particular tends to leave the eleventh and twelfth centuries out of account, instead linking late-medieval texts and images with biblical commentary and apocrypha of the early Middle Ages. As a result, he overlooks the changing significance of Mary's reading act, equating it throughout with literacy and bookishness. Miles, "Origins," remedies Schreiner's chronological oversight but not the conceptual

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overlooked is the isolation of Mary's experience at the Annunciation as a reading moment, a moment, that is, when the Christian soul is privileged to a perfect knowledge of the Word. This moment appears to have been discovered as a focal point of devotional reading sometime around 1100, and one way of visualizing the development was to place the Annunciate before an open book.

The idea that a book was one of the essential accoutrements of Gabriel's encounter with Mary was not unknown before the period around 1100, but examples of it in visual art are rare.[24] The two earliest appear to stem directly or indirectly from one Carolingian workshop in Metz.[25] These and a textual counterpart from the same period, the Annunciation as recounted in Otfrid von Weissenburg's *Evangelienbuch* (ca. 860), doubtless drew their inspiration from apocryphal gospels such as the Pseudo Matthew, which portrayed Mary weaving and singing the Psalms.[26] As a rare textual witness, Otfrid's description provides our best indication of how the visual invention should be read.[27]

In Otfrid's text, Gabriel finds Mary "with the psalter in her hands, which she often sang from beginning to end." Lest the question whether the book was open—that is, whether Mary was "reading" and praying as Gabriel arrived—seem overly punctilious, it should be noted that the continuation reads, "[he found her] occupied with the weaving of beautiful fabrics … an activity that always pleased her."[28] The complications involved in holding the psalter and weaving simultaneously have not gone unnoticed in commentary on the passage, and, as Gisela Vollmann-Profe concludes, the reason is that Otfrid's description is not concerned with "what happened in that moment when," but rather with the conduct of Mary's life in general, that is, with the portrayal

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one: here, too, an open book is necessarily an invitation to and a model for engagement of the literate arts; Miles's account of the twelfth century in particular is faulty and under-documented. Lesley Smith recognizes the need to distinguish between Mary's psalter prayer and literacy or reading generally in Smith, "Scriba, femina," pp. 22–23; see also Clanchy, "Images of Ladies," 112–13.

24 In *SAP*, pp. 63–67, Otto Pächt traced both iconographic and textual precedents; further detail on textual precedents is found in Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 318–25. For an updated and incisive account of the few examples that precede the Saint Albans Psalter, see Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 9–17, 262–66, and passim. Three further examples from the final quarter of the tenth century can be seen in Palazzo, *Sacramentaires*, pp. 39–41 and plates 14, 34, 109.

25 An ivory casket in the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig, dated ca. 860–870, and an ivory situla in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (cat. no. 17.190.45), dated there to ca. 860–880 (www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/17.190.45, accessed January 24, 2013); but cf. Deshman, *Benedictional*, p. 265: "c. 1000"; on both examples see Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 262–66 and figs. 1, 207, 208; on the casket, *SAP*, p. 66, pl. 118e; and Goldschmidt, *Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pp. 52–53, no. 96, plates 44, 45; and vol. 2, p. 45.

26 Vollmann-Profe, *Evangelienbuch*, p. 199.

27 *Evangelienbuch* 1.5, lines 1–72.

28 "er … fand sia … / mit sálteru in henti then sáng si unz in entí; / Wáhero dúacho werk wírkento / diurero gárno, thaz déda siu io gérno," *Evangelienbuch*, lines 10–12; for commentary (and the modern German translation on which mine is based) see Vollmann-Profe, *Evangelienbuch*, pp. 191 and 199–202.

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Figure 2.1. Annunciation. Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy, Conques, France, early twelfth century. Photo © Daniel Villafruela, GNU Free Documentation License.

of Mary as a model of the contemplative life.[29] *Ora et labora*, Otfrid's own Benedictine ideal, is identified with the beginning of the Christian faith through the portrayal of the Annunciation.

A number of modern scholars have been more inclined to the idea that Otfrid was modelling an ideal of the devout noblewoman, which then leads Klaus Schreiner to the conclusion that his description "played a decisive role in making Mary into the prototype of the reading woman."[30] Certainly a lay audience of Otfrid's vernacular biblical epic

29 Vollmann-Profe, *Evangelienbuch*, p. 199; see also pp. 198–99, 200, 202.

30 Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 323. The view that Otfrid portrays Mary as the ideal noblewoman stems from the text's first editor, Oskar Erdmann, *Otfrids Evangelienbuch*, p. 356.

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Figure 2.2. Annunciation. Lintel frieze, Chartres Cathedral, France, ca. 1145–1150. Photo © Jane Vadnal.

may have opted for a gendered identification between Mary and women's prayer. For Schreiner, however, Mary's psalter prayer points to literacy, bookishness, and hunger for learning.[31] These ideas, for the High Middle Ages at least, turn out to be very much beside the point.

The most salient indications that literacy is not the issue are found in the iconography itself, and here the Annunciation in the St Albans Psalter proves an extraordinarily revealing witness. Not only a book has been interpolated into the scene. The second all but ubiquitous feature of the (later) Annunciation as a visual event, the descending dove, also makes one of its first appearances here. From our vantage point,

31 "Maria, mit den Augen des Mittelalters betrachtet, war der Inbegriff einer bücherhungrigen, lesefreudigen und wissenschaftlich gebildeten Frau" (Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 317).

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Figure 2.3. Annunciation (detail), St Albans Psalter. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1 (Property of the Basilica of St Godehard, Hildesheim), p. 19.
© Dombibliothek Hildesheim.

it is only too easy to overlook the fact that only the descending dove visually identifies Gabriel's announcement as the moment in which Mary conceives the Word, that is, as the Incarnation. Rubbing of the painted surface has partly effaced the detail in the St Albans picture, but a dove is still visible flying horizontally as if directly into Mary's ear (fig. 2.3).[32] The dove enters the iconography with a chronological progression conspicuously parallel to that of Mary's book. Before the period ca. 1100, Annunciation scenes that thus visualize the Spirit's descent are rarer still in Western art than are those with books, the sole known examples being a fifth-century mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and an illustration in a psalter from Saint-Germain-des-Prés of the first half of the ninth century.[33] The dove then reappears from the late eleventh century onward to become, in the later Middle Ages, nearly as indispensable as Gabriel himself.

32 All illustrations from the St Albans Psalter appear by generous permission of the Dombibliothek in Hildesheim. The codex, MS St Godehard 1, is the property of the Basilica of St Godehard, Hildesheim. To avoid repetition, I have included this information below the first illustration from the psalter only, figure 2.3.

33 Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, bibl. fol. 23, fol. 83v, widely known as the Stuttgart Psalter. See also Kitzinger, "Descent," pp. 99–115.

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An early recurrence of the dove in one Annunciation from ca. 1100 may, in its very peculiarity, reveal the point of the change. This is an ivory book cover that not only illustrates Luke 1:35 but also, it seems, visualizes the conception itself (fig. 2.4).[34] Gabriel raises his hand in speech to Mary, who is seated on the right in a configuration very like the one in the St Albans Psalter. Above the two and possibly outside or beyond their view—it is in a space in the centre over the architectural frame—a dove is shown flying vertically downwards. The rays from its beak extend to a small bust, apparently of Christ, which emerges from a horizontally oriented quarter-moon, possibly a symbol of Mary. If it is correct to interpret this scene as integral to the Annunciation, then what it portrays is "what occurs in Mary's body and what is made known to her."[35] From the illustration of an episode from Mary's life we have moved to one that instead seeks to visualize the point of origin of all Christian knowing.

Yet a third element distinguishes the St Albans Annunciation as a prototype of later medieval understanding of the Annunciation. The dove does not pass alone from Gabriel's lips to Mary's ear. It rides, as it were, on his voice, manifest in fine white lines that span the distance (fig. 2.3). The picture is perhaps the earliest known visual representation in the West of a *conceptio per aurem*, the idea that the Word penetrated Mary's body by passing through her ear. The role of this idea in shaping the meaning of the Annunciation within Christian devotion has been sorely neglected. It is, however, no mere visual conceit but rather emerged as a focal point of doctrinal controversy over Christ's dual nature, divine and human, that was first played out in the Eastern church in the early fifth century.[36] Within this controversy—of which twelfth-century authorities were well informed—Mary's conception through the ear served as the response to dissenting opinions over whether Christ was divine from conception or merely "the mortal man Jesus in whom it pleased the Word to dwell."[37] The only scriptural moment available to refute such ideas was Luke's account of the Annunciation; the *conceptio per*

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34 Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nr. 2787, possibly from Northern France; see www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=1719650&viewType=detailView (accessed August 26, 2019).

35 Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, p. 126. Indeed, the tip of Gabriel's "speaking" index finger touches the bottom of the quarter-moon. Both Gössmann and Guldan, "Verkündigungsbild," 149–50, interpret the scene as the conception; Guldan therefore calls it the oldest representation of the Incarnation in Western art.

36 Constas, *Proclus*, pp. 273–313. So far as the Western church is concerned, the *conceptio per aurem* has been studied only in art historical literature, where it is at times dismissed as the embarrassing materialization of a properly spiritual idea. One exception, although of limited use to study of the Middle Ages, is Jones, "Empfängnis," 135–204. For art historical study of the late-medieval tradition, see Steinberg, "Filippo Lippi's 'Annunciation'," 25–44; and Jongh, "De conceptie," 24–43. The most useful general introduction remains Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, pp. 296–98.

37 Constas, *Proclus*, p. 51. For twelfth-century reception of these ideas, see Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *De gloria*, 1073–160, esp. 1105A–B, 1148C, 1151B. Gerhoh's treatise recapitulates the entire controversy to establish anew that Mary conceived in the moment the angel spoke the words concerning "the Most High" (Luke 1:32), thereby conceiving and bearing the divine Word.

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Figure 2.4. Annunciation. Ivory book cover. Northern France, ca. 1100. Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nr. 2787. Photo: Jörg P. Anders, Berlin

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aurem, therefore, established that Mary had conceived in the moment of Gabriel's communication to her and that she had conceived from his voice as the vehicle of the Word, a sound that passed through her eardrum and entered her womb.[38] As she was made to say through the preachers who spoke for her, "An angel appeared and … I heard a word, I conceived a Word, and I delivered a Word." Similarly, Christ reported that Gabriel had been sent before him to "speak into the ears of the spiritual ark, and to prepare for me the entrances of her ear."[39]

Nicholas Constas, to whom we owe the recent excavation of these origins of the *conceptio per aurem* for modern scholarship, has argued that the fifth-century Byzantine school of thought that promulgated Mary's auricular conception and her status as *Theotokos*, "birth-giver to God," established by the same means a new poetics of sound and sight, more generally then, of the sensory mediation of the Logos. His words are worth quoting in full, for they provide an uncannily appropriate introduction to the parallel developments in the Latin West that concern us in this book:

> When the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14) the verbal was woven together with the visual in a seamless fabric fashioned from two fundamental modes of communication. In the ongoing intertwining of word and image, the experience of the ear is reinforced by that of the eye, which in turn seeks confirmation though touch, for "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes," was also "touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1–2). Doubt seeks certainty in the desire to touch the wounded body of the Word (John 20:25); faith seeks fulfilment by clasping the hem of his garment (Matthew 9:21), for the infringed form of the divine longs not merely to be gazed upon but to be touched. "Put your finger here, and place your hand in my side" (John 20:27) is an invitation which beckons the eye of the spectator to become the hand of a participant.[40]

In the twelfth century as in the fifth, Mary's role in humanity's salvation lay like a latent fulcrum awaiting discovery. It offered the leverage to move into place and mobilize an entire mediary orchestra in the service of devotion to the humanity of Christ and thus also to suggest a paradoxical divinity of the body. The *conceptio per aurem* served as "a form of symbolic shorthand" for the idea at the theological centre of this momentous development; moreover, as Constas concludes, this

> appropriation of hearing as a theological category required an imaginative charting of the (female, virginal, maternal) body and its senses … [in which] the ambivalent logic of the lower bodily material zone was relocated to the highest levels of sense perception and intellection, thereby de-sexualizing the virgin birth of Christ, or, in what is also true, re-sexualizing it within a different view of sexual union.[41]

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38 As Pseudo-Athanasius put it, "Just as the sunlight passes through a pane of glass without shattering it, so too did the Son of God pass through the glass window, that is, through the ears of the Virgin without destroying her virginity" (*Quaestiones aliae*, 19; cited in Constas, *Proclus*, p. 281).

39 Proclus of Constantinople, Homily 36; and Ps.-Gregory Thaumaturgus, Homily 3; both as cited and trans. in Constas, *Proclus*, p. 280.

40 Constas, *Proclus*, p. 315.

41 Constas, *Proclus*, pp. 282, 312.

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Such a statement brings us into remarkable proximity with the project of Rupert of Deutz, to be examined shortly for its generative significance in the twelfth century's own Marian media revolution.

The Annunciation in the St Albans Psalter has itself come to us as part of one of the most notable early examples of such deliberate mediary orchestration, one that charts, promotes, or abets a woman's visionary—or, more properly, sensory—experience of the presence of Christ in her life and will be examined as such in chapter 4. Such unequivocal portrayals of the *conceptio per aurem* remain very much the exception in Western art until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and one reason for this may well be the complexity of the argument of which it is a part.[42] In monastic theological and exegetical writing of the first half of the twelfth century, on the other hand, the *conceptio per aurem* finds explicit and repeated mention after having been apparently more or less forgotten by Western writers since patristic times.[43] But the central idea was not inextricably bound to Mary's ear. With its illustration of Gabriel's voice as the apparent vehicle of the dove's flight, the St Albans Annunciation can be taken as a reminder that the idea that Mary conceived in the moment of Gabriel's announcement and through his words to her could as easily be stated as a conception through the voice, *a voce*, as it were.[44] We will encounter it in this form elsewhere, and thus it is treated as well in a

42 Another prominent twelfth-century example (dated 1181) is found in Nicholas of Verdun's elaborate typological image programme for the altar at Kloster Neuenburg. It likewise includes an open book on a lectern, but lacks the dove.

43 These statements reflect current knowledge of the Western tradition, which is in need of further study. A search of the *Patrologia Latina* reveals no mention of the *conceptio per aurem* before the twelfth century and later than Agobard of Lyons (d. 816), but Deshman points out that it occurs in a hymn for the Annunciation feast at Winchester in Aethelwold's time (late tenth century; see Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 13–14). It is common in patristic writings up to and including Gregory the Great, as also noted by Constas, *Proclus*, p. 274n4. To the list of occurrences in the Latin church given there, the following additions or corrections should be noted: Pseudo-Ambrose, *Sermo 47. In cap. 30 Proverbia de differentia Salomonis et aliorum prophetarum*, PL 65:700; Eleutherius Tornacensis, *Sermo in annuntiationis festum*, PL 65:98; Gregory the Great, *Liber responsalis sine antiphonarius*, PL 78:731; Agobard of Lyons, *De correctione antiphonarii*, 8, as cited in Jones, "Empfängnis," 137. The passage listed by Constas as Augustine, *Sermo in natali Domini 7*, PL 39:1991, is also found in a nearly identical text attributed elsewhere to Fulgentius, *Sermo 36 De laudibus Mariae ex partu Salvatoris*, PL 65:899. Twelfth-century witnesses include Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo 2 in festo Pentecostes*, *Sancti Bernardi opera*, 5, ed. J. Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), p. 167 (PL 183:327); Hugh of St Victor, *De inquisitione mysticae arcae*, PL 176:733–34; Geoffrey of Vendôme, *Sermo 8 in omni festivitate B. Mariae Matris Domini*, PL 157:267. The idea occurs in German vernacular works beginning in the early twelfth century with Frau Ava (see below pp. 59–60) and then the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied* (pp. 36/37, 551–52); and is found among courtly poets by ca. 1200, as witnessed by Walther von der Vogelweide's "Leich," lines 5,23–26, p. 6. Another frequently cited instance from Walther's work (for example, Künstle, *Ikonographie*, p. 339) is no longer regarded as authentic: see Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke*, 12a.3, lines 5–6, and commentary p. 433.

44 This is especially apparent in comparison with the iconographic tradition of the Byzantine Psalters, which always show the dove descending directly from Heaven, often guided or released by the hand of God. The Trinitarian emphasis that Kitzinger sees in this iconography would not seem to apply to the St Albans picture; here it is instead the efficacy of Gabriel's voice that is given visual form; cf. Kitzinger, "Descent," 106–9 and 114–15.

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twelfth-century treatise on the fifth-century controversy by Gerhoh of Reichersberg.[45] The central point for my argument remains the same: whether through the dove, the open book, or the auricular conception, what we encounter in early twelfth-century representation of the Annunciation, verbal or visual, is a concentrated focus on the event as that moment in time in which Christian knowing was conceived, in body as in mind.

But what then, finally, do we make of Mary's open book? Of the three distinctive features just discussed, the book is the one that most clearly reflects the twelfth-century mind; it is also the only one that could serve as a bridge between Mary's experience and that of the medieval Christian.[46] Once the Annunciation was associated with Mary's reading (or prayer, or meditation on scripture), it became an experience that was implicitly, and for some explicitly, approachable through that same activity. If our continuing concern thus remains with "her" book and the reading act it implies, it should now be amply clear that actual literacy is not at stake; similarly, it must be remembered that what is at stake is far more momentous, and could be and was being represented in several ways at once.

Otfrid's account of Gabriel's visit to Mary makes psalter prayer into an attribute of Mary's devout way of life and is neither concerned with the specific event of the Annunciation as conception nor with a causal relationship between it and Mary's reading.[47] This latter notion is, in fact, an ancient one, but it rather arises in connection with Mary's reading of the prophet Isaiah. The idea that Mary "had read" the prophetic words announcing her own role in the Incarnation occurs in the biblical commentaries of the church fathers, and the difference between these and one twelfth-century witness, the Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1166), is most revealing.[48] Both Ambrose (d. 397) and Bede (d. 735) mention that Mary *had read*, before Gabriel's arrival, of the event that was to be fulfilled in her and emphasize the idea that the meaning of the prophet's image was not clear to her; even she could not know how it was to be accomplished. As Ambrose put it (commenting on Gabriel's words): "Denique, 'Accipe,' inquit, 'tibi signum: *Ecce virgo in utero accipiet, et pariet filium*.' Legerat hoc Maria, ideo credidit futurum; sed quomodo fieret, ante non legerat" ("Indeed," he says, "receive unto yourself the sign: *behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*" [Isaiah 7:14]. Mary had read this, thus she believed it would happen, but how it would happen, this she had not read).[49] The idea of reading enters into the commentary on Luke to demonstrate a theological

45 See note 37, above.

46 Constas, *Proclus*, pp. 315–58, argues that the idea of Mary spinning at a loom operated as a similar "bridge" for the Christians of fifth-century Constantinople.

47 Most telling on this point is the fact that Otfrid's otherwise copious account entirely omits the crucial words, *Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*; see Vollmann-Profe, *Evangelienbuch*, pp. 205–6.

48 *SAP*, pp. 64–66.

49 Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, p. 38. The passage from Bede, which is nearly identical to Ambrose's, is found in *In Lucae evangelium expositio* 1.35, p. 33: "Quia ergo legerat, 'Ecce virgo in utero habebit et pariet filium' [Isaiah 7:14], sed quomodo id fieri posset non legerat merito credula his quae legerat sciscitatur ab angelo quod in propheta non invenit."

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idea: Mary represents humanity in its unenlightened state before the Incarnation. What was not yet written, she had "not yet read," that is, she could not yet know. In addition, neither commentator mentions *when* Mary read the prophecy; indeed, *legerat* might mean she had previously committed it to memory by whatever means. The important idea is the state of her and our knowledge before the coming of Christ; what was knowable was what was "readable." What happens in this moment is no less clear. As Ambrose goes on, "Hodie primum auditur, 'spiritus sanctus superveniet in te' et auditur et creditur" (For on this day was heard for the first time, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you" [Luke 1:35], thus it was heard and thus it was believed).[50]

By the mid twelfth century this idea has been altered in telling ways. In a sermon for the feast of the Annunciation, Aelred of Rievaulx envisions the very event as follows:

> Ingressus, inquit, angelus ad eam. Non est igitur inventa foris in oculis carnis, non est inventa in nundinis. Intus erat, in secreto cubiculo suo erat, ubi orabat patrem suum in abscondito. Audeamne conicere quid eo momento temporis agebat, quibus utebatur meditationibus, quali oratione pascebatur? Forte in manibus tenebat Isaiam et ordine legendi in illud inciderat capitulum: Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium et vocabitur nomen eius Emmanuel.[51]
>
> (The angel came to her, it says [Luke 1:28]. This did not happen out of doors under worldly eyes, it did not happen at the marketplace. She was inside, concealed in her chamber, where she was praying to her father in seclusion. May I venture to suggest what she was doing at that moment in time, to which meditations her attention was devoted, what prayer she was savouring? Perchance she held in her hands the book of Isaiah, and in her reading had just come upon the chapter: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel [Isaiah 7:14].")

Aelred's portrayal changes the emphasis entirely. His interest is in the moment, *eo momento temporis*; he seeks to know the precise state of Mary's mind when Gabriel arrived and thus to enter into her experience.[52] Aelred in fact revisited the same moment in two other sermons, always with the same intense concentration on Mary's meditation over the very prophetic words to whose fulfilment she will lend the flesh:[53]

> Credo quod in hac serie lectionis humilitas et caritas in Virginis pectore compugnabant, … Ecce virgo concipiet. Felix, inquit, virgo cui cum virginitatis signaculo caelestis promittitur generatio! Felix venter in concipiendo, felicia ubera in lactando, felicia brachia in amplectando! … Forte in hac meditatione concalvit cor eius et aculeis amoris excitabatur affectus eius et in lacrimas solvebatur. Forte sic affectam angelus inveniens: "Ave," inquit, "gratia plena."[54]

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50 Bede (see the preceding note) follows Ambrose in this respect as well. For either commentator, the focus of argument is faith as opposed to skepticism; Mary's faith in what she had read properly disposes her for the event that makes the truth manifest, once and for all time.

51 *Sermones,* 59.9–10, 2B:121.

52 Bernard of Clairvaux amply displays the same interest in his *In laudibus "Maria, mit den Augen des Mittelalters betrachtet, war der Inbegriff einer b ü cherhungrigen, lesefreudigen und wissenschaftlich gebildeten Frau," Schreiner, "Marienverehrung," 317. Virginis Matris*, otherwise known as "Missus est." See the discussion in the next chapter, pp. 102–6.

53 *Sermones*, 9.18–19, 2A:74–75; also *Sermones*, 60.16, 2B:132–33.

54 *Sermones*, 59.10, 2B:121.

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> (I believe that while she was thus reading, humility and love were wrestling with one another within the virgin's breast. … "Behold a virgin shall conceive." [Isaiah 7:14] "O how happy," she says, "is a virgin to whom it is granted to bear heavenly offspring with her virginity intact! O happy womb thus conceiving, happy breasts thus giving milk, happy arms thus embracing!" Perhaps her heart burned in just such a meditation and her emotions were stirred by the sharp prickings of love and released in tears. Perhaps she is thus moved when the angel, arriving, says "Hail, full of grace" [Luke 1:28].)

In none of his three variations on this moment does Aelred state explicitly that Mary conceived on being greeted by the angel, but neither does he state how or when this otherwise occurred. By leaving the idea unspoken, he arguably allows it more inner force. Twice he sets the scene thus: "Hauriebat sibi aquas in gaudio de fontibus Salvatoris, id est de Scripturis sanctis, ubi legerat et Virginis partum et Salvatoris adventum." (She was drinking unto herself the "waters with joy from the fountains of the Saviour" [Isaiah 12:3] where she read of the virgin giving birth and the Saviour's coming.)[55] What interests him is in its essence ineffable, an experience in which scripture becomes so immediate, so present, as to be imbibed into the self as body. The event is therefore not named but instead made present for our own contemplation. Moreover, by making Mary's reading of the prophecy, the *signum*, into the act that prepares its fulfilment in her body, he makes her experience of the conception, the fulfilment of the letter as flesh, into her own reading—that is, praying–act. Mary does not merely submit to the will of the Lord, she reads in a way that implies a role in making it come about.[56]

A similarly striking alteration of the scene surrounding the idea of Mary's prayer is recorded in the very early German poems of Frau Ava (d. 1127). In "Das Leben Jesu," Gabriel arrives to find Mary "where she sat alone in her room. She was praying for the world's salvation." The ensuing exchange is then summarized first with these lines:

> si bette umbe daz heil der werlte,
> do chom ir des sie gerte.
> der heilige spiritus sanctus
> der bephiench ir die wambe.
> er bescatewet ir den lichnamen,
> do wart si swanger ane man.[57]

> (She was praying for the salvation of the world, and then that came to her which she desired. The holy *spiritus sanctus* impregnated her womb. It beshadowed her body, and so she became pregnant without a man.)

As if to leave no shadow of doubt, Gabriel then speaks to Mary of the conception in the perfect tense, "niht furhte du dir, / iz ist dir wol ergangen. / du hast ein chint enphangen"

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55 *Sermones,* 9.18, 2A:75; s.a. 60.16, 2B:132–33.

56 This idea also emerges in twelfth-century commentaries on the Song of Songs. Possibly the earliest example is found in Rupert of Deutz. See below, pp. 253–55; also Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, p. 843.

57 "Das Leben Jesu" 4,6–12, in *Ava's New Testament Narratives*, pp. 32–34. Further references are parenthetical.

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(Do not be afraid: it has gone well with you, you have conceived a child) (6,4–6). Finally, Mary's experience of the event is described such that Gabriel's greeting transmits the breath of God to Mary's womb:

> Do diu magit des verstunt
> daz iz chome vone got,
> und der hailige adem
> entswebete ir den lichnamen
> von den vuozen unze an den wirbel,
> do gihte her himel zuo der erde.
> daz wart da ze stete scin,
> do er sprach daz wort sin.
> (7.1–8)[58]

(When the maiden understood that it came from God, and the holy breath shook her body from her feet to the top of her head, then Heaven was married to the earth. This was revealed there and then, when he spoke his word.)

Ava's interest in the Annunciation, like Aelred's, lies in knowing that moment of Mary's experience when the Word was conceived in the body.[59] This moment constitutes the original act of Christian knowing (or reading), without which no other is possible. But the female recluse of Bavarian or Austrian origin writing in the vernacular at the beginning of the twelfth century testifies emphatically that this interest neither began with Aelred nor with the Cistercian order, nor was it limited to the speculation of exegetes.[60] Aelred's sermons instead represent the highly interiorized and refined expression of what was undoubtedly already a popular idea: Mary conceived the Word when Gabriel's words were delivered to her ears and as the result of an inward preparedness that was represented as her reading of scripture, or better: the conception occurs as the perfect realization of her reading act.

In visual art, the change in the understanding of this moment is mirrored in the portrayal of Mary with an open book. The first known instance in which the text of Isaiah

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58 I have modified Rushing's translation. "Heiliger adem" is indeed "Holy Spirit," but the meaning "breath" is still present in the German, and the conception could also be attributed to a breathing from God by way of Gabriel or the Holy Siprit; see Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, pp. 297–98. In the parallel scene in "Johannes," Ava names the Spirit in Latin as *spiritus sanctus* (in *Ava's New Testament Narratives*, line 8,1).

59 Similarly, Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, p. 102. Frau Ava treats the Annunciation similarly in a second poem on John the Baptist, where it seems that Gabriel actually announces and even effects the conception (Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, pp. 100–101), as he speaks of it first in the present and then in the perfect tense: "Uber dich chumet spiritus sanctus, / Er bescatewet dine wamben. / du hast ein chint enphangen" (The *spiritus sanctus* is coming over you and beshadowing your womb. You have conceived a child) (Ava, "Johannes," in *Ava's New Testament Narratives*, 8,1–3, pp. 33–34).

60 Ava most likely did not enter the religious life until middle age, after having raised two sons. She is thought to have become an *inclusa* under the protection of the Benedictine abbey of Melk. See Rushing, introduction to Ava's *Narratives*, pp. 1–5.

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Figure 2.5. Annunciation. Capital from the Abbey of Saint-Martin d'Ainay, Lyon, France, first third of the twelfth century. Photo © Morgan Powell.

7:14 is inscribed on the pages she holds is found on a capital of the abbey church of Saint-Martin d'Ainay in Lyons and dates from the first third of the twelfth century (fig. 2.5).[61] Pächt speculated that the ruled lines in Mary's open book as portrayed in the St Albans Psalter may have been intended to receive the same inscription.[62] But perhaps the real content is no longer to be sought there, on the parchment page of Mary's book or of the psalter itself. By adding the dove that enters Mary's ear, the image dramatizes Mary's *lectio* of the prophetic word as the event in which Christ the Word was given human

61 The four capital letters would read *E[cce] V[irgo] C[oncipiet] E[manuel]*. Miles, "Origins," 654–55, is both misinformed on the dating and misreads the letters; cf. Reveyron, "L'Abbatiale de Saint-Martin d'Ainay, p. 110; and, in the same volume, Parron and Becker, "L'Abbaye d'Ainay," pp. 137–40.

62 As the picture cycle neither contains any other inscription nor any place in which one seems likely or planned, this one would have acquired an extraordinary importance. Where a book appears in earlier Annunciation scenes, it is likewise always blank.

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flesh. Aelred's sermons and Ava's poems, I would argue, offer the verbal equivalent; in visual representation, the materialization of the idea has simply made the implicit role of the ear visibly manifest. In all three cases, the content, what is known or "read," is to be sought in the heart or soul of the listener or viewer.

Whether in verbal or visual images, the imagination of the early twelfth century dramatically isolates the Annunciation as "that moment in time" when Mary experienced the fulfilment of the letter of scripture as life; the moment of the conception is identified with the fundamental exercise of Christian reading, that is, Christian *knowing*. It is not simply the idea of the ignorance of the church before the coming of Christ that is at stake here but rather the passage from *imperfecta* to *perfecta cognitio* as a moment of illumination experienced in the—female—body. This is the perfect, or perfected act of Christian reading, and Mary's perusal of an open book is only a metaphor for its point of departure; indeed, the substance of her knowledge as of her experience reaches her by way of the ear, from which it passes directly into her *venter* and *viscera*, her womb and her flesh. Such an understanding of Mary's reading act has everything to do with the medieval import of the letter and the spirit of the Word but next to nothing to do with the social value, distribution, extent or even the use of literacy. Indeed, as we shall see, its greatest potential for the twelfth-century imagination lay in the opposite direction: in empowering an "illiterate" gnosis.

Mary's Reading and the Song of Songs

In terms of the desire they express to enter into and know Mary's experience, Aelred's sermons are no exception. They are rather typical of the development of Marian devotion beginning in the late eleventh century. As both Ann Astell and Rachel Fulton have shown, the intense desire to enter into Mary's experience by meditating on the scriptural images of her life is at the centre of and even provides the decisive impetus for Marian commentary on the Song of Songs, the interpretation of the biblical text as a prophetic account of Mary's life.[63] Fulton, above all, has argued that this reading of the *sensus historicus*, far from being merely another application of the established method of scriptural allegory, served the discovery of a new experience of the text. Where all commentators of this period share an idea that the Song expresses the feminine position of the soul before God, within the Marian interpretation this position is not allegory but history, fulfilled one time for all in the life of a woman. By mapping the images of the dialogue between lover and beloved onto the events of Mary's life, the exegetes of this mode did not aim beyond the text to an objective, allegorical signified but rather sought a way to sink further into it, to fuse with its "historical"—that is, subjectively lived and experienced—meaning, a "sensible union with both Mary and Christ in time."[64] Consequently, this reading of the Song for *historia* resulted in a transformation of the exegetical category itself. That dimension of meaning that could otherwise be taken

63 Astell, *Song of Songs*; Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion"; and Fulton, " 'Quae est ista,"

64 Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 116; see also Fulton, "Quae est ista," 117.

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as identical with the letter of the text was now instead the gloss, but both letter and gloss began and ended in lived, bodily experience.[65] The truth of history, previously constructed as the report of an eyewitness, became one in which "witnessing" instead occurred through the reader's experience of the text, the apprehension of "historical" truth through contemplation of the prophetic image.

The preconditions for this development are two, and their collusion is of paramount significance for later developments. One resides in the history of exegesis, another in the history of the liturgical expression of devotion to Mary. The idea that the prophetic images of the Old Testament could reveal to the contemplative reader details that were "missing" from the New goes back to the fathers of the church, who relied on it as a way of discovering (*invenire*), among other things, the narrative details of the Passion and Crucifixion, which were so sparsely accounted for in the Gospels.[66] Christ himself had authorized such discovery, indeed, made it an obligation, when he said, *necesse est impleri omnia quae scripta sunt in lege Moysi, et prophetis, et psalmis de me* (all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms, concerning me) (Luke 24:44); the evangelists had shown the way by making the fulfilment of prophetic images explicit in the Gospel narratives. The fathers then undertook to "complete" the Gospel narrative by scanning the Psalms—held in part to be Christ's own words—and the texts of the prophets for prefigurations that would allow them to "see" what the Gospels themselves did not reveal. In this way, the contemplation of scripture accomplished a kind of visualizing completion of the scriptural narrative.[67] It is not until the turn of the eleventh century, however, that we find this store of images beginning to serve as the basis of sequential devotions to Christ's life and Passion in image and text.[68]

Some three centuries previous, the Song of Songs began to fill a role with regard to Mary's life analogous—but not identical—to that of the Passion Psalms (Psalms 21 and 56) for the life of Christ.[69] In the entirety of the Gospels, Mary spoke only six times, the last occurring at the wedding at Cana (John 2:3 and 2:5). An account of her suffering over the Passion and Crucifixion was all but entirely lacking. And yet who could have experienced these things more intensely, who could have felt them more personally, than Mary? The devotional need to know and enter into Mary's experience became acute with the introduction of the feast of her Assumption into Heaven, which occurred in the West beginning ca. 800. The new feast became "one of the most solemn observances of the medieval church, ranking alongside Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the dedication of

65 Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 116.

66 The foundational study is Pickering, "Crucifixion," here p. 24. See also Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, pp. 190–205.

67 Pickering, "Crucifixion," pp. 233–34, 245–47, 307 and passim; Bestul, *Texts*, p. 27.

68 Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, pp. 8–9; Bestul, *Texts*, pp. 34–35; Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," p. 184 and passim; and Constable, *Three Studies*, pp. 203–6. For indications of an earlier tradition, see Deshman, "Galba Psalter," 118–19, 123–24.

69 In what follows, I am summarizing Fulton's conclusions in "Quae est ista," and "Mimetic Devotion."

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the local sanctuary as one of the five principal celebrations of the liturgical year."[70] But there existed no *vita* and no body, no relics, textual or physical, from which to commemorate, to relive in memory, the events of Mary's death and her Assumption into Heaven. The Song of Songs, the sole scriptural dialogue between a man and a woman, allowed the development of a liturgy in which the voices of the scriptural text were understood as Mary's and Christ's, embodied in the hymns and antiphons of the chanting choir. Thus, through the language of desire of the biblical text, members of the medieval church could "hear" the words and "see" the events that transpired between the eternally suffering *sponsa derelicta* and *mater dolorosa* and her son as she was reunited with him and crowned the queen of Heaven. Words that bespoke the desire of every soul were fulfilled once and for all as the *historia* of the mother of God.

In this way, as Fulton argues, the words of the Song of Songs served the celebration of the Assumption as the "relics" of Mary's life, the *vestigia* of her path through, and passing from, this world. To know Mary's *historia* was a work of *memoria* that operated through imaginative identification, that called upon the participants to experience the truth of Mary's words by witnessing their expansion into narrative as the drama celebrated through the liturgy of her feast. In this way also, Mary's experience of the fulfilment of scriptural prophecy as life became that of the participants in the celebration: "The feast, transformed into a bridal occasion, celebrated the Incarnation of the bridegroom both in the womb of his mother-bride and in the heart of the faithful soul."[71] Standing at the core of the experience was, however, not an allegorical embodiment of the collective, the church, but instead the eyewitness, "a woman, a woman who had lived and died in history."[72] The idea of reading scriptural prophecy to recover sacred history as presence—what the fathers had done—became an act identical with Mary's experience as *sponsa et mater*, the body that bore the Word. "Mary's reading" was then an experience of truth available to every human soul.

The attempts of twelfth-century exegetes to know Mary's *historia* through the prophetic images whose truth she fulfilled thus undertook as formal exegesis what had been developing since the ninth century as the object of the experience of Mary's feast.[73] Mary's *historia* was now completed as Christ's had been. These two dimensions of "imaginated" *historia* subsequently found a powerfully productive point of intersection in Mary's experience of Christ's Passion.[74] Some of the earliest and most influential Passion narratives are in fact Marian laments, *planctus Mariae*, that begin to appear by the mid twelfth century. Mary is interposed between the contemplative viewer and the suffering Christ to the extent

70 Fulton, "Quae est ista," 55–56.

71 Fulton "Quae est ista," 117.

72 Fulton "Quae est ista," 117.

73 Before Rachel Fulton's work, the Marian interpretation was generally regarded in the scholarship as simply a "type" of a primary identification between the *sponsa* and the church. Fulton has convincingly established the priority of the liturgical texts as well as their independence from the preceding commentary tradition.

74 With this coinage "imaginated" I wish to draw attention to the role of visualization in contemplation, without implying the whimsical or "unreal," as would the term "imaginary."

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that what the viewer "knows" is far more Mary's grief and compassion than the sufferings of Christ himself.[75] In these texts, Mary figures as the very source of our ability to know and, above all, to experience what happened. That is, our ability to know Christ's suffering through scripture has been superseded by Mary's perfect knowledge-in-the-body of all scriptural prophecy. We now experience the truth of the prophetic images not as exegetical conjecture but rather as historical narrative delivered to us by the woman "who was there."

The history of the Marian interpretation of the Song of Songs thus exhibits the way this project of biblical exegesis related to deeply felt devotional needs and, most importantly for the idea of reading, made the Song into a dramatic performance, "a dialogue between Mary and Christ" that "could bring the worshiper into their presence, transcend time, and allow him or her to participate in their conversations."[76] Through the Marian interpretation, the exegesis of the Song of Songs potentially opens onto and abets the development of a different kind of reading experience altogether, one focused on identification with narratives that are performed for the reader by texts, but also by pictures, and may take place as much through oral (for example, liturgical) performance as through meditative reading. The Marian trajectory became the key to a translation or recasting of the monastic reading experience of the Song into other media and for other social groups. Mary's place in the literature (both devotional and dramatic) and iconography of the Passion represents the most prominent and influential outgrowth of this development. But, as we shall see in the later chapters of this book, the same can be found at the very centre of a new poetics of vernacular narrative.

The full potential of this narrative, experiential dimension of the images of the Song—the potential to transform the relationship between reading subject and Word—was first fully articulated, if not discovered, by Rupert of Deutz; or rather, this potential is *performed in* Rupert's commentary on the Song of Songs as a reading act.[77] With the protagonist of this performance, at once Mary and Rupert's feminized reading self, Rupert's text reveals the contours of the woman in the reading mirror that later becomes the focal point of a vernacular poetics. As such it must be examined in some detail before I return, in conclusion, to its relationship to Hildegard's audio-visual gnosis.

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75 In *Stabat mater*, Andreas Kraß argues that the twelfth century constitutes the true high point of *compassio* as a devotional ideal, with Mary at its centre. The first fully developed Marian lament is the *Planctus ante nescia* of Gottfried of St Victor (d. 1194; sometimes attributed to Gottfried of Breteuil, as in Kraß, *Stabat mater*, p. 121), followed by the *Stabat mater*, which Kraß redates to the twelfth century (Kraß, *Stabat mater*, pp. 133–42), and the decisively influential *Quis dabit capiti meo* (before 1205). See also Mertens Fleury, "Klagen," pp. 143–52; and Bestul, *Texts*, pp. 121–28.

76 Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 115.

77 Rupert's text cannot be called the first commentary devoted to a Marian interpretation. This distinction may belong to the *Sigillum beatae Mariae* of Honorius Augustodunensis, now thought to date from ca. 1100; see Flint, "Chronology," 215–42. On Honorius's text as a Marian commentary, see Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 251–54; Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 91–93 and 102–3; *JP*, pp. 244–88; and Matter, *Song of Songs*, pp. 155–58.

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Reading as Mary Did: The *De incarnatione Domini* of Rupert of Deutz

Femina mente Deum concepit, corpore Christum
Integra fudit eum nil operante viro.
(Rupert of Deutz, *CCC*, Epistula)

Reading scripture in a new way was a lifetime career for Rupert of Deutz. In fact, his commentary on the Song is one of the last works in a long list of firsts in the history of exegesis, listed by his modern biographer as follows:

> The first work ever on the whole of scripture under a single theme (the work of Triune God), the first new commentary on John's Gospel since Augustine, the first new commentary on the twelve Minor Prophets since Jerome, the story of salvation narrated as an epic battle, the most innovative commentary on the Apocalypse before Joachim, and the first consistently Marian interpretation of the Song of Songs.[78]

But if Rupert unlocked many new doors in the art of exegesis, he did it with only one key: he dispensed with the ossified tradition of commentary that consisted in the citation and collation of the church fathers and, with audacious and unwavering confidence, put personal inspiration in its place, his own reading experience of the text.[79] Moreover, Rupert was the first author to locate his authority to expound the meaning of scripture in visionary experience, an idea that Hildegard and Elisabeth, and after them a long line of women mystics, would shape into a rich tradition.[80] As such, and as he himself protested, he was hesitant to speak openly on the source of his knowledge.[81] But the period from 1125 to 1127, the same in which he composed his commentary on the Song of Songs, saw Rupert under increasing pressure to silence critics and oblige supporters with a fuller justification of this self-acknowledged *novum*.[82] To a great extent, the most profound and extensive answer that Rupert gave or could give on his ability to read through experience rather than through the authority of the learned doctors was his meditation on the text of the Song as an account "Of the Incarnation of God."[83]

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78 Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 372.

79 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 129; also pp. 124–28; and Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, p. 324; Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 67–72 and 345–52; Meier, "Literarische Sendung," 29–52; Haug, "Autorität," pp. 56–58.

80 McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 328–29; Dinzelbacher, *Mystik*, p. 103. See also Meier, "Literarische Sendung," 30–32, 50; Meier, "Befreiung," 267, 271, 282–83; and Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 267–95.

81 Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 349–50.

82 Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 336–52.

83 Thus the title Rupert gave his text, now published as *Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum*, cited hereafter as *CCC*. Shortly afterward (ca. 1127), Rupert offered a more direct, autobiographical account, or *apologia*, in the twelfth chapter of his *De gloria*. There he made the defiant claim that "[one] visit from the Most High is worth ten such *patres*" such as his critics demanded he cite, and that "I speak and have written down [only] what comes to me from that teacher [the Holy Spirit]" (*De gloria*, p. 386).

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In Rupert's reading, the entire biblical text of the Song of Songs is focused on one event: Mary's conception and bearing of the Word. Rupert takes up the idea of Mary's experience as a passage from imperfect to perfect knowledge of the Word and uses the erotic images of the Song as the key to feeling and knowing as she did. This places the life and reading of the exegete in the same position vis-à-vis the text as the one he "reads" in Mary's experience. That is, Rupert's commentary tells two *historiae*, two dramas of awakening to the Word are intertwined within it. The first recounts Mary's awakening as *prophetissa*, *mater*, and finally *magistra* or *mater ecclesiarum*. The second, parallel to hers, is that of the reader-exegete, Rupert. Both become "mouths" of scripture, able to expound its full meaning because of the reading performance that, for each, Rupert's text represents.[84] For Mary, this is accomplished in the body, as her life fulfils and manifests the scriptural images of the Song and other prophetic texts. For Rupert it is possible through Mary's body; that is, not only by reading her life as embodied truth but by repeating her own revelatory act of reading in the body.[85]

The three stages of Mary's awakening correspond to her conception of the Word at the Annunciation (*prophetissa*), her own experience of the Word as flesh (*mater*), and her awakening as the fountain of all church doctrine (*mater ecclesiarum*). Rupert constructs his own "awakening" to the task of writing the commentary on the Song around three visions in the prologue, which, taken together, make clear that he is to "make the lamb with the Holy Trinity"; that is, in no uncertain terms, give the Word flesh as Mary did before him.[86] This is the Annunciation to Rupert.[87] His account of Mary's experience is thus from its inception simultaneously reading and *imitatio*, but, as the text amply reveals, this *imitatio* is not contained in the emulation of virtues or admired actions. It is a quest to know and fuse with Mary's experience in all its psycho-sexual specificity, the process whereby *he* discovers how to be *she*, in which he relives her *historia.* Rupert is fully aware of the magnitude of this claim, and far from shying away from the opportunities it offers to sensualize and eroticize reading, far from forestalling implications that point to a somatic gnosis, a knowing that resides entirely in the senses and the body, he rather orchestrates the full power of the text in service of his reading performance. One is confronted here with the force of conviction of a writer who is offering the key to his most profound creative experience.

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84 Similarly, Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 103–4; also in *JP*, pp. 323–36; Fulton's reading and my own of Rupert's text are highly complementary; I am grateful to her for reading and commenting on mine in 2002.

85 Meier, "Literarische Sendung," 32 and passim, analyses Rupert's slightly later commentary on Matthew to conclude that the experiential identification between reader and work being read, between commentator and the voice of scripture, constitutes in itself Rupert's reading method and a new model of authorial consciousness of epochal significance. See also Haug, "Autorität," p. 116.

86 "… per visum mihi dicere visa es: Pascha cum beata Trinitate facies" (*CCC*, p. 7).

87 Cf. Astell, *Song of Songs*, pp. 65–66.

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I cited earlier a passage in which Rupert saw the reading of scripture as the starting point for all knowledge of God that is accessible in this life; in the commentary on the Song of Songs, this starting point is Mary's life:

> Ecce hic, o Maria beatissima, ecce hic nobis "quasi per speculum in aenigmate" sublucet vita tua, vita inclita. … Totus fere huius capituli sensus ad illud pertinet, quod in te latet. … Admoveamus igitur hoc speculum et diligenter oculis cordis exinde contemplemur, ut saltem aliqua ex parte cognoscamus sanctissimam conversationem tuam.[88]
>
> (*CCC*, p. 106)
>
> (This, then, o most blessed Mary, this chapter [that is, Canticles 5:2–8] illuminates your life for us "as a mirror darkly" [1 Corinthians 13:12], your glorious life. … Nearly the entire meaning of this chapter pertains to that which lies concealed in you. … Let us approach this mirror, then, and contemplate thence lovingly with the eyes of the heart, so that we may know if only in part [cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9] your most holy life.)

This statement on Mary as mirror, which might easily have found its place at the opening of the text, Rupert reserves for the point at which she awakens to expound and teach as *mater ecclesiarum*. The reason for this delay lies in the importance that Rupert attaches to "this chapter" of the biblical text: it corresponds not only to Mary's awakening but also to his own. "This chapter" refers to the verses of Canticles 5:2–8, which recount how the bride is woken to open to her beloved and contain possibly the most intimately erotic imagery of the text. When he reaches the chapter's fourth verse, "Dilectus meus misit manum suam per foramen, et venter meus intremuit ad tactum eius" (My beloved but his hand through the opening, and my belly trembled at his touch), in one of the best known, if not fully understood, passages of his commentary, Rupert substitutes two of his own visions for an explication of the experience that is properly Mary's life—and reports them as the experiences of *quaedam adulescentularum*, "one among the young women."[89] Scholarship has long recognized that Rupert later revealed the same visions as his own experiences and as the indispensable keys to his exegetical vocation.[90] Nevertheless, this young woman is not "a certain nun"; neither does the interpolation of a young woman signal an attempt to disguise Rupert's experience as that of another. This identity rather generalizes his experience as that of an *altera Maria*, a reader and emulator of Mary's experience.[91] Rupert's text takes place not only as a dialogue between Mary and Christ but also, even primarily, as a dialogue between Mary and the inquiring voice of the exegete, her emulator, whom she addresses either as one among her *adulescentulae* or as

88 *CCC*, p. 106.

89 *CCC*, p. 110.

90 Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 50–53; analysed in Meier, "Literarische Sendung"; and Meier, "Befreiung."

91 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 133, took *quaedam adulescentularum* to mean "a nun." The phrase has since been consistently mistranslated or overlooked in the scholarship. For more on this point and its significance for Rupert's reading *persona*, see Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 285–86. The new German translation in the Fontes Christiani series gives "ein junges Mädchen," (p. 419), thus perpetuating the error, which follows from a failure to grasp the significance of this reading *persona* within the project of the text.

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one of her *amici*. Mary thus addresses the readers and auditors just as, in the biblical text, the *sponsa* addresses the daughters of Jerusalem who accompany her search for the beloved. That is, Rupert places himself and his readers/auditors *inside* the drama of the biblical text; they are female characters and witnesses, as well as Mary's pupils and "readers."[92] The exegete then, does not interrogate tradition or learning as to the meaning of the text. He interrogates Mary, and what she can tell him, she knows because it happened to her, and he believes because he sees and hears it—and finally because it happens to him. The *expositio mystica*, as Rupert states in his prologue, "stands more firmly," when constructed over (*superaedificata*) a foundation in the events of a certain time or identifiable facts (*historiam certi temporis vel rei demonstrabilis*). His experience vindicates the biblical text by revealing its meaning in and as *historia*.[93]

The "young woman's" vision functions as the answer to the exegete's question to Mary:

> Quomodo, o dilecta, "misit dilectus tuus manum suam per foramen"? Quae est illa "manus"? Quod est illud "foramen" Quis ille "tactus"? Quis ille "tremor"? Quomodo "intremuit venter tuus," aut quid est venter tuus? Mirantes ista quaerimus, quia talium inexperti sumus.[94]
>
> (How, o beloved, did "your beloved put his hand through the opening."? What is this "hand"? What is this "opening"? What the "touch"? What the "tremor"? How did "your belly tremble," or what is your belly? We ask this in wonder, for we are without experience of anything comparable.)

The concluding statement is then at least implicitly denied by the answer, as Rupert reports that *nostra aetate* (in our time), "The young woman, that is, the soul devoted to these nuptials and earnest in these wedding songs, was recalling the same [verses]," when she had a half-waking experience on her bed that reduplicates all the queried particulars of the biblical text.[95] There is no further response, either from Mary or the exegete, none, that is, but the second "vision" Rupert relates (*non vana visio*, as he states, but rather a somatic experience), in which the same *tremor* was felt again, this time as an experience of bodily fusion with the crucified Christ, "so that mouth seemed moved to mouth, her whole body to his body."[96] This second vision, beyond being reported elsewhere as the crucial turning point that enabled Rupert to write, recalls the opening of both the commentary and the biblical text, in which Mary experiences "the kiss of his

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92 With this technique Rupert is continuing a tradition that goes back at least as far as Origen; see Robertson, *Lectio divina*, pp. 165–69.

93 *CCC*, p. 8.

94 *CCC*, p. 110.

95 In view of the confusion over this passage as only just discussed, it is best to clarify: I am conflating two successive paragraphs of the text here, the first beginning "Nostra aetate, quaedam adulescentularum …" and then making a first account of the experience; the second beginning "Memorabat etiam eadem adulescentula, scilicet anima nuptiis istis dedita canticisque nuptialibus intenta, quoniam dilectus in visu noctis," which further develops the same "vision" (it is, properly speaking, rather an experience of *unio mystica*). Cf. *CCC*, p. 110.

96 "… ita ut os quoque ori, totumque corpus admotum videretur eius corpori," *CCC*, p. 111.

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mouth" (Canticles 1:1) as the moment of the conception.[97] The two visions together, then, show the emulating reader having completed, as visionary experience, the same development revealed as Mary's by the biblical text. "Reading Mary" is not so much exegesis as it is a psychosomatic *imitatio*. The reading exegete seeks identity with Mary, fusion with her experience, which he knows not through the Gospel but through the fusion of the letter—the sensual images of the Song—with the gloss, her life. What Rupert reveals in this text as Mary's experience—and Rachel Fulton has called "the story of Mary's contemplative development and visionary birth, of her awakening as the scriptural exegete *par excellence*"—is thus also always implicitly his.[98] In this way, Rupert's commentary relates the drama "Of the Incarnation of God" as the beginning of a new gnosis, and this new gnosis, Mary's reading, is the foundation of his vocation as scriptural exegete.

The commentary begins with the moment that is the key to its own existence, the Annunciation to Mary, understood both as an intensely physical experience and as the fusion of letter and gloss, prophetic image and life:

> "Osculetur me osculo oris sui." Quae est ista exclamatio tam magna, tam repentina? O beata Maria, inundatio gaudii, vis amoris, torrens voluptatis, totam te operuit totam te obtinuit penitusque inebriavit, et sensisti "quod oculos non vidit et auris non audivit et in cor hominis non ascendit," et dixisti: "Osculetur me osculo oris sui." Dixisti enim ad angelum: "Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum."[99]
>
> ("Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" [Canticles 1:1]. What is this exclamation, so great and so unexpected? O, blessed Mary, the floodwaters of joy, the force of love, a torrent of pleasure filled you totally, possessed you totally, intoxicated you completely, and you felt "what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and what has never entered into the heart of man" [1 Corinthians 2:9], and you spoke: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth!" You spoke to the angel, indeed, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word" [Luke 1:38].)

Rupert's opening takes the image of the Song as an intensified expression of Mary's words as reported by the Gospel, their meaning is "the same," and both equally describe an experience, which, in itself, reveals their equivalence to Mary alone:

> Nonne sensus idem est in verbis seu vocibus diversis? Sicut audisti et credidisti, sicut tibimet imprecando dixisti, "fiat mihi," ita et factum est tibi. Deus Pater te osculatus est "osculo oris sui." Quis oculus hoc vidit? quae auris audivit? cuius in cor hominis ascendit? Tibi autem, o Maria, semetipsum revelavit, et osculans, et osculum, et os osculantis.[100]
>
> (Is this not the same meaning in different words and voices? Just as you heard and you believed, just as you, beseeching yourself said, "let it be unto me," just so it was done to

97 In his slightly later commentary on Matthew, Rupert makes a seemingly contrite admission of a "foolish sentiment" that had led him earlier to "transfigure the narrative so as better to speak the truth, and yet not allow the person to be recognized" (*De gloria*, pp. 394–95); see Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 281–87; and Meier, "Literarische Sendung," pp. 29–52. See also notes 83 and 85, above.

98 Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 94.

99 *CCC*, p. 10.

100 *CCC*, p. 10.

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> you. God [the] Father kissed you "with the kiss of his mouth." Who has ever seen this kiss? what ear heard it? into whose human heart has it ever ascended? But to you, o Mary, he revealed himself, the kisser, the kiss, and the mouth that kisses.)

In this moment, "when He with that vehement love and through the Holy Spirit implanted the substance of his Word deep in your heart, in your womb," Mary was granted full knowledge of scripture.[101] Having first immersed himself in Mary's experience of the moment, the kiss, Rupert turns to its significance with the next verse, "Quia sunt meliora ubera tua vino" (How much better is the milk of your breasts than wine) (Canticles 1:2). In the kiss of the conception, Mary was nursed from the two breasts of the Holy Spirit. The first is man's redemption and had never been drunk of before (the New Testament), and the other nursed the prophets and produced the miracles of the Old Testament.[102] As he elaborates somewhat further on, "all prophets were born out in you, because in your feeling as 'the Holy Spirit came upon you' all prophecies and scriptures were conjoined with it."[103]

Elsewhere, as we have seen, Mary is the *speculum* that is also scripture; she is also called "secretarium omnium Scripturarum sanctarum" (the secret receptacle of all holy scriptures).[104] This kiss, unheard and unseen by any but Mary, is nevertheless that experienced later in the text by the emulating *adulescentula.* And here, too, while he uses an allegorical referent for the images of the text, Rupert insists on their physical realization as a woman's experience. The moment is still emphatically that of the Annunciation seen as conception, and the experience of the milk is a drinking in the womb, a gnostic counterpart of sexual intercourse:

> Utrorumque huiuscemodi uberum laetificata dulcedine ineffabili, dum concipis, o virgo beata, … quibus duabus clausulis iam dicta significantur duo data eiusdem Spiritus sancti, quid aliud diceres, nisi quia "meliora sunt ubera tua vino, fragrantia unguentis optimis?" Non fueras experta vinum huius saeculi, vinum voluptatis carnalis, sine cuius ebrietate nulla umquam mulier praeter te concipere potuit aut poterit, et tamen diiudicare nosti quam melior aut vehementior, dulcior atque fortior esset voluptas sive amor Dei, in quo concepisti, sine dubio potata illius torrente voluptatis.[105]

> (Having been nursed by each of these breasts in unspeakable sweetness when you conceived, o, blessed virgin, … when these two things had been spoken, which signified the same two gifts of the Holy Spirit, what else could you say, if not, "Your breasts are sweeter than wine, and their fragrance surpasses all precious ointments" [Canticles 1:1–2]? You had no experience of the wine of this world, the wine of carnal pleasure, without whose intoxication no woman before you was able to conceive, nor ever will conceive; and yet you knew to judge how much better, how much more vehement, how much sweeter and more powerful was the desire, or love of God, in which you conceived, once having drunk of the "torrent of that desire" [Psalms 36:9, 35:9].)

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101 "… dum substantiam Verbi sui cum illo amore suo Spiritu sancto tuae menti, tuo ventri penitus insereret" (*CCC*, p. 11).

102 *CCC*, pp. 11–12.

103 "Immo prophetae omnes ad te accesserunt, quia prophetiae omnium et Scripturae omnes in tuum sensum cum superveniente in te Spriitu sancto convenerunt" (*CCC*, p. 12; see also p. 147).

104 *CCC*, p. 89.

105 *CCC*, p. 12.

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The difficulty of translating *voluptas* with one term in this passage—I have used "pleasure" as well as "desire"—is possibly due to a play on yet another meaning of the word: male semen.[106] But the pun would only enhance an identification otherwise completed in the text. Rupert is describing a moment in which scriptural images—words of the prophets such as those of Solomon's Song—fused with physical experience in the same way and at the same time as the love of God (*voluptas Dei*) fused with the flesh of Mary's womb. The intensity with which the exegete explores the physical dimensions of both image and event, letter and gloss, witnesses him seeking to know the experience in which Mary became, as she is named here, *prophetissa*. Like the visual portrayal of the Annunciation beginning around the same time and like Aelred after him, Rupert cites Isaiah's prophecy in connection with this moment, but he opts for a variation of it that occurs one chapter later in the biblical text: *Et accessi ad prophetissam, et concepit et peperit filium* (And I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son) (Isaiah 8:3).[107] The emphasis for Rupert is displaced from the virginal birth to the way in which Mary "became a prophet."

At his point, Mary herself is still silent, her experience ineffable, and the "kiss" cannot be communicated. When Rupert returns to the moment of the conception a second time (to be discussed shortly), Mary as *mater* will speak her own experience to the *amici*, her reading emulators and initiates.[108] Finally—after Rupert's text has reached its crucial midpoint ("Ecce in medio nuptiarum sumus"),[109] and thus passed from the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy to proclamation of New Testament doctrine—Mary will "awaken" to her calling as exegete with the words "ego os meum aperui in doctrina" (I opened my mouth to teach).[110] The kiss itself will be felt again "nostra aetate" by the "young woman" who is Rupert as Mary's reader. At this juncture of the text, then, the exegete and Mary fuse, her experience is knowable to him, or "her." More properly, the hermeneutic distance between letter and gloss has been collapsed and with it the difference between his reading self and hers. But Rupert's text does not content itself with the justification of one inspired career. It constructs Mary's moment of conception and *cognition* as the redemption of the body and bodily vehicles of knowledge, that is, as a new *lectio* in which the body can both perceive and reveal the Word.

Rupert's identity as *adulescentula* in the text is far more than a convenient way to project himself into the drama of the Song. This feminine reading identity is the key to understanding how his visionary authority as exegete could become a model of an alternative, women's, or "illiterate's" gnosis. He introduces his female persona as the "immature soul" (*anima imperfecta*), and as she "whose education is not

106 Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, p. 2013; Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin–Français*, p. 860.

107 *CCC*, p. 12.

108 The *amici* are identified as the prophets and apostles (cf. *CCC*, p. 55)—that is, as the voices of scripture. But as with the daughters of Jerusalem, the way Mary and Christ address them, explaining their words, puts them in a position indistinguishable from that of the audience.

109 *CCC*, p. 85.

110 *CCC*, p. 112.

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yet complete."[111] The term *adulescentula* is generally identifiable with a position of weakness and insufficiency before God—the same position then, that Hildegard renames as *paupercula feminea forma*. Elsewhere, for purposes of contrasting his personally inspired exegesis to the learned methods that he rejected, Rupert was fond of characterizing himself as an *indoctus*. For him this term meant "untutored monk" as opposed to licensed schoolman or *doctor*.[112] Speaking of the formal intellectual training of the schools that others had pursued and he himself lacked, Rupert wrote to Abbot Cuno in 1125, "I did none of all this; instead I was like the simple Jacob who stayed at home with his mother."[113] The fact that prominent *doctores* such as William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon were among his most tenacious detractors lent dramatic force to this self-image.

Rupert was in reality by no means unlearned; the *indoctus* served him as it served others, as a claim to personal inspiration through the Spirit. But Rupert took this claim much further than his predecessors in that he used it not as a topos of modesty or authenticity—not as a way, that is, to reinforce his position within tradition, but rather as a way of introducing a voice from outside it. As such, the topos alone was not sufficient to his claim of inspiration through personal visionary experience. In the *adulescentula* of the Song of Songs, an immature female who witnesses Mary's original reading in the body, he constructed a new basis for his claim, one that is intrinsically appropriate to his exegetical project, because it appropriates Mary's experience of the Incarnation as the authority for a direct knowledge of the Word that is free of "learned intervention," *because* it is female.

In the prologue, Rupert traces his inspiration to undertake the task at hand to an experience from his youth in which knowledge of Mary's accomplishment is revealed to him by the Spirit when "a whistling breath of air blowing in both ears, faster than can be described, placed [*deposuit*] these verses in me":[114] "Femina mente Deum concepit, corpore Christum / Integra fudit eum nil operante viro" (A woman conceived God in her soul, Christ in her body / Intact she brought him forth without male intervention) (*CCC*, p. 6). These verses mention neither the Song of Songs nor Mary by name. They instead contrast a woman's knowledge of the Word, simultaneous in spirit and body, with "male intervention." As noted earlier, the final vision reported in the prologue sees Mary summoning Rupert to repeat her own miraculous bearing of Christ the Lamb. Rupert's initial auditory experience, on the other hand, collapses the idea of prophetic inspiration as a breath of air (cited from the experience of Elias in 3 Kings 19:12) with that of the *conceptio per aurem*.[115] A patristic sermon, for example, evoked the latter with

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111 *CCC*, pp. 13, 119; see also p. 138. The first instance follows from the introduction of the *adulescentulae* in the biblical text at Canticles 1:2, *ideo adulescentulae dilexerunt te*.

112 Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 347–48; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 121–24.

113 *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe*, p. 32.

114 "… et ecce quasi sibilus aurae tenuis (3 Kings 19:12) per utramque aurem transcurrens, velocius quam dici possit, istos in me versiculos deposuit" (*CCC*, p. 6).

115 The idea that Mary conceived through God's breath, or a wind, also had its tradition and could be assimilated to the *conceptio per aurem*; see Jones, "Empfängnis"; and Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, pp. 297–99; also below, pp. 238–39.

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these words: "Oh blessed Virgin … made mother without the coupling of man. For here the ear was the wife, and the angelic word the husband."[116] The inspiration for Rupert's account would appear to lie in similar verses extolling Mary's conception through the ear, while transferring the receptive act to his own audition.

The verses placed in Rupert's creative "womb" thus not only described the miracle of Mary's unaided conception of the Word but also his own calling to expound on scripture, most specifically, to bring forth the "flesh" of Mary's experience from the images of the Song of Songs.[117] Where the idea at stake is this vocation, the opposition between Mary's experience of the Word and that effected by the intervention of man is manifest as one between divine inspiration—Rupert's experience—and human learning. The *adulescentula* thus provides Rupert with the perfect position to describe his reading self vis-à-vis Mary. He is an "imperfect" or "immature" version of herself, the gender reversal makes Mary's teaching in the emotionally and sexually charged images of women's physical experience specifically appropriate not only to what he knows (his circumvention of learning or reading through previous authorities) but also to how "she" knows (a different, bodily gnosis). Rupert's new gnosis is thus female *sui generis*, in its beginning as in its end, in its relationship to learning, to the body, and to God.[118]

The *adulescentula*, marked as the female soul not suited to the man's learning and spiritual strength, learns from Mary because Mary's way of knowing redeemed her entire sex. When the *prophetissa* becomes the *mater* and first speaks herself of the ineffable to her *amici*, she proclaims women's redemption in the same breath as she proclaims the fulfilment of the prophetic letter in her experience:

> O amici, hoc ego experta sum. Humilitatem meam de illo accubitu suo sensit et respexit et valde delectatus est et placuit sibi, quod in isto sexu tantam humilitatem invenit: in isto, inquam sexu, a quo initium superbiæ generi humano superveniens totam massam corrupit.
>
> (*CCC*, p. 30)
>
> (O my friends, this I have experienced. From where he reclined on his couch he perceived and gave heed to the scent of my humility, and truly he was delighted and it pleased him that in that sex such humility should be found: in that same sex, I say, from which *superbia* sprang, thence to overcome and corrupt the whole body of the human race.)

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116 "O Virgo benedicta … mater effecta absque alicujus viri copulatione. Ibi enim auricula uxor fuit, angelicus autem sermo maritus exstitit" (PL 65:98), attributed to Eleutherius of Tournai, as cited in Jones, "Empfängnis," p. 153.

117 Similarly, *JP*, p. 338.

118 Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 285–87. This becomes only more apparent in the commentary on Matthew, where Rupert mobilizes a still more explicit account of his "coupling" with the Word—including an insemination of the *uterus animae* and a joining of reclining bodies, in which a male form lowers itself in a dream onto the visionary and presses itself upon him like a seal upon wax, perceived as a drunkenness in love (*viva et vera voluptas*). See Meier, "Literarische Sendung," 39–44, esp. 42–43, who notes that the dates of the visions undoubtedly coincide with Rupert's work on the Song commentary; and *JP*, pp. 309–14. I cannot follow Fulton's determination to render the experience somehow genderless (*JP*, pp. 336–40).

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Letter becomes life in Mary's body, as she emphatically proclaims with the words "ego experta sum."[119] Mary is speaking here of the conception, seen to correspond to the words of Canticles 1:11: *nardus mea dedit odorem suum*. Here and elsewhere in Rupert's text, Mary's experience is referred to her sex specifically. She reverses the fall of the body in Eve, and the reversal corresponds to a redemption not only of humanity but also of woman's body and of woman as body. This *factum*, proclaimed in its theological import here, is evident on every level of Rupert's project: the identification sought with the images as a woman's physical experience, the doubling of the "literal" meaning as bodily experience both in letter and gloss, the claim to gnosis through a fusion with this same literal physicality. But most of all it is evident in the way the fulfilment of the *sponsa* as *mater*, the transformation of a woman's body as a life-giving act, corresponds both to the fulfilment of this text as life and to the knowing of all scripture In the body. Thus Mary explains to her *amici*, Rupert and his readers or auditors, the prophetic knowledge she received with the conception of Christ:

> Prophetissa namque eram, et ex quo mater eius facta sum, scivi eum ista passurum. Cum igitur carne mea taliter progenitum, talem filium sinu meo foverem, ulnis gestarem, uberibus lactarem, et talem eius futuram mortem semper prae oculis haberem, et prophetica, immo plus quam prophetica mente praeviderem, qualem, quantam, quam prolixa, me putatis materni doloris pertulisse passionem? Hoc est quod dico: "Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera commorabitur." O commoratio, dulcis quidem, sed plena gemitibus inenarrabilibus!
>
> (*CCC*, p. 32)

> (For I was a prophetess, and from the moment that I was made his mother, I knew he was going to suffer these things. When, therefore, I fondled such a son, born of my flesh, at my bosom, carried him in my arms, nursed him at my breasts, and had always before my eyes such a death as was destined for him, and foresaw everything with a prophetic, nay rather, a more than prophetic mind; what kind, how much, and how extensive a passion of maternal grief, do you imagine me to have endured? This is what I mean when I say: "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved is to me; he shall abide between my breasts" [Canticles 1:12]. O sojourn sweet indeed, but filled with unutterable groanings!)[120]

Mary speaks, here and throughout, in the past tense of her own experience, which puts her in the present of the reader who seeks to know that experience. This fact, coupled with the physical and emotional intimacy that Mary offers her *adulescentulae*, renders complex ideas of theology and gnosis as a mother would initiate her daughter into the heights and depths of intrinsically female experience. Mary's intervention in the text is not only drama, it is also method, and one conceived around the "female" position of her pupil.

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119 A later passage is more explicit. Speaking to Christ of an Old Testament passage just cited (Genesis 19:26), Mary says, "Quam veraciter ille te appellaverit desiderium, ego maxime in visceribus meis experta sum, et hoc amicis est intimandum" (I have experienced in my flesh and blood the truth of his words when he called you [the bridegroom] the object of desire, and this must be made known to [our] followers) (*CCC*, p. 56). Mary then speaks to the *amici* and the *filiae Hierusalem* of the desire that is also theirs. On Rupert's corresponding use of *expertus sum* and *experimentum*, see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 328; and Miquel, "Expérience spirituelle," pp. 56–58.

120 Trans. slightly modified from Astell, *Song of Songs*, p. 64.

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In passages such as the above Mary teaches the reading exegete how to read her life by evoking as if in pictures the actions that constitute her fulfilment of the biblical text. These pictures of her experience, and the narrative and emotional context they evoke, are redistilled into the images of the biblical text and thus recommended to her emulating reader, who can become Mary through meditation on them, through "reading" the images of the Song as the vestiges of her own reading life. The same connection Rupert makes here between the *fasciculus myrrhae* and the "picture" of Mary holding in her arms simultaneously her infant son and the crucified Christ grew into an independent complex of image and text that continued to inspire meditational texts, devotional images, and combinations of the two, including the figure known to art history as the pietà, throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.[121] The image aims at a moment of loving identification with suffering that corresponds to Christ's own descent and wounding in love to redeem mankind. Mary as *sponsa derelicta* and *mater dolorosa* teaches this moment of identification with her narrative experience, distilled into an image. We will encounter a translation of the same image into vernacular narrative that is also profoundly aware of its significance as a woman's gnosis in the final chapters of this book on Wolfram's *Parzival*. The woman as a focus for identification in suffering and love, whose "reading" act can motivate God's loving descent into the bride: this is likewise the same woman that Chrétien de Troyes places at the beginning and end of Yvain's narrative path.

Another image of woman as "reader," one that identifies her sooner with the opposite pole, Eve, explicitly makes her into a viewer whose desiring gaze is the starting point for her transformation into Mary. Mary as *magistra magistrorum* recommends this reading position explicitly to her *adulescentulae* as the image of a woman seduced by a picture. They are to imitate the biblical whore Ooliba, the woman whose lust for the forms she sees painted on the wall led her to take their living counterparts as lovers (Ezekiel 23:14–17). The response of Mary's followers is not a different one, it is only properly directed to a different image:

> Non, inquam, talis pictura haec, verumtamen aemulamini in melius visum illum et concupiscentiam illam. … Et ego vobis dico: Sicut illa videlicet non Hierusalem, sed Ooliba, exhibuit oculos suos videre viros depictos in pariete, videre imagines Chaldeorum expressas coloribus, videre balteos eorum, tiaras eorum et formam eorum, ita nunc exhibete oculos vestros, oculos interiores, videre dilectum hunc, videre aureum caput eius, nitentes oculos eius reverendas genas eius, candida et gratiosa labia eius, tornatiles et aureas manus eius, eburneum et sapphiris distinctum ventrem eius, rectissima crura eius, et tangite suauissimum guttur eius, iuxta illud: "Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus."
>
> (*CCC*, p. 130)

> (Not, I tell you, before a picture such as this, but indeed before a better you should emulate her same gaze and desire. … And I say to you: even as that woman—not Hierusalem but Ooliba—opened her eyes to see men depicted on a wall, to see the images of the Chaldeans expressed in painted colours, to see their belts, their crowns, and their bodily beauty [cf. Ezekiel 23:14–15], so now you: open your eyes, you interior eyes, to see this beloved, to see his golden head, his brilliant eyes, his awe-inspiring cheeks, his radiant

121 Schawe, "Pietà und Hoheslied," 161–212.

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> and glorious lips, his smooth and golden hands, his ivory stomach set with sapphires, his upright legs. And touch his throat, surpassingly sweet, in accord with the words: "Taste and see how sweet the Lord is" [Psalm 33:9].)[122]

Rupert is not only reading according to his own inspiration here; he is also expressly reversing precedent: Origen, too, had briefly evoked Ooliba's response in connection with the reading of the Song, but as a negative counter-example.[123] For Rupert, Ooliba's lust is the way Mary instructs her reading daughters to emulate her own life. Ooliba is to the reader's objective as Eve is to Mary. While Mary reverses the seduction of Eve by seducing the bridegroom with her humility, this fact takes place and is made known to her followers in the language of human erotic love. That is, Mary's reading relives, transforms, and thus redeems the seduction of Eve. The reader/auditor, the *adulescentula*, seeks identification with Mary, but the means and capacity to do so she inherits from Eve/Ooliba, the woman as symbol of the flesh seduced. The woman-as-reader is suspended between opposite manifestations of the identification between women and flesh, Eve and Mary, and seeks to approach the latter by adopting and redirecting the response of the former. *Sacra pagina* becomes an act of visual contemplation, sensory and sensual desire, authorized by a female experience of the Word, reading as Mary did.

Rupert's text thus displays a tendency to open onto a devotional practice focused on images both as visible and physical experience and as moments of a narrative development, and it is important to emphasize the way this moment in devotional aesthetics emerges inextricably bound to the idea of Mary's experience as a woman's reading. As a reading identity, Rupert's *adulescentula* represents the conflation of a series of dualistic oppositions that formed the hierarchical scaffolding of medieval thinking about knowledge and its acquisition. These constellate around three related notions: the capacity for and extent of learning, the limits of human knowledge of God, and the place of humanity before God. As seen in the first chapter, the *indoctus*, the *illitteratus*, and the *laicus* are all potentially facets of the negatively marked pole of the first opposition, that between learned and unlearned. The immaturity that is emphasized in Rupert's use of the *adulescentula*, however, sooner recalls his own repeated citation of Paul's words from first Corinthians on *perfecta* and *imperfecta cognitio*, knowledge of God gained face to face as opposed to that available in this life, which is received *per speculum in enigmate*, "through a glass in a dark manner."[124] Paul equated perfect (and unattainable) knowledge with the man, *vir*, and imperfect knowledge with the child, *parvulus*.[125] Finally, as I have argued here, Rupert identifies most strongly not solely with the *adulescentula*'s

122 Trans. slightly modified from Astell, *Song of Songs*, p. 69.

123 Astell, *Song of Songs*, pp. 69–70.

124 Rupert cites 1 Corinthians 13:9–12 seven times in all, five times in the fifth book alone, which recounts Mary's awakening as exegete.

125 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child" (1 Corinthians 13:9–11).

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immaturity but also with her gender; the figure perfectly accomplishes the jump from Paul's opposition to that between man and woman, or between Rupert and Mary. This last opposition takes the duality beyond the realms of learning and social status and into an ontological field in which the woman's position corresponds to the flesh as opposed to the spirit and to the body as opposed to the mind.

All three of these metaphorical fields meet in the idea of bodily vehicles of knowledge. The woman who is flesh is seen as limited to "non-cognitive" or "non-intellectual" ways of knowing; she must learn through the body, identified with images and personal experience, pictures and narrative. The *laicus* and *illitteratus* likewise learn through "the eyes and ears," that is, by example, through pictures and others' oral explanations, means that are "sensory" as opposed to the intellectual means of the literate and cleric. Paul's *speculum* was the favourite medieval image for knowledge gained through the natural, visible world and became the characteristic justification for bestiaries and other compendia of natural lore as well as justifying the place of pictures in these and other works.[126] That is, seen through the question of reading, of man's ability to know the divine, these three oppositions always potentially overlap, a fact that affords the opportunity to mix and match their terms wherever a common denominator is at stake. This is the possibility of which Rupert avails himself so as to equate Mary's role in the Incarnation with his own vocation to read scripture: once both are understood as ways of "knowing the Word," slippage and fusion can occur between other potential identities on the same side of the different oppositions. The same possibility invites the paradoxical identification of Hildegard as *laica et illiterata*: as a woman, she cannot be *clericus*. But Hildegard's fate also exhibits the double jeopardy in the woman's position: while the *illitteratus* or the *indoctus* might represent a stage of individual development, potentially to be surpassed, the woman's relationship to the man's knowledge was not one of lack of training but rather of incapacity; her position depends not on education but on her state of being.

What we encounter in Rupert's use of the *adulescentula* as a figure through which to engage in *imitatio* of Mary's experience—and in the embodiment of this same figure in Hildegard, to be examined shortly—is the point at which the articulation of reading and gnosis, or a redefinition of the relationship between reading subject and Word, meets and becomes co-generative with a new theology of the body and the flesh that, as Caroline Bynum's work has amply demonstrated, formed the foundation of late-medieval religiosity and shaped the development of women's spirituality, in particular as visionary and mystical experience.[127] Bynum's work focuses on an opportunity discovered in the extension of the opposition between man and woman as spirit and flesh to that between God and humanity. The Incarnation itself demonstrated that God could dispense neither with woman nor with flesh to assume human form and redeem humanity, and the twelfth century—Bynum locates the beginnings of these developments in the writings of

126 On the use of the passage to justify new media in instruction see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 377–83 and 424–25; and Wenzel, *Spiegelungen*, esp. pp. 64–96.

127 See the essays collected in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; and Bynum, *Holy Feast*.

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Bernard of Clairvaux and other Cistercians among men, and in Hildegard's and Elisabeth's writing among women—witnessed the discovery of this idea as a way of exploring the human aspect of Christ. Christ's flesh, his woman-self, was humanity's way of knowing him. Thus, men, to identify with their own redemption, identified with the feminine as a reversal of their symbolic selves as man, spirit, and intellect. As Bynum puts it, "the image of both sinful and saved humanity is the image of woman."[128] Both woman and flesh undergo a revaluation and even a value inversion as the possible and indispensable medium of divine will: just as God required the vessel of woman's, Mary's, body to take human form; so humanity as God's flesh is afforded the possibility of epiphany in the body. But woman is body and thus cannot know the Spirit except through this exemption, through the flesh. Woman thus becomes a symbol of an imperative integration of the life of the flesh into that of the spirit, for which the authority is found in the Incarnation and the model is Mary's experience. In Rupert's use of a feminine persona, *Maria imperfecta*, as double of his own reading identity and a model offered readers and auditors of his text, the same understanding redeems the faculties of sensory knowing along with the corporeal vehicles of knowledge. Mary is the body as woman, as image, as letter, as reader and as the flesh of Christ; all collapse into one moment of perfect knowing that her life represents.

Reading as the Bride Embodied: Hildegard and Her "Publicists"

Hildegard's awakening as *prophetissa* is the same awakening Rupert sees revealed in Mary's life as the Bride of the Word. As she stated repeatedly, her gift was one of reading, of knowledge of the full meaning of scripture: "I know then by the book the interior meaning of the explication of the Psalter, the Gospels and other scriptures, which is demonstrated to me through this vision that touches me in heart and soul like a burning flame, teaching me the depths of meaning."[129] The *paupercula feminea forma* who penetrates to the deepest meaning of scripture "sine ulla humana doctrina" or "absque doctrina ullius hominis" is a reading identity that follows precisely in the footsteps Rupert set out before her.[130] With the circumlocution of her sex, Hildegard identifies her prophetic persona with the female principle as manifestation of the divine (as the Spirit put it for Rupert: "Woman conceived God in her soul, Christ in her body"), and her claim to have no experience of human learning is a claim to educational virginity that, from the position of bodily identity with the female that distinguishes her from Rupert, does not renounce the learned male but rather states the facts of her biography: "sicut indocta mulier me docuerat."[131] The equivalence between the three positions, Mary's, Rupert's, and Hildegard's, only eludes modern sensibility because the common denominator

128 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 265; see also pp. 267–68. The point is also emphasized by Astell, *Song of Songs*, pp. 6–7.

129 *Epistolarium*, 1, p. 4; see also *Scivias*, 1, p. 4. For the *vita*, see above, p. 38.

130 *Vita Hildegardis*, 2.2, p. 128 (s.a. p. 38, above).

131 *Vita Hildegardis*, 2.2, p. 128.

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between them, reading, has shrunk in the succeeding millennium from its scope as a metaphor for all human knowledge of the divine to the mere decoding of written signs and interpretation of texts.

The Incarnation is the mystical centre and eternal wellspring of Hildegard's theology.[132] Mary's role as model and originator of her ability to know and bear the Word is nonetheless somewhat elusive in her works, but this is only because it is suffused into her creative process and pervades her complex imagery in ways that are not demonstrative but experiential. There are as yet few studies that attempt to grasp Hildegard's oeuvre through the interrelationship of music, text, image, and voice that made up the experience at which all her creative production aims. In her attempt to relate these different dimensions as they are found in the *Scivias* and the *Ordo virtutum*—a work that, as a fully staged drama, realizes the otherwise implicit dimension of performance—Margot Fassler has shown how this process of suffusion of a central, generative image—in this case, that of the Tree of Jesse as a figure of the Incarnation—could, for those who both performed and witnessed these texts in their monastic lives, accomplish a transformational experience in which they "lived" the truth of the mystery that the image expressed.[133] In this specific sense, Hildegard recreated the experience of Marian *imitatio* as the formative centre of the spiritual identity of her community and as an experience of presence in performance. This latter conclusion only appears to go against the grain of the view that Hildegard was little concerned with Mary's person, with the events of her life as a focus for devotion. As Barbara Newman observes, Hildegard's disregard for the human biography of Mary was only a way of affirming the supreme and all-encompassing importance of her transformative act: the Incarnation.[134] Bynum argues that this focus is the way to grasp the importance of Mary not only to Hildegard but to medieval women's spirituality generally.[135] And, indeed, Rupert's understanding of Mary's significance not only fertilized Hildegard's imagination but also became, through the *Speculum virginum*, fundamental to a universal model of women's monastic, reading lives.

These larger developments are examined further in the next chapter. My concern in the remainder of this one is to show first how Hildegard communicated her creative activity as a reincarnation of Mary's and then how readily the same idea was taken up by her admirers and even explicitly referred to the model to which it was indebted, Rupert's awakening as exegete through Mary's experience.

As suggested above, Hildegard suffuses the identity between her prophetic persona and Mary's bearing of the Word into the imagery of her texts. Thus, one of the most telling testimonies to this identification occurs embedded in a threefold "annunciation" from God at the beginning of the third part of *Scivias*. In the first instance, God, speaking through a male figure seated on a throne, renews his command that she "Write what

132 Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 156–95 and passim.

133 Fassler, "Composer," p. 161 and passim; s.a. Holsinger, *Music*, pp. 87–136.

134 Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 159–60; 187–88.

135 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 269.

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you see and hear." Hildegard, characteristically, humbly protests her unworthiness, and pleads that he first

> grant me the understanding that will enable me to give these mystical things recountable form [*ennarabiliter proferre*] … strengthen me in the dawn light of your justice, in which your Son became manifest, and show me in what way I can and how I should bring forth [*proferre*] the divine plan that was concluded in eternal wisdom, how you wanted that same Son to be incarnated. … You determined before all Creation in your simplicity and in the fire of the Holy Spirit that your Son should rise up like a radiant sun in the morning of virginity and truly, for the sake of humanity, take on the garment of humanity and human form.[136]

That is, the key to fulfilling her commission is a complete knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, an ability to bring forth mystical truth in narrative form. The "dawn light" that Hildegard evokes is a characteristic image in her work for Mary at the moment of the conception and as the feminine principle that gave birth to the son; it is no less, however, an image of the bride from the Song of Songs.[137] The dawn light runs through this "annunciation" as a leitmotif that accomplishes the identification—as seen through the eyes of God—of Hildegard with Mary. The second iteration, which follows immediately the reply just given, offers a rare acknowledgement of the scriptural archetype of the image: "Et iterum audivi eum dicentem mihi: 'O quam pulchri sunt oculi tui in divina narratione, dum ibi surgit aurora in divino consilio!' " (And I heard him speak to me again: "O how beautiful your eyes are when you recount things divine and the dawn light arises there in the divine plan!")[138] The words collate language from several verses of the Song of Songs—4:14, 2:1, and 6:9—such that Hildegard, Mary, and the bride become one in a visual moment extolled by the voice, which, thus inspired, descends and fills Hildegard with its light as it once filled Mary in her conception of the Word. Hildegard does not generally display a preference for citation from the Song of Songs to describe her place before God, but she is, all the more so, the bride of God even as Mary was; the language that describes the bride's experience is fused with the creative process that brings forth her work.

Hildegard then responds with a renewed and more extended expression of her unworthiness, to which the voice, concluding the discussion, commands,

> Speak now, as you have been taught. It is because you are nothing but ashes that I want you to speak. Speak the revelation of the Bread that is the son of God. … He himself begins to stir as sanctity in the human person before it fully awakens within her. For this reason

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136 "… ut mihi des intellectum, quatenus possim ennarrabiliter proferre haec mystica … confirma me in aurora iustitiae, in qua manifestatus est Filius tuus, et da mihi quomodo possim et qualiter debeam proferre divinum consilium quod in antiquo consilio ordinatum est, quomodo eundem Filium tuum voluisti incarnari … hoc volens ante omnem creaturam in simplicitate tua et in igne columbae scilicet Spiritus sancti, ut idem Filius tuus quasi splendida solis forma mirabiliter surgens in incipiente capite virginitatis veraciter indueretur humanitate sumpta hominis forma propter hominem" (*Scivias* 3.1, p. 329).

137 Gössmann, *Verkündigung*, p. 114; Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 166; Fassler, "Composer," p. 166.

138 *Scivias*, 3.1, p. 329.

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> God the magnificent, the glorious and incomprehensible gave to man a great instrument (*magnum instrumentum*), sending His Son into the chaste purity of virginity.[139]

Hildegard is to understand the growth of her mission within her and her ability to fulfil it as a parallel to God's election of another humble virgin and her awakening to the life contained in her womb. Mary's virginity and humble state served to conceal the secret within her "when in great silence the son of God came into the dawn light, that is, into the humble girl."[140] Thus the voice gets the last word in the argument and with it reminds Hildegard of the parallel between her self-description and that of the virgin: "The Virgin herself lived in a poor and humble state, because divine majesty wished to find her so. Now write as follows about the true recognition of the Creator's beneficence!"[141]

Mary, too, hesitated in her humility to acknowledge herself as the vessel of God's "eternal plan." This exchange between another angelic voice and a new virgin turns around forcing her to recognize the very grounds for her reluctance as identical to those that distinguished Mary in God's eyes to perform a task that is the archetype of her own. The same fundamental identification underlies Hildegard's descriptions of herself and her task in others of her works, although this passage illustrates with unusual eloquence the way she preferred to express it: not as *dictum* but as *factum*, not as an argument but as an experience embedded in vision, in images that are the rhetoric of her audio-visual gnosis.[142]

Hildegard's admirers and biographers were more direct in their statement of her reading archetype. The testimony of her correspondents shows, in the words of John Van Engen, that "An untaught or nearly illiterate woman, able to draw beneficial communications from the depths of the divine hiddenness, … such a person was explainable only as a living intimate of the divine spouse, a dwelling place of the Spirit."[143] This idea was frequently extolled in language calqued or quoted from the Song of Songs, and not infrequently in direct comparison to Mary. But the most emphatic affirmation comes from one who knew her well and admired her above all, Guibert of Gembloux.

With his first letter to Hildegard, Guibert describes Hildegard's "extraordinary and unheard of gifts" from the Holy Spirit in terms that make Hildegard fulfil for her

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139 " 'Nunc dic ut docta es. Volo ut dicas, quamvis cinis sis. Dic revelationem panis qui Filius Dei est. … Ipse initium suscitationis sanctitatis in homine exsistens, antequam in illo exsuscitetur. Unde etiam magnificus et gloriosus ac incomprehensibilis Deus dedit magnum instrumentum, mittens eundem Filium suum in pudicitiam virginitatis' " (*Scivias*, 3.1, p. 330).

140 "… quando Filius Dei in magno silentio venit in auroram, videlicet in humilem puellam" (*Scivias*, 3.1, p. 330).

141 "Ipsa enim Virgo erat in pauperculis rebus, quia divina maiestas eam ita invenire voluit. Nunc scribe de vera agnitione creatoris in bonitate ipsius sic" (*Scivias* 3.1, p. 330).

142 Further instances are found in *Liber vitae meritorum*, p. 291, and *Liber divinorum operum*, p. 462. Holsinger, *Music*, pp. 124–25, sees the Virgin's womb as the generative centre of Hildegard's entire creative oeuvre, likewise encompassing its communal performance, which "brings women together in the *clausurum ventris*—the 'cloister of the womb' of the Virgin, … that physically constitutes their institution and contains their musical lives." See also Ferrante, "Hildegard," pp. 104, 117.

143 Van Engen, "Letters," p. 415.

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contemporaries the role Rupert gives to Mary. Her experience as the bride makes her the fountain of all scripture. She is "like a pure vessel" into which the Spirit pours its gifts, thus, "Truly, 'thy breasts are better than wine' to us, your fragrance better than the 'best ointment' (Cant. 1:1–2)."[144] Guibert continues extolling Hildegard's experience in words from the Song of Songs for two paragraphs. In the second, he addresses her as *mater sancta*, and she becomes, again like Rupert's Mary, the origin of all church doctrine as the *fons hortorum*, from whose womb flow the "rivers of living water." "Truly," he concludes in words from the *Ave Maria*, "save for her through whose Son we attain our salvation, your grace is unique among women," and like Mary, she exhibits the reversal of the failing of her sex in Eve: "For through the same sex by which death entered the world, life has been restored—through His mother. And the same hand that served us the deadly cup of perdition has now poured out for us the antidote of recovery through your salvific teaching."[145] In a gesture not atypical of his later letters, Guibert offers devotion to Hildegard as it is offered to Mary:

> Hail, therefore, lady full of grace, after Mary, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women [cf. Luke 1:28] and blessed the speech of your mouth, which conveys the secrets of invisible things to men, and couples the heavenly to the earthly, and joins the divine to the human. Believing this with our whole heart, we confess with our mouth that you are the fountain of gardens, the well of living water that flows from Libanus [cf. Cant. 4:15].[146]

"The speech of [Hildegard's] mouth" is one with the fruit of Mary's womb, which it displaces in Mary's prayer, and lest one not give this parallel its full force, Guibert elaborates that Hildegard, too, "joins the divine to the human." Once again the *fons hortorum* completes the equation. Hildegard is quite simply Mary's identity as *magistra magistrorum* and *secretarium omnium Scripturarum sanctarum* embodied here and now in the teaching of a living woman.

Whether Guibert's rhetoric is inspired by Rupert's text or another intermediary, it establishes that, by the 1170s, the idea that Mary's fulfilment of the prophetic images of the Song of Songs is an act of reading, a kind of living exegesis that makes her the origin of all scripture, can serve as a way of understanding a woman's reading without learning. Hildegard's biographer, Theoderic, confirms this point in a way that makes the direct connection to Rupert as a model all but unmistakable.[147]

The key passages to this identification occur exactly where one would expect them, at the beginning of the *vita*'s second book, where Theoderic is concerned to establish Hildegard's visionary authority. Having first solicited awe and disbelief over her accomplishments ("Quis vero non miretur …") he offers the following explanation:

> Que omnia quia ei clavis David aperuit, "qui aperit et nemo claudit, claudit et nemo aperit," gratulari merito et cantare anime sue licuit, quod eam "rex in cellaria sua introduxerit," ut "inebriaretur ab ubertate domus" sue et *potaretur torrente voluptatis sue* [cf. Psalm 35:9];

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144 *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:16–17.

145 *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:17.

146 *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:44.

147 Argued in detail in Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 278–91.

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> unde et ipsa, sicut scriptum est, a timore Domini concipiens pareret et spiritum salutis super terram faceret.[148]
>
> (Because all this had been opened to her by David's key, the key that "opens and no one closes, closes and no one opens" [Revelations 3:7], her soul could rightfully rejoice and sing that she "had been lead into the king's wine cellar" [Canticles 1:3], so that she might be "inebriated of the abundance of his house" and made drunk by the torrent of his desire [cf. Psalm 35:9], so that she, too, as it is written, conceiving from fear of the Lord might give birth and bring forth the spirit of salvation on earth.)

When Theoderic uses the bride's experience to explain Hildegard's prophetic gift, he, like Guibert, concentrates on the image of her "drinking" knowledge of scripture. Rupert used the image of Canticles 1:3, *introduxit me rex in cellaria sua*, to describe how Elisabeth, "in whose womb the Spirit had also been at work," is introduced after Mary into the mysteries of scripture.[149] In Theoderic's description of Hildegard, the same equation between knowledge of scripture and the conception and bearing of a child applies, but with reversed significance: Hildegard's manifest knowledge of scripture *shows that* she drank of the "torrent of God's desire/pleasure/semen," just as Mary did; for good measure, Theoderic also cites Canticles 1:3, in effect combining the moments in which, for Rupert, Mary and Elisabeth become *prophetissae*.

Theoderic's account presents a battery of such textual allusions to Rupert's prophetic awakening.[150] A connection between the two had been noted before, though not fully examined or appreciated; moreover, some have dismissed it as an invention of Theoderic's that is somehow at odds with Hildegard's own.[151] Our interest lies no less in Theoderic's contribution than Hildegard's, but there is no need to postulate any crucial difference between them. On the contrary: two scholars have shown that Hildegard's work betrays extensive knowledge of Rupert's, and the connection is nowhere clearer than in Hildegard's concept of and justification for her own position as *prophetissa*.[152] Like Rupert, she places herself in this regard directly in Mary's footsteps. Theoderic's demonstration serves only to set the construction of Hildegard's prophetic authority explicitly into the mould from which it was first formed: that of Rupert's *adulescentula* from his commentary on the Song of Songs.

Rupert had revolutionized exegesis by interpolating his own "autobiography"—his visionary experience—as the fulfilment of the biblical text, in effect as its gloss. Theoderic's account is constructed explicitly to accomplish the same; he announces the interpolation of one of Hildegard's visions into the text as proof of "how fittingly" the

148 *Vita Hildegardis* 2.1, pp. 118–20, emphasis added.

149 *CCC*, pp. 15–16.

150 Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 283–89.

151 Klaes, "Einleitung," *Vita sanctae Hildegardis*, pp. 61–63; Newman, "Hildegard," pp. 16–34, esp. 25–27.

152 Kerby-Fulton, "Prophet and Reformer," pp. 70–90; Meier, "Autorschaft," pp. 232–44, 261–62, 265; Meier, "Befreiung," 282, 288–89.

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same biblical verse, Canticles 5:4, "can be applied to her."[153] What is inserted begins as a vision but soon gives way instead to Hildegard's account of her youth and education—that is, to autobiography. In this way, Theoderic would seem to collapse Rupert's account from his Song commentary with the well-known "transfiguration" of the same in his Matthew commentary, completed only slightly later.[154] There Rupert inserted an autobiographical narrative in which the same visions reported for the *adulescentula* are claimed directly, rather than through the biblical *dramatis persona*, as his own.[155] Theoderic frames the insertion of Hildegard's autobiographical "vision" with the two halves of the biblical passage (Canticles 5:4 and 5:5) that defines the visionary awakening in Rupert's original version, the Song commentary.[156] That is, in Hildegard's case, the identity of Rupert's *adulescentula* is simply her own, or she is *quadam adulescentula* whose experience serves to gloss the biblical text in our time. She embodies an identification that, for Rupert as the receiving male, was accomplished through gender reversal. The "awakening" of the bride and opening to her beloved (Canticles 5:5–6) is Hildegard's awakening to her vocation to preach and write, just as it had been for Rupert and Mary before her.[157]

This gesture provides the logical and suitable completion of an identity Hildegard had discovered and assimilated to her own voice decades earlier.[158] Theoderic's treatment only foregrounds the way this identity is embedded in the history of exegesis and the images of the Song of Songs; moreover, he again inflects the account such that Hildegard appears not merely as *indocta* but rather as the *illitterata* limited to her vernacular.[159] His exposition of her prophetic authority operates to force recognition of her visionary gifts as a re-embodiment of Mary's reading *nostra aetate* in a psalter-literate woman.

The Marian devotion, or Marian epistemology, of Rupert and Hildegard was focused on the Incarnation as a gnostic event, the moment when human flesh apprehended and revealed the Word, when divinity became knowable and accessible as matter, as body. Rupert's *De incarnatione Domini* revealed this experience as one that was knowable and readable in the Song of Songs as the images of the bride's experience. Mary's reading revealed divinity in the body, redeemed the body as it redeemed the sex of Eve, even as it revealed divinity in this most carnal and sensual, this most "female" of biblical texts. *Imitatio Mariae* was, for Rupert as for Hildegard, identification with the *sponsa et mater*, a way of reading and of re-experiencing the gnostic event in which *sponsa* becomes *mater*.

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153 *Vita Hildegardis* 2.2, pp. 120–22: "Congruum autem videtur, ut hoc in loco scripta visionum eius aliqua inseramus, et ex his, quam convenienter sententia illa de Canticis: 'Dilectus meus misit manum suam per foramen, et venter meus intremuit ad tactum eius' sibi adaptari queat, videamus."

154 The term is Rupert's own in *De gloria*, p. 395.

155 Powell, "Authorial Identity," pp. 281–87.

156 *Vita Hildegardis* 2.2, pp. 120–22; 130.

157 *Vita Hildegardis*, 2.3, p. 130.

158 As argued in Powell, "Authorial Identity," passim.

159 *Vita Hildegardis* 2.1, p. 120; see the remarks in Klaes, "Einleitung," p. 60.

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This same idea reveals where Rupert's text and the Marian reading of the Song of Songs contained possibilities to transform *lectio* that distinguish them from other contemporary and later understandings of this central monastic reading experience. As Ann Astell lays out, to cast the act of reading in feminized terms became the hallmark of twelfth-century commentary on the Song of Songs. Whether Marian or not, whether Benedictine, Cistercian, or Victorine, "The exegetes all encourage their auditors to identify their 'bridal self' with the Bride, using the feminine figura as a way of evoking, expressing, and directing the emotional domain within themselves."[160] But Rupert's *adulescentula* is not an alter ego of the reading self through which first to identify with and then to transcend the carnal images of human experience. She is the reading soul's initiation into Mary's experience of the Word, an experience itself so intimate—that is, *so physical*—that it can never be surpassed. Its very carnality is its authenticity and its objective.[161]

Rupert, then, put a woman on both sides of the epistemological mirror. The act of reading the Song is one that seeks fusion with this female experience of the Word, the body as woman reads the life of the woman as bride; "she" is the reader and what is read, her experience is letter and gloss, starting point and objective. Only in this fusion, which he expressed as startlingly physical and sensual, could he claim the privilege of an alternative gnosis that bypassed the learned tradition of *sacra pagina* and that Mary's experience claimed as female (*hoc ego experta sum*). Rupert thus fully anticipated "the descent of the divine into the weaker sex," and revealed, in effect, the exegetical master key to a new domain of women's religious experience.

As I indicated in the last chapter, the packaging of Hildegard's identity documents with surprising fullness the ideas that accrued to the image of the woman-as-reader in the twelfth century. Mary's reading has its place at the centre of this complex image, as one of the varying facets of one and the same mirror. But one more aspect of the fate of Hildegard's gnosis remains to be emphasized before this picture is complete. It is now apparent that Hildegard, in adopting her identity as a poor, unlearned female form, was donning a mask devised by Rupert. For her, however, the same must have seemed to reveal her true identity as *prophetissa*. That is, just as she never claimed to be illiterate, but only to have acquired full knowledge of scripture without learning, so she did not foreground her sex as such, but only as a manifestation of identity with Mary's gnosis. She was, first and foremost, *homo* and, as such, knew God as *feminea forma*. But for her contemporaries, admirers and "publicists," another equation was only too clear, the one inherent in the model she adopted.

Rupert's reading begins and ends in the female, and for others, Hildegard manifested this reading in her being, that is, she reads as Mary did, *because* she is a woman, and woman's reading proceeds without learning, *because* she is flesh; it is authenticated, as

160 Astell, *Song of Songs*, p. 10.

161 Astell makes clear in her discussion of other exegetes that the "feminine figura" is transcended in the rhetorical structure of the reading process. See, for example, the analysis of Bernard of Clairvaux in Astell, *Song of Songs*, pp. 73–77 and 89–104, esp. p. 94.

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we saw in the last chapter, by the incapacity, or "illiteracy" that is deemed a consequence of woman's nature. This is where Theoderic's, and Guibert's representations of Hildegard diverge from her own, but in so doing they only restore the underlying assumptions of the model on which she relied. Theoderic's exposition of Hildegard's prophetic authority is argumentative where her own was experiential; it substitutes the rhetoric of biblical exegesis for her complex use of imagery. Thus its rhetorical thrust lies in *demonstrating* that Hildegard is the embodied bride; the *sponsa et mater* lives and speaks among us, and as such she can only be a woman. Guibert's praise of Hildegard as "the modern-day Mary" reveals the same shift: Hildegard's gift is a special privilege granted her sex. This emerges in the passages quoted above when he sees Hildegard, like Mary, as the representative of "the same sex by which death entered the world," the sex of Eve, and, equally, in the way her sex invites him to refer the significance of the images from the Song to the female body. The breasts that "are sweeter than wine" become, in his treatment, her own, and the image expresses her importance to "us" as that of a mother to her offspring. In effect, a male church (clerical authority) is nursed from the breasts of a lowly woman's special intimacy with God.[162] Like Mary, she was God's "chosen vessel, dear to God, pleasing to angels, indispensable to men," and, as Guibert adds, no less beloved by the clergy, "For they understand that the female sex has been divinely honoured through the sacred merits of your excellence, and they see your glory, the glory of a woman given new life by the Father, full of grace and truth."[163]

Guibert thus recognized in Hildegard the "special privilege among the women of our time" that was chronicled for the year 1159 by the author of the Annals of Pöhlde, one granted the weaker sex as the embodiment of human incapacity before God.[164] This same, however, clarifies how Hildegard stood before the church: not as *homo* before God but as a woman before the clergy, one who "teaches many through her sound doctrine, pouring forth abundantly from her two breasts," but who also "bears in mind her sex, her appropriate condition, and especially the Apostle's … prohibition" against women teaching in church (cf. 1 Timothy 2:12).[165]

Rupert's text thus potentially articulated a woman's *lectio*, and when completed by a woman, this *lectio* was no self-renunciation, not a reversal of a male identity, but an identification with herself as woman, as the weakness, humility, and ignorance—an emptiness longing to be filled—that Mary's reading represents. Rupert's circumvention of learned tradition, applied to Hildegard's case, is understood as factual incapacity, and the reading identity of the *adulescentula* becomes biography as the *laica et illiterata*. Women, Hildegard and Elisabeth and many others after them, now read through their own physiological being and sexually defined selves, as vessels capable of conceiving and

162 *Epistolae* xvi, *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:16–17.

163 *Epistolae* xxii, *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:43–45.

164 *Epistolae*, xviii, *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:27. The same was a favourite argument of Abelard's in his letters to Heloise see pp. 146, 189–90, below, and Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 270–72.

165 *Epistolae*, xviii, *Letters of Hildegard*, 2:31.

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bearing the Word. Similarly, women's physiological being is a living symbol of a bodily gnosis. The profound implications of this moment for the development of women's spirituality, mysticism, and late-medieval devotion have been amply demonstrated in the work of Caroline Bynum. But the superstructure that accumulates over such historical moments generally obscures from view the way they were perceived in their own time. In the twelfth-century context, what we have observed is a redefinition of the reading subject that gives reading form to a latent possibility of Christian gnosis. Its impact in its own time is to be sought, accordingly, in a new poetics of reading and gnosis that takes the woman as its focal, receptive point, and from there explores the relationship of alternative media—images, narrative, performance, and the vernacular as varying facets of body and presence—to the enlarged, or recast, epistemological landscape.

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Chapter 3

CONSTRUCTING THE WOMAN'S MIRROR

The *Speculum virginum*

"Audivi et vidi": Hildegard's tirelessly reiterated description of her visionary illumination emerged in the last two chapters as, on the one hand, the announcement of a reading that proceeds without training in letters and writing and, on the other, as the moment in which the unlearned woman re-embodies Mary's experience as *sponsa* of the Word. To experience the meaning of scripture unlocked, unmediated and at once, was to relive Mary's original reading of the Song of Songs as Rupert of Deutz had read the same in her wake. But Hildegard's emphasis on the audio-visual nature of the message sooner recalls the other epithalamic song of monastic spirituality, Psalm 44. "Audi filia et vide" (Psalm 44:11), begins the psalmist's instruction and praise of the bride as she is led to meet the king at the heavenly wedding. Within the same two decades that separate Hildegard's prophetic awakening from Rupert's *De incarnatione Domini*, sometime between 1125 and 1141, that is, the same passage was chosen to shape a programmatic introduction to women's instruction in scripture in the *Speculum virginum*.[1] The work's original introduction, now found at the beginning of the third of twelve parts, assimilates the psalmist's song to the bride to its own call to instruction:

> *Audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam et obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui. Et concupiscet rex decorem tuum*. Audi sanctae ecclesiae filia, *uni viro Christo Iesu virgo casta desponsata* et consignata, audi sponsum tuum ad æterna dona te vocantem, vide premia premonstrantem, sequere precedentem.[2]
>
> (Hear, daughter, and see, and bend your ear, and forget your own people and the house of your father. So shall the king desire your beauty [Psalm 44:11-12]. Hear, daughter of holy church, chaste virgin betrothed and promised in everlasting fidelity to Jesus Christ [cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2], hear your bridegroom calling you to eternal gifts, see the rewards he shows you beforehand, so that you follow him who leads.)

The earliest and best manuscripts of the *Speculum virginum* come from important monastic centres along the middle Rhine within Hildegard's and Rupert's greater vicinity.[3] By the late twelfth century, if not before, the oldest, known as manuscript *L* (ca. 1140), belonged to one "Hugo magister" of the Cistercian abbey at Eberbach—a mere day's walk up the Rhine from Eibingen, where Hildegard re-established her own community after leaving the Rupertsberg.[4] Another, manuscript *K*, was written ca.

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1 Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," pp. 111–35.

2 *Speculum virginum*, p. 58; cited hereafter as *SV*. Translations are my own, assisted by the German in the Fontes christiani edition and the selections found in Mews, *Listen Daughter*, pp. 269–96.

3 For a detailed account of the institutional history of women's communities in the region, see Felten, "Frauenklöster," pp. 189–300.

4 London, British Library MS Arundel 44; see Palmer, *Zisterzienser*, pp. 72–80 and 144–47.

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1150 at the Benedictine abbey Maria Laach for use in the Augustinian congregation of Springiersbach, near Koblenz.[5] Whether Hildegard herself perused this work is far from certain; it appears very likely, however, that she was intimately familiar with its contents.[6] The entire project is conceived as if her extraordinary case were recast as a general method.

This "Mirror of Virgins," the first treatise since the patristic period to offer a comprehensive introduction to the female monastic life, does so on the assumption that women do not, and at least in the learned sense cannot, read. Its twelve parts with their accompanying pictures are presented as if the transcript of oral instruction between the *magister*, Peregrinus, and his female pupil, Theodora. The extant manuscripts—which are plentiful even from the first century of its existence[7]—appear to have been used in men's houses, leading to the conclusion that the text was a handbook and sourcebook for women's male instructors and spiritual mentors.[8] It thus offers an idealized portrayal of practice and a model for its own use. Within this ideal model the audience reads, as we shall see, in a way so fully compatible with Rupert's and then Hildegard's understanding of Mary's reading that it is best seen as the translation of the same into different media for a new audience: the monastic art of *lectio* is recast as pictures and oral instruction for the female religious. The injunction to hear and to see acquires tangible objects in the oral address and the pictures, but even more so in a method conceived as if a dialogic meditation on scripture presented through oral performance.[9]

Most likely composed and progressively adapted over a period reaching from ca. 1125 to ca. 1145, the *Speculum virginum* emerges in the middle of the most dramatic expansion and reform of the monastic life in the history of the Western church.[10] The Cistercian, the Premonstratensian, the Carthusian, and the Gilbertine orders all originated between the end of the eleventh and the middle of the twelfth centuries. The Cistercian order alone, founded in 1098, had expanded by 1153 to well over 300 houses.[11] The total number of monastic houses in some regions probably increased by a factor of ten.[12] Women

5 Cologne, Historisches Archiv W 276a, which also served as exemplar for the third extant twelfth-century copy, Rome, Vatican Library, Cod. Pal. lat. 565 (MS *V*); see Cohen-Mushlin, *Medieval Scriptorium*, pp. 116–19; and Seyfarth, introduction to *SV*, pp. 45*–46*, 61*–62*. The Springiersbach reform was heavily engaged in the foundation and care of women's houses, as discussed in Felten, "Frauenklöster," pp. 257–63.

6 Also suggested in Fassler, "Composer," pp. 157–59.

7 Ten manuscripts before the mid thirteenth century, an eleventh contains an excerpt.

8 Bernards, *Speculum virginum*, p. 12; Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," p. 113; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 107–18.

9 Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics."

10 Seyfarth's dating (introduction to *SV*, pp. 32*–37*) "bald nach 1140," reflects little more than the date assigned MS *L.* Cf. Jónsson, *Miroir*, pp. 171–74, esp. 172; and Powell, "Picture Program," p. 128n18.

11 Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, p. 13.

12 Constable, *Reformation*, p. 47. For estimates of the numbers of men and women concerned, as well as the size of communities, see Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 88–92.

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loomed very large in this expansion, both in numbers and in substance, as it was only in this period that a monastic life under the Benedictine rule—one parallel in practice and equivalent in profession to that of monks—was broadly established and given clear institutional form.[13] Two of the new reformed orders, the Premonstratensian and the Gilbertine, were founded expressly as double orders, with men and women living under the same rule and jurisdiction. Their foundation was preceded by a concerted movement within the Hirsau Benedictine reform in southern Germany to integrate women into the order in double monasteries; the Augustinian canons likewise founded numerous double houses or entered into looser associations with women's communities for which they provided pastoral care.[14] Elsewhere, entire female monastic congregations sprang directly from the activity of reform-minded thinkers: the charismatic preacher Robert of Arbrissel founded the abbey of Fontevraud to house his female following in 1101; by his death in 1116 it had fifteen daughter houses scattered across western France; by 1149 the number had grown to nearly fifty.[15] When the all-but-outcast Peter Abelard assumed the burden of housing Heloise and her sisters in the 1130s—themselves previously disowned by the Benedictines at Argenteuil—at his oratory of the Paraclete, the modest foundation grew to comprise six daughter houses by 1163.[16] Reliable figures recently compiled for England and France show a fourfold expansion in the number of women's communities between 1080 and 1170, from around 100 to over 400.[17] Similar expansion has long been acknowledged in Germany.[18]

The dramatic increase in the numbers of women in the monastic life placed the church before the enormous challenge of providing for their pastoral care, for the performance of the mass, preaching and confession, and religious instruction. The urgent need for more priests, canons, and monks to assume these duties is palpable in many sources, as are the disputes that often arose over the legitimacy of the intervention, over the challenge it presented to monastic vows of seclusion and chastity, and, most often, over the assignment of responsibilities.[19] Evidence of positive engagement is no

13 Bertelsmeier-Kierst, "Bräute Christi," pp. 1–7; the situation should not, however, be over-simplified, as emphasized in Felten, "Frauenklöster," pp. 189–95. A useful overview of female religious houses in the earlier period is Gerchow, "Klöster und Stifte," pp. 156–62; also Delarun, "Monachisme," pp. 1–20.

14 Visually demonstrated by the map in *Krone und Schleier*, p. 309. See also Hotchin, "Female Religious Life," pp. 59–83.

15 Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, p. 62; see also Felten, "Verbandsbildung," pp. 306–21.

16 McLaughlin, "Heloise the Abbess," pp. 8–9; and Felten, "Verbandsbildung," pp. 287–301, esp. 299.

17 Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, pp. 11–12.

18 For Benedictine and Augustinian foundations in the period 1050 to 1200 the current state of research is displayed on the map in *Krone und Schleier*, p. 309. Bernards, *Speculum virginum*, p. 1, estimated the number of women's monasteries in Germany at seventy in 900, 150 in 1100, and 500 by 1250; Bertelsmeier-Kierst, "Bräute Chisti," p. 7, counts 220 Cistercian houses for women in Germany by the mid thirteenth century, making them far more numerous than those for men.

19 These duties would be formally institutionalized as the *cura monialium* in the course of the thirteenth century, primarily among the Dominican and Franciscan orders. See Küsters, *Garten*, pp. 170–72; Schreiner, "Seelsorge," pp. 53–65; and Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, pp. 199–318.

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less striking, however. Beyond its celebrated story of frustrated love—and head-on confrontation with sexual desire in the religious life—the correspondence of Abelard and Heloise has been incisively interpreted as putting forward a carefully wrought argument justifying men's tutelage of the female religious and serious engagement of their specific practical, liturgical, and spiritual needs.[20] That Abelard filled this role for the Paraclete is amply evident: before his death in 1142, he left the nuns with a body of writings that "define the authority and the justification for their religious life," including the first medieval monastic rule for women since the sixth century and a considerable body of sermons and liturgical texts.[21] We also know that Abelard's literary efforts in this direction were avidly received elsewhere. The Guta-Sintram Codex from the Augustinian house of Marbach in Alsace, so named for the canoness and the priest who wrote and illuminated it, uses one of Abelard's sermons for the Paraclete as a *pièce justificative* for the relationship between male and female religious that the codex itself serves and in some ways embodies.[22] The codex contains texts for use in the canons' pastoral care of the women, while a necrology that was maintained for both communities by the women makes up the body of the book. A necrology serves monastic memory of and prayer for the dead; the same reciprocal benefit is what Abelard so avidly seeks for himself from the sisters of the Paraclete.

Such relationships are not atypical. The mutual benefit envisioned, the intensity with which it is pursued, and the willingness to experiment are features as deserving of appreciation in the pastoral writings of Abelard as they are essential to an appreciation of the *Speculum virginum* or the subject of the next chapter, the St Albans Psalter. The same are reflected in other literary and artistic examples of a new engagement of women's needs that cluster around the middle of the twelfth century: Irimbert of Admont's commentaries on the Old Testament, which originated in sermons and lessons for his monastic sisters,[23] a commentary on the Song of Songs written by Wolbero of St Pantaleon for the Benedictine nuns of Nonnenwerth—the first ever specifically addressed to women,[24] another commentary on the Song of Songs, the first in any vernacular, written for a women's community most likely within the Hirsau reform;[25] Aelred of Rievaulx's Rule for Female Recluses, with its intensely "visual" meditations on the life and Passion of Christ,[26] and a group of illustrated monastic prayer books that circulated in Germany and include possibly the

20 Von Moos, "Palatini quaestio," 124–58; also Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 255–86.

21 Abelard, *Epistres,* 7, pp. 107–47; and "Abelard's Rule," 241–92; Abelard's rule, however, seems never to have been put into effect, either at the Paraclete or elsewhere; see Haarländer, "Chancengleichheit," pp. 41–60, esp. 55, 60. For a complete list of Abelard's writings for the Paraclete and their modern editions, see Mews, *Peter Abelard*, pp. 36–41 and Appendix 2.

22 Strasbourg, Bibliothèque du Grand Séminaire, MS 37, dated 1154–58; see Griffiths, "Abelard's *cura monialium*," 57–88, esp. 79.

23 See Beach, "Claustration," pp. 57–75.

24 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 271–76.

25 Known as the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied*; study and historical context in Küsters, *Garten*.

26 See below, pp. 144–46, 154–56.

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earliest cycles of illustrations supporting such meditations.[27] These works represent the beginnings of a new literature dedicated to the articulation and development of women's spirituality, monastic and otherwise. A new literature, however, assumes instruction in how to read. Once again, this might or might not mean training in literacy; in any case, it means an introduction to the function and place of "what is written" in the monastic life. As a work that served equally well within different reformed orders and is found within little over a half a century of its completion in an area stretching from Bohemia to eastern France, the *Speculum virginum* claims a prominent place in the vanguard of new forms of interaction and collaboration between men and women in the religious life, and above all in women's introduction to the monastic culture of scripture, or *lectio*.

The relationship between the literacy skills of its female audience and the audio-visual method of instruction is articulated in the *Speculum virginum* in terms of a now familiar duality: privilege goes hand in hand with incapacity, and, as a rule, the latter serves apologetically to justify the former. As virgins the women are singled out for a "special" and elite experience of scripture; the nature of this experience is, however, determined by limitation: as women they are repeatedly identified as the weak sex (*sexus fragilior* or *infirmior*) and thus as bound to the senses and the body, which is seen as confining their understanding to the literal meaning of scripture.[28] The use of the pictures is justified in analogous terms, favouring the allusion to Gregory the Great's equation: what scripture offers to those who read, the picture offers to the illiterate.[29] This equation, while conventional, is applied with real intention, for it is indeed alternative access to the meaning of *scriptura*, and not simply written texts, that is truly at stake.

When Theodora asks at the end of part 5 for an explication of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Peregrinus replies:

> Quod ergo de hoc capitulo queris, sicut a patribus accepimus, pauca ponenda sunt, premissa tamen figura, ut consodales tuæ, si forte quod legunt non intelligunt, vel proficiant ex forma subposita, quia ignorantibus litteras ipsa pictura scriptura est et exemplo excitatur ad profectum, cui littera non auget intellectum.
>
> (*SV*, 5, p. 159)

> (What you seek on this passage of scripture, as we have received it from the fathers, will shortly be our subject. This picture precedes, however, so that your sisters in communal life may progress through a substituted figure if perhaps they do not understand what they read, for this picture is scripture for those who are ignorant of letters, and they may be incited to improvement by example for whom the letter does not aid understanding.)

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27 Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," p. 151.

28 See, for example, Theodora's naïvely "letter-bound" inquiries, *SV*, 4, p. 113; 6, p. 175; 9, p. 287; and Peregrinus's increasingly impatient responses to such inquiries towards the end of the work: *SV*, 12, p. 352; and 12, p. 357; also Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," p. 114; and Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 145–50. This representation of the inquiring pupil as a simpleton is exceptional within the genre tradition of the dialogue; it is also oddly mismatched with the knowledge and understanding of scripture Theodora displays elsewhere: Flanagan, "Medieval Dialogue," pp. 192–93.

29 See, in addition to the passage cited here, *SV*, 1, p. 39, and 10, p. 310; also Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 119–21 and 145–48.

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The picture is neither here nor anywhere else a substitute for the ensuing text—Peregrinus's oral explication of the "chapter" in question. The activity of reading refers instead to the encounter with sacred scripture, though possibly in a context other than (or in addition to) that of the ensuing conversation, and clearly occurs with or without understanding. It does not necessarily even imply functional literacy, for the "readers" can still be referred to as *ignorantes litteras*, and the letter is no aid to their comprehension. The picture is instead a substitute for a process of meditation on the scriptural passage, and in this sense Gregory's apology can serve as a literal and pointed description of its function. What the study of scripture offers to the literate, the picture offers those who do not read: a deeper understanding of God's word. What the *Speculum* means by "reading" is thus, again, the process through which the Word was apprehended and assimilated to life. For its female audience, this process is clearly seen to revolve around the oral presentation of the magister, a performance of the voice of Christ. In the final part, part 12, the *audi-et-vide* opening is paraphrased within the dialogue when Peregrinus says, "Hear, then, the voice of Christ, in His voice, the law of Christ, so that in Christ and through Christ you overcome what you once were." In this case Theodora can respond, "This voice let me hear through you, this law let me hear through you."[30]

The *Speculum virginum* constructs female monastic identity as a reading process, seeking to transform "an old woman into a new" by introducing its female audience into the specific relevance of scripture, in particular scriptural imagery, to their monastic lives. It thus presents us with the singular opportunity to observe the point at which reflection on a "female" way of knowing the Word meets the lives and needs of large numbers of monastic women—as church authority and an ancient ontology portrayed them. The casting of the audience as semi-literate auditors and viewers performs as a smokescreen for the major innovation that the work represents: it undertakes to transform the *lectio divina* into an audio-visual performance, an instructor's manipulation of voice, physical presence, and visual perception that is to deliver the Logos as a present, sensory experience.[31]

The *lectio divina* was the monk's experiential counterpart of the scholastic's exegesis; twelfth-century writers, above all, elaborated it as a progression from *lectio* through *meditatio* to *oratio* and, ultimately, *contemplatio*.[32] Rupert's commentary on the Song of Songs is in effect a performance of the *lectio divina* that is offered as authoritative and exemplary and thus displaces or fuses with exegesis. The way the analogy between reading process and exegesis is understood and implemented in the *Speculum* will emerge below. It is in the pictures themselves, however, that the intricate connections to Rupert's text are most evident, and these have been previously elucidated.[33]

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30 "*Peregrinus*: Attende igitur vocem Christi, in voce legem Christi, ut in Christo per Christum vincas hoc, quod fuisti. … *Theodora*: Vocem istam de te audiam, legem de te legam" (*SV*, 12, p. 360).

31 Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," pp. 115–16 and passim.

32 Edsall, "Reading," pp. 1–18 and passim; Stock, "*Lectio divina*," 172–77. For a complete overview, see Robertson, *Lectio divina*.

33 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 142–52; Greenhill, *Voraussetzungen*, pp. 88–97.

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The *Speculum virginum* went through several stages of composition, of which the last two can still be clearly reconstructed: the *audi-et-vide* opening once served as the introduction to a complete version of eight parts, now parts 3–10. To this trunk, two parts each were added to the beginning and end, now parts 1, 2, 11, and 12.[34] The addition thus displaced the original introduction and necessitated its reformulation. The author used this opportunity in a way that displays at once the importance of Rupert's text to his project and considerable innovation and ingenuity in its recasting as pictures for the virgins' contemplation. In its crucial passage on the *hortus conclusus* of Canticles 4:12, Rupert's account provided the image complex that inspired the "mirror picture" of the "fruits of the flesh and the spirt" as trees of vices and virtues, which we will have reason to discuss further on. There, Mary is identified with a new Paradise as Eve is identified with the old one, and both exist as potential images of self-identification (mirroring) and orientation in the virgin's personal transformation from "an old woman to a new." This concept was then recast, or rather, complementary dimensions of its meaning were captured through changing visual perspectives, in the two pictures that were added with parts 1 and 2, the frontispiece and the picture of "mystical Paradise" near the end of part 1. The author's conception of his method as demonstrated in text and picture can thus be seen as ongoing and repeated attempts to capture what Rupert presents as Mary's experience of the images of the Song of Songs, in particular of Canticles 4:12–16, but also in relationship to other passages of both his and the scriptural text.[35] Rupert's imaginated ideas of Mary's life as bride become pictures that serve almost as maps to guide the women in its recapitulation.

These conclusions are of relevance not merely as further evidence of the capital importance of Rupert's model of Mary's reading for the *Speculum virginum*, but also, and more important, because they reveal women's reading taking shape as a visual translation, a kind of crystallization on the page, of the *lectio divina*. In the first section of this chapter, I will revisit the two successive introductions to the work to show how they also articulate a method in which the female religious are to realize a personal meaning of scripture for themselves as brides in an audio-visual theatre, performing a *conceptio per aurem et oculum* that was to be felt and lived as particular to their bodily selves. Mary's reading provides the model for a woman's assimilation of Word to self that bypasses learned exegesis and is to be felt as much as understood, to be "heard and seen," rather than acquired by cognition. As in Hildegard's case, the metaphors of male reading experience are re-embodied in the woman as audience of the Word. This idea of embodied reading is then the subject of the second section, while a third and final section distils from the investigation the outlines of a female poetics of body and truth that will serve in the following chapters as our guide to the emerging poetics of vernacular literature. The adaptation of Rupert's imaginated ideas of Mary's experience into visual constructs that themselves serve as models for the reimplementation of a reading path provides

34 Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," pp. 117–19; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 517–39.

35 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 151–52, 154–55.

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surprisingly intricate evidence of the way reading as a process was being reconceived through "bodily" media, translated into forms that sought to transfer not knowledge but experience to new audiences.

The Woman in the Mirror: Listening as *Adulescentula*

Rupert's Marian gnosis sees the exegete reliving an experience in which letter reveals gloss through a simultaneity of physical and spiritual experience that is expressed one time for all in the sensual imagery of the Song of Songs. Mary is the key to a knowledge of scripture as experience, and the key to Mary's experience is found in the reading path she took, the path of the *sponsa*. Rupert's text offers two female alter egos, or reading selves, through which he or his audience complete this experience: the one is Ooliba, a figure of Eve, or the woman seduced by the flesh. The other is the "young woman" who, taken from the dialogue of the biblical text itself, "follows" Mary in her conception and bearing of the Word. Through the *adulescentula* Rupert is able to cast his own experience of union with the *sponsus* as witness to a reliving of Mary's experience. The same two feminine models of reading in the body serve the *Speculum*'s recasting of *lectio* for monastic women: the two introductions cast the virgins in the position of the *adulescentula*, a *Maria imperfecta* who seeks to imitate Mary's original conception of the Word through the instructor's audio-visual address; while the reading process through which this takes place mirrors Ooliba's transformation from Eve to Mary, making "a new woman from the old" (*SV*, 3, p. 59).

At the geometric centre of the work's frontispiece, the visual introduction added with part 1, Mary reads from a large open book (fig. 3.1).[36] This centre is determined by the four corners of a square, created by two pairs of speaking figures: above, two prophets, Isaiah and Zachary, below, Peregrinus and Theodora. Mary herself, however, stands as one figure in a progression from bottom to top that appears at first to be genealogical but is in fact a portrayal of the history of God's word in its human apprehension.[37] Seen iconographically, it is the visual embodiment of the first prophetic announcement of the Incarnation, "And there shall come forth a rod [*virga*, also "branch"] out of the root of Jesse: and a flower shall rise up out of this root" (Isaiah 11:1–2).[38] The same recurs in a much more straightforward realization of the prophet's words at the work's conclusion (that is, preceding parts 11 and 12; see fig. 3.2). There too, however—as nowhere else in the iconographic figure known as the Tree of Jesse—, Mary reads.[39] In the frontispiece,

36 The frontispiece is considered here as it occurs in manuscript *L.* The picture is missing in the one other mid-twelfth-century manuscript, *K,* but judging from its copy, MS *V* (see note 5, above), was nearly identical. Cf. Cohen-Mushlin, *Medieval Scriptorium*, fig. 245. On the proximity of *L* to the author, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 517–34, esp. 529–30; and Seyfarth, "*Speculum Virginum*," pp. 45–48.

37 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 141–42.

38 Resolved from its extemely abbreviated form, the passage in Isaiah's book reads, "Egreditur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet et requiescet super eum spiritus domini."

39 This statement applies to the best of my knowledge through the end of the twelfth century; I have not pursued it in the later period.

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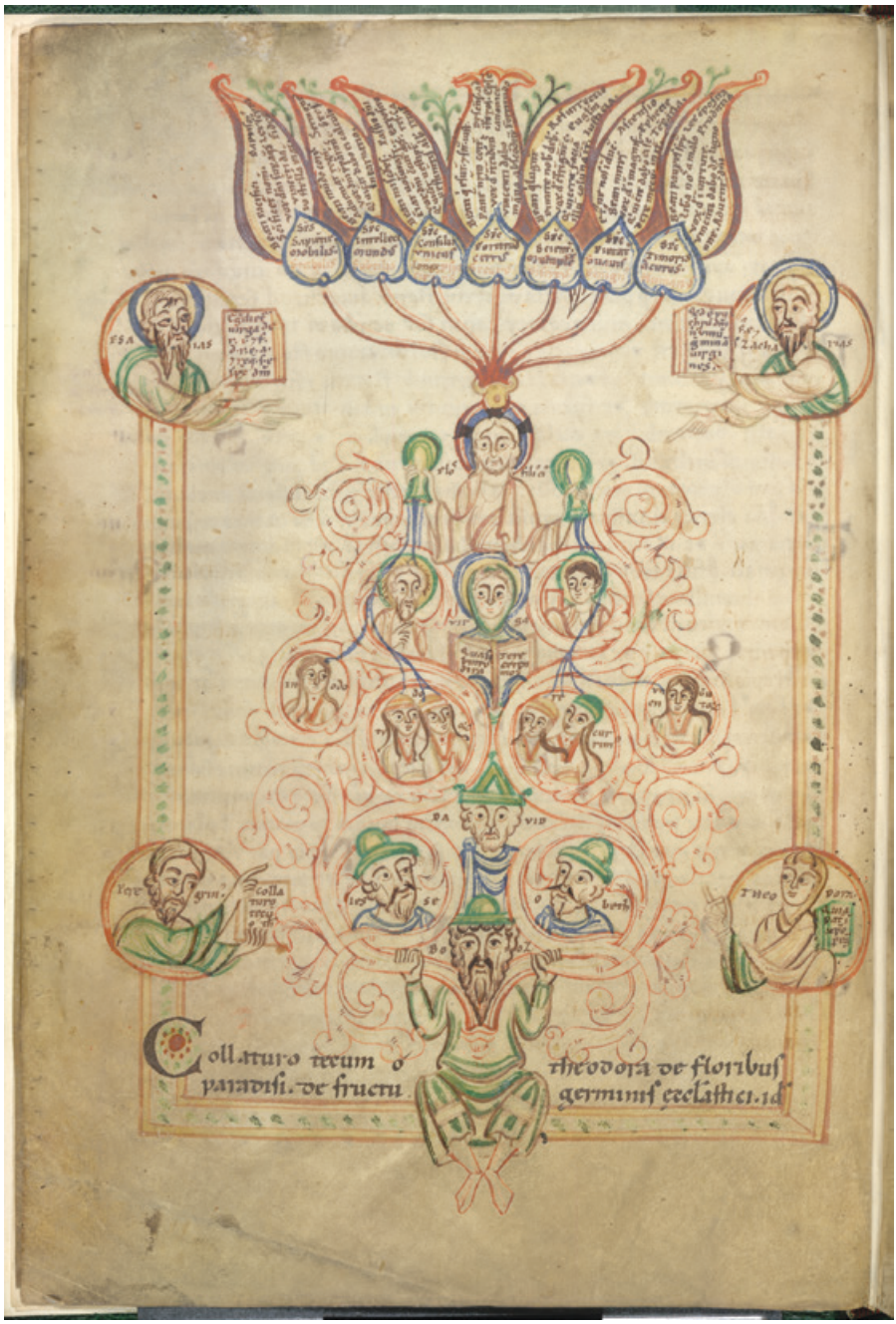


Figure 3.1. Frontispiece of the *Speculum virginum*, ca. 1140, London, British Library MS Arundel 44, fol. 2v. © The British Library Board.

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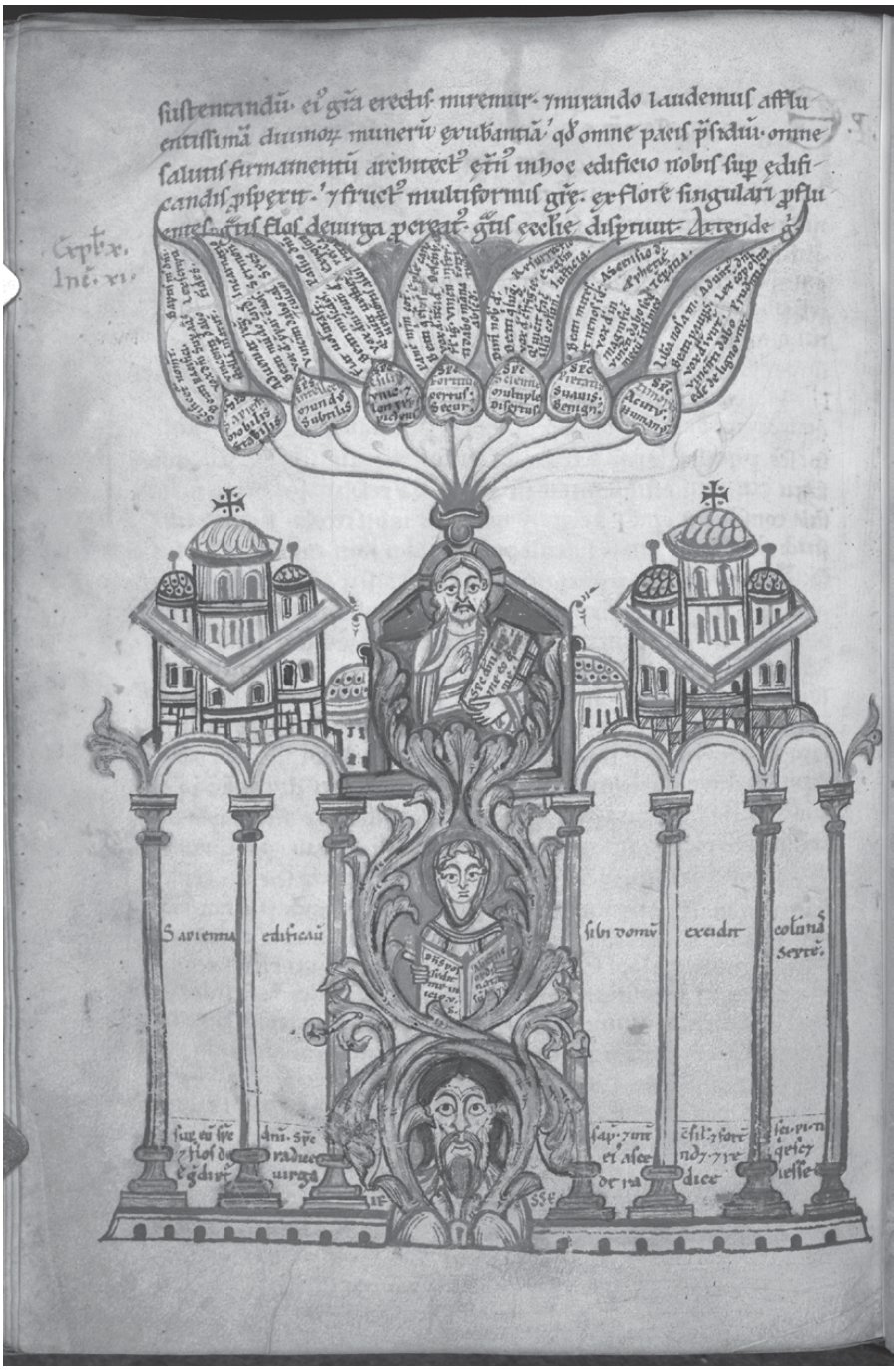


Figure 3.2. The House of Wisdom, *Speculum virginum*, ca. 1140, London, British Library MS Arundel 44, fol. 114v. © The British Library Board.

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the words in her book are taken from those spoken by Lady Wisdom in Ecclesiastes 24:22: "I have stretched out my branches as the turpentine tree." Mary thus describes herself (more properly, *reads* of herself) in a metaphor that creates identity between the tree metaphor of Isaiah's prophecy, Lady Wisdom, and the bride of the Song of Songs; the identity of the metaphor is realized in her life as the one bride who conceived the Word.[40] Prophetic letter becomes experience as Mary's life fulfils the words of the Old Testament and the Word becomes flesh. Without this moment there is no Christian scripture, and, accordingly, from Mary's reading act the new book is generated, Christ and the scriptures of his church: from Christ's head emanate the septiform "gifts of the Spirit" (cf. Isaiah 11:3–4), that here collate key textual elements of the Christian faith as the petals of a floral growth.[41] With one more unique addition to the *stirps iesse*, which follows from Zachary's (initially mysterious) contribution to the conversation and no less from its latter-day double between Peregrinus and Theodora below, the author's conception of the virgins' reiteration of Mary's reading is complete: in four roundels below Mary are six virgins gazing upwards at her generative reading act and its result (fig. 3.3). *In odorem unguentorum tuorum curremus* (Canticles 1:3), they proclaim, in the inscription distributed over the four roundels: "We will run after the fragrance of your ointments."

This scriptural passage has programmatic value in the *Speculum virginum*. Combined with the preceding words of the same verse, *Trahe me post te*, it signals a moment in which the listening virgins' reception of scripture achieves identity with Mary's own, a kind of ascent to the letter of the word in which letter becomes gloss, or the recipient's story is identical with *historia*. To fully appreciate its place and function in the *Speculum*'s model of reading, we need to turn to the work's original introduction at the opening of part 3. But within the first exchanges of the dialogue in part 1 this significance is no less underlined. The full verse occurs there spoken by the one bride, Mary, and such that her moment of conception is identified as its meaning fulfilled. Mary is

> the unplowed field … that, made fertile by this seed without the aid of a gardener, brought forth a flower and the flower's fragrance for the eyes of man [*visibus humanis*], exclaiming with the bride to the bridegroom, *Trahe me post te, curremus in odore unguentorum tuorum* [Cant. 1:3]. Does she not speak of the fragrance of that flower?[42]

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40 Ecclesiastes 24:22 was possibly favoured over a passage from Canticles for its first-person speech as a tree. The imagery of Ecclesiastes 24 is replete with echoes of Canticles and the two were intermingled in the liturgy. The verses preceding, in which Wisdom speaks of yielding a "sweet odor like the best myrrh," and "my odor is as the purest balm" (Ecclesiastes 24:20–21), taken together with the following verse, "I have brought forth pleasant odor: and my flowers are the fruit of honour and riches" (Ecclesiastes 24:23), are richly reminiscent of Canticles 1:11 as the moment when the bridegroom embraces the bride, lured by her odor of spikenard (cf. *CCC*, 1, pp. 29–30). Seen this way, Ecclesiastes 24:22 reads as another announcement of the conception.

41 One part of each of the following appears in each leaf: the Beatitudes, the *Pater noster*, the *voces Domini* (Psalm 28), the *coronæ triumphales* (Apocalypse 2 and 3), Articles of the Creed, the scriptures, and the Virtues (as listed by Watson, "*Speculum virginum*," 459–61; transcription of the text also in Seyfarth, introduction to *SV*, pp. 134*–36*).

42 The entire passage reads: "Campus heremi terra inculta est vel integritatis in Maria virginalis, de quo germine sine culture fecunda florem et floris odorem visibus humanis produxit, proclamans sponso cum sponsa: 'Trahe me post te, curremus in odore unguentorum tuorum'" (*SV*, 1, pp. 7–8).

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Figure 3.3. Frontispiece of the *Speculum virginum* (detail), ca. 1140, London, British Library MS Arundel 44, fol. 2v. © The British Library Board.

"That flower" is, here as elsewhere, the *flos filius eius* seen in the picture, identified in the opening lines that furl out below it as the *flos campi et lilium convallium* of Canticles 1:2. The picture describes the virgins' reception of scripture as a sensory call from the bridegroom and the bride's response. These virgins interpolated into the history of the Word as flesh are there to relive Mary's reading act, to experience scripture as an *imitatio verbi conceptionis* completed through the eye and the ear. As the passage just cited elaborates, Mary takes her identity as the unploughed field,

> in which "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally" [Colossians 2:9], … from that same flower, brought forth from the rod that sprang from the root of Jesse. This is then the flower that "young women [*adulescentulae*] so dearly love" [Canticles 1:2], embrace and follow devotedly while the mother and the son go before, so that they in turn may blossom among flowers and in this flowering chastity win the fruit of eternal life.[43]

43 "'in quo habitat omnis plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter,' … de hoc flore suo trahit, quem virga de stirpe Iesse producta produxit. Hunc igitur florem adulescentulae nimis dligunt, amplexantur, colendo sequuntur habentes matrem et filium praecedentes, ut cum floribus floreant et fructum aeternitatis in castimonia floribunda conquirant" (*SV*, 1, p. 8).

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The *adulescentulae* from the Song of Songs are thus offered as figures of reading identification for the female audience, who in assuming this identity enter into the moment in which *sponsa* becomes *mater*.[44] The frontispiece is a visual reiteration of Rupert's reading model as a method of instruction in scripture for the female religious.[45]

Little has yet been said of the conversation on the lower register of the picture's frame. This configuration, simple as it is, is the sole element of the earlier introduction to have been integrated as such into the new one. Two similar figures in conversation, with the man holding a scroll and the woman a book, are found at the beginning of book 3 in four other manuscripts; in the filiation of MS *L*, they were apparently displaced to appear rather unremarkably at the bottom of the preceding page, marking instead the end of part 2.[46] However, this is enough to indicate that what occurs between the two interlocutors in the frontispiece is the visual reiteration of a different, textual presentation of the same concept in the original introduction. Where the frontispiece keys the visual template of the *flos de virga iesse* to a dialogue from the Song of Songs, the original opening takes its visual template from the Annunciation and its textual inspiration from Psalm 44. Accordingly, it is more focused on the mode of communication, the articulation of a *conceptio per aurem et oculum.*

The original opening, cited at the beginning of this chapter, projects the argument for audio-visual presentation into an extended elaboration of the eleventh verse of Psalm 44. The psalmist's words *Audi filia et vide* signal at once the twin media of the method—although these receive no explicit mention—and the identity of their addressee. As the incipit indicates, this is "the address of the Holy Spirit to the daughter"; she is church, bride, and female religious. The verbs *audire* and *videre* are repeated eight times as a pair in this opening address (the first thirty-one lines of the modern edition), with four additional instances of *audire* alone. For us they might recall the (later) opening of Hildegard's *Scivias*, in which the "Voice of the Living Light" calls her to her own vocation. As a call to its monastic audience, however, the words unmistakably echoed the prologue to the monastic arch-text, the Rule of St Benedict: "Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui."[47] The author thus anchored the opening

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44 In MS *V* (n. 5, above), the words *adulescentule dilexerunt te nimis* are included in the inscription in the roundels, which suggests they also occurred there in its exemplar, MS *K* (see note 36, above).

45 While the phrase following from Canticles 1:3 (*Trahe me, curremus*, etc.), figures repeatedly in the text, the phrase *adolescentulae diligunt te* occurs only this once. Close examination suggests that it serves, upon the addition of parts 1, 2, 11 and 12, to underline the relationship between the *Speculum*'s reading model and Rupert's understanding of the Song of Songs. The *Speculum*'s elaboration of the *stirps iesse* in text and picture reveals a reshaping of at least three different passages from Rupert's commentary (cf. *CCC*, 4, pp. 87–88, and *CCC*, 1, pp. 13 and 33), in which visual ideas that arise in his text are reified and visualized on the page in the *Speculum virginum*.

46 In one of these four, Zwettl, *Bibliothek des Zisterzienserstifts*, Cod. Zwetl. 180, the male figure, labelled as Peregrinus, also holds a book. The other three of this type are the Clairvaux group, discussed below. The manuscript from Himmerod (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 72), was copied from *L* and reproduces its solution. In the remaining manuscripts these pictures are either missing or were never executed. See also note 52, below.

47 Benedict of Nursia, *Règle de S. Benoît*, p. 412; for the translation, see below, p. 102.

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of his introduction to the female monastic life firmly within Benedictine tradition—with equally pointed variation from that tradition. While the Rule relies on the injunction from Psalm 44 to inaugurate the monastic life, it also clearly suppresses the visual component of the scriptural text. Moreover, for Benedict, the voice of scripture is distinct from that of the orally expounding *magister*, who is accordingly identified: "Listen, carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart."[48] The master's teaching echoes but does not appropriate the voice of scripture; accordingly, the son listens but is not asked to "see" the meaning he is to receive, and even the act of hearing is rather a metaphor for the reception of the truth, which properly occurs in the heart. For Theodora, the voice of the Spirit and that of her instructor are one: "Audi filia et vide, et inclina aurem tuam. … Audi sanctae ecclesiae filia … audi sponsum tuum ad aeterna donum vocantem, vide premia premonstrantem, sequere precedentem. Audi, inquam, legibus divinis intentendo, vide legibus … ferventer obtemperando, audi quid sponsus precipiat, vide quid promittat" (Hear, daughter, and see, and bend your ear [Psalm 44:11]. … Hear, daughter of holy church … hear your bridegroom calling you to eternal gifts, see the rewards he shows you beforehand, so that you follow him who leads. Hear, I say, by attending to the divine laws, see by fervently obeying those laws. … Hear what the bridegroom requires, and see what he promises) (*SV*, 3, p. 58). There is thus also no distinction (in the introduction) between letter and gloss, scripture and its exegesis. The biblical text is not explicated but rather appropriated to the instructor's purpose: "Hear, I say …" For the *Speculum virginum* and for the model of instruction it portrays, the woman re-embodies the addressee of the biblical text. Like Rupert's *adulescentula*, she is part of the cast of its drama; her hearing and seeing are an immediate reception of its truth.[49]

But it is another text, contemporary with Rupert's, that more immediately illuminates the author's project in this case: Bernard of Clairvaux's four homilies on the Annunciation to Mary, *In laudinibus Virginis Matris* (also known as "Super missus est"), dated to 1125. Like Rupert's *De incarnatione Domini*, Bernard's text is a meditation on Mary's experience of the Incarnation, in his case focused entirely on the Annunciation as the moment and mystery of Mary's conception. This moment he characterizes not as reading but rather as the perfect act of hearing and seeing, "to which she had long before been called by her father David" in Psalm 44.[50] "The king desired her beauty" (Psalm 44:12), because of the perfection he saw in Mary's virginity and her humility, which are the expression of her full understanding—*avant la lettre*. For as Bernard elaborates at length, Mary could not yet have "heard or read" of the New Testament's ideal of virginity (*LVM*, 3.7, pp. 40–41). Mary, then, "heard and saw not such as those who 'hearing do not hear, and seeing do not understand' (cf. Matthew 13:13); rather she heard and she believed, she saw and she understood" (*LVM*, 3.3, p. 37). The call to the bride from

48 Benedict of Nursia, *Rule of St Benedict*, p. 15.

49 The same point can be demonstrated by contrast with Jerome's use of Psalm 44 in his letters to Eustochia and Principia. See Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," pp. 119–20.

50 *In laudibus Virginis Matris* 3.4, p. 37; hereafter *LVM*; references are parenthetical.

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Psalm 44 is thus collated with a passage from the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23), whose subject is none other than the assimilation of the Word to the self as it applies to all Christians but is fulfilled in differing degrees. Bernard's audience is exhorted earlier as "all mothers" and "daughters, who, after Eve, are born and bear in pain," to "run … to the bridal chamber … where, behold, the angel is addressing Mary." There they may seek to overhear what Mary heard, to hear as she did: "press your ear to the wall and listen to what he proclaims, see whether you can hear whence you may be consoled."[51]

The original opening of the *Speculum virginum* collates the same scriptural passages to exhort its audience to emulate the same perfect act of hearing and seeing—not, however, by overhearing but rather by direct address. Following the fivefold exhortation to hear and to see at the outset, the *magister* continues with a paraphrase of Matthew 13:13, reformulated as an affirmative directive, "Querit enim Christus aures audiendi, querit oculos videndi," then adding an explanation that defines this hearing and seeing for the purposes of his method: "id est ut resideat interius, quod sonus innuit exterius, et fructificet ad mentis intuitum, quod trahitur per oculorum aspectum" (Christ seeks ears that hear, he seeks eyes that see, that is, so that what the voice intimates externally may dwell internally, and what is drawn in through the eyes' gaze may bear fruit in inner contemplation) (*SV*, 3, p. 58). These few lines contain the *Speculum*'s audiovisual poetics of the virgins' assimilation of the Word to the self, its *conceptio per aurem et oculum*, an idea which becomes fully clear to us only once we recognize the model for the communication as Bernard constructed it on the same scriptural authority: the Annunciation as Mary's perfect act of hearing and seeing. The virgins as audience reembody Mary's experience of the Word even as they embody the bride of Psalm 44. The means to their accomplishment is to "hear and see" as she did, that is (in our terms), to read the prophets' words as she did. Appropriately, then, Mary's *historia* per se, and in particular the text of Luke's account of the Annunciation, play no role in the exposition; the act of communication is nonetheless entirely modelled on hers with Gabriel, as on its objective.

The manuscript tradition offers visual evidence of this latter idea. In the three manuscripts that were copied at Clairvaux at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the picture that originally accompanied the *audi-et-vide* introduction is still found in the original position above that text (fig. 3.4).[52] It doubtless shows us the predecessors of the two figures facing each other on the lower frame of the frontispiece in manuscript *L*. A male figure holding a scroll on the left addresses a woman on the right. These are

51 "Currite matres, currite filiae, currite omnes, quae post Evam, et ex Eva, et parturimini cum tristitia, et parturitis. Adite virginalem thalamum, ingredimini, si potestis, pudicum sororis vestrae cubiculum. Ecce enim Deus mittit ad Virginem, ecce affatur Angelus Mariam. Apponite aurem parieti, auscultate quid nuntiet ei, si forte audiatis unde consolemini" (*LVM*, 2.2, p. 22).

52 Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, MSS 252 and 413; and Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, MS Phil. 1701. The Berlin MS shows the figures seated, but the configuration is otherwise identical. A fourth copy not related to the Clairvaux group, Zwettl, Bibliothek des Zisterzienserstifts, Cod. Zwetl. 180, also shows standing figures and bears some resemblance to an Annunciation scene; for further discussion and reproductions, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 194–207.

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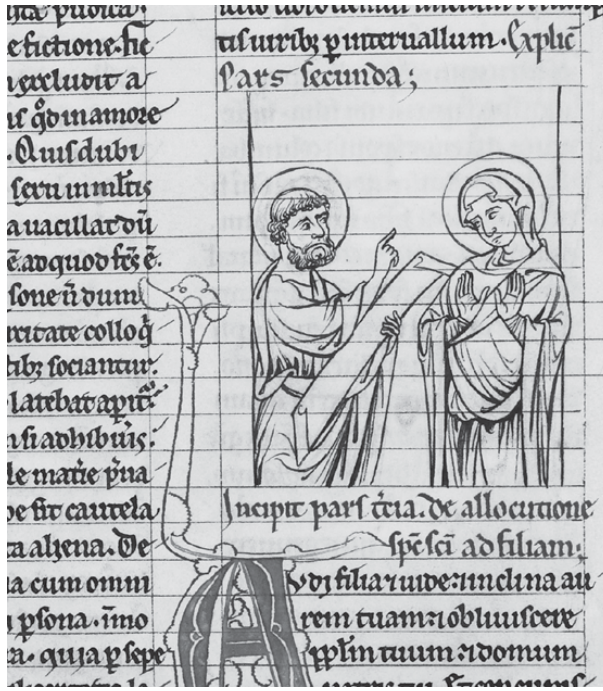


Figure 3.4. Peregrinus and Theodora, *Speculum virginum*, beginning of the thirteenth century, Troyes, Médiathèque Jacques Chirac MS 252, fol. 20r. Photo © Médiathèque Jacques Chirac, Troyes Champagne Métropole.

not properly understood if taken simply as Peregrinus and Theodora.[53] The best copy of the Clairvaux group, which also remained there, would suggest they should be identified as the Holy Spirit and the daughter of the biblical text: the incipit, *de allocutione spiritus sancte ad filiam*, appearing directly below it, reads as if a caption to the picture (fig. 3.4). In all three copies, the image contains hints of sacred or even divine communication: the figures are both nimbed as if saints or figures from scripture, the woman is in *orans*, and the man's raised hand and scroll are possibly reminiscent of the portrayal of prophetic speech.[54] The answer to the identity question lies in the relationship just observed between this text and Bernard's: the template for the image is in fact Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary.[55] What it presents is, nonetheless, not this communication but in

53 The Zwettl MS is in fact the only one in which the figures are labelled as Peregrinus and Theodora.

54 Camille, "Visual Signs," 111; and Camille, "Seeing and Reading," 28. As Camille notes, the scrolls can likewise be taken as indicating oral performance; see also Huot, *Song to Book*, pp. 78–79.

55 On similar Annunciation scenes, see Wenzel, "Verkündigung," pp. 23–52, esp. fig. 5 (from Nicholas of Verdun's altar at Kloster Neuenburg); and Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, pp. 274–82. The *filia* in Troyes MS 252 (fig. 10) bears a striking resemblance to a portrayal of Mary in the same manuscript on fol. 58v, its picture of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

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a sense its typological predecessor. Some of the earliest examples of the Annunciation in visual art in fact occur as "illustrations"—typological materializations on the page—of either the third or eleventh verses of Psalm 44.[56] Thus the image in the *Speculum* presents a precursor of the communication between Gabriel and Mary that it is not yet resolved into its realized form as Christian history: just as its listening woman is a *Maria imperfecta*, it is an annunciation about to happen. And just as the final frontispiece does, this image places its interlocutors on a threshold between the prophetic image and its incarnate form, a threshold that is crossed as scripture speaks and the daughter responds.

The later frontispiece does not, in fact, simply reproduce this conversation on the lower register of its frame but instead splits the communication into three different exchanges: one that occurs between prophets above, another between figures of the present day, and the third, the object of the whole, between *sponsa* and *sponsus*—in turn doubly represented—inside the frame where the generative act is revealed. The "Tree of Jesse" inside the frame of the frontispiece is to an extent a visual condensation of the content of the conversation that follows (that is, the text), but this idea falls far short of its primary subject, which is the process of instruction as initiated on the same page between Peregrinus and Theodora, its origin, authority, and objective.[57] It shows how the virgins read within the frame of a once and present communication. The two introductions to the work articulate for the first time the position of the woman as audience of an audio-visual delivery of the Word.

Dialogue, then, is far from being a genre convention in this work. The call from the bridegroom and the soul's response are at the heart of its conception, this exchange forms the very moment of apprehension on which its audio-visual model of reading is based. Dialogue between the Word and the bride is the communicative fact that links the Song of Songs, Psalm 44 and Luke's account of the Annunciation. This same fact forms the very motor of both Rupert's and Bernard's texts, though for its concentration on, and suspense over, the single moment of Mary's response, Bernard's text is unmatched. At one point, he, the admiring observer, pauses to sum up what she has heard, urging her to consider and respond, to "open your heart to faith, your lips to confession, your womb to the creator," and conceive.[58] The passage, which begins, "Audisti inquam …" and then continues in incantatory repetition of the verb, may have inspired our author's use of the same in the present imperative ("Audi inquam …"); in any case, Bernard's text again shows us what he is about. The entire introduction is an incantatory exhortation intended to lead to one moment: the virgins' response. This response, however, is not given to Theodora, who (as she often does) comments on Peregrinus's words as if an observer; it is instead supplied as part of the address, just as it also occurs within the picture (and not on the frame) in the frontispiece: "Proclamat enim: 'Anima mea liquefacta est, ut dilectus locutus est. Trahe me post te!' (Canticles 5:6, 1:3)" (She

56 This tradition enjoyed a revival in Norman Sicilian churches of the mid twelfth century; see Kitzinger, "Descent," pp. 99–115, esp. 106–7, 112–13.

57 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 140–42.

58 *LVM*, 4.4, pp. 53–54 at 54.

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thus exclaims: "My soul melted as the beloved spoke. Draw me after you!") (*SV*, 3 pp. 58–59).[59] This programmatic response in the words of Canticles 1:3, which occurs in the text a total of five times, will occupy us once more in the analysis of the reading method. Its use in the introduction corresponds perfectly to what we have thus far observed as the parallel between this annunciation and Gabriel's to Mary: rather than speaking as Mary does, *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*, the virgins are to attain identification with Mary's experience of the prophetic image. Their own response is thus spoken in those images, the words of the bride through whose experience the images first become life.

What is most noteworthy in this conception is, however, not the idea in itself of a *conceptio per aurem* as completed through the oral delivery of scripture to the believing soul but rather the way the female audience is seen to re-embody an experience that is understood, as we saw in the previous chapter, as Mary's experience of the Word as life; the way "she" embodies Rupert's reading path. An ancient metaphor for life lived in the Christian faith, that of Christ's rebirth in the hearts of the faithful, is claimed as specific to their persons and their experience—as their *historia*, even as it is Mary's.[60] The real affinity between the *Speculum*'s understanding of the *conceptio* and Bernard's is found here: both participate in an exploration and intensification of the metaphor such that its meaning is experienced in a way that, despite an obvious paradox, is somehow insistently visceral, proper to the body and a literal understanding of scriptural imagery. This same is responsible for the surprising equivalence, visually unmistakable, between Isaiah's first prophecy of the coming of Christ and the apparently unrelated response from Zachary on the right: "Quid pulchrum Domini nisi vinum germinans virgines (cf. Zachary 9:17)" (What is the beauty of God if not wine bringing forth virgins?).[61] The connection between the two requires some explanation.

Zachary's words have no known connection to the Tree of Jesse or to the Incarnation, but image and text together leave no doubt as to their place there in this case. The wine is the liquid that pours out from the two vases held in Christ's hands and descends in carefully drawn tendrils to touch all the virgins in the picture (fig. 3.3).[62] It thus causes the women to be reborn ("germinate") within the tree as virgins "who follow the lamb wherever it goes" (Revelations 14:4; *SV*, 1, p. 18). But Zachary's words in the frontispiece would also have been felt as the echo of another of Isaiah's prophecies of the

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59 I have corrected the punctuation as it stands in the edition, which misunderstands the prosopopeia in these lines. The words are all to be assigned to the bride (as tradition and the biblical text require). The exclamation *Trahe me post te* stands here as elsewhere in the text for the virgins' inner assent; without these words she would offer no real response.

60 Rahner, "Gottesgeburt," pp. 13–87.

61 The words *et frumentum electorum* (the corn of the elect), properly part of the scriptural text, were added later in extremely abbreviated form outside and to the right of Zachary's "speech tablet and are not included when the passage is cited in the text.

62 These include John the Bapist and John the Evangelist to either side of Mary (as clarified in the text of part 5), but Mary herself does not appear to require the wine; its blue color instead already surrounds her nimbus as it does Christ's. Peregrinus clarifies that the wine is Christ himself; Theodora then equates it with his blood shed on the cross: *SV*, 1, p. 11.

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coming of Christ: *rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum, aperiatur terra et germinet savatorem* (Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above: and let the clouds rain the just. Let the earth be opened and bud forth a saviour) (Isaiah 45:8). The understanding of Mary as the "unploughed" earth that brings forth the "flower" we encountered earlier in the exposition of part 1 of the *Speculum*, and Isaiah's words on the rain "germinating" the Saviour were habitually associated with his other prophecies on the coming of Christ (for example, the *stirps iesse*) in exegesis and the liturgy—Isaiah 45:8 had been recited daily in the Office of Advent at least since Carolingian times.[63] Another Old Testament image, that of rain falling on Gideon's fleece in Psalm 76:1, was well known as a typological precursor of Mary's conception, which, like, the verses of Psalm 44, also found early illustration as the Annunciation.[64] Thus the idea of germination or impregnation through a liquid that falls from God—the equation of wine and water only serves further Christological association—is used here to grant the virgins a typological authority for their place in the tree that is equivalent in meaning (not in magnitude) to Mary's own: Zachary's words stand opposite Isaiah's as the prophetic image whose visual realization identifies the virgins' reception of the Word with Mary's conception of Christ.

An image complex of rain, fertility, and plant growth that reveals the mystery of Christ's descent to man in human form is thus variously and interchangeably evoked in the frontispiece as the gathering point, the quintessential locus for meditation on that mystery and its meaning for the female religious, an *imitatio verbi conceptionis*. That the experience and its meaning are intended as applying to the virgins specifically and exceptionally is the second point that Zachary's words are made to demonstrate. As just indicated, the idea that Christ was received in the heart through baptism, dwelt there, and was born anew through every life lived in Christian virtue was a tenet of ancient sacramental theology.[65] The same idea could be extended to the reception of God's word through his prophets and preachers, so that the Virgin's conception of the Word was metaphorically repeated not only in the moment of initiation into the Christian faith but also whenever the Word was received in the community of the Spirit: the listening congregation was continually witness to the event of Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary as the embrace of Christ's teaching in the individual soul.[66] The imagery of rainfall and fertility was similarly applied to this idea, such that the prophets become clouds and Isaiah's words on the coming of Christ a rain that is to fertilize the understanding of the faithful even as Gabriel realized their meaning with his own words to Mary.[67]

In the light of such generalization of the metaphors, it is no wonder that Theodora interrupts her *magister* to wonder for her own part, "why you ascribe the fruit [the

63 Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 11–13.

64 Kitzinger, "Descent," 106–10.

65 Rahner, "Gottesgeburt," pp. 13–17.

66 Deshman, *Benedictional*, pp. 13–14.

67 Deshman, *Benedictional*, p. 14.

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bearing of Christ] solely to the virgins to the exclusion of the other orders."[68] She insists at some length that the *fructus spiritus* is not their privilege *specialiter* but rather one available *generaliter* to the entire church, citing scripture effectively to her purpose. All of this merely sets up Peregrinus's response, which builds on two scriptural passages. Matthew 19:11—"All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given"—he says, defines an elite reception of the Word among virgins (*SV*, 1, pp. 9–10). Zachary's words then make their entry into the conversation to vindicate this understanding: "Note well what the prophet said, 'What is the beauty of God if not wine bringing forth virgins?' " (*SV*, 1, p. 10). What the frontispiece portrays as the virgins' *imitatio verbi conceptionis* is thus theirs and theirs alone.

This idea is elaborated in the work as a whole as the virgins' experience of scripture *specialiter*. The same had already been more amply developed in the original introduction (part 3), where the author repeatedly distinguishes the virgins' experience as closer to, if not identical to, Mary's own, insisting on a reification of the metaphor as justified by their bodily identity with Mary's virginal state. There, too, he begins with Matthew 19:11 and the idea that "[Virginity] is truly a special gift, not a general one, and is given only to the few."[69] The idea of the virgins' conception and bearing of Christ (with no picture to support it) is then more explicitly developed. The virgins are entitled to this gift as "special" compensation for their exclusion from carnal procreation, that is, in their sexual specificity as women. They conceive and bear a child inwardly in direct analogy to the reproductive roles of women in the world.[70] Peregrinus first underscores the women's experience as a counterpart of Mary's that is specific to their bodily virginity.[71] He then uses the same reasoning to imply an experience of scripture for the virgins that is specific to their persons, in fact, to their bodies, because it originates from a bodily continuity with scriptural imagery:

> Quamvis igitur *generali* comprehensione virginem dicat apostolus corpus universalis ecclesiae "desponi," inquiens, "vos uni viro virginem castam exhibere Christo," *specialiter* tamen, quae vere virgines sunt, flores sunt ecclesiae mentis et corporis integritate, sicut idem ait apostolus: "Virgo domini cogitat, quae domini sunt, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu." (*SV*, 3, p. 65)

> (Even though the apostle calls the body of the entire church a virgin in the general sense when he says, "I have promised you to one man alone so that I may lead a chaste virgin to

68 "Miror, cur solis virginibus fructum istum sic asscripseris, ut ordines licet magni meriti de hoc exclusisse videaris" (*SV*, 1, p. 9).

69 "Vere enim speciale donum est, non generale, paucis quidem datum" (*SV*, 3, p. 61).

70 "Maius est, inquam, spiritaliter Christus concipere et parere quam filios morituros carnaliter procreare. … Carnalis igitur Christi virginum sterilitas sancta et voluntaria fecunditate compensatur spiritali et aeterna, in qua quia Christum bonis operibus virgo manens parturis, mater et fiia sororque vocaris" (*SV*, 3, p. 64). See also Greenhill, *Voraussetzungen*, pp. 83–84; Bernards, *Speculum virginum*, pp. 189–92.

71 "Si igitur ordo fidelium in se Christo facit habitaculum, quanto magis cor virginum, cor pudicum et humile Christi est sacrarium? Christus semel a matre virgine natus est corporaliter, portatur, nascitur a virginibus sacris semper spiritualiter. O decus incomparabile virginitatis!" (*SV*, 3, p. 64).

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> Christ" [2 Corinthians 11:2], this applies in a special sense to those who are truly virgins, the flowers of the church by integrity of body and soul, just as when the same apostle says, "The virgin of the Lord attends to the things of God, so that she is sanctified in both body and spirit" [1 Corinthians 7:34].)

Thus, where the virgins' bearing of Christ is a spiritual reliving of Mary's corporeal experience, as women and virgins it is they who live out scripture *specialiter*, "in body and spirit," while the church in general does so only "in spirit."

This notion, however, begins to exhibit the Janus-faced duality of the woman's position: what is extolled as the exclusive privilege of an elite at the same time approaches a literal understanding of scriptural imagery otherwise associated with the incapacity of the body to proceed beyond a sensory level of understanding. The latter can thus serve equally well to justify the former, an observation born out in the *Speculum*'s characterization of its audience as *puellae* before their mirrors (as we will see shortly) and consistent with the reading identity of the *adulescentula* as discussed in Rupert's use of the same.[72] The two ideas became one in Mary's experience, a female understanding that is at once inveterately sensual and bypasses all cognition, and this is finally the significance of the virgins' "special" *imitatio* of Mary's perfect act of hearing and seeing. The same visceral *imitatio* was the consistent objective of Rupert's reading of the Song of Songs; Bernard likewise makes it the culmination of his meditation on the Annunciation.

For Bernard, Mary's conception of the Word figured as the extreme case of knowledge of God *specialiter*, that is, it proceeded not solely through love or the harmony of wills (*concordia voluntatis*) but also through the flesh (*carnem conjungere*, *LVM* 3.4, p. 38). The apostles were imbued with the Spirit, yet by no means such as Mary was, who conceived the Spirit in the body (*LVM* 3.2, pp. 36–37). The last word on the idea of such experience *specialiter* Bernard leaves to Mary herself in what are likewise the last words of *In laudinibus Virginis Matris*, her so urgently awaited response:

> Fiat mihi non tantum audibile auribus, sed et visibile oculis, palpabile manibus, gestabile humeris. Nec fiat mihi verbum scriptum et mutum, sed incarnatum et vivum, hoc est non mutis figuris, mortuis in pellibus exaratum, sed in forma humana meis castis visceribus vivaciter impressum, … Nolo ut fiat mihi aut declamatorie praedicatum, aut figuraliter significatum, aut imaginatorie somniatum; sed silenter inspiratum, personaliter incarnatum, corporaliter invisceratum. … Fiat quidem generaliter omni mundo, sed specialiter fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum [Luke 1:38].
>
> (*LVM* 4.11, p. 57)

> (Let me experience this not only such that ears may hear, but also such that my eyes may see, my hands touch, and my arms bear. Let me know the Word not in mute, written form, but rather alive and embodied: that is, not through dumb signs drawn on dead parchment skins, but as human form impressed in my chaste, living flesh. … I do not wish to experience this either through the preacher's rhetoric or through figural signs or fanciful dreams, but as if filled with a silent breath, given personal flesh, in the depths of bodily sensation. … Let this happen generally, then, to the entire world, but to me especially, according to your word.)

72 See note 28, above.

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Bernard's rhetorical invisceration of the Logos goes far beyond anything Peregrinus attempts. Nevertheless, both are engaged in the same "historicization"—a kind of narrative reinvention in the life of the body—of the birth of the Logos in and through the hearts of believing Christians.[73] The distinction between Mary's experience and that of the entire church, in which for her alone is "special" and literal what for others is "general" and allegorical, was part of the same tradition.[74] But the fervent plea of Bernard's Mary is in truth no less the author's own, in turn recommended to his audience (suitably, then, the text culminates in desire, rather than its fulfilment), and it leaves no shadow of a doubt. Her entire being is focused on a palpable, visceral experience of the Word, voiced in terms that reject, by contrast, an intellectual cult of the "dead letter." This experience *specialiter* is still uniquely hers, but by being hers it holds the promise of being available to others: "Let this happen generally, … but to me especially." Bernard's Mary thus expresses her desire in terms that encourage identification with the sensory reality of a seemingly inimitable experience.

By adopting this model for its own audio-visual wedding between the Word and its female audience, the *Speculum virginum* completes a next, crucial shift in the understanding and application of reading through the body of the *sponsa et mater*. Its audience becomes a *sponsa corporaliter*, a remanifestation of the truth of the biblical text in our lives—just as the *adulescentula* figures in Rupert's text to vindicate his own attempt to "make the lamb with the Holy Trinity." With the *Speculum virginum* this idea is no longer one of a feminized or female reception of the Word but rather a model for women's reading, their general reception of the truth of scripture as specifically determined by their female nature. The tradition of a millennium of Christian thought, which had seen a life in Christian virtue as part of the larger body of Christ, his church, and thus as participating in the generation of that body, is reified and focalized in the experience of the woman-as-audience, who herself re-embodies the life of the Christian faithful, an *imitatio verbi conceptionis*.

The Woman in the Mirror: Reading as *nova ooliba*

> Religious women … understood that "man … signifies the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity." And they understood that both equations were metaphorical. But given the ultimate dichotomy of God and creation, the first was *only metaphorical*. Man was not divinity. The second was in some sense, however, *literally* true.[75]

Thus Caroline Bynum formulated the basic equation that stood behind the gender-specific trajectory of women's spirituality from the twelfth century onwards. This idea is possibly codified for the first time when the *Speculum* articulates it as the meaning of

73 On the increasingly somatic understanding of the metaphor in the High and Late Middle Ages, see Dinzelbacher, "Gottesgeburt," pp. 94–128; on gender identification, see *JP*, pp. 421–22, and Fulton, "Quae est ista," 117.

74 Rahner, "Gottesgeburt," pp. 14–17, 33, 59, 63, 65, 70.

75 Bynum, " 'And Woman," p. 178.

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scripture in the virgins' lives *specialiter*. Their experience is continuous with the *sensus litteralis* of the biblical text not only semantically but also ontologically; that is, not only do scriptural images of the bride's experience apply in a specific, personally experienced way to the lives of the female religious, but also their experience of scripture generally, as a result of their physicality, is seen as remaining bound to and never fully renouncing the literal meaning.[76]

With its definition of the woman-as-audience, the *Speculum virginum* extends the understanding of woman as the flesh of the Incarnation into the realm of reading and poetics; this single gesture provides the seminal idea for the introduction of the project, whether in the original or the final version. We observed the same in Hildegard's announcement of her prophetic *persona*: she could see Rupert's understanding of Mary's reading as continuous with her own biography because woman's physicality provided the vessel that originally embodied the Word. As others saw and represented it, however, Hildegard was privileged to immediate and full knowledge of scripture *because* she was a woman, unlettered and body-bound. In this way her miraculous gnosis proclaimed the arrival of the symbolic position of woman as the key to a new understanding of the place of the body, the flesh, and material representation—*visibilia*, "visible forms," was the twelfth-century term—within the relationship between *homo* and Logos, human capacity to know the divine. The *Speculum virginum* fleshes out the position of woman in this relationship and in so doing reveals the relationship between a collection of topoi associated with women's religious lives and questions of epistemological aesthetics—the same that will be encountered in later chapters at the centre of a new vernacular poetics.

The position of woman as body is here at the basis of a continuing development of women's and men's spirituality that witnessed a divergence in the nature and understanding of their religious experience. As recalled in the last chapter, "The image of both a sinful and a saved humanity is the image of woman."[77] Just as humanity fell into a life of sin through the action of a woman, Eve, so its redemption from that life, the life of the flesh, occurred through Mary as the New Eve. The foregrounding of women as subjects fundamentally alters the structure of identification with this idea. Rupert, as a man, could assume a position of feminine identification as a self-conscious act of renunciation, one no less discontinuous with his biography than his monastic life was discontinuous with the life of a man in the world. The male writer sought this reversal "because reversal and renunciation were at the heart of a religion whose dominant symbol is the cross—life achieved through death."[78] With this idea of reversal and renunciation as "the heart of religious dedication, women, who were already inferior, did not have much to offer. Moreover, neither maleness nor femaleness could serve for them as an image of renunciation."[79] As a result, women, to define and fulfil their spiritual selves, embraced

76 On representation of Theodora in this respect, see above, n.28.

77 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 265; see also pp. 267–68; also emphasized by Astell, *Song of Songs*, pp. 6–7.

78 Bynum, "And Woman," p. 171.

79 Bynum, "And Woman," pp. 178–79.

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their humanity, their physicality and fleshliness, as the expression of their own proximity to God: "Women reached God not by reversing what they were but by sinking more fully into it."[80] Thus they reported their religious experience "in images that continued ordinary female roles (bride, child, mother) and stereotypical female behaviour (vulnerability, illness, bleeding)."[81]

With its *audi-et-vide* opening, the *Speculum virginum* projects this idea into the staging and conception of instructional communication itself, inviting the female audience to "sink into" the scriptural imagery of the bride's seduction and thus to receive the letter of the Word as continuous with her own experience. The further consequences of mediary translation—exegesis becomes oral address, *lectio* becomes bodily experience, its visualizing process becomes picture—can all be seen to proceed from this first shift: the rhetorically feminized audience, such as figures so prominently in male monastic reading of the Song of Songs, becomes a real audience of women, male renunciation becomes female self-contemplation.[82] The idea is then enshrined, no less, in the work's titulary mirror. It is likewise readable as a method that is repeatedly demonstrated in the text. Properly understood, then, this is the guiding idea behind the *Speculum*'s translation of *lectio* into a method suitable for women: the woman's position replaces the idea of renunciation with that of self-contemplation, the identification between woman and flesh as mirror of her own life in its spiritual transformation.

In the discussion of Rupert's completion of this redemptive value inversion of the flesh, I argued that Mary's reading in the body also redeems the vehicles on which it depends: the historical/literal sense of scripture, narrative, and the image. Mary's reading functions as a basic theological switch capable of unleashing an enormous expansion in the implementation of bodily media as vehicles of an experience of the presence of the Word. The full magnitude of this shift and the way woman and women's roles were implicated within it can only be grasped against the background of the fusion of the feminine and the aesthetic, of the female body and the ornamental and rhetorical arts, which the twelfth century inherited from patristic thought. In *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, R. Howard Bloch marshals an impressive array of anti-feminist topoi from patristic tradition to demonstrate what he sees as the eternal conundrum of woman in the Christian world. Because his subject is so intricately tied to literary poetics—in particular vernacular literary poetics—the terms of his argument are doubly relevant to my own—with inverted significance. They constitute a powerful résumé of precisely those patterns of thought that were overcome in the twelfth century's reinvention of woman as reader and sign to be read.

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80 Bynum, "And Woman," p. 172.

81 Bynum, "And Woman," p. 172. See also Newman, "Golden Bowl," 26–27.

82 Another crucial shift, that from the abstracted world of Latin to the concrete and biographical world of the vernacular, may have occurred as well in varying degree. It is conceptually fully in keeping with the rest, but whether the instructor delivered from or paraphrased the text directly or orally translated as he went or a mix of these was used doubtless depended on the circumstances in each case. See Powell, "Audio-Visual Poetics," pp. 131–32; and Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 45–48, 127–31, and 151–53.

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Bloch's project is to map the origins of a "feminization of the esthetic" that, he argues, is so pervasively influential in Christian thought that it makes up the very origin of the association of "the question of woman" with "that of reading in the literary history of the West."[83] The identification of woman with flesh and with secondary representation originated in the story of creation itself. Not only because it was Eve who seduced Adam but also because "the creation of woman is synonymous with the creation of metaphor, the relation between Adam and Eve is the relation of the proper to the figural, which implies a derivation, deflection, denaturing, a tropological turning away."[84] Thus, the Fall was a fall into the order of Eve, "a fall into mediations, signs, representations that imply a gap between inner and outer, the [prelapsarian] body and its cover."[85] Such thinking was at the root of "a metaphysics that abhorred embodiment," in which "woman's supervenient nature" was "indistinguishable from the acute suspicion of embodied signs—of representations."[86]

Women's proclivity for ornament and cosmetics figures as proof positive of their perversity in this argument, and on this point in particular, the point at which the flesh seduced glories in itself as seductress, one finds some of the most vehement displays of misogynist rhetoric. The following is taken from Tertullian's treatise "On the Apparel of Women":

> Come, now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians had been shearers of sheep, and the Chinese spinners of silk, the Tyrians dyers and the Phrygians embroiderers, and the Babylonians weavers of tapestry, if pearls had gleamed, and gemstones sparkled; if gold and the greed it inspires had already issued from the earth; if the mirror, too, had already been allowed to lie so largely; all these things, I imagine, Eve would have coveted, once she was banished from Paradise and thus already dead. Any woman, therefore, who hopes to live again [in Christ] should not long for them now, or even know of them, since she did not possess them or know of them when she lived in Paradise. All these things are but the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state, arrayed as if to lend splendor to her funeral.[87]

Woman-Eve (or *homo Eva*, for Tertullian admonishes his audience, "Do you not recognize Eve as yourself?") is the author of a multiplication of signs, of corporeal forms experienced as a movement away from God; to indulge herself in those same, to see them as enhancing her beauty and the means of enticing others' gazes—this was the height of depravity, devilry itself. It identified woman as a Christian Pandora, generator of the entire catalogue of vices known to man.[88] All these ideas, and even the specific ornaments and accessories of women's seductive art with which they were frequently illustrated, play an explicit role in the central demonstration of women's *lectio* in the *Speculum*

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83 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 47–48, s.a. pp. 90–91, 45.

84 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 38, s.a. pp. 22–29.

85 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 99.

86 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 37.

87 Translation of this passage has proven troublesome; this one is my adaptation based on several others in consultation of the Latin text as found in Tertullian, *Toilette des femmes*, pp. 43–45.

88 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 45.

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virginum. There, however, they are the starting points of a transformation that repeats the original redemption of woman and flesh through Mary as *nova Eva*, the New Eve. But before I turn to the *Speculum*'s solution to this metaphysical conundrum—and here one should not overlook the place given its titular mirror in Tertullian's tirade—one further point in the patristic tradition deserves special emphasis. The world of representations is verbal as well as visual, woman is synonymous with rhetoric, the seductive power of the spoken word, and ultimately with poetry and poetics as "representational pleasures" appealing to the senses and prone to the decorative and ornamental.[89] This dimension of the argument is witnessed in the long tradition of Christian rhetoric in rejection of *ioculatores*, or jongleurs, who were also the primary purveyors of vernacular poetry:

> If any one delights in the sports of the circus, or the struggles of athletes, the versatility of actors, the figure of women, in splendid jewels, dress, silver and gold, and other things of the kind, the liberty of the soul is lost *through the windows of the eyes*, and the prophet's words are fulfilled: "Death is come up into our windows" (Jer. ix. 21). Again, our sense of hearing is flattered by the tones of various instruments and the modulations of the voice; and *whatever enters the ear* by the songs of poets and comedians, by the pleasantries and verses of pantomimic actors, weakens the fiber of the mind.[90]

Jerome broadens Tertullian's focus from a perversion of the soul that operates through the eye to include the ear as well. All the senses are gendered feminine, but the eye and the ear together are the primary "windows" of a seduction exercised on a female body.

If preoccupation with the visual remains the most pervasive feature of the rhetoric that conflates woman, flesh, and ornament, it is because visual perception, above all, makes the woman into the image of the flesh as both the seductress and the seduced. The same idea implies, as a consequence, the doubling or mirroring of an essentially feminine gaze. When it delights in material form, the flesh gazes upon itself. As Bloch observed, "If woman is conceived to be analogous to the senses or perception, then any look upon a woman's beauty must be the look of a woman upon a woman, and the male gaze is a non-sequitur."[91] Rupert exploited this very idea to an opposite purpose through his feminine reading models. "You should emulate [Ooliba's] gaze and desire," Mary tells her followers, but that desire should be directed towards "a better picture." For Rupert and other twelfth-century thinkers, the problem lies not in the seductive nature of visible forms, in exterior things, but only in the *intentio* of the viewer, the inner orientation of "her" desire, or the direction of "her" gaze.

There is no doubt that Bloch is correct to insist on the persistent and comprehensive identification of woman with a dualistic abhorrence of the flesh—in all conceivable manifestations. The problem with his argument lies in a failure to recognize that it was medieval thinkers themselves, and not modern scholarship, who first dismantled it by reversing its assumptions. Where Bynum's work reveals that the same extension of dualistic oppositions on which such thinking was based could be employed to enable its

89 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 46.

90 Jerome, *Against Jovinius*, 2.8, p. 394; emphasis added.

91 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 106.

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reversal, Bloch sees no such possibility: "Poised between the contradictory abstractions implicated in each other, women are idealized, subtilized, frozen into a passivity that cannot be resolved. … Woman, at least no real woman, can resolve the dilemma of the contradictory abstracted double."[92] In women's reading as it is offered in the *Speculum virginum*, we will see how the twelfth century answered Bloch's supposed conundrum by calling upon "young women" to gaze upon Ooliba's gazing as the mirror of their own desires, a process that takes place almost entirely as juxtaposition of opposites and postulates that it is the very doubling of the flesh on both sides of the mirror that makes integration out of opposition, Mary out of Eve.

The most concise formulation of the effort to "redeem" woman and the vehicles of her perception in the *Speculum virginum* poses the paradoxical possibility of redemption through "fallen" media as a figure of the relationship between flesh and spirit. The passage in fact introduces the picture that begins part 8, the picture of the *colluctatio carnis et spiritus* (struggle of flesh and spirit) (fig. 3.5). Taking the bull by the horns, as it were, it begins with Eve and Adam:

> Nonne et hoc habes in apostolo, quod: "Caro concupiscat adversus spiritum et spiritus adversus carnem?" Eva seducens virum Adam carnis concupiscentia est seducens spiritum, in qua colluctatione nisi ratio et sapientia moderetur utrumque, alterum periclitatur ab altero. Quod ut apertius clareat, rursus figuram ponamus, et quomodo sensus carnales obvient spiritalibus, quomodo trahant isti, illi fugiant, ostendamus. Sepe enim aliud per aliud consideratur, et per rerum imagines visibilibus obiectas intellectus acuitur. Sicut igitur proprium habet qualitas et natura uanitati studentium puellarum, vicio curiositatis pre ceteris laborare et in speculis leuitates nugarum suarum exercere, sic Christi uirgines, quacumque rerum similitudine uel collatione uisibilia possunt inuisibilibus conferri ipsæque per hoc ad profectum uirtutum excitari, gratanter intuentur, coniectantes maiora de minoribus et quandam ueritatis soliditatem in figuralibus speculantes rationibus.
>
> (*SV*, 7, p. 220, punctuation slightly modified)
>
> (Did not the apostle write: "The desires of the flesh are in conflict with the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are in conflict with the flesh?" [Galatians 5:17]. Eve seducing the man, Adam, is the desire of the flesh seducing the spirit. Unless the power of reason and wisdom governs each in this struggle, the one is imperilled by the other. So that this may appear more clearly, let us once again turn to a picture, and show in what way the corporeal senses impede the spiritual, in what way the latter draw forth, even as the former flee. Often, though, the one is contemplated through the other, and understanding is sharpened by images of things offered for visual inspection. Just as it is characteristic of the quality and nature of girls studious of vanity to cultivate curiosity above other vices and to tend to their frivolous trifles before a mirror, so also the virgins of Christ gladly contemplate whatever similitude or analogy through which visible things may be transformed into invisible ones such that they be excited to the perfection of virtues, understanding greater things through lesser ones and seeking [*speculantes*] the solidity of truth in figural representations.)

The passage makes a jump from the equation "woman is to man as flesh is to spirit," to the equation "the carnal senses are to the spiritual (senses/things) as picture is to

92 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 90–91.

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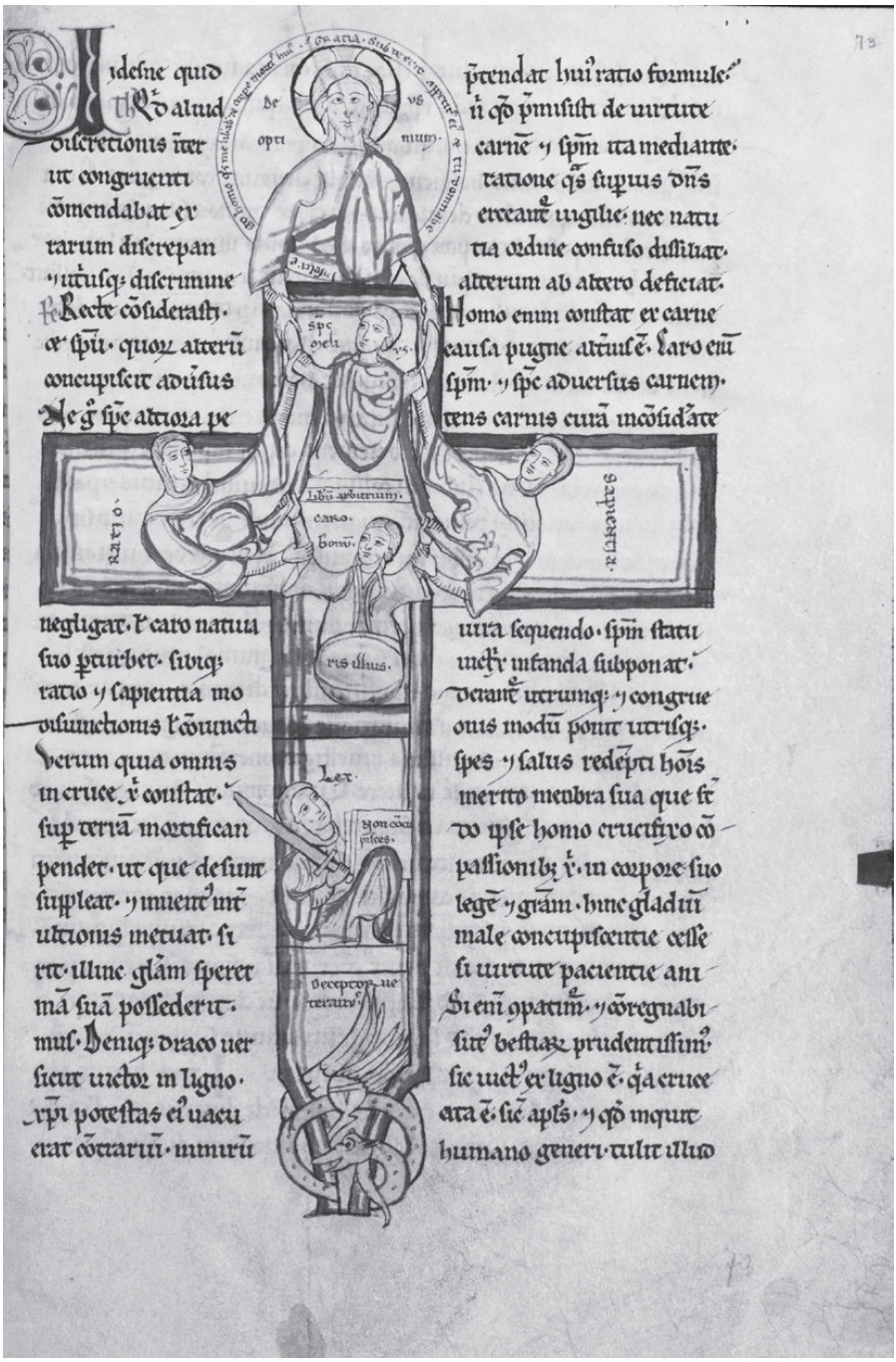


Figure 3.5. The Struggle between Spirit and Flesh, *Speculum virginum*, early thirteenth century, Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, MS W. 72, fol. 73r. Creative Commons License.

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idea." The process of the first equation is said to be seduction, while in the second it has become instruction—but is nonetheless reidentified as one in kind with young girls' preening before their mirrors. This last image is by no means a mere topos: the mirror as an image of human recognition is equated here for the first time with the mirror as an accessory of female beauty, and this with remarkable intentionality.[93] The movement back and forth between the opposition of spirit and flesh and that of picture and idea allows the two processes to become one in this image of woman before mirror, which is itself both object and mirror of the audience's own gaze. The emphatic opposition of the Pauline dictum that opens the passage is simply elided; the defence of the flesh is not overtly espoused, it rather emerges as a simple consequence of the extension by analogy of the binary opposition. At the end we are left with the idea of a continuity between the female gaze of *curiositas* and an equally female gaze that seeks spiritual enlightenment.[94]

In the picture thereby announced, *caro* is represented as a woman and *spiritus* as a man (fig. 3.5).[95] *Caro* receives the attribute *bonum* and is thus hierarchically distinguished from *spiritus–melius* and *deus–optimus* but also placed in a continuous relationship to them: the separation is one of degree, not of kind. Beyond this, this picture offers little that would seem immediately to fulfil the promise of the passage with which it is introduced.

Demonstration of the women's reading as the way to the spirit through the flesh instead forms the central, structuring idea of the original presentation of the project; that is, in the text of part 3 and the double, mirror picture that follows, commonly referred to today as the "Trees of the Vices and Virtues" (fig. 3.6). Reversal of patristic rhetoric occurs there in a form analogous to that observed in the passage above, by seizing on the very terms of the rejection and performing their transformation. Eve becomes a wise virgin who gazes on a new mirror twice over, through two media jointly employed. The text of part 3 transforms the seductive finery—the "ornaments"—of the daughters of Sion (Isaiah 3:16–22) together with their mirror into the "mystical wedding finery of virgins."[96] The whole is to serve at once as a mirror of spiritual beauty and as the exemplary demonstration of how the women read. The picture, which the text designates as "the fruits of the flesh and the spirit" (*fructus carnis et spiritus*) (fig. 3.6),[97] is likewise identified as a mirror, the contemplation of which is conflated with the process of reading scripture:

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93 Jónsson, *Miroir*, pp. 196–97.

94 On this point, too, Jónsson underlines the originality of the *Speculum*: "Cette juxtaposition des deux functions du miroir est tout à fait remarkable à l'epoque; … aucun auteur médiévale n'avait dans le meme texte défini et séparé les deux functions avec tant de netteté" (Jónsson, *Miroir*, p. 189, s.a. 193–99).

95 The sex of the *caro* figure is readily evident in both *L* and *K*, the two oldest and best copies, and it is especially clear in *H*, the direct descendant of *L*, as seen in Figure 3.5.

96 "Mystica virginum ornamenta sponsalia" (*SV*, 3, p. 72).

97 *SV*, 3, p. 83, and 4, p. 85. Elsewhere, the text does refer to the pictures as "trees," but never offers the title *arbores viciorum et virtutum*.

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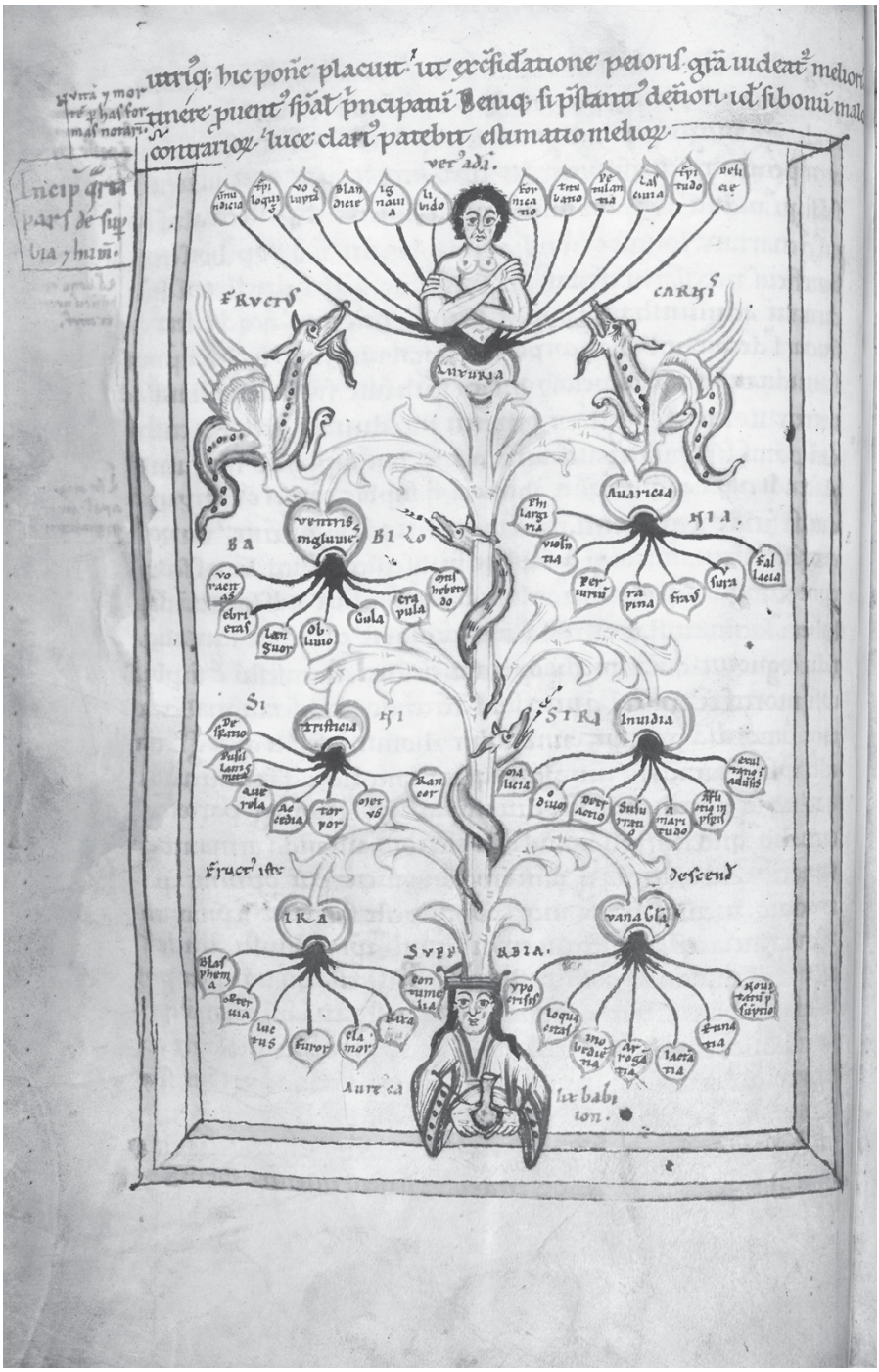


Figure 3.6. The Fruits of the Flesh (verso) and the Fruits of the Spirit (recto), *Speculum virginum*, ca. 1140, London, British Library MS Arundel 44, fols. 28v and 29r. © The British Library Board.

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Figure 3.6. (*continued*)

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> Speculum, filia queris. Ecce quantum profeceris vel defeceris, in alterutro fructu speculari poteris. Hic enim, si te queris, reperis. Speculum dici non potest nisi quod intuentis imaginem representat. Igitur ex consideratione sacrae scripturae te ipsam consule, et aliqua vel virtutum vel viciorum vestigia reperis impressa conscientiae tuae.
>
> (*SV*, 4, p. 85)[98]

> (You ask for a mirror, daughter. Here you can behold, in the one fruit and the other, how much you have progressed and where you are still wanting. Here, indeed, if you seek, you will find yourself. Nothing can be called a mirror unless it reveals the image of its beholder. Therefore, advise yourself through the consideration of holy scripture, and you will discover the signs of the vices and virtues impressed on your conscience.)

Only apparently the representation of two irreconcilable opposites, the picture in fact superimposes an idea of growth or progress in the moral, inner life onto a history of salvation as the transformation of the old Paradise into the new, a transformation whose human agents are Eve and Mary.[99]

In the picture of the *fructus carnis et spiritus* as in the passage on the "struggle" between them, opposition is not a figure of antithesis but an invitation to join, compare, and retain what is useful in movement from the one to the other; to observe, as Peregrinus says, "how much you have progressed and where you are still wanting." The trees are an image of their beholder in that her gaze invents a self-image in the space between them, supplying a mediating position in the void between evil and good, *superbia* and *humilitas* as the roots of the trees. The progression from the old to the new Paradise is made most immediately evident through their respective "fruits," labelled as *vetus* and *novus Adam*. Around the left tree a serpent coils. This tree, *Babilonia sinistra*, as its inscription reads, represents the old woman, who brings forth the old man; while the right tree, or *Ierusalem dextra*, generates the new man, Christ as an outgrowth or "fruit" of her inner virtue. This tree stands in the same relationship to Mary's generation of Christ as the communication illustrated above the *audi-et-vide* address does to the Annunciation. The virgins, contemplating their "beauty" in this mirror, fulfil the pedagogical value envisioned for flesh and picture (*fructus carnis*) in the passage from part 8; they fulfil no less the conception and bearing of Christ (*fructus spiritus*) as envisioned in the final frontispiece. In a remark occasioned by discussion of the other mirror at hand, the ornaments of the daughters, Peregrinus makes clear that the contemplation of either mirror is an exercise in reading scripture, which, in turn, is the process that allows the virgins to bear Christ within: "For Christ is the Word of the Father, and thus Christ is reborn within your breast even so much as you delight in the Word of Life. Where then should the vices take root, when within you grows the fountain of all virtue?"[100]

The female viewer reconstitutes Mary's transformation in her hermeneutic mediation between the left and the right tree. Mary is thus present in the image to the extent that it is properly "read," even as Christ is conceived and born anew through the same

98 The words in *alterutro fructu* refer to the two pictures. A passage later in part 4 describes the effects of scripture as a mirror in similar terms (*SV*, 4, p. 107).

99 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 136–38.

100 "Cum enim Chirstus verbum sit patris, totiens Christum geris in pectore quotiens delectaris verbo vitae. Ubi igitur locus erit vitiorum, quando apud te geris fontem virtutum?" (*SV*, 3, p. 68).

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hermeneutic act. The picture visualizes as a process the invitation to the bride in the opening address to make "the new woman from the old, a beautiful woman of an ugly one, a strong woman of a weak one"; that is, to enter into the transformation from Eve to Mary, which is itself the redemption of woman. Here, then, lies the solution to the woman's reading conundrum: woman as body contemplates obverse images of the body as woman and "seeks herself" as a moment of transformation from the one to the other; her reading life is a figure of the integration of the life of the flesh into the life of the spirit. No less was described above as the process whereby the virgins "gladly contemplate" their self-image as young girls who "tend to their frivolous trifles before a mirror," seeking to transform *visibilia* into *invisibilia* even as they seek "the solidity of truth in figural representations": these pictures of her reading path.

As indicated above, Rupert's understanding of the Song of Songs stands behind this image and is present on the same terms as Mary is herself: the picture maps out the generation of the *paradisus novus* from the *paradisus antiquus*, which Rupert, in a passage he singled out as the inner mystery of his text, had read as Mary's realization of Canticles 4:12, *hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus*.[101] The picture offers the virgins a stage of reflection and visualization that corresponds to the tropological dimension of this reading act: the way it is relived in the inner life. The text affirms this idea in the same way as it does elsewhere, through the words of Canticles 1:3 to signal the virgins' identification with the images of Mary's experience—a moment to which I will return below. It is the idea of the woman's reading of the Song of Songs as a mirror in which she relives and transforms, as Mary did, the seduction of Eve, that unites scripture, picture, and Mary's reading path equally as the "visual" objects of the virgins' reading, as one and the same mirror in which she sees "herself"—as a woman before a mirror.[102]

In the discussion of the daughters of Sion, woman's reading life is presented, literally speaking, as the process in which she is clothed and adorned as the bride. Theodora requests treatment "of this mirror and ornament in both literal and figurative meanings" so that she might not arrive at the wedding "improperly dressed," or, in the words given her by scripture, "that she not be found naked even while clothed" (2 Corinthians 5:3).[103] "This mirror" is thus also that used by young girls in the art of pleasing the beloved:[104] "Looking-glasses [*specula*] are so-called because women use them to look on their faces and their finery," says Peregrinus as he catalogues this item with the rest of the ornaments.[105] As he turns from the literal to the figural, or "mystical"

101 *CCC*, 4, pp. 85–86. Rupert begins his fourth book with the words, "Ecce in medio nuptiarum sumus, nuptiarum hominis regis." See also Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 132.

102 Eleanor Greenhill's attempt to interpret the text as a commentary on the Song of Songs was thus not so abstruse as it appeared to many, as affirmed (exceptionally) by Leclercq, Review of Greenhill, 477–79. See also Jónsson, *Miroir*, pp. 187–99.

103 "Quia igitur speculum visibus nostris proponere decrevisti, non pigeat te de hoc speculo et ornatu isto ad litteram et figuram aliqua resolvere, ut ipsa de his scientia sit … Christi virginibus cautelæ providentia, ne iuxta apostolum vestitæ nudæ inveniantur" (*SV*, 3, p. 68).

104 Also emphasized by Jónsson, *Miroir*, pp. 196–97.

105 "Specula dicta sunt a speculando, eo quod facies suas et copitis ornatum in eo soleant speculari…" (*SV*, 3, p. 71).

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explication, he substantiates the analogy by appropriating a passage from Paul to his own purposes: "Nonne et habes in apostolo, quod 'mulier innupta cogitat, quomodo placeat deo, quæ autem nupta est cogitat, quæ mundi sunt, quomodo placeat viro?' Diversus amor utriusque discernit inter utrumque" (Does not the apostle say, where "the unmarried woman is intent on how to please God, she who is married is intent on things of this world, on how to please her husband" [1 Corinthians 7:34]? The different love of each distinguishes between them) (*SV*, 3, p. 71). The continuity that Peregrinus intends between worldly and religious women is the result of a liberty taken with the biblical text. In a contrast between virgins' attention "to the things of God" (*quae Domini sunt*) and that of married women to what pleases men (*quomodo placeat viro*),[106] Peregrinus replaces *quae Domini sunt* with *quomodo placeat Deo*, forcing a parallel in the efforts made to please the beloved. The injunction to contemplate things divine he omits altogether: the flesh, the entire concern of the worldly woman, is implicitly upheld as the starting point for the spiritual quest of the virgin, while "a different love," the differing direction of their attention, will distinguish between them.

This starting point of the virgins' quest to become the consummate bride thus puts them in the same position as Rupert defined for his audience through Ooliba. The same attention is to be devoted to a different picture-beloved. This basic movement of affective identification that then undergoes a transfer of object governs the entire presentation of the ornaments of the daughters; rather, the presentation serves to initiate its audience into the same as their way of reading in the body. Accordingly, Peregrinus's attention to the ornaments *ad litteram* does not treat of the "historical" sense of scripture—the cautionary tale of how the daughters of Sion fell out of favour with the Lord[107]—it is rather no more than a glossary that allows the listener to situate the Latin names of the ornaments in the world of her own experience (*SV*, 3, pp. 70–71). The images themselves apply to the virgins in the special sense: "Crede verbis nostris, filia, sermo iste propheticus specialiter adversus eas dirigitur, quae … sanctimonialum nomen acceperunt" (Believe our words, daughter! The prophet's words apply in a special way to those who … have accepted the sacred name of nun) (*SV*, 3, p. 69). Having gathered these scriptural images, Peregrinus proceeds to their individual relevance for the virgins' inner lives, their meaning *ad misticam* (*SV*, 3, pp. 71–77). They are mapped onto an ideal image of self, which becomes—very much in the sense just seen for the picture—the mirror of what the listener sees in the daughters as women in the world, daughters of Eve.

Peregrinus's instruction thus performs as *lectio* and *meditatio* within the *lectio divina*. Passages of scripture are selected in their relevance to the reader and then assimilated to self through a meditative process. As recast for the female religious, however, this process corresponds to an interiorization of the images of Eve's seductive

106 The Vulgate reads: *Et mulier innupta et virgo cogitat quae Domini sunt, ut sint sancta corpore, et spiritu. Quae autem nupta est, cogitat quae sunt mundi, quomodo placeat viro* (1 Corinthians 7:34). This passage is cited all of nine times in the *Speculum*. The other eight instances limit themselves to the first sentence, pertaining to the virgin, and follow the Vulgate text.

107 This same is briefly considered earlier, *SV*, 3, pp. 66–67, such that the daughters are identified with *superbia* and the virgins with *humilitas*, but only as a preliminary.

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art and their transformation into an image of inner, spiritual growth. Theodora refers to the same idea as the proper function of the ornaments of the daughters when she urges Peregrinus to continue "ut quod feminis ornatus iste conferre videtur exterius, misticis siginificationibus pro nobis agat interius" (so that what this finery is seen to bestow on women outwardly may work through its mystical meaning for us inwardly) (*SV*, 3, p. 74). The image of the virgins' inner life is in turn realized as fusion with the letter of scriptural imagery—but within "a different picture": the process culminates repeatedly in a fusion between Word and self that corresponds to a fusion between letter and gloss as witnessed through the experience of the bride in the Song of Songs. The process of clothing and adorning the bride is in this way demonstrated as a reading process that uses woman's proclivity for ornament and the exterior as the inverted means of her redemption.

Virgins and daughters are initially equated in their original vocation as "viewers," or "watchful souls": "Syon speculatio dicitur, cuius filiæ sunt sanctæ animæ virgines precipue ad auctorem suum ardentissimo amore speculandum procreatæ" (Sion means "lookout," and the daughters are the holy souls, above all virgins, who were created to watch in ardent love for their creator) (*SV*, 3, p. 68). Later, the daughters' moral failing is identified explicitly as one of visual cupidity; wandering eyes trigger depraved moral development:

> Denique in nutibus oculorum filiarum Syon duplex cor et inconstans intellige, ubi quod mens maliciose vel vane concipit, indecenti gestu corporis prodit et, quod gerit intus, exterius ostendit.
>
> (*SV*, 3, p. 69)
>
> (Finally, you should see in the lustful glances of the daughters of Sion a duplicitous and inconstant heart, in which that which the mind conceives in malice and vanity is manifest in an indecent bearing of the body, and what is born within becomes manifest without.)

This passage finds its implicit reversal in Theodora's statement of her objective as just cited, which itself echoes the *conceptio per aurem et oculum* as evoked in the *audi-et-vide* address: "so that what the voice intimates externally may dwell internally, and what is drawn in through the eyes' gaze may bear fruit in inner contemplation" (*SV*, 3, p. 58). The gaze of the bride of Christ, no less than her hearing, draws from the exterior to the interior, where her moral life takes shape as the progressive perfecting of her own image as the *sponsa corporaliter*. The virgins seek to become the *sponsa et mater*, but like Rupert's *adulescentula*, they inherit the capacity to do so from Eve, represented here by her descendants, the daughters of Sion. The assimilation of scriptural imagery to their reading selves occurs as the visual reclaiming of the images of woman as seductress so that these may instead seduce the heavenly bridegroom.

The seductive intention of the literal ornaments is emphasized especially for the first, the *calciamentes* (sandals), and the last, the *fascia* (corset). *Lascivia muliebris* is responsible for the ornaments on sandals, "so that they may please their lovers all the more."[108] The *fascia* is a cloth wrap that pushes up the breasts, "to offer them more generously to

108 "… ut magis ex hoc amatoribus suis placeat" (*SV*, 3, p. 70).

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the eyes of the beholder."[109] The same features recur in the mystical explication, where the idea of physical beauty, far from being suppressed, is expanded and supported in each case by a citation from the Song of Songs. Peregrinus begins, "What else is to be understood of [the virgins'] footwear, if not what you read in the Song of Songs: 'How comely your steps in your sandals, o daughter of the prince!' [Canticles 7:2]."[110] All told, he will cite the Song of Songs eight times in the mystical explication of the ornaments.[111] The repeated effect is to refer the worldly beauty of the daughters not only to an abstract inner virtue but also to the equally physical beauty of the bride of the Song. The explication *ad misticam* culminates in the *fascia* and the *olfactoriola*. Of the *fascia*, which is worn by the virgins as a sign of their chaste fidelity to Christ, the Song is made to bear double witness:

> "Pone me," inquit, "ut signaculum super cor tuum, ut signaculum super brachium tuum." Sicut enim lascivia virgo seculae papillas carnis erumpentes stricta premit fascia, sic vera virgo, veri sponsi sponsa castitatis et pudiciciæ vinculo vinciat interiora ubera sua, ut spiritu sancto preventa possit proclamare: "Dilectus meus mihi inter ubera mea commorabitur."
>
> (*SV*, 3, p. 76)

> ("Place me," the bridegroom says, "as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm [Canticles 8:6]." For just as the lustful young woman in the world presses up the swelling flesh of her breasts with a tightly wrapped cloth, so the true virgin, bride of the true bridegroom, should bind her inner breasts with the bond of chastity and modesty, so that, once filled with the Holy Spirit, she may proclaim, "My beloved will rest between by breasts" [Canticles 1:13].)

The text makes its own explanation here of "how" the listener can be brought to "proclaim" identification with the letter of the bride's experience, and the understanding operates by strict analogy (*sicut … sic*) with the worldly woman's concern for physical appeal to her lover. The virgin understands her experience through this analogy—the "special" relevance of scriptural images to her life as embodied bride—and proclaims it in the words of the bride of the Song. The transfer of the experience of worldly women to the spiritual life does not suppress or even mitigate its sensual appeal; the literal meaning is not relinquished but rather realized in the poetic eroticism of the Song of Songs.

This is the ascent to the letter of the bride's experience that we saw illustrated in the frontispiece and announced in the original introduction. The reading moment—Mary's own—occurs over and over again in the text; it serves several times to portray the fulfilment of the instructive process as either the realization of an inner Paradise or the consummate virgin's entry into the heavenly Paradise.[112] The first of these occurs in the mystical treatment of the *olfactoriola* (perfume vials), which concludes the ornaments of the daughters of Sion. "The pure hearts of Christ's virgins are the holy *olfactoriola*," Peregrinus begins, and then unleashes a rhapsodic accumulation of aromatic spices

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109 "… ut gratior intuentum oculis videatur" (*SV*, 3, p. 71).

110 "Quid de calciamentis aliud intelligendum est, nisi quod habes in canticis canticorum: 'Quam pulcher sunt gressus tui in calciamentis tuis, filia principis?' " (*SV*, 3, p. 72).

111 One of these, *SV*, 3, p. 77, was overlooked in the edition.

112 In addition to the passage discussed below, see *SV*, 1, pp. 37–38; 4, p. 97; and 10, pp. 306–8.

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and floral growths as the virgins' inner virtues.[113] The passage serves to assimilate the *emissiones* of the *hortus conclusus* in Canticles 4:12–13 to the virgins' inner lives, thus completing *as reading practice* the identity between them and the same scriptural image that, while itself the *fons et origo* of the visualization of their lives in the *fructus spiritus*, remains otherwise unspoken in the text:[114]

> In his olfactoriolis humilitatis redolet viola, hic aureae spirat verecundiae rosa, lilium albae castimoniae, poma spiritualis exuberantiae, ibi denique "ciprus cum nardo, nardus et crocus, fistula et cinamomum cum universis lignis Libani, mirra et aloe cum omnibus primis unguentis," hoc est in cordibus virginum perfecto amore Chirstum querentium inveniuntur suaveolentia germina omnigenarum virtutum, quarum radices mentis et corporis puritas et humilitas.
>
> (*SV*, 3, pp. 76–77)
>
> (In these perfume bottles the violet of humility releases its fragrance, the rose breathes golden modesty, the lily chastity, the apple spiritual exuberance; there, where "the cyprus with nard, nard and saffron, cane and cinnamon with all the trees of Lebanon, myrrh and aloe with all the best unguents" [Canticles 4:13]—that is, in the hearts of virgins who seek Christ in perfect love, there are found the sweetly fragrant shoots of every kind of virtue, whose roots are purity of mind and body and humility.)

The exposition of the daughters of Sion—as Peregrinus indeed indicates at the outset—is none other than the same transformation as reading process that is visualized in the two trees as the Old and the New Eve. The two presentations duplicate each other, but as consummate translations of one idea into two different media. The passage that follows concludes, then, in the only way possible, by describing the assimilation of letter to life as identification with the archetype of the *sponsa*'s response: "His unguentis et aromatibus Christi virgines delibutae cum apostolo possunt proclamare, 'Christi bonus odor sumus' … et illud: 'Trahe me post te, curremus in odore unguentorum tuorum' " (When they have been daubed with these unguents and perfumes, Christ's virgins may proclaim with the apostle, "We are the good fragrance of Christ" [2 Corinthians 2:15], … and that word, "Draw me after you, we will run in the fragrance of your ointments" [Canticles 1:3]) (*SV*, 3, p. 77).

The same programmatic moment, here applied to the virgins' listening "conception" (scripture as *speculum*), is applied to its ocular complement once the picture-mirror of the same process has been introduced between parts 3 and 4. The demonstration of the pictures as *speculum* builds to an analogous rhetorical crescendo evoking the virgin's entry into heavenly Paradise.[115] In this last instance, the picture itself opens like a

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113 "Munda Christi virginum corda sancta sunt olfactoriola …" (*SV*, 3, p. 76).

114 This identification was then indeed made explicit in the reconception of the opening in part 1 and its pictures; see Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 147–48.

115 The inspiration for the *Speculum*'s use of Canticles 1:3 possibly came from the liturgy of the feast of Mary's Assumption, where it occurs as Mary's dying words, marking the culmination of a narrative in which she seeks reunification with Christ; see Fulton, "Quae est ista," 101–17, esp. 107, 113. The congregation would have known it as such.

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window onto Paradise[116]—when the instructor asks his pupil to witness the "mutation" of the one tree into the other:

> Sed leva relicta, dexteram repetamus, ligno vitae transgressionis stipitem mutemus, paradisum intremus amentitate sua ultra gratiam secularis exuberantiae deliciosum … ubi tanta quinis sensibus haurias delicias, ut gratanter odorifero haustu perfusa domino tuo sursum residenti proclames: "Trahe me post te, curremus in odore unguentorum tuorum."
>
> (*SV*, 4, p. 97)
>
> (But leaving the left side, let us return to the right, let us transform the trunk of transgression into the tree of life, let us enter Paradise, in its delight and by its flowing abundance beyond all the rewards of this world. … where all your five senses imbibe such delights, that, filled through and through with this fragrant draught, you will cry out in gratitude to your lord who abides above, "Draw me after you, may we run in the fragrance of your ointments" [Canticles 1:3].)

The trees that are a map of the plan of salvation, portraying the generation of the New Man as the mirroring repetition of the generation of the Old, effect the same transformation in real time as a result of the reading process that is the instructional dialogue. The virgin relives the original transformation of Eve into Mary, and she does so through the experience of scripture in an audio-visual theatre. Peregrinus confirms as much when he next identifies the same tree as the image of her inner and her monastic life. The virgins as "virtutum cultores" are to be seen as the same "hortus deliciarum": "Accordingly, the Paradise I place before you is the rule of the monastic life, this garden is the harmonious communal life of holy virgins in Christ."[117]

In addition to the repetition of Canticles 1:3 as the announcement of identification achieved, four other instances signal a similar moment either through other passages from the Song of Songs or with the words of the adorned bride from Isaiah 61:10.[118] That the woman repeatedly ascends—through the embodied media of the instructional method—to a position of identification with the scriptural image is a reification of the vertical fusion of letter and gloss. That she cultivates the *hortus* within her as the progressive re-enactment of the salvation narrative and the Incarnation is likewise a consequence of the same reification, a reconstitution of the narrative transformation from Eve to Mary in her life. The *hortus conclusus* of Canticles 4:12—in which Rupert was able to read Mary as the new Paradise, thus inspiring the *Speculum*'s picture of the *fructus carnis et spiritus*—resurfaces in the *Speculum virginum* as the *hortus deliciarum*, a figure that equates it with the Paradise to come (in Heaven), the monastery, and the virgins' reading lives. The woman's body is the site of the integration of the life of the flesh into

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116 To designate this function for the picture of "Mystical Paradise," added later with parts one and two, the author hits upon the moniker *paradisus speculatorius* (*SV*, 2, p. 39). See Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 152–53.

117 "Verum non solum fores premissos, id est virtutes, sed et virtutum cultores studiosos hortum istum deliciarum dixerim. … Itaque paradisus, quem propono, monasticae vitae regula est, hortus iste sanctarum virginum concors in Christo commanentia est …" (*SV*, 4, p. 98).

118 *SV*, 3, p. 76; 6, pp. 174–75; and 1, p. 38; 4, p. 113.

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that of the spirit, fulfilled through the assimilation of image/letter to life. She reifies the reading experience that Rupert first revealed through Mary in his commentary on the Song of Songs.

A Female Poetics of Body and Truth

When seen through this reading model of integration, the *audi-et-vide* address that once opened the work is revealed as far more than an expansion of Benedict's prologue to include the eye in instruction; it is an inversion of the eye and ear as the windows of Eve's seduction such that they become the instruments of "her" transformation, the extension into poetics of Mary's original inversion, the transformation of the Old into the New Eve.[119] When the *audi-et-vide* address states that Christ seeks "open eyes and open ears," so that what is heard and what is seen are drawn from the outer to the inner world to form the consummate bride, it describes the same process that elsewhere accomplishes continuity in rupture between the seductive wiles of worldly women and the inner beauty of the virgin, the use of mirrors there, the use of scripture and picture here, the woman as body and the body as woman's mirror.

The method reproduces over and over again this essential doubling of the female gaze as the implicit rationale for the necessary integration of a female dependency on the flesh and the senses into the life of the spirit. The oppositional pairs that shape the instructive project are all alternative remanifestations of the analogy in opposition between Eve's seduction and religious instruction. The woman's way of knowing the Word attends to and seeks the latter through the former and discovers in the process the "special" meaning that this "conjunction of divergent natures" brings to her understanding of her spiritual life.[120] The original "mirror" of this process in the treatment of the daughters of Sion itself contains the seductive instrument mirror as one of the women's ornaments—what Tertullian had called "the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state." Like the continuity between secular and religious roles that became characteristic of female religious experience, women's reading was a figure of continuity in rupture, of integration between opposite poles: "In hac itaque carnis et spiritus coniunctione vel disiunctione vigilandum est Christi virgini" (Thus to this conjoining and separation of spirit and flesh Christ's virgins should give their utmost attention) (*SV*, 8, p. 221).

The figure of the woman reader has attracted considerable attention in study of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but this attention has focused primarily on vernacular literature and has thus generally substituted the replica for the original and overlooked or misunderstood the substance of the transfer between them. In a contribution

119 The contrast between Eve's seduction through the voice of the serpent and Mary's conception of Christ through the voice of Gabriel is a constant of the tradition of the *conceptio per aurem* from the earliest witnesses onward; see Constas, *Proclus*, pp. 282–90; also Steinberg, "Filippo Lippi's 'Annunciation'," 26–27.

120 The opening of part 6 features the relationship between the five bodily senses and their inner spiritual equivalents as a "coniunctae naturae discrepantia vel discrepantis naturae coniunctio" (*SV*, 6, p. 161).

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investigating the woman reader as cast in Richard of Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amours* and its anonymous *Response*—a multilayered persiflage of the complicity between models of reading sacred and profane in later thirteenth-century France—Helen Solterer identifies in its "figure of the woman reader" an innovative "iconoclasm" that "suggests in its widest terms a physical recasting of epistemology."[121] This woman reader "reclaims her senses as a mode of self-defense," an attitude towards sensory experience that affirms value in all its vehicles and rehabilitates women's habitual vice, *curiositas*, to restore it to a more neutral semantic field[122]

> Just as it is characteristic of the quality and nature of girls … to cultivate curiosity above other vices, and to tend to their frivolous trifles before a mirror, so also the virgins of Christ gladly contemplate whatever similitude or analogy through which visible things may be transformed into invisible ones such that they be excited to the perfection of virtues.
>
> (*SV*, 7, p. 220)

Behind Richard's playful manipulation of an audio-visual form and the genres of instruction (the bestiary) and seduction (the love letter) lay a tradition of women's "special" relationship to the voice and truth of scripture that was well over a century old. The physical recasting of epistemology in the figure of the woman-as-reader occurred in the monastic culture of the early twelfth century.

In the patristic discourse on woman and body, women's proclivity for ornament and exterior charms was an expression of depravity *sui generis* because it further multiplied the sin, manifest in her bodilyness, that she brought into the world. For Tertullian, merely to catalogue all manner of luxuriant finery known to the early Christian world was to render transparent his abhorrence of Eve and her sex. The *Speculum*'s woman reader, it should be clear, is not presented with a reversal of the value of ornament itself. What was formerly depraved is not now "good." But depravity is no longer the inescapable consequence of the woman's position. She is given a different way of understanding the role of the body in her own life:

> "Omnis igitur gloria filiae regis ab intus," quia illum, qui facit aeternaliter beatos et gloriosos, possidet intus. Sicut enim Christus humana fragilitate deitatem celavit, et vili indumento "speciosum forma prae filiis hominum," sic virgo Christi, mundo foris despecta, mundi conditorie plena est. … Quid igitur opus habent virgines Christi olosericis indumentis vel aurotexta ciclade superius amiciri, armilla, anulis, inaruibus margaritarum granis splendientibus onerari, cum sacramentis spiritalibus fulgeant interius, quorum summa omnium est Christus?
>
> (*SV*, 3, p. 63)
>
> ("For all the splendor of the king's daughter comes from within" [Psalm 44:14], because within she possesses him who grants eternal grace and glory. Just as Christ hid his divinity in the frailty of human flesh, concealing "his beauteous form from the sons of men"

121 "Medieval Senses," 129–45 at 142. On the *Bestiaire d'amours* as understood here, see above, pp. 1–2 and Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 343–57.

122 Solterer, "Medieval Senses," 142. For the frequent association of curiositas with woman and Eve's failing within contemporary instructional literature, see Newman, "Golden Bowl," 119.

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> [Psalm 44:3], under this wretched garment, so the virgin of Christ, abject to the eyes of the world, bears within the world's creator. … What need then, have the virgins of Christ to wrap themselves in garments of pure silk, to don a stately cloak worked in gold, or to adorn themselves with bracelets or rings or earrings hung with brilliant pearls, when they shine from within with the light of the spiritual sacraments whose essence is Christ himself?)

The body that willingly humbles itself and assumes an abject exterior joins Christ in the Incarnation. This body is no longer irretrievably a vile cover or deceptive exterior but rather can become the diaphanous vehicle of divinity and truth: Christ, born within, "shines" through it. The true virgin of Christ in this way reveals her own beauty, her own radiating ornament—evoked over and over again in the text through a visual idea, that of inner virtue manifest in the body as light radiating through material form. As Peregrinus says of the ornament that consists in the harmony between faith and action: "Iunge utrumque et deo placebis ex utroque. … Fulget alterum ex altero et fit ornatus communis utriusque collatio" (Join the two together and you will please God in both. … The one shines forth through the other, and from the combination results their reciprocal beauty) (*SV*, 3, p. 78). Or again, of the ornament afforded by a pure mind in a chaste body: "alterum splendeat ex altero et compositione specierum ornatus communis augeatur" (The one shines through the other and the combination of two substances increases the beauty of each) (*SV*, 3, p. 73). As Theodora affirms, "Magnus decor iste virginis, in quo deus homini coniungitur" (Great is this beauty of the virgin, in which God joins himself to humanity) (*SV*, 3, p. 73).

Such beauty radiating from within mirrors Christ's bodily divinity because it manifests a perfect accord between will and action, between inner truth and outer form. The gold ring that encloses a radiant gemstone—as the ornament bestowed on betrothal, whether of secular or sacred brides—becomes the archetypal symbol of women's perfection: "What then, is the precious stone enclosed in gold if not a pure heart enclosed in a chaste body?"[123] Woman as body lives in the peril of an immanently corruptible nature; her spiritual task is thus constantly to seek this state of perfect integrity, a state in which she again embodies the Word as it was originally embodied in Mary's flesh. The continuity with secular roles and desires in the female religious life is only one manifestation of a continuity between woman in the carnal and woman in the spiritual life that stems from the inability to renounce the flesh. The abject exterior, an exterior that abnegates its very exteriority, acknowledges woman as humanity's physicality and marks this as weakness and incapacity before God; it manifests the inner humility that is then the only true mirror of her outward state. This position does not renounce or revile the flesh but rather embraces it—as Christ did—as the true nature of humanity. The body contemplates itself as the available mirror of divinity. By injecting the woman-as-reader into the patristic epistemology of gender, twelfth-century monasticism reversed the significance of "the question of woman" for the question "of reading in the literary history of the West."[124]

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123 "Quid est enim lapis pretiosus in auro nisi pudica mens in corpore casto?" (*SV*, 3, p. 73).

124 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 47–48.

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This shift from the abhorrence of the exterior, of embodiment, to a position that abhors only discontinuity in representation between the idea and its embodiment thus proceeds from the same understanding of woman's position and shares the same structural order of importance, as that noted earlier from self-renunciation to self-contemplation. It is fundamental to the formulation of woman's spiritual experience and generates an entire complex of metaphors centring on the inner truth and outer form, the primacy of intention in virtuous action, the dangers of worldly praise and, once again, the mirror as the image of the desired continuity between flesh and spirit, as between self-image and *imago Dei*. These are the terms that, from this point on, define the spiritual life of the "New Eve."

The imperilled, corruptible state that is immanent in the woman's position is featured most frequently in the *Speculum virginum*—and elsewhere—in two ways: as the imperative preservation of her bodily integrity, that is, her virginity; and as the desire to please and her resultant susceptibility to praise. These latter represent the flesh as seductress and seduced, respectively, and therefore reveal the weakness that most often endangers the former. To please and be praised are behavioural manifestations of woman's attraction to the exterior—both tendencies find their place in the *Speculum* as equally central to women's religious vocations. The desire to please makes women adopt false exteriors, whether in ornament or action; in the virgin's instruction it is made the motivator—*quomodo placeat deo*—of her inner adornment in the virtues. The attraction to the exterior makes women susceptible to others' deceits; in the *Speculum virginum* it is the basis of their use of the mirror, "whatever … analogy by which visible things may be transformed into invisible ones."

Virginity itself is the sign of the vulnerable body, "the glass that is shattered with one blow."[125] The woman preserves both beauty and bodily integrity for the bridegroom, Christ, and does so literally, because she is the embodied bride. The imperative of continuity between inner intention and outer form—outer form being, in this case, bodily virginity or good works—is a rejection of bodily integrity or outward beauty as meriting reward in themselves. The woman who understands these latter as her own accomplishments rather than as the gift of her creator is as false as the flatterers who encourage her with their praise.[126] Thus, virginity as the vulnerable body, the false exterior, and "false praise" are intrinsically linked and mark a trajectory towards spiritual perfection that is essentially female.

Speaking in terms of poetics, the ideas of woman's body as exterior form and her task as the realization of the diaphanous body mean that both woman and representational forms retain integrity through the abject exterior, the one that seeks no praise, acknowledging its own baseness. Truth is manifest in the rejection of ornament and rhetorical eloquence but also of learning and letters, ideas that will figure largely in the justification

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125 The idea is a commonplace; I cite it here from Gautier de Coincy, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, vol. 3, p. 490, lines 788–89.

126 These ideas recur throughout the *Speculum virginum* and are also made the subject of part 6, within the explication of the parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). See esp. *SV*, 6, pp. 162–65, 172–73. The same complex of ideas is central to Abelard's pastoral concern for Heloise and her sisters at the Paraclete; see Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 269–78.

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of vernacular literature. The "reader" who corresponds to this idea of representation through the body diaphanous is the *mulier indocta* or *laica illiterata*, the body that is simple in its understanding not by negligence or mere ignorance, but by virtue of an incapacity that redeems the sensory means on which it depends—Ooliba on the way to becoming the *adulescentula*. We encountered her in singularly exalted form as Hildegard of Bingen; she will recur in vernacular literature both inside and outside the narrative, as protagonist and as audience.

Gregory's apology for visual art lends itself in the *Speculum* to this same notion of woman as monastic *laicus*. *Idiotas* and *ignorantes* … *qui litteras nesciunt* came to be understood as referring to laymen generally in opposition to clerics or *doctores*; in this way women were perpetual illiterates because they were never *clericus*.[127] But, as we have seen, the equation is more properly understood the other way around: laymen, as illiterates, are in fact a special category of woman as the sex that embodies humanity's weakness and insufficiency before God, humanity as bound to the body and dependent on the physical senses. A corollary thus emerges that we will find exploited in later chapters: laymen, in as much as they are "illiterates," are epistemologically female. This is the equation that makes the recasting of *lectio* for monastic women so readily accessible as the poetics of a layman's way of knowing the Word, how the woman-as-audience, the central concern of the *Speculum virginum*, could become an audience-as-woman in vernacular literature. The articulation of a spiritual path particular to the nature of woman as monastic *laicus* contains an implicit rehabilitation of the secular and vernacular, of the spiritual value of lay experience, which corresponds to yet another instance of reification, or the play between metaphor and experience.

The reading method of the *Speculum virginum* witnesses the woman as body seeking the integrity of the body in visible forms as the traces, the *vestigia*, of her absent beloved. They are her mirror. Part 1 identifies this woman reader through the scriptural figure of the *sponsa derelicta*:

> Sit igitur laudis divinæ confessio operum eius considerata magnitudo, ubi ratio ipsa *visum intuentis* in sapiente prevenit quia ex consideratione rerum visibilium, quod futurum est purificatæ mentis intellectu iam precurrit. Ubi dum virgo licet in hac carne posita steterit, *interiori mentis auditu* sponsum clamantem attendit: "Non vocaberis ultra derelicta et terra tua non vocabilitur amplius desolata."
>
> (*SV*, 1, p. 29, emphasis added)

> (Therefore from the contemplation of the greatness of his creation comes the outpouring of his praise, wherever the viewer's gaze is endowed with a reasoning mind, for that which will be is prefigured in the understanding of a pure heart through the contemplation of visible things. In which place once a virgin, though she remain in the world of the flesh, has established herself, she hears the voice of the bridegroom calling, "You shall no longer be called the foresaken one and no more shall your land be called desolate" [Isaiah 62:4].)

In the corporeal forms of this world, the audio-visual call to the bride comes directly from the bridegroom. This possibility is the bride's assurance that she is not truly forsaken,

127 For Gregory's text, see pp. 44–45, above.

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and serves as consolation for the physical loss her religious life requires. In response to a dubious inquiry from Theodora, Peregrinus gives this quasi-widowed state special emphasis:

> Numquid non videtur tibi virginitas quodammodo ex hoc derelicta, quæ licet sponso cælesti desponsata coniugalis gratiæ vel prolis manet tamen penitus ignara? Totius humanæ culturæ vel sementis nescia est ac per hoc ad multiplicandos filios Adæ penitus infecunda est. Itane menti tuæ querimonia lugubris excidit, quam vox una feminarum sterilium in veteri lege coram domino effudit se derelictas a deo conquerentium, quia sterilitate ventris earum populus dei non accepit incrementum?
>
> (*SV*, 1, pp. 29–30)
>
> (Does the state of virginity not seem to you forsaken in that a virgin, though she be betrothed to the heavenly bridegroom, remains utterly without experience of the grace of marriage and offspring? Of human conception and reproduction she knows nothing and is therefore entirely infertile for the increase of the sons of Adam. Has your heart forgotten the mournful lament that the infertile women of the old law poured forth as if in one voice before God, lamenting that He had forsaken them, because the sterility of their wombs had stopped the increase of God's people?)

Here again the virgins' position is not affirmed through negative representation of its alternative, the secular roles of women. The passage instead directly addresses the depth of deprivation felt by the infertile woman through the lamenting voices of Sarah and Rachel in the Old Testament. This mourning lament is made the virgins' own in preparation for the consolation offered in the ensuing discussion of marriage and birth in the Spirit. "Thus women reached God not by reversing what they were but by sinking more fully into it."[128]

As Augustine had written: "The entire church is a widow, whether men or women, husbands or wives, whether young people or the aged or virgins: all the church is a widow, forsaken in this world."[129] Thus the woman as "widowed bride" is a figure of all humanity, the church, but she remains no less a figure of her own bodily experience. She replicates in her own life the scriptural metaphors of the Fall, the Incarnation and salvation. The reification of the strategy of audience response defined as feminine identification produces a mirror experience in which the woman contemplates images of self as metaphors for the transformation from flesh into spirit and completes these metaphors as bodily transformation.

The life of the woman as a progression towards epiphany in the body thus constitutes a narrative dimension of the scriptural image, the rediscovery of coherence in the disjunct images of the Song and the prophets as a model of reading and viewing. The *sponsa derelicta*, or widowed bride, is herself a figure of the fusion between the bridal metaphor of Christian experience and its narrative, or "historical" dimension. In the use of this figure the experience offered the female religious through the instructional

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128 Bynum, "And Woman," p. 274; see also Newman, "Golden Bowl," 26–27.

129 "Tota ecclesia una uidua est, sive in uiris, siue in feminis, siue in coniugatis, siue in maritatis feminis, siue in adolescentibus, siue in senibus, siue in virginibus: omnis ecclesia una uidua est, deserta in hoc saeculo" (Augustine, *Ennarrationes in psalmos*, 131.23, p. 1923).

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process of the *Speculum virginum* joins both in media and in conception that offered the user or users of the St Albans Psalter, to be considered next. There the experience of the widowed bride is presented such that both the medium (vernacular narrative) and the content make it immediate and accessible, linguistically and conceptually. It is placed alongside a pictorial narrative of the history of salvation that fulfils essentially the same functions. The entire assemblage of images and texts serves the recreation of an aesthetic experience equated with that of dramatic performance, another multimedial translation through which the woman-as-reader completes her spiritual ascent as *sponsa corporaliter.*

In the *Speculum virginum*, what we have seen is the missing third dimension of the relationship between text and auditor, picture and viewer: the performance in which scriptural imagery is rendered as personal experience and the receptive act is a continuing process of assimilation of letter to life. The woman's life is a narrative reenactment of the fusion of letter and gloss, *sponsa* (body) and *sponsus* (head/soul), flesh and spirit. She identifies affectively with the images and metaphors of this abstract ascent from letter to spirit and seeks to make them continuous with her own experience, re-embodying the original *historia* that constitutes their fulfilment. Because she embodies the metaphor, her life as narrative is a figure of the same progression—recast not as a reading process in which cognition accomplishes the renunciation of the image but as experience that is communicable as such through the retention of its corporeality. This is as much as to say that in the woman, the reading experience of the *clericus/litteratus* becomes physically apprehensible as narrative, as "our" *historia*.

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Chapter 4

SEEKING THE READER/VIEWER OF THE ST ALBANS PSALTER

St Albans, a Psalter, a Life

Something happened in the 1120s at the English abbey of St Albans, not far north of London. Under an abbot of Norman origin, Geoffrey of Maine (r. 1119–1146), formerly a *magister* and schoolman of Le Mans, illustrated manuscripts "suddenly gushed forth like a released torrent."[1] The most notable example is the St Albans Psalter (ca. 1120–ca. 1140).[2] For Otto Pächt, its prefatory cycle of forty full-page pictures represented an "unparalleled outburst of pictorial narrative" in Western art and as such testified to "one of the most astonishing phenomena in the history of medieval art, second in importance only to the rise of monumental sculpture."[3] To be sure, Anglo-Saxon England had boasted a rich tradition of manuscript illumination that was abruptly broken off with the Norman Conquest. In particular, the tradition of psalter illustration and the inclusion of one or more full-page pictures marking the divisions between the Psalms was ancient and apparently well developed—even if the extant examples are few.[4] But this was not so much a revival as a completely new beginning: in style, execution, and content, "these pictures reject everything that Anglo-Saxon art had stood for"; and this above all in their representation of narrative.[5] These were not singular, timeless scenes of largely allegorical or symbolic significance but frozen moments of time made present and real, *sacra historia* dramatically arrested for the viewer's contemplative gaze (see figs. 4.3–4.9). For Pächt, this made St Albans into "the birthplace of a new art of storytelling," for "wherever in twelfth-century England we come across a sequence of narrative scenes, their iconography and style invariably points back to St Albans as the fountainhead of the pictorial tradition."[6]

By this account, the St Albans Psalter would have all but accomplished the visual turn of the twelfth century in reading and prayer. The significance of the reading Annunciate near the beginning of its picture cycle (fig. 4.3), which yielded a good deal to our attention in chapter 2, thus looms potentially very large. Immediately following the picture cycle is

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1 Dodwell, *Pictorial Arts*, p. 329.

2 Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1. Attempts to rename the book as the Psalter of Christina of Markyate (as I earlier did myself) or, most recently, the Markyate Psalter (see Collins and Fisher, eds. in the list of works cited), are more a hindrance than a help to continuing inquiry. On the dating, see Collins and Fisher, p. 3.

3 *Pictorial Narrative*, p. 13.

4 Openshaw, "Symbolic Illustration," 41–60; Openshaw, "Weapons," 17–38; Deshman, "Galba Psalter," 109–38.

5 Dodwell, *Pictorial Arts*, p. 329.

6 *SAP*, pp. 170–71.

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another vehicle of narrative renewal, the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* (fig. 4.10). The earliest extant manuscript of any monument of French vernacular literature thus occurs, on the one hand, bound into the material body of monastic prayer, the psalter, and on the other, twinned with a new art of pictured *lectio*, or visual storytelling. The visual and the vernacular turn, both in one binding: the understanding of Mary's reading agency as captured in the psalter's portrayal of the Annunciation appears to inaugurate a radical expansion in the use of images, narrative, and the vernacular, the translation of *sacra historia* into bodily media.

In the selection and treatment of its subjects, which reach from the Fall to Pentecost, the picture cycle offers much to sustain such a hypothesis. The reading Annunciate follows a two-page sequence of the Fall, identifying its narrative context as the making of the New Eve.[7] Of the remaining thirty-seven full-page pictures, Mary appears in no fewer than nine, including oddities such as the doubling of the Flight to Egypt with a mirroring image of the return and a striking entombment scene in which Mary displaces Joseph of Arimathea to figure at the centre of the composition (fig. 4.6). Mary is likewise found at the centre of the capital events that conclude the narrative and determine humanity's continuing relationship to Christ: his Ascension and the Pentecost (figs. 4.8 and 4.9). These latter examples, while not unprecedented, constitute striking iconographic gestures of theological significance.[8] Indeed, where Mary is not found at the centre of the images in which she appears, her experience constitutes the event portrayed (Annunciation, Nativity), with one exception: the Descent from the Cross, in which her position holding one of Christ's hands is symmetrical with John's (fig. 4.5). Other than Christ, she is the only figure portrayed within the cycle in both a three-quarter turn and full front, in the Annunciation and Pentecost, respectively.[9] This last feature serves to arrest attention on the two pictures that allow Mary's position to frame the whole. The connection between the two is marked by another feature as well: the descending dove.

The cycle displays the story of Christ's salvation of humanity, but it does so such that a woman's body is front and centre at every possible opportunity. It is the history of the Logos on Earth, shaped no less into a history of Mary's body as the meeting place of divinity and humanity. Nowhere is this idea more imposing than in her enlarged and central intrusion in the picture of Pentecost (fig. 4.9). There she all but displaces the apostles, who appear to be as much in awe of her as they are of the event. This is Mary as Rupert named her, as *omnium Scripturarum secretarium* and *magistra magistrorum*: she seems herself to create the enabling axis between humanity and the descending dove of the Spirit, as she does at the Ascension on the facing page. Her conception of the Word through the dove at the Annunciation thus appears as the enabling predecessor of the later event. What the apostles learned at Pentecost, Mary had known, completely and perfectly, "from the beginning," and thus in some way imparts to them.

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7 Connections between the two images are noted by Heslop, " 'Grand Tour'," p. 24.

8 *SAP*, pp. 67–70; and, on the Ascension in particular, Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," 525–27.

9 One other figure, the Devil, receives a single full-face portrayal in the Harrowing of Hell. As a marker of prominence, the gesture is typical of the Alexis Master's work; see Bepler, Kidd and Geddes, *Albani Psalter* (cited hereafter as *AP*), pp. 125, 127, 174–76.

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The real fountainhead of pictorial narrative thus appears to be the reading Annunciate herself; or rather, this spectacular emergence of pictorial narrative within psalter prayer is presented as a reflex of Mary's incarnatory reading. Immediately following the Old French narrative poem there is a bilingual insertion of Gregory the Great's apology for *picturae* as the scripture of the illiterate (fig. 4.11). The Psalter as a whole, with its illuminated calendar and finally the unprecedented programme of 215 historiated initials to the Psalms and other prayers, stands as if the material realization of the stereotypical equations Hildegard exploited to justify her audio-visual gnosis; that is, as if voice and vision had been translated, reified on the page as the material media suitable for the *laica et illitterata*, pictures and vernacular narrative.[10] It is the new mediary compendium of the reading bride. And, what is more, this reading bride appears to be identifiable as the holy woman Christina of Markyate.

Enter the adventurous and restlessly creative abbot, Geoffrey, who, if we are to believe a text he apparently commissioned, doted on the sometime vagrant recluse, Christina, housed on the periphery of his dominion.[11] Such is the story told in the *vita* of Christina of Markyate, a vivid and deceptively candid portrayal of a girl's bitter struggle against parents and church authorities alike to remain a virgin bride of Christ, of her flight from home into the shelter of a hermitage, of subsequent challenges to her vow of virginity and inner chastity, and, finally, of her growing powers as a holy woman and eventual establishment as prioress of a female community at Markyate.[12] Christina's *Life* reads very much as a narrative enactment "in our day" of the *sponsa derelicta*, the virgin bride left to maintain fidelity to an endlessly absent spouse. The text, written ca. 1135–ca. 1145, and thus well within the "saint's" lifetime and contemporary with the assembly of the Psalter, prominently represents Geoffrey as almost a second protagonist; his protection and admiration finally afford security and stability to her religious vocation. The latter half of the *vita* is devoted almost entirely to the relationship between these two, which is that of chaste lovers, portrayed in highly emotional terms frequently less than flattering for the abbot. While her benefactor in material affairs, the powerful prelate is made clearly dependent on his beloved *puella*'s special privilege to the presence of Christ. Several figures named in the *vita* recur in the obits of the psalter's calendar, among them Christina's parents and two brothers, and Geoffrey and Christina themselves. The case would seem clear: Christina is the psalter-reading double of Mary as the reading bride; the picture cycle and the Psalter as a whole were made for her and commissioned by Geoffrey, just as the *vita* was.[13] More detailed inquiry confirms the first proposition over and over again; the second, oddly enough, is far less certain.

Both appear to be visually affirmed in most ingenious fashion in an initial to one of the Psalms. Now often referred to as "the Christina initial," it is the sole initial in the programme to exhibit no connection to the psalm it begins, Psalm 105; no more, that is,

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10 For detailed discussion, see Powell, "Media and Presence."

11 *Vie de Christina de Markyate*, 2:15–21. The text is cited from this edition, abbreviated hereafter as *VCM*.

12 See the preceding note.

13 On date and patronage of the *vita*, see *VCM*, 2:15–21, also 42–44, 66–68.

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than the letter "C" in which its picture is enclosed (fig. 4.1). It shows a woman who can reach into the heavenly sphere to touch the right hand of Christ, while a group of monks crowded behind her looks on with intent interest. The inscription, *Parce tuis queso monachis clementia iesu* (O Jesus, I beseech you in your mercy to spare your monks), would then clarify that what we see is Christina interceding with Christ on the monks' behalf—apparently from her position still among them in this life. Beyond its visual realization of the *sponsa mediatrix*, the image displays intricate connections to both the *vita* and the prefatory picture cycle. Christina has a vision in the *vita* in which the central gesture of the image, her contact with Christ's right hand, becomes a disquieting issue, precisely because the privilege appears to exclude Geoffrey, who stands on her right (*VCM*, p. 196). The echoes in textual and descriptive detail offer a convincing interpretation of, as well as an explanation for, the otherwise anomalous initial. The nature of Christina's position between Christ and her benefactor, or benefactors, thus received explicit commemoration in the Psalter.[14]

The same image is no less striking as visual homage to the picture cycle.[15] From the colours and type of her clothing to the positioning and rendering of her feet and hands and her oddly levitating position opposite Christ, this portrayal of Christina is a pastiche of striking features in the picture cycle and, in particular, a copy of Mary within it. Yet the Alexis Master, whose masterpiece is the psalter's picture cycle, was not one of the two artists of the psalm initials, nor did either of these latter create this stylistic and physical intrusion on their work: the image is painted on a parchment patch that was pasted over an earlier initial that had first been carefully scraped away.[16] Features of its style as well as the hand of its inscription may indicate it was executed some twenty to thirty years later.[17] It is possibly even a posthumous portrayal—is Christina shown moving beyond the earthly sphere? Whatever the circumstances were, someone assimilated the visual insignia of the picture cycle to the portrayal of Christina *sponsa et mediatrix* and used this idea as a way of inserting her presence into the psalm section of the codex—a good many years after that section's completion. Put differently: someone styled Christina as the ideal viewer of the picture cycle at some point after the two independent sections had been combined in one book.[18] *Sacra historia* has assimilated to the reading bride, or she appears as if re-embodying it "in our day." As we will see shortly, this latter idea, too, finds an emphatic complement in the *vita*.

Oddly, though, the "Christina initial" is in one way not exceptional: its after-the-fact adaptation is rather the rule where Christina's presence in the codex can be ascertained. The artist may have borrowed its central gesture from the initial to the litany, where, once

14 Powell, "Media and Presence," 352–53.

15 For more detail on the following points see Powell, "Media and Presence," 353–54.

16 Powell, "Making the Psalter," 352; also Kidd in *AP*, pp. 105–6.

17 Powell, "Making the Psalter," 353; Thomson, *Manuscripts*, p. 35; and Ayres, "Angevin Style," 215–16.

18 The psalm section and the picture cycle are clearly separate projects, sharing neither artist nor scribe and the former possibly a decade earlier.

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Figure 4.1. Initial to Psalm 105, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1150. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 285.[19]

again, a woman at the forefront of a community, this time of praying women, can alone reach across a boundary to access a space occupied by the Holy Trinity (fig. 4.2).[20] This image has been no less convincingly identified with a passage from the *vita* of Christina, and yet it is the work of one of the psalter artists.[21] Close inspection shows, however, that the litany initial was originally laid out differently. The illustrated area was enlarged at some point rather drastically to accommodate this scene, in which, if the usual interpretation is correct, Geoffrey is once again also present. Even the obits in the calendar, often taken *a priori* as solid evidence of her ownership and use of the Psalter, may have been added all at once as part of a campaign to appropriate the codex for Christina.[22] Or should we sooner say: to commemorate her as the reading bride?

19 See p. 52 note 32.

20 On this and the following see Kidd in *AP*, pp. 108–9; Powell, "Media and Presence," 349–52; and Powell, "Making the Psalter," 319–21.

21 See Powell, "Visual," 349–51 and earlier literature cited there; also *AP*, pp. 108–9, 213–14.

22 Kidd in *AP*, pp. 68–69, 119–20; *contra* Gerry, "Cult and Codex," pp. 87–88.

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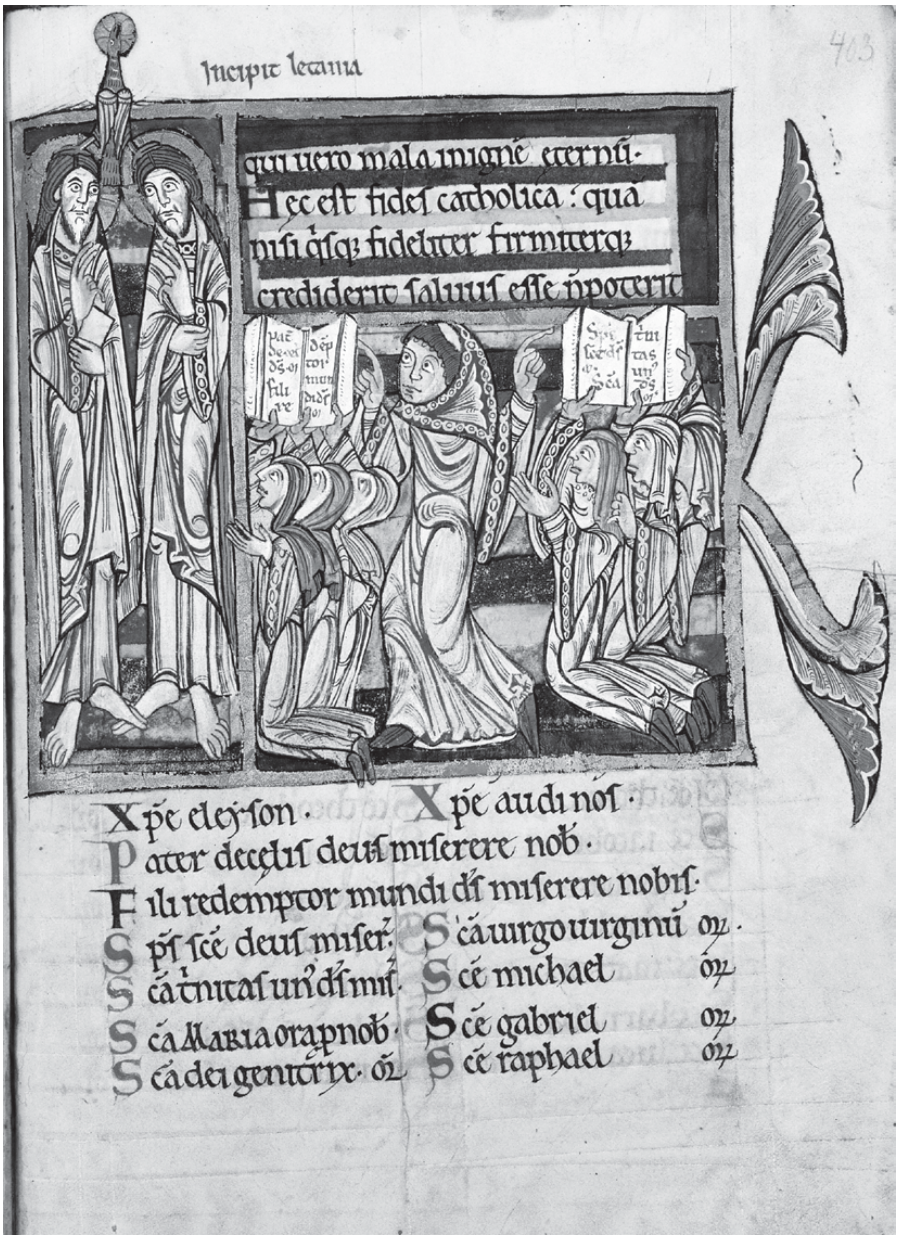


Figure 4.2. Initial to the Litany, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 403.

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The St Albans Psalter, for all its spectacular qualities, is an oddly composite book with curiously unfinished or unresolved seams between its parts, duplications that defy simple explanation, and a number of clearly ad-hoc modifications and additions.[23] The more I have studied the subject, the more I have become convinced of two things: first, the four parts of the Psalter and the *vita*, all products of one scriptorium and showing significant chronological overlap, became, at some point, collaborators in one campaign: the establishment of Christina as *sponsa et mediatrix*. Second, the connection of the Psalter to Christina is more likely constructed than real, that is, it results largely from this campaign and only minimally (if at all) from the circumstances of her biography or from her personal needs in reading and prayer.[24] Both the book and the *Life of Christina* reveal, above all, the varying facets of a reading persona, the woman who reads in and through the body as a figure of humanity, the bride who is allowed in this world a special bodily knowledge of Christ. This figure is the focal point of the Psalter's multimedia display no less than it is the model for the *vita*'s idealized portrayal of Christina. Its pertinence to the Psalter does not properly derive from the idea of Christina as the posited recipient or user but rather is created and defined in the texts and images themselves. Psalter and *vita* together are vivid testimony to the intense interest of the male monastic world in a woman's privilege to the presence of the Word and, above all, in the mediary expansion of reading that "she" enabled.

The Christina initial fuses the visual display of the Psalter with a portrayal of the specific import of the woman's position in relation to knowledge of the divine. As such, it implies a poetics of the visual specific to that position, and in this regard it is not so much an intruder as an image of the entire Christina phenomenon, the way one woman's experience comes to serve as the focal point just described. The most striking elements and episodes of both the *vita* and the codex can be seen to support one idea, a poetics of the woman-as-viewer in which women's desire effects a bodily knowing in physical presence, a reincarnation of *sacra historia* that appears to find its material consequences and accessories in the Psalter's picture cycle and, above all, in its prototype, the Emmaus sequence found in the Alexis Quire (figs. 4.12–4.14). The specific presentation and treatment of the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* reveal it as a narrative analogue of this idea; or rather, as I will argue, the *Chanson* and the Emmaus sequence present the central arguments for this entire reading model, they represent its preliminary justification and articulation.

As a hinge-text, a narrative poised between monastic and secular audiences, as it is between Latin psalter and *chanson*, prayer and public performance, the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* points directly to the chapters to come and is my main object of interest in this one. The St Albans Psalter thus provides us with an uncannily effective bridge

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23 For a summary, see Kidd in *AP*, pp. 139–43; also Powell, "Making the Psalter"; and Gerry, "Psalmist," pp. 219–48.

24 Such judgments must always distinguish between the different parts of the Psalter. In particular the making of the calendar and the Alexis Quire may well be more biographically connected to Christina. On the calendar, see Morgan, "Patronage and Ownership," pp. 54–58; on the Alexis Quire, see Powell, "Making the Psalter," 299–319.

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between the two halves of this investigation. But in addition to this, taken together with the representation of Christina in the *vita*, it shows us the construction of the woman as psalter-reader as a material project, as full-fledged implementation of visual media and performed texts. The elements I will examine here, the *vita*'s account of Christina's experience of *sacra historia*, the picture cycle, the Emmaus sequence, and the *Chanson* all represent varying approaches to reading in *historia*, each implying an embrace of corporeal representation and identification that is equally the embrace of a female reading self, favoured over and even explicitly contrasted with a position of male self-renunciation. As we found at the end of the last chapter: the bride lends her body to the *lectio* of the male and the result is woman as the narrative embodiment of reading experience. The intently constructed doubling of this figure with the biography of a contemporary woman makes codex and *vita* into mirroring images of a receptive instance that truly exists only between the two, the woman-as-reader as reinvented within monastic culture of the twelfth century. We will encounter the same figure, as a rule suspended in the same productive ambiguity between figurative and historical existence, in the construction of a female audience for vernacular texts, successors at the secular courts of France and Germany to the *Chanson de Saint Alexis.*

Pictures, *Sacra historia*, and Reading as Mary Did

In the last episode of the incomplete *vita*, Christina effectively accomplishes a reincarnation of the Word within and for her monastic community, and she does so as if in fulfilment of the promise of the *audi-et-vide* opening of the *Speculum virginum*: the bride conceives and bears the Word as life. This same episode, which I have elsewhere called "Emmaus at Markyate,"[25] exhibits Christina's devotional life as if it were the narrative counterpart of the initial to Psalm 105 in the Psalter: that is, as if it consisted of the re-embodiment of episodes of *sacra historia* through the desirous meditation of the reading bride. Taken together, then, the two ideas suggest that the picture cycle itself arises from a similar understanding and that Mary's reading act is indeed its origin.

Christina twice receives "a certain pilgrim" as her guest at Markyate, and the description and progression of events leave no doubt that these two episodes and a third, in which he reappears only to mysteriously disappear from inside the Markyate church, show Christina reliving the story of Christ's post-resurrection appearance in the guise of a pilgrim to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32).[26] That is, she relives the Emmaus story in a highly nuanced reinterpretation current at St Albans, one that is elaborated here no less than it is in the Alexis Quire, beginning opposite the conclusion of the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* (figs. 4.12–4.14). The three pictures of one Gospel episode parallel the *vita*'s account of three separate appearances of a pilgrim. But through the resulting intervals between the Markyate visits, a Gospel narrative on the presence and

25 Powell, "Media and Presence," 346–47.

26 *VCM*, 1:196–202.

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absence of the bodily Word is recast as one on the power of women's desire to restore that presence to their lives.[27]

With the pilgrim's second appearance, the story incorporates another Gospel event, which also effects a gender shift, as Christina and her sister Margaret are seen to re-embody Mary and Martha serving Christ at Bethany (Luke 10:38–42), referred to in the *vita* as service of his humanity (*humanitatis officio*).[28] The combination of the two stories fuses the question of recognition at Emmaus with the behaviour of women as archetypes of Christian faith, and further with a complex of interchangeable *historiae*—a confusion of suppers and Marys and of serving and anointing women in the different Gospel accounts—that were inseparable from the notion of *infirmioris sexus praerogativa*, women's privilege to Christ's physical presence.[29] This also allows the narrator to pause over the women's delight in the pilgrim's beauty and manners, and then, during the second interval, over their longing for his return. Christina's longing becomes a lovesickness so severe that it confines the visionary virgin to bed, not on the occasion of Easter, as the Emmaus story would require, but rather at the approach of Christmas.[30]

The scene is thus set for Christina to relive the capital events of Christian knowing, the conception and birth of Christ, and finally, in the final disappearance, the Ascension. Because Christina is confined to bed, two monks perform the liturgy of the Christmas vigil at her bedside, and the scene takes shape as if the embodied aspiration of this "vigilating" choir, with Mary, "the recumbent virgin," about to give birth in their midst.[31] The Word incarnate is then brought forth from the heart in the hearing and seeing of the bride.

The choir's chanting fuels a steady crescendo of Christina's desire, leading to the conception through the ear: "audit inter cetera" the passage continues, "totaque mente concipit versiculum hore none speciale scilicet singularis illius feste gaudium: 'Hodie scietis quia veniet Dominus' " (among the other versicles she heard and conceived with her entire soul that special one from the hour of None that expresses the singular joy of this feast, "Today you shall know of the coming of the Lord").[32] This unleashes within her the indescribable joy that Mary must have felt:

> No sooner had she perceived that versicle's meaning than she was transported by such spiritual joy that for the rest of the day and the following night, her heart was bent continuously on meditations of this sort: Oh, at what hour will the Lord come? Oh, how will He come? Who shall see Him when He comes?[33]

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27 As argued in Powell, "Blindness and Insight," pp. 249–78.

28 *VCM*, 1:196.

29 On the suppers at Bethany and in the house of Simon, see below, pp. 145–46 and 154.

30 *VCM*, 1:198.

31 "Cumque decumbenti virgini horas vigilie dominice psallerent," *VCM*, 1:198. See also Fulton, "Quae est ista," 117.

32 *VCM*, 1:198.

33 "Cuius versiculi percepto sensu tanto spirituali gestivit gaudio ut in residuo die vel in subsequenti nocte vix ab ejus corde hujusmodi meditationes exciderent: 'O qua hora veniet Dominus? O quomodo veniet? Quis videbit venientem?' " (*VCM*, 1:198).

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And so on, such that her longing for "her pilgrim" finally identifies its true object. All the while Christina remains ill and confined to bed, for relief comes only with the actual birth. What the editors can reconstruct of the mutilated text then reads, "cum audiret Cristina, 'Christus natus est' sic videt Christum natum, ac se ad illius Nativitatis gaudium comperit invitatam. Morbo enim omni sublato, tanta spirituali jocunditate perfusa est" (When Christina *heard*, "Christ is born," she also *saw* the newborn Christ, and realized that she had been invited to the joy of His birth. Her illness vanished and she was filled with such spiritual happiness).[34] Christina's *gaudium* will then culminate with the physical return of her pilgrim on Christmas day, an event to which she has in effect "given birth" for her community.[35]

It is difficult to imagine how such a description could go farther, that is, how it could more fully embody the spiritual birth, combine this with the experience of the liturgy as Mary's conception and birth, and somehow embed the whole in the contemporary monastic life. This is Mary's reading *non plus ultra*; it takes Hildegard's understanding of the experience of Rupert's *quaedam adulescentula* to a new extreme of the embodied bride, the *sponsa corporaliter*. The incorporation of the Emmaus story into the *vita* thus reads as if the narrative fulfilment of an idea that, in the Psalter, pertains only as a suggestive possibility: that the Annunciation of the picture cycle stands to introduce the entire Psalter as a mediary compendium serving the renewal of Mary's reading. By relating an episode in Christina's life as if it displayed the re-embodiment of four different events of *sacra historia*, the narrative appears even to function as the account of such practice fulfilled; one is tempted to see the pictures in the Psalter as the accessories of a visual *lectio divina* that itself inspired Christina's experience.[36] But this would once again take the *vita* as history rather than *historia*.

No such transgression is necessary, however, to establish how closely the pictures can be associated with female desire for presence in *sacra historia* and with the technique prescribed to conjure it. There exists a vivid account of visualizing meditation for religious women in Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, written, ostensibly, for his sister, ca. 1160.[37] While not so precocious as the St Albans picture cycle, this text is nevertheless the earliest example we possess of serial meditations on scenes from the life of Christ.[38] The St Albans cycle, while rarely noted as such, is the earliest extant narrative picture cycle to have possibly served the same purpose. The striking similarities between the two include both the selection of the scenes and their treatment; they have been noted often and accounted for at some length.[39] My objective is to discover

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34 *VCM*, 1:198

35 Powell, "Media and Presence," p. 346; Powell, "Blindness and Insight," p. 270.

36 Thus I interpreted the situation in Powell, "Media and Presence," p. 346.

37 "Ego certe qui tibi carne et spiritu frater sum, … faciam quod hortaris" (*De insitutione inclusarum* 1, p. 637).

38 Edsall, "Reading," p. 171.

39 Carrasco, "Imagery," 73–75; also Powell, "Media and Presence," 355–57; earlier literature in note 51, below. The emphasis, however, has been to demonstrate that the picture cycle was designed for Christina, once a *quasi-inclusa* herself.

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whether the aspects of Aelred's treatment that are most clearly gender-specific find their equivalents in the psalter's pictures. Three instances will illustrate the affinity between the two: once again, the Annunciation (fig. 4.3), the Supper at the House of Simon (fig. 4.4), and the Descent from the Cross (fig. 4.5).

The persistent objective of Aelred's text is to offer an experience that immerses the listener/viewer in a flood of presence, encouraging her not to observe and reflect, but to hear, see, touch, and even taste the reality of sacred history.[40] "Why are you standing there?" Aelred admonishes his listener on the sight of Christ prostrate and perspiring as he prays alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Run up, consume those sweet drops and lick away the dust from his feet. Do not sleep with Peter."[41] *Unlike* the apostles then, the men, who—as Abelard, too, emphasized in his "On the authority and dignity of the holy order of nuns"—slept in the garden and fled from witnessing the Passion, while the women steadfastly followed;[42] she should intervene and accompany, even assuage the sufferings of her saviour. This appeal is doubly gendered: the contrast to the men in the narrative stands in analogy to one between male and female viewers. For monks, such indulgence in affective, "image" meditations was generally discouraged, permissible only in "the elementary stages of sensory imagination."[43] The female meditant, for her part, is not only to immerse herself in the sensory "reality" of the scene, she is also to intervene and act within it in difference to the male participants.[44] Far from being merely enthralled to the literal sense, the female devotee can alter history through her own participation.

The attention to Christ's feet (licking the dust from them) might seem oddly chosen as a gesture of consolation, but it appears here as another emphatically gendered gesture. Aelred makes women's devotion to Christ's feet the particular boon accorded the female devotee and the leitmotif of their participation in his text.[45] Already at the Nativity they are to kiss the infant's feet, and the entire meditation concludes with the image of the Magdalene clasping Christ's feet at the tomb after he had first refused (*Noli me tangere*). "Linger here as long as you can, virgin" (*Rule*, 31, p. 92), are Aelred's last instructions to his meditant with regard "to things past." Gregory the Great had identified Christ's feet in the anointing scenes (which occur both at the house of the Pharisee and in three of the four versions of the supper at Bethany) with his humanity and his head with his divinity.[46] For Aelred, the image thus becomes the epitome of a specifically female devotion

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40 Dumont, introduction to *La vie de récluse* [*De institutione inclusarum*], p. 26.

41 The English translation is cited from Aelred, "Rule of Life for a Recluse," here p. 88 (hereafter *Rule*).

42 *Epistres*, 7, "De auctoritate vel dignitate ordinis sanctimonialium," pp. 111–14.

43 William of St Thierry, *On Contemplating God*, p. 152. See also Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," pp. 184–90; Edsall, "Reading," pp. 138–44 and 167–71. Compare also Aelred's teaching for monks, as in the discussion of meditation and weeping over the life of Christ in *De speculo caritatis*, 41–63.

44 Carrasco, "Imagery," 74.

45 *Rule*, 31, pp. 81, 83–84, 86, 88, 92; see also Carrasco, "Imagery," 73.

46 "Potest quoque per pedes ipsum mysterium incarnationis ejus intelligi, quo divinitas terram tetigit, quia carnem sumpsit. … Si pedes Domini mysterium incarnationis ejus accipimus, congrue per caput illius ipsa divinitas designatur," *XL Homiliarum in evangelia libri duo* 33, PL 76:1242–43.

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to Christ's humanity, a point in which he also had Abelard's example to follow. Abelard makes the scene of the supper at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50) the first point of departure for his extensive exposition of "the intrinsic dignity of women" in the Gospels and, above all, for the extraordinary favour of the weaker sex with Christ—what he marvels over as "infirmioris sexus praerogativa."[47] The episode at the house of Simon is unique among the various supper scenes in the Gospels for the contrast Christ draws between the male host's neglect (he did not extend the usual courtesy of washing his guest's feet) and the extremity of attention shown him by the unnamed "woman who had sinned" (Luke 7:44–47).[48] For both Aelred and Abelard, this attention to the feet becomes the woman's special point of entry into the presence of the Word. Where this privilege is denied, Aelred abjures the woman to "raise your eyes to him brimming with tears and exhort from him with deep sighs and unutterable groanings what you seek. Strive with him as Jacob did." (*Rule*, 31, pp. 83–84). Thus the meditant is encouraged to participate in the supper at Simon's house.

The inclusion of the same scene in the St Albans cycle (fig. 4.4) is remarkable in two ways: it is unusual within psalter illustration of Christ's life,[49] and, placed at the beginning of the Passion cycle, it displaces (in terms of Gospel chronology) the supper at Bethany, where, in John 12:2–8, Mary's service is contrasted with Martha's, and where, in two other accounts, Matthew 26:6–12 and Mark 14:3–8, a woman anoints Christ's head, not his feet. The choice of scene thus allows devotion to Christ's feet—which the woman first weeps over, then dries with her hair and anoints (Luke 7:38)—to appear as the woman's privilege as opposed to the men's. With a second and more extraordinary inclusion, that of the Magdalene's Annunciation to the Apostles (fig. 4.7), the cycle contrives, as Aelred did, to frame the entire Passion sequence with demonstrations of a woman's privilege to the human presence of Christ.[50]

The Psalter's scene at Simon's house visually accentuates separation between the woman's embrace of Christ's feet and the men's discourse with him: the division of the scene places the kneeling woman in a different register, almost in a different plane of reality, from the other participants, a separation bridged only by Christ's foot. In this way it somewhat surprisingly recalls what occurs in the "Christina" initial and the *vita*'s account of her privilege to Christ's right hand, except that in the supper scene the division would not be between men and a woman as between Heaven and earth but rather between the men with Christ and the woman who cannot sit at the same table, but is nevertheless physically and affectively closer to him. Aelred uses the later supper at Bethany to underline a similar contrast. Returning once again to Mary's embrace of the

47 *Epistres*, 7, pp. 108–9.

48 In medieval tradition the woman's identity was firmly established as Mary Magdalene.

49 Carrasco, "Imagery," 69; see also the note following.

50 *AP*, p. 168. The same two scenes form beginning and end of Abelard's presentation on the dignity of women in the Gospels; cf. Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, pp. 108–10, 114–15. Neither scene appeared in the (sole) comparable contemporary (or slightly earlier) picture cycle, known from its description as the Psalter of Sigardus. The Crucifixion did, along with the Descent; see Wormald, "Illuminated Psalters," 22–24, nos. 12–13, 20–22, 25–26.

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Figure 4.3. Annunciation, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 19.

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Figure 4.4. The Supper at the House of Simon the Pharisee, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 36.

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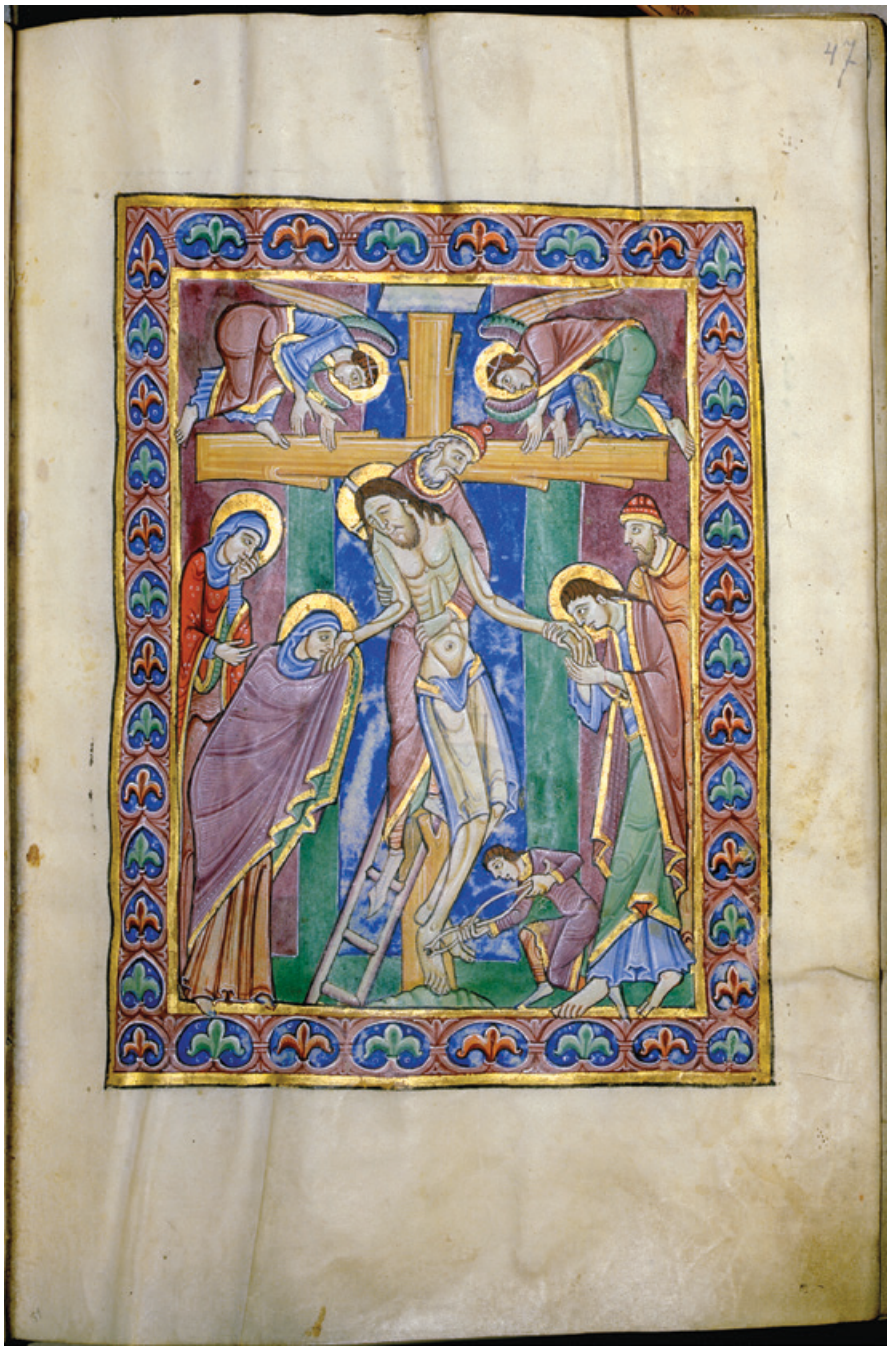


Figure 4.5. The Descent from the Cross, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 47.

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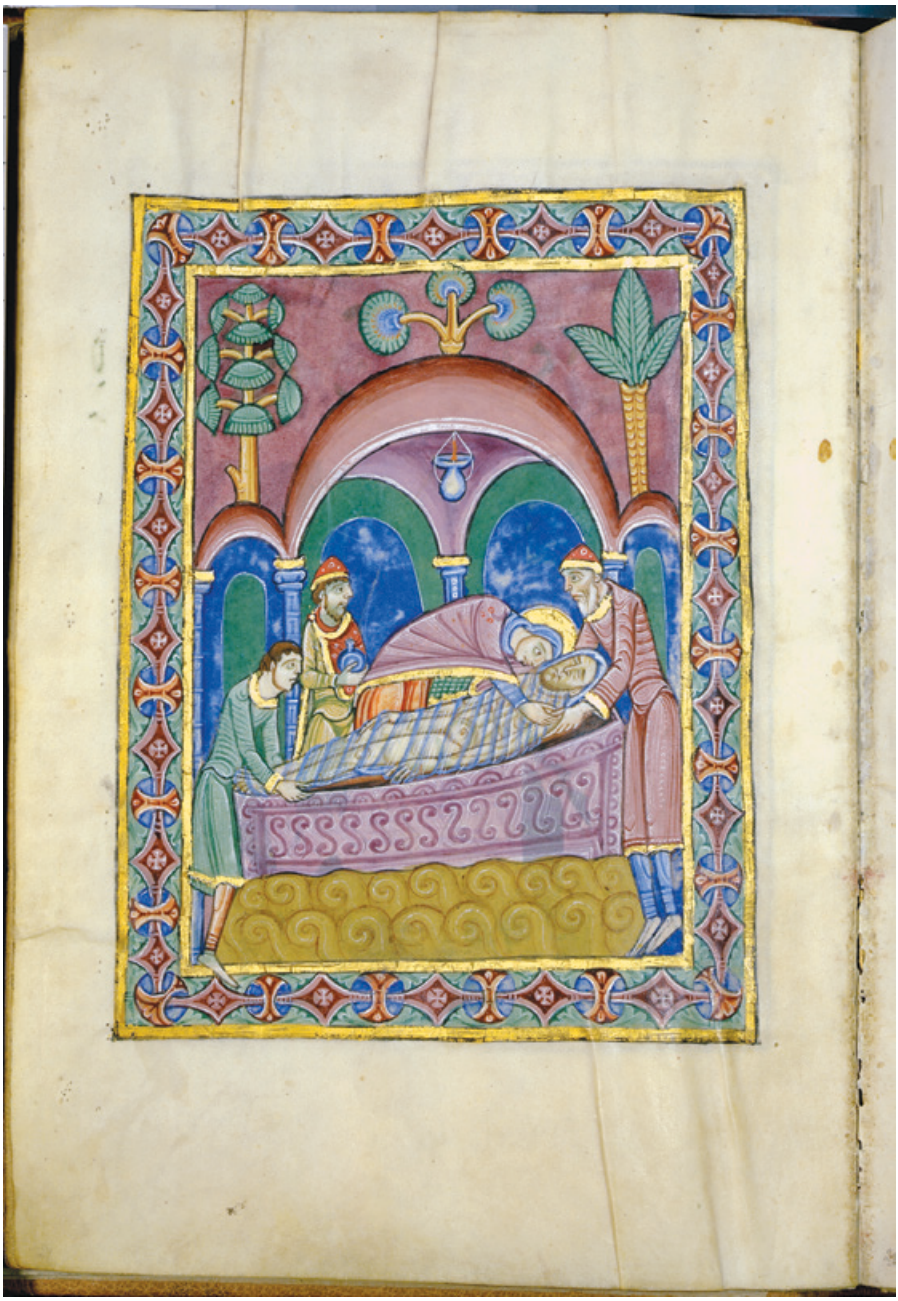


Figure 4.6. The Deposition, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 48.

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Figure 4.7. Mary Magdalene's Annunciation to the Apostles, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 51.

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Figure 4.8. The Ascension, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 54.

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Figure 4.9. Pentecost, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 55.

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feet, he has Christ silence the men's objections, saying, "I am wholly taken up with Mary and she with me" (*Rule*, 31, p. 86).

There are few to no signs within the St Albans picture cycle of an intended viewer. I am arguing that this scene stands out, then, among the rest; indeed, it was chosen and represented in this way to suggest identification between the woman at Christ's feet and the viewer, and to offer "her" this point of entry into the Gospel narrative. Moreover, the peculiar figure standing on the frame at the left offers another such indication: not a second woman (as with Mary and Martha at Bethany), but a servant has been interpolated into the account. This might suggest the quality of the devotion involved and anticipate the complementary gesture at Bethany, in which the woman will (also) anoint Christ's head. Either figure, woman or servant, offers an avenue of identification on the margins, but the servant is doubly unique: he has no equivalent in the Gospel accounts, and he accomplishes a connection between the image and the space beyond it in two ways nowhere else repeated: his left hand crosses under the frame (and not over it, as his foot and the woman's do) to touch Christ, while his right arm reaches entirely beyond the border and into the empty parchment space. A "genre figure," then, one with no other particular identity, observes the scene from the threshold, as if entering from the outside.[51] This viewer would be a man aspiring to a woman's embrace of Christ.

Another striking conjunction between the two cycles occurs in the Descent from the Cross (fig. 4.5).[52] This image takes on special importance in the Psalter as it must double as a picture of the Crucifixion, which figures as the psalter cycle's most notable exclusion. The gesture is, however, neither an omission nor a replacement but rather a fusion of two subjects.[53] The Descent as elsewhere encountered is usually a scene of action and physical effort, emphasizing the roles of Joseph and Nicodemus removing the nails and receiving the body. Where Mary is present, she holds one of Christ's hands, while the other is still affixed to the cross, clearly accentuating diagonal and downward movement.[54] The St Albans scene—with one hand held each by John and Mary, and Joseph placed completely behind Christ's erect body, which thus remains in its familiar position as crucifix—has instead become a symmetrical, static, even ceremonious *display* for the viewer. The overall arrangement, then, reproduces the Crucifixion as it occurred in earlier devotional books, with Mary and John to either side of Christ,[55] but by superimposing it on the Descent, bestows one of Christ's hands on the adoration of each devotee.

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51 *SAP*, p. 87.

52 Mayr-Harting, "Functions," pp. 351–52; also Heslop, "Visual Arts," pp. 168–69.

53 Otto Pächt in *SAP*, p. 70. In *AP*, pp. 72–73, Kidd confirms that the "omission" was planned as such. See also note 49, above.

54 *SAP*, pp. 70–71, where the few exceptions are also discussed. Another early example occurs in the so-called Prayer Book of Hildegard of Bingen (ca 1180), reproduced in Hamburger, "Illustrated Prayer Book," p. 151.

55 See Carrasco, "Imagery," 73; also Southern, *Middle Ages*, p. 237.

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Similarly, Aelred's text insists that his sister can join Mary and John before the crucifix, weep with Mary and even kiss Christ's wounds—if only she awaits the arrival ("Sed adhuc expecta donec") of Joseph of Arimathea to loose the nails.[56] She should see how Joseph, "in his most happy arms … embraces that sweet body and clasps it to his breast" saying, " 'My beloved is a bundle of myrrh for me, he shall rest upon my breast' [Canticles 1:12]. It is for you to follow … and either hold the feet or support the hands and arms."[57] The two scenes have become successive and complementary moments in one experience, the Descent, here too, a static moment of embrace and contemplation. The visual artist, however, can go a step further and achieve the illusion of synchronicity realized, with the result that the crucifix becomes available to the viewer's embrace. Performed on the subject *sine qua non* for identification and compassion with Christ's humanity, the transposition of this idea to the visible image makes a radical statement on presence in devotion. Rupert of Deutz affirmed that, alone of all physical images, the crucifix permits a realized *unio* between viewer and viewed.[58] The St Albans artist has effectively fused the same privilege with the narrative of the Passion.

Finally, though, we should reconsider the beginning, the Annunciation (fig. 4.3). Aelred's treatment of this moment for his female audience operates very much as Rupert's did in his prophetic awakening; it is the beginning of and an invitation to their bodily reading:

> First enter the room of blessed Mary and with her study the books[59] which prophesy the virginal birth and the coming of Christ. Wait there for the arrival of the angel, so that you may see him as he comes in, hear him as he utters his greeting.

She is then to receive Gabriel's greeting, "and so, filled with amazement and rapt out of yourself," to "cry with a loud voice" Gabriel's words, up to *benedicta inter mulieres*. These she is to repeat to herself, to meditate over "what this fullness of grace is in which the whole world shared when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (*Rule*, p. 80). From this intimate participation in Mary's reading, or rather its doubling in the devotee's life, Aelred, the devotee's male onlooker, immerses himself in a meditation over Mary's experience of the conception strongly reminiscent of Rupert's:

> O sweet Lady, with what sweetness you were inebriated, with what a fire of love you were inflamed, when you felt in your mind and in your womb the presence of majesty, when he took flesh himself from your flesh and fashioned for himself from your members in which all the fullness of the Godhead might dwell in bodily form. All this was on your account, virgin, so that you might diligently contemplate the Virgin whom you have resolved to imitate and the Virgin's son to whom you are betrothed.[60]

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56 *De insitutione*, 31, p. 671. The continuous flow of the text is somewhat obscured by its modern division into paragraphs and, in the English translation, by the rendering of the words as "But wait yet a while until …" It is precisely this "while" that Aelred's text elides. Before the crucifix the woman is told to kiss the wounds; for her to do this, Joseph must first arrive.

57 *Rule*, 31, p. 91.

58 Schmitt, *Corps des images*, pp. 83–84.

59 Macpherson's translation, "read," does not fully capture the sense of Aelred's *evolve*, which might also be rendered as "immerse yourself in."

60 *Rule*, 31, pp. 80–81.

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Aelred's text is in part an exercise in self-indulgence: the male author, ostensibly denied the experience he offers his audience, embraces the same to the extent that, imaginatively, he becomes the woman for whom he writes. Aelred's sister thus takes on for this text the function fulfilled by Rupert's *adulescentula*, that of the female surrogate from whose position the male exegete reads Mary's experience. The gender reversal disarms the taboo that would otherwise have applied to such pure immersion in *historia*.[61] Aelred describes the same scene, with the same focus on Mary's reading act, in his sermons cited earlier in consideration of the "new" Annunciation. But there was nothing in those passages comparable to this immersion in experience, a sort of "real-time" recapitulation of the event. Aelred's female surrogate (or audience) does not need to wonder what it was that Mary was reading—she enters the room and reads together with her; moreover, "all this" occurred so that she might undertake this very reliving of the event, knowing it *corporaliter*, in bodily presence. The result is a succinct statement of the origin, mode, and meaning of Mary's reading as a way of knowing the Word.

As we saw earlier, the St Albans picture is committed to the same idea, and its signal innovations perform just as Aelred's text does to capture the event as a moment in time. Placed before it, the viewer could see herself on the same threshold and enter the same understanding of the event. In Christina's experience of the *conceptio per aurem* on her Christmas Eve birth-bed, we possess, from the same abbey scriptorium, cast in a different genre, the portrayal of a parallel experience as fulfilled in a woman's life.

Placed as gateways to presence directly before their viewer with no textual support, the pictures of the St Albans cycle all but declare themselves "female," an idea their content amply bears out. There is no need and no room here for "spiritual interpretation."[62] Participation is meaning at its fullest and most complete. The immersion in presence renders Aelred's visualizing text and the Psalter's visual scenes all but equivalent in the way each abandons all need, even all means, to renounce the potential embrace of the image, which becomes an embrace of the body of the Word. Repeatedly within the pictures one can find suggestive parallels to the position of the "servant" in the supper scene, that is, of men who seem to assist secondarily in the woman's embrace or to learn it from her. Where Mary displaces Joseph in the entombment scene, her embrace appears as the real object of attention for her male onlookers (fig. 4.6). In the Descent from the Cross, preceding, the women seem to weep while the men appear to observe their response as if it prompted their own. The prominent position of Mary at the centre of the Ascension and the Pentecost scenes (figs. 4.8 and 4.9) raises this idea to a theological statement: what humanity knows of its saviour comes to us through the body of woman; a similar statement is made with the Magdalene's Annunciation to the Apostles. The Christina initial only restates the same idea within the self-referential visual language of the completed Psalter, translated into the life of the re-embodied bride.

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61 See note 42, above, and Powell, "Media and Presence," 356–57.

62 Such was seen as obligatory in men's use of meditation on Christ's life, see Edsall, "Reading"; to my mind, her attempt to elucidate something similar for *De institutione inclusarum* (Edsall, "Reading," pp. 161–66) sooner demonstrates the difference.

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The picture cycle, then, was created for a reader-as-woman. That reader, however, need not always, nor even in the first instance, have been a woman. If he was not, then he will have had a woman as reading model in mind; this picture cycle was the means for him to be her, his access to her privilege to the presence of the living Word. It afforded an experience of *historia* that bypassed the reading process of exegesis to proffer a fusion with Christ as the body of humanity, the experience of the reading bride. The key to this fusion is the woman's desire and her acknowledgement of her abject state as body—she is the sinner, the servant, or Gregory's "illiterate," overjoyed to clasp and kiss the feet of her lord and desiring no more. Her reward is an embrace that brings her to the heart of knowing, as is revealed both in Christina's experience of the Christmas Nativity and in the historiated initial in the Psalter.

A Female Gaze and Women's Vision

The *vita* never offers any account of Christina contemplating pictures, whether of scriptural events or other subjects, just as Aelred offers no real pictures for his sister (in fact, he proscribes their presence in her enclosure; see *Rule*, 24, p. 171). The visual language of the Christina initial provides a tenuous link in that it seems to acknowledge a connection between the pictures and Christina's own privilege to the presence of her Lord. There is more to be found, however, in the Psalter, both on the representation of the bride who seeks the embrace of her Lord and on the poetics of the visual. For the first we must only proceed from the last page of the picture cycle to the opening of the *Chanson* that faces it. The nexus for all inquiry into the second is then found at the poem's end, beginning on the two pages that also contain Gregory's apology for pictures and the first picture of the Emmaus sequence (figs. 4.11 and 4.12). As has been amply demonstrated before, the *Chanson* and the Emmaus sequence are made to relate to each other on these two pages, most overtly through their respective statements on vision and knowing.[63]

On the first folio of the Alexis Quire, the dialectic between male renunciation of the flesh and a female longing for its embrace is made the theme of a striking visual narrative (fig. 4.10). The proemium to the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* (the text begins only on the verso) places a female gaze front and centre, the gaze of Alexis's bride. The contents of this first outer folio were very likely added sometime after the text itself was copied to adapt it to a more specific purpose. Logically speaking, this would occur when the loose quire was bound to other parts, as the outer folios would then be protected from wear.[64]

In the legend of Alexis, a young patrician of Rome, on the night of his wedding, abandons his inheritance and his bride in preference for a pilgrimage to Edessa and a life of chastity and extreme asceticism. After seventeen years he returns, but as a terribly disfigured beggar, who, irony of ironies, lives unrecognized under the staircase of his paternal home for another seventeen years, until he finally dies there. The tripartite miniature on the

63 Powell, "Making the Psalter," pp. 309–13, and Powell, "Media and Presence," pp. 343–45; previously, *SAP*, pp. 78–79 and 138–39; now also Strahuljak, "Alexis Quire," pp. 203 and 209–12.

64 Powell, "Blindness and Insight," p. 257; and Gerry, "Psalmist," p. 203; see also the detailed account in Gerry, "Cult and Codex," pp. 72–82.

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opening recto of the Alexis Quire, unique in the illustrative tradition of Alexis's life, reshapes this story into one simply of union (marriage) and separation. Seen as the life of Alexis, it recounts only the events (two days) that launch his lifelong path of renunciation. Seen as the life of his bride, however, it tells very nearly the whole story, for she remains the immobile embodiment of her own desire, staring into the void of Alexis's absence, until the poem's conclusion. Whether her gaze is seen as following the departing Alexis or as awaiting his return, it is partially turned out to the "audience." The *sponsa gemebunda*, as the inscription calls her, can on this basis alone be taken as one of the most significant figures portrayed in the codex.[65] She appears in three-quarter turn twice on one page. Alexis, by contrast, is shown only in profile.

The transition from union to separation shown in the picture is also an invitation to participation. In full, the inscription above the bride reads, "O, sponsa beata semper gemebunda!" (O, blessed bride, ever grieving)—unlike the others to its left and right, this inscription is no mere *titulus*; it rather prescribes the viewer's response.[66] This viewer of Alexis's life—whether the bride or her double evoked by identification beyond the page—provides a reading model for the entire quire and possibly for the Psalter as a whole. It is a reading model that stands in contrast to the renunciation of the body exemplified in Alexis's life, and it likewise represents a model of vision constructed in opposition to the same renunciation.

Below the picture, a prologue, very likely composed specially for this page, tells us more: the young man commended, or left, his young bride "al spus vif de veritet, ki est un sul faitur e regnet an trinitiet" (to the living bridegroom of truth, who is one sole creator and who reigns in the Trinity). Of Alexis's own trajectory nothing is said. The bride, given no other name here or in the poem, also needs none. She is quite simply the *sponsa derelicta*, that is, every human soul longing for the return of its beloved. The remainder of the prologue then qualifies its audience and aim: "Icesta istorie est amiable grace e suverain cunsolaciun a cascun memorie spiritel, les quels vivent purement sulunc casthetet e dignement sei delitent es goies del ciel & es noces virginels" (This story is a sweet gift of grace and supreme consolation for all those of spiritual disposition who live purely in the chaste life in worthy anticipation of the virginal wedding and its heavenly delights).[67] The viewer who greets the *sponsa gemebunda* is thus her mirror image in the religious life, the *sponsa Christi*; to this audience the poem offers *suverain cunsolaciun*. As I will argue below, the emergence of Alexis's bride as secondary protagonist and object of identification corresponds to a shift in envisioned audience

65 See p. 136 and note 9, above.

66 This inscription possibly recalls the viewer's identification with the figure of the bride in a performance; see Geddes, *Book for Christina*, p. 73; also *AP*, p. 175.

67 My translation, relying on Mölk, "Bemerkungen," 295. The prologue is a puzzle, as it contains a number of syntactical and morphological errors, see Mölk, "Bemerkungen," 19–20, and Bullington, *Alexis*, pp. 218–19. It appears to be either a topical modification of an earlier prologue, or perhaps a reproduction from memory rather than a written copy (Hunt, "St Alexis," p. 222). See also Tyssens, "Prologue, pp. 1165–77.

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Ici cumencet amiable cancun espiritel raisun de cel noble barun cui femmen par num e de la mue de sum filz boneurer del quel nus auum ot lire e cunter par le diuine uolenter il desirrable sel sul filz angendrat Apres le naissance co fut emfes de deu mechime amet e de pere e de mere par grant certet nurrit la sue iuuence fut honeste e spiritel par lamistet del sureiain pietet la sue spuse iuuene cumandat al spus uif de uentet ki est un sul fantur e regnet an trinitet Icesta istorie est amiable grace e sauueiain consulacun a castin memorie spiritel les quels uuelent puremet sulume castethet e digneiement sei delitent esgoies del ciel & ef noces urgnels

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Figure 4.10. Proemium to the *Chanson de Saint Alexis*, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 57.

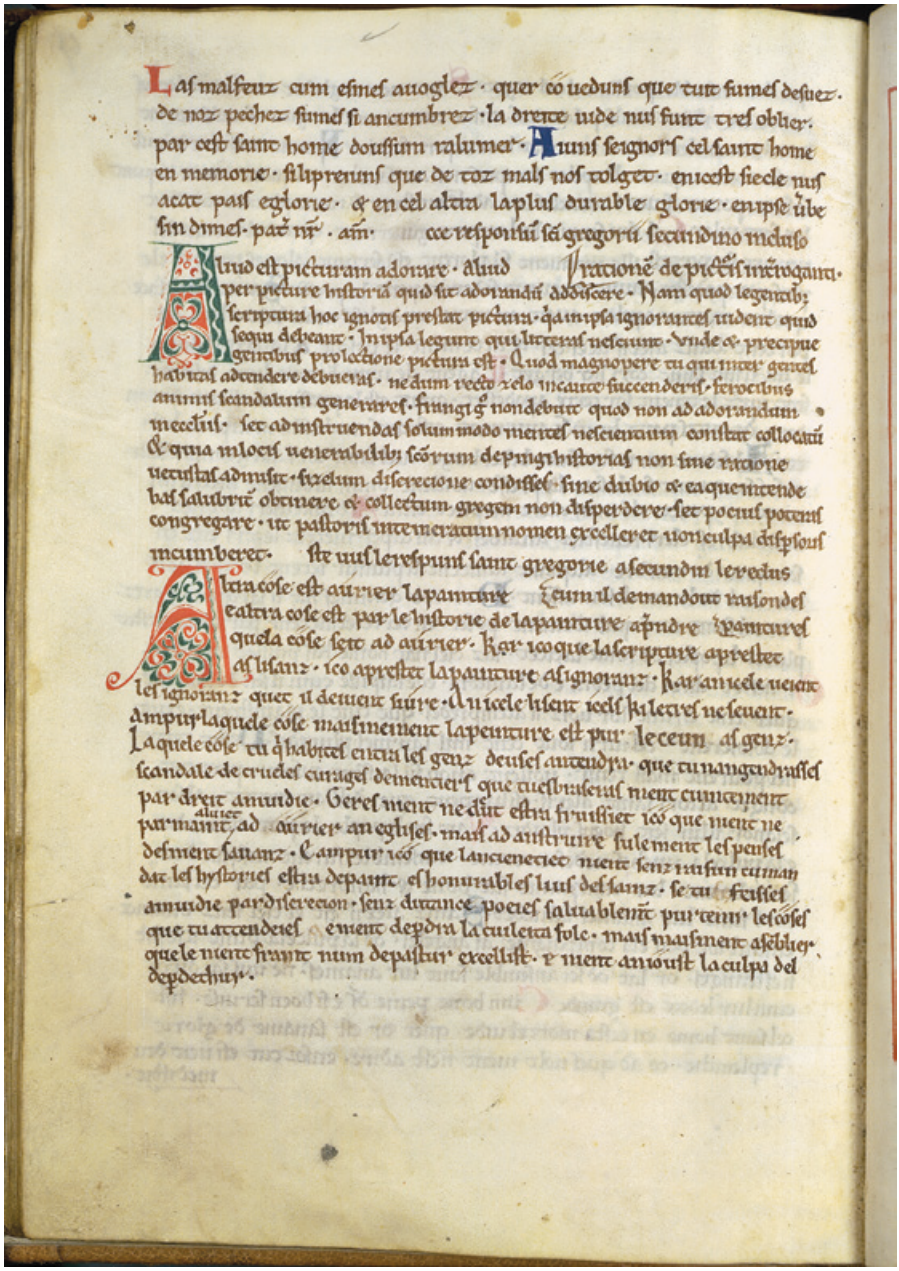


Figure 4.11. The conclusion of the *Alexis* text and an excerpt from Gregory's letter to Serenus of Marseille, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 68.

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Figure 4.12. The Road to Emmaus, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 69.

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Figure 4.13. The Supper at Emmaus, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 70.

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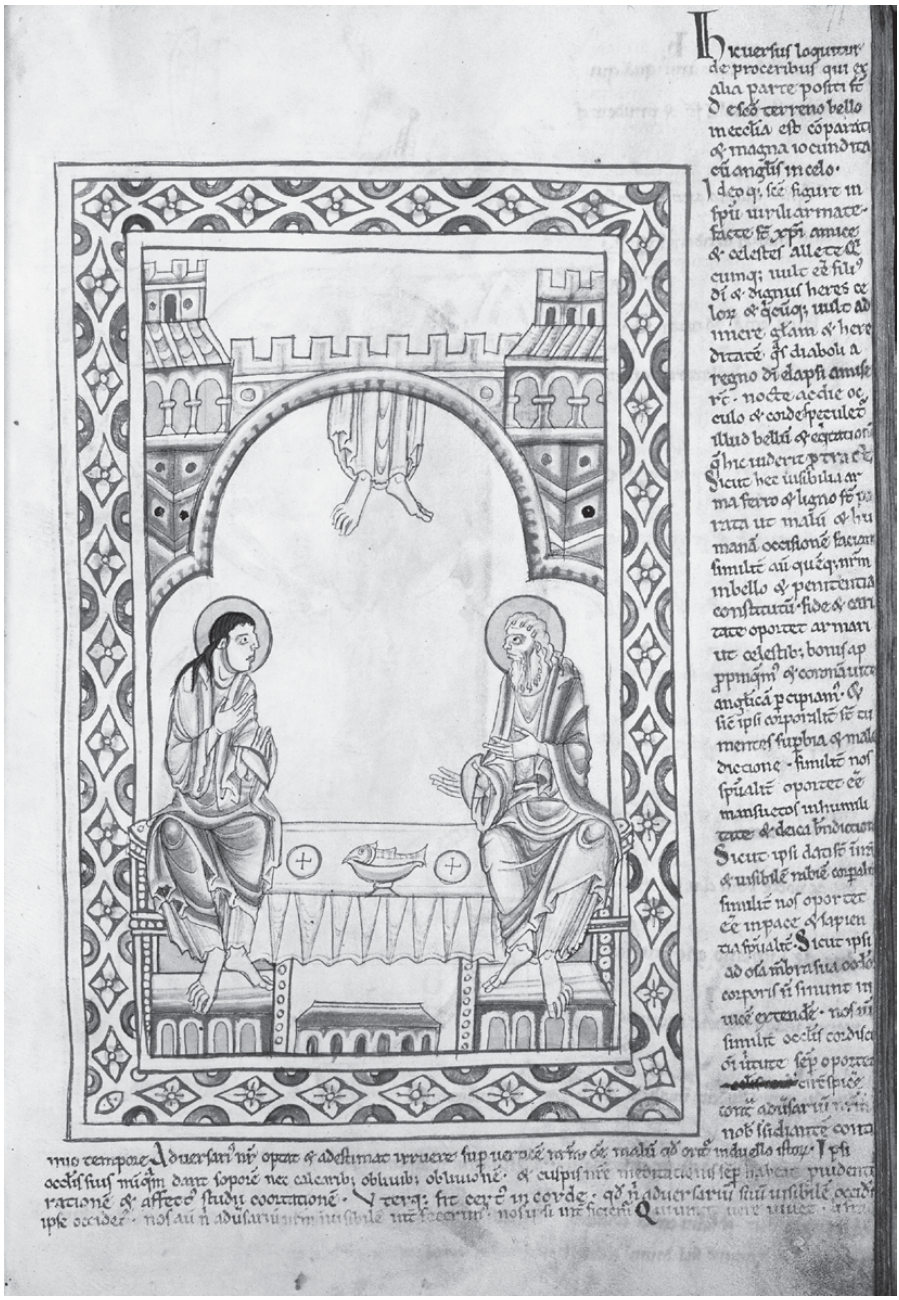


Figure 4.14. The Disappearance at Emmaus, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 71.

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response: more than admiration and awe before the sufferings of the spiritual athlete the audience is to feel compassion for his abandoned bride.

To further support its specific understanding of the *Chanson*, the makers of the Alexis Quire offered an epilogue, or rather two: the conclusion of the Alexis itself was possibly reworked and expanded for this manuscript, and it is followed by the tripartite picture story of Christ's appearance at Emmaus (figs. 4.12–4.14). On the double page where the two meet, it seems all the avenues of reflection on media and knowing represented in the Psalter come together (figs. 4.11–4.12). The Alexis Quire as a whole has a unifying theme, found in the opposition between sight and blindness, presence and absence, and the role of body and *visio corporalis*—of which the media on the page form pointed examples—in knowledge of the divine. Gregory's letter, which, sandwiched between the vernacular and the pictorial narratives, speaks of pictures as the vehicles of stories and of what, within these, "should be worshipped" (*per picturae historiam quid sit adorandum addiscere*), acts as an invitation to enter into reflection on the relationship between the media on the pages and the message they contain.

The Alexis and the Emmaus sequence are connected on these two pages by a common discourse on blindness and insight.[68] In the concluding stanza of the Alexis, the people lament their inability to recognize Alexis as a holy man before his death: "how we are blinded! … Through this man we should receive new light."[69] This then relates to the Emmaus story, in which Christ is not recognized until he disappears—or so commentary on this relationship has often maintained. In fact, it is only in the St Albans Emmaus sequence that disappearance appears to trigger recognition for the disciples. In the biblical story as in the medieval commentary tradition, recognition was triggered instead when Christ broke the bread at supper.[70] To effect this shift, the third scene of the St Albans sequence (fig. 4.14) is taken over from a strikingly "visual," Anglo-Saxon portrayal of Christ's Ascension, known as the Disappearing Christ—the same portrayal of the event as is seen in the Psalter's picture cycle (fig. 4.8).[71] The discourse on the visual evoked by the Disappearing Christ also plays a role in the final scene—and the meaning—of the *vita*'s account of Emmaus at Markyate.

As we learn in Acts 19, it was the event of the Ascension that first initiated the apostles into Christ's true nature, for until his body was given up, they remained blind to his divinity.[72] Thus bodily and spiritual vision were mutually exclusive, and the Anglo-Saxon iconography displayed this fact by allowing the viewer to see in the picture exactly what bodily vision could reveal—nothing but the feet of Christ that had not yet disappeared into a cloud, itself situated on the frame of the image (cf. fig. 4.8). The frame defined the boundary between (human) vision and blindness, even as it identified the same with the

68 See note 9, above. In what follows, I am summarizing also from Powell, "Blindness and Insight."

69 *Life of St Alexius*, ed. and trans. Odenkirchen, lines 616–20. Hereafter cited as *LA*.

70 Hall, "Narrative Strategies," 1, 7; also *SAP*, 78–79.

71 Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," 543–45.

72 This paragraph summarizes the argument in Deshman, "Disappearing Christ."

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human and divine natures of Christ. The divine was thus unavailable, inapprehensible to corporeal vision, unless simply as cloud. This cloud itself, however, doubly underlined Christ's removal from humanity: not only did it obscure him from view forever, but it was also interpreted as the sign of his sinless flesh. By virtue of the weightlessness of this perfect flesh, Christ was able to rise to Heaven unassisted (as if a cloud). In this way, even his human body marked separation from, rather than community with, mankind.

In the St Albans Emmaus, the same motif is adopted, but the result is a reversal of its message on the visual. In the biblical account, the disciples at Emmaus are not deficient in vision. Instead, it is Christ who chooses to deceive them with his pilgrim disguise (Luke 24:16). Once they demonstrate their charity to a stranger, he reveals himself—only to vanish. Visual recognition is thus not an issue. In the Alexis Quire, however, not merely the picture of the disappearance, but rather the entire sequence is skewed to this new idea. The pictures consistently show the viewer what the disciples cannot see: Christ, whether pilgrim or no. Whether the disciples ever "see" him is, visually at least, left oddly ambiguous, regardless of their charity. In either event, in the second picture (fig. 4.13), Christ displays for "us" the bread of the Eucharist as if to remind the viewer that he is indeed present and visible in the lowliest forms of this world—as a pilgrim, a stranger, or in the fish on the table. In other words, blindness and insight are certainly at issue, but the opposition is now one between inner and outer vision; that is, at issue is the use of bodily vision to see beyond appearances. In this visual discourse, the body reveals even as it conceals, at least to those who can see with the heart.[73]

This latter vision is not what the internal audience of the Alexis laments as lacking—their self-admonishment disparages human blindness to the spiritual. The discourse on the visual as communicated by the Emmaus sequence is a clue instead to a secondary message within the same story, a message delivered through the *spuse*, Alexis's bride. The same message is delivered, again through contrast with the Disappearing Christ, in the story of Emmaus at Markyate, where it becomes an implicit insistence on "women's vision."

The *vita*'s Emmaus account, as already noted, is an amalgamation of several Gospel scenes used to appropriate it to the life of the reading bride. The casting of the women as Mary and Martha serves not only to identify the story with female roles and desire, however, but also to underscore their recognition of the pilgrim's divinity from the beginning. In his presence, Christina and Margaret are "filled with such spiritual joy" that they feel "they ha[ve] before them an angel rather than a man"; they can scarcely contain their affection for him, and only *virginalis pudor*, their "virginal modesty" *prevents them* from retaining "their pilgrim" for the night.[74] This is indeed a feminine twist on the Emmaus story, but not merely for the erotic suggestion: it is most clearly gendered in the fact of the women's surety of the inner truth. Their love of Christ allows them to penetrate the exterior in perception even if it cannot allow action unseemly to that same exterior. In this they are the doubles of the anonymous female sinner of the supper at Simon's house.

73 Powell, "Blindness and Insight," pp. 268, 272.

74 *LCM*, p. 84; cf. *VCM*, 1:78.

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This implicit insistence on women's vision is then contrasted with what might be termed men's vision through Christina's experience in her lying-in as she awaits Christ's birth and the pilgrim's return. Once she has "conceived" and knows the Lord will come, she is "rapt to another heaven" where she sees, among the monks at St Albans, Christ seated in majesty as if presiding over the Christmas service. But neither is she seen nor does anyone else see Christ. As I have argued elsewhere, the function of this scene is to contrast a *visio spiritualis* with the women's experience at Markyate.[75] In the choir of the men's abbey Christ is unapproachable and, for bodily eyes, invisible. As the biographer comments, "whether she saw these things in the body or out of the body … she never knew."[76] At Markyate, the women experience Christ's divinity as if through a third mode of vision. It becomes both approachable and tangible but is also obscured and one step removed by his human form. The message of the entire narrative progression thus joins what we found in the Emmaus sequence of the Alexis Quire, and, accordingly, the *vita*'s account too restages the Disappearing Christ, alluding to it, however, not so much by ekphrasis as through the ideas it was known to evoke: the poetics of vision and the obscuring cloud.

The pilgrim's Christmas return ends when he vanishes from within the church. In the ensuing comment, the narrator's voice seems to merge with that of the women who witnessed the event. Christ had appeared by night (among the men) in all his glory—that is, such that bodily eyes could not perceive him. During the day, he appeared (to the women) as "that glory appears to us in this present life, since we see it only through a glass, darkly. Hence God is said to inhabit a dark cloud; not because cloud is his habitation, but because his light in its immensity blinds us who are weighed down by the body."[77] The cloud of divinity is here analogous to an obscuring exterior such as the pilgrim's or to Paul's *speculum*, the preferred instrument of recognition of women and the immature. Both the story of Emmaus at Markyate and the picture sequence in the Alexis Quire, then, offer a subtle but insistent affirmation of a third mode of vision, a vision of the heart's desire that is accessible to those who are dependent on an affective approach to their bridegroom and, no less, on corporeal forms. Successful completion of this bodily vision depends on the corresponding bodily disposition of the viewer. Not everyone sees the immanent truth; in fact, as the Emmaus sequences show, it generally goes unrecognized. Such insight is the privilege of simplicity, of loving humility, even of ignorance. The diaphanous body is made possible by Mary's mediation, by Christina's no less. Their privilege resides in an ability to see with the heart in and through what presents itself to the eyes.

The *vita* makes this privilege evident over and over again in the reliance of Geoffrey, the prelate and schoolman who bustles about in the service of popes and kings, on his

75 Powell, "Blindness and Insight," pp. 270–72.

76 "Ista tamen sive in corpore sive extra corpus viderit, … se fatebatur nescire (2 Corinthians 2:13)," *VCM*, 1:200; *LCM*, p. 186. The translation is modified to follow *VCM*'s text, which is undoubtedly justified in making emendations to follow 2 Corinthians 12:2–3.

77 As translated in Powell, "Blindness and Insight," p. 271; cf. *VCM*, 1:200/02.

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beloved *puella*'s access to Christ; the same privilege is the subject, from the inverse perspective of Christina's loving humility, of the vision concerning Christ's right hand. The episode immediately precedes the story of Emmaus at Markyate, whereby it acquires a justification in bodily vision that was itself, so we must conclude, constructed on a template derived from pictorial art as that medium's own defence of figural representation. Here the question, for purposes of my argument, of Christina's ownership or use of the codex becomes moot. Far more important is the recognition just stated: each, *vita* and codex alike, is an exploration of the same privileges of the woman-as-reader.

Alexis Recognized

The *vita* shows us the Emmaus story as assimilated to the life of the reading bride. The text of the Old French Alexis and its specific staging in the Alexis Quire do the same with the Alexis story: it becomes one to be read through the position of the abandoned bride, her desire and its trajectory to the heavenly embrace are the audience's own. But still more than this is at stake. In the story of Emmaus at Markyate an opposition between two views of body and gnosis that is implicit in the visual treatment of the narrative is made explicit in the women's own understanding of their and Christina's experience. In the St Albans Alexis this opposition becomes embodied in the two protagonists. Alexis exemplifies a contempt for the body and its attachments that prohibits what the bride must seek: his embrace, or at least, in this life, continuing assurance of his love. Yet she is denied not only this but also any knowledge of his fate and thus any recognition of his holiness. Here, the Emmaus drama of recognition and blindness is played out antagonistically, not merely as a game of disguised identity but as an existential conflict between two different quests for recognition from God.

Visual recognition is made the crux of the story of Alexis in the text preserved in the St Albans Psalter, and in this it is intricately tied to the Emmaus sequence that follows. The lament over blindness and failed recognition recurs four times before the poem's conclusion, figuring above all in the family's original lament over his departure and again as part of both the father's and the mother's *planctus* over Alexis's dead body.[78] The message is then driven home in the closing verses on blindness and new light that stand opposite the first Emmaus picture.[79] The body of *l'ume deu* (the man of God), once recognized by the people after death, shows them, visibly, how to lead righteous lives.[80]

Alexis in fact acquires his capacity for illumination solely through his position as *imitator Christi*, or, better, as a visible remanifestation (for the audience) of Christ's suffering.[81] Once he is discovered, we learn of the people of Rome that, "Because of the holy body [of Alexis] that they possess, / It seems to them that they hold God himself."[82] This despite the

78 *Vie de saint Alexis*, ed. Storey; for the original lament see lines 238–40, the parents' *planctus* are at lines 394–95, 434–45, 439. The Old French text is cited from this edition, hereafter *VSA*.

79 Cited above, p. 167; see also Powell, "Media and Presence," 343–44.

80 Powell, "Media and Presence," 343–45: *SAP*, pp. 78–79.

81 Mölk, "Culte," 533–35; also Bullington, *Alexis*, pp. 201–3, 211.

82 *LA*, lines 538–39.

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fact that, as Ulrich Mölk notes, "Saint Alexis … is not a priest, is an ascetic but not a hermit, converts no one to the faith and performs not a single miracle."[83] His holiness resides entirely in renunciation—of his inheritance, the world, the flesh—manifest in a body so disfigured that not even his mother recognizes the man that was. This "man of God" devoted his life to the pursuit of a weightless body, a purity of the flesh finally reserved solely for the Saviour and the same that enabled his unassisted ascent to the heavens.

Still, the struggle at the centre of the Old French version of the Alexis Quire is not contained in Alexis's victory over the flesh—this it presents simply as a progressively realized fact. The central problem is the paradox contained in a holiness that appears to glory in its own concealment while nevertheless requiring recognition if its purpose is to be fulfilled. The very revelation of Alexis's sanctity depends on a contrivance whereby a mysterious voice announces the city's oddly unmotivated but impending destruction should the *ume deu* in its midst not be discovered. Not to be outdone, Alexis passes from this world rather than suffer this discovery, leaving an account of his life behind. Once he has entirely escaped the flesh, recognition of his person can occur, his *historia* can be acknowledged by the community—but not before.[84] In this, Alexis's "disappearance" is again reminiscent of the Disappearing Christ at the Ascension, where divinity was manifest only once the body was removed from human apprehension. But the same point underscores the difference between Alexis's story and the message contained in the Emmaus pictures on seeing in the body. Whereas there we are taught to see divinity in the material manifestations of this world; here visual recognition and spiritual vision are mutually exclusive, hence the troubling dissonance that arises from the family's suffering for their own "blindness" and Alexis's apparent lack of compassion, indeed, his utter indifference to their pain.

The dissonance in question has been the subject of a great deal of discussion on the vernacular Alexis legend, for this version amplifies the mourning laments of mother, father, and bride considerably over the Latin text.[85] In these laments the theme of blindness is brought to a head. Where modern readers have frequently debated whether this constitutes a moral reproach to Alexis's indifference or instead points up the family's failure to merit revelation of his identity, the crucial point is instead that it cannot be otherwise: Alexis flees recognition as he flees the flesh; he cannot be reintegrated into the family home, for this would mean retying the bonds from which he has liberated himself. There is no moral failing at stake but only an aporia between two opposing views of body. While his indifference evinces freedom from the weight of the flesh, it also precludes recognition of his holiness and thus any benefit for the larger community. The conclusion, which contrives to bring about recognition only after his death, makes clear that the problem cannot be resolved in this world.

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83 Mölk, "Culte," 535: "Saint Alexis, qui n'est pas prêtre, qui est ascète sans être ermite, qui ne convertit personne à la foi et qui n'exécute aucun miracle."

84 Alexis's final flight, to Heaven, is fully analogous to his earlier one from Edessa, provoked by another mysterious voice that announced his holiness (*VSA*, lines 166–90). In both cases his imperative is to escape recognition as the man of God.

85 For an overview, see Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 79–86, 91–99.

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This would likely be the last word on the matter, if the legend had not been reshaped to tell the story of two holy lives rather than one. This development becomes evident already to a degree with the expansion of the Latin legend as performed in the Latin West; it is enhanced considerably in the vernacular *Chanson*, and, as presented in the Alexis Quire, it advances to the position of an *a priori* interpretation of the poem.

The basic structure of the story as we find it in the *Chanson* is a medieval version of the legend, disseminated in the Latin West beginning in the later tenth century.[86] Older Syriac versions, apparently not unknown in the West in the eleventh century, told a simple story of a saint known only as "the man of God," who flees from his patrimony *before* being married, never to return. He "is exceptional only in seeking to efface—indeed to erase—his own individuality."[87] This story, along with its objective, clearly persists as the trunk of the medieval Latin and vernacular narratives, but scholars have long conjectured that an intermediary Greek "composite" version, now extant only in later copies, made a major structural modification by introducing Alexis's return to his family home, in this case in Constantinople, and an account of his recognition after death. In this version, Alexis likewise returns to his bride, for the marriage is now completed before his departure, introducing a "double threshold" that effectively combines two structures of hagiographic narrative, the flight from the *domo patris* and the entry into a chaste marriage, into one.[88] But if his bride therefore acquires a presence in the poem, it is not yet the one we see illustrated in the double threshold on the opening page of the Alexis Quire. There she is seen on the threshold of her own trajectory to blessedness, as *sponsa beata* seemingly the equal of *beatus Alexis*. In the Latin legend her place is merely one alongside Alexis's parents. Together, the three represent the worldly duties, obligations, and temptations that the saint must overcome to follow Christ in the chaste life.[89] By the later eleventh century, however, when the Alexis legend first spread across western Europe, the same ascetic ideal was about to run up against a new definition of Christian piety, within which Alexis's bride represented a latent opportunity for expression.

The vernacular *Chanson* offers a clear indication of this shift when it adds to the legend's conclusion a final image of Alexis and his bride reunited in Heaven:

> Sainz Alexis est el ciel senz dutance,
> Ensembl' ot Deu e la compaignie as angeles,
> Od la pulcela dunt se fist si estranges;
> Or l'at od sei, ansemble sunt lur anames:
> Ne vus sai dirre cum lur ledece est grande.
> (*VSA*, lines 606–10)
> (Saint Alexis is in Heaven, without any doubt,

86 In this account I follow the summary in Hunt, "Alexis," pp. 217–21; along with Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 84–91; and Uitti, *Story*, pp. 27–36. See also Ulrich Mölk, "Alexiusvita," 293–315.

87 Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 87. A text of the Syriac version is reprinted in *LA*, pp. 21–29.

88 Gaiffier, "Intactam sponsam relinquens," 157–95.

89 This remains true (*pace* Uitti, *Story*, pp. 37–43) for the Bollandist *vita* thought to lie behind the OF *Chanson*; see Mölk, "Épouse," p. 164.

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> Together with God, in the company of the angels,
> Together with the maiden to whom he had made himself
> so long a stranger.
> Now he has her with him; their souls are together:
> I don't know how to tell you how very happy they are.)
> (*LA*, lines 606–10, translation modified)

This image was thoroughly foreign, indeed nearly inimical, to the idea of sanctity that Alexis otherwise represented and in fact still largely represents in the St Albans text; if we can anticipate it as the poem's ending, then primarily (although not solely) because of the prologue and miniature on the opening page, which contrive to make us do so. The symmetry of union so artfully evoked in these verses corresponds to the symmetry of separation represented in the miniature and then identified as the life of the *sponsa Christi* through the prologue. Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann has sensitively analysed the variable meaning of the gifts, the transfer of which is portrayed in the miniature's first frame, to demonstrate that here, in contrast to a notable silence on the point in the text, the bride engages herself in a sacred vow, freely entering into a life of chastity together with her newly-wed husband.[90] And the artist has indeed used the composition to produce a visual rendition of the same idea (fig. 4.15): the couple is shown symmetrically inclined the one to the other over their untouched wedding bed; the circle of the ring at the centre of the exchange is reduplicated in a larger circle formed by their hands and Alexis's sword belt, with a third, broken circle formed by the bed and the two figures and interrupted by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The concentric circles perfectly unite the couple visually exactly as the gifts are to do: in a mutually binding life of marriage (the ring), fidelity (the gifts), then chastity (the broken circle). Thus, while the objects are all given by Alexis to the bride, the image produces the impression of a reciprocal exchange—the content of their vows.[91] The artist offers the visualization of a formally contracted and mutually engaged agreement: this action is the true marriage between the two, completed in their own intention, as if in place of the physical consummation foreseen by the previous, secular ceremony and the empty bed.[92]

In the Alexis Quire, then, the conclusion as written, with its surprisingly completed embrace, becomes a necessary consequence of the legend as presented *from its beginning*.[93] The Psalter restages the story of Alexis's austere and single-minded asceticism as one—also—of marriage, separation and reunion. With the same change, the (original) story of Alexis's disdain for the wedding bed is transformed (for the audience) into one that understands the experience of human love and marriage as a kind of earthly vessel, or bodily vehicle, through which to experience love for and marriage to Christ.

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90 "Ring," 304–13.

91 In fact mistaken for such by Geddes, *Book for Christina*, p. 73; cf. Mölk, Albani-Psalter," p. 47.

92 In the vernacular poem, in notable contrast to the Latin *vita*, the marriage is not performed in church or by a priest.

93 It is possible that the added "second" conclusion (stanzas 111–25) is original to St Albans, though recent editors have not taken this view. To my knowledge it was last maintained by Elliott, "Ashburnam Alexis," 254–58.

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Figure 4.15. Proemium to the *Chanson de Saint Alexis*, St Albans Psalter, ca. 1120–ca. 1140. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, MS St Godehard 1, p. 57 (detail).

This latter is a consequence, in fact, of the new focus of audience identification, now the desire and suffering of Alexis's bride, *the* bride. This figure, the *sponsa gemebunda*, or, in more general terms, the *sponsa Christi* in her "widowed" state as *sponsa derelicta*, is another iteration of Eve on the way to Mary, but in narrative translation the aspiration native to her position becomes a longing for the bridegroom's return and the desire for a renewed embrace. Thus we encounter in the figures of Alexis and his bride once again the opposition between two fundamentally different ideas of the place of the body in the apprehension of the Logos. The difference is more than a contrast, however. It results in a contradiction: whereas Alexis's sanctity remains in the *Chanson* an expression of the complete victory over human and earthly attachments, and consequently an abhorrence

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of the flesh, above all his own; a woman who conceives of her fidelity to a conjugal bond as the basis of her love for Christ cannot simultaneously abhor such a bond in its earthly form. The *sponsa Christi* instead longs for the one in place of the other, as its extension into a spiritual realm.

We have encountered this idea repeatedly before. The woman's virginity is not a form, first and foremost, of renunciation, but rather a consequence of her fidelity to a "conjugal" bond. Corollary to this, her fidelity is expressed as the preservation of bodily integrity, witnessed as well in the idea that she preserves her beauty for Christ, rather than denigrating her flesh as Alexis does. Similarly, she seeks her bridegroom in, or within, her bodily role and its affective expression. The absolute precondition then becomes the complete subordination of outer form (body) to inner truth and intention (her one true commitment), for only then can the two remain commensurate. What she invariably seeks, and must seek, is the recognition of her "truth" in the eyes of her beloved, while any gesture of seeking the same is inherently subject to suspicion.[94]

We have only just seen the suffering desire of the *sponsa Christi* vindicated through the descent of her bridegroom in dissimulated form ("dimmed" or obscured by the body) in the *vita*'s retelling of the Emmaus story as a triple iteration of arrival and departure. But the same also highlights the difference between Christina and the bride of Alexis. The *vita* actually affirms over and over again how *present* Christ is in his absence, primarily to Christina herself but through her also for others. If the story becomes a romance of the bride forsaken, then only because she is so long tormented for her fidelity at the hands of a world that cannot "see" her husband. For her tormentors, her spouse is decidedly absent, because invisible. The *sponsa Christi* is thus continually caught in a drama of presence and absence in which her own ability to "see" is her only consolation. This vision is also what the pages of the Psalter train and serve. Alexis's bride teaches the same vision in a narrative iteration of the *sponsa derelicta*, but her narrative is not Christina's. The primary differences are two: Alexis never "returns" to his bride, nor does he ever acknowledge the sacrifice her radical fidelity represents. The recognition that occurs on the first page between the viewer and the figure painted there, a woman seemingly confined to a tiny "cell," never occurs within the couple itself. Recognition is once again the central problem, the veritable *crux*, of this text—not in one life, but two, and in the opposition between them.

Where the opening page of the Alexis Quire is constructed to anticipate the poem's final embrace between bride and bridegroom, the same is only implicit in the text of the *Chanson*. It shows us the story of the bride in a progression from newly-wed to abandoned bride to widow (she in effect lives through the three orders, the virgin, the spouse, and the widow, always as a virgin) as one in which she suffers not only for the absence of her beloved but also as the loving mirror of his suffering. This latter image of herself she can, admittedly, only express in retrospect, because it depends on recognition. But it is finally because of the reciprocal nature of her suffering, the expression of

94 The sheer difficulty of this position finds no more eloquent witness than Heloise; see Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 255–86.

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the woman's perfection, that she can be so surprisingly assumed into Heaven with him at the poem's conclusion.

In the text as in the prologue, it is Alexis who enjoins his newly-wed bride to embrace the heavenly *sponsus*: "Oz mei, pulcele! Celui tien ad espus / Ke nus raens[t] de sun sanc precïus" (Hear me, maiden! Take him as your bridegroom / Who redeemed us with his precious blood) (*VSA*, lines 66–67). Her response, if there is one, must await her final lament over his dead body:

> 'Or sui jo vedve, sire', dist la pulcela,
> 'Ja mais ledece n'avrai, quar ne pot estra,
> Ne ja mais hume n'avrai, an tute terre.
> Deu servirei, le rei ki tot guvernet:
> Il nem faldrat, s'il veit que jo lui serve'.
> (*VSA*, lines 491–95)

> 'Now I am a widow, my lord,' the maiden said,
> 'I will never have happiness again, for that cannot be,
> In the whole wide world I shall never have a man again.
> I shall serve God, the king who rules over all.
> He will not fail me, if he sees me serving him."
> (*LA*, lines 491–95)

The resigned dignity of this statement is a reminder *ex post facto* that the bride never questions the idea or fact of her marriage to Alexis; nowhere is there so much as a hint that she desires other than the chaste marriage he offered her.[95] Discrepancy arises instead over the second threshold—his departure from the *domo patris* and only dissembling return. In her final statement, the widowed bride makes clear that she sees herself as both *uni viro*–that is, faithful to her husband until death–and as *ancilla Dei*: her devotion is both to Alexis *and* to God. The same is implicit earlier, when, on acknowledging Alexis's disappearance, she announces, "Henceforth I shall live in the manner of a turtledove" (*LA*, line 149). We will have reason to recall this passage shortly.

It is the idea of love of Alexis as service to God that allows the bride's longing and love for her *sponsus* to model the response of the people of Rome, who in turn figure as the model for the poem's more general audience.[96] The bride's lament begins with the words, "Sire Alexis, tant jurz t'ai desirrét" (My Lord Alexis, I longed for you so many a day) (*VSA*, line 471). Somewhat surprisingly, a similar formulation is then twice repeated for "La gent de Rome, ki tant l'unt desirrét" (The people of Rome who so much longed for him) (*VSA*, line 571, s.a. 519). This "longing" of the people for Alexis has no real motivation unless his absence and return are understood to remanifest Christ's own. The (thoroughly unmotivated) threat of the destruction of the city (from which the man

95 Gnädinger, *Eremetica*, p. 46; Mölk, "Épouse," p. 168.

96 The conclusion of the Latin text does not allow for, still less elicit, identification of the people's devotion with the bride's.

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of God is to deliver them), of which they first learn only that same day, hardly allows for a sentiment expressed as the equivalent of the bride's. The people then complete a familiar topos of women's grief in hyperbole by refusing to relinquish the body for burial for seven days, for "It seems to them that they hold God himself" (*LA*, line 539). In other words, the people display the same devotion to the holy man and to God through him that is properly the province of the bride alone; their relationship to the *saint cors* appears as an extension of hers. She is a model or *exemplum* of a perfect Christian life, and one that stands partly in opposition to her husband's own.

The story of Alexis is one of radical separation from the body or at least radical desire for the same; the story of his bride is one of radical fidelity, which, in that she lives in a human and not a spiritual marriage, is a desire for the body's embrace, chaste or otherwise. The tension and even opposition between two models of sanctity appears to be native to the genesis of the vernacular poem: the legend that began as the story of exemplary *imitatio Christi*, understood in the most penitential sense, progressively acquired a secondary model of devotion and sanctity, above all in the vernacular versions. In the *Chanson*, the same tension is not only unresolved but also enhanced.

If the bride's suffering for love reciprocates Alexis's own sacrifice within the capacity proper to her female nature, if the two of them are to remanifest the love between *sponsus* and *sponsa*, then we should expect some acknowledgement on his part of the continuing dignity of their bond, but difference on this point instead becomes a focus of interest at the story's conclusion. Any possibility of reciprocity is prohibited, because flight from recognition is the very objective of Alexis's denial of the flesh; he *cannot* be seen if he is to be holy, whereas the truth his bride seeks and must seek can only be revealed in reciprocal recognition.

This problem is not to be excused or explained away. Alexis's trajectory is launched quite explicitly as a flight from woman as body. The poem reads: "When he sees the bed, and looks at the maiden, he is reminded of his heavenly lord."[97] Alexis's response is to call upon God to assist in his escape: " 'Ah, my God,' he said, 'What heavy sin oppresses me! / If now I do not flee, I greatly fear I shall lose you' ") (*LA*, lines 59–60). Some have argued that this implies Alexis wishes to preserve his marriage bond for the pure embrace possible only in Heaven; Alexis himself does not so much as bat an eyelid in this direction.[98] The passage has even been misread as if Alexis's fear was of losing not God, but his bride.[99] It is instead simply naked in its aversion to carnal union and the temptations of the flesh;[100] equally clear is that this position is of no possible service to the bride, identified in her person with what is to be fled. When she is received into Alexis's embrace in Heaven, the poem recognizes the necessity of accommodating her path to the same end; it does nothing to accommodate Alexis to the same path. The bride's

97 "Cum veit le lit, esguardat la pulcela; / Dunc li remembret de sun senior celeste," *VSA*, lines 56–57.

98 For the earlier position, see Petit de Julleville, *Histoire*, p. 13; and Uitti, *Story*, pp. 24, 37; *contra* Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 95–96.

99 Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 94.

100 Sckommodau, "Alexius," 177; see also Burger, "Mariage," pp. 230–34.

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lament even includes a veiled reproach to this effect. Read from within the Psalter, the same lines poignantly recall the gaze of the *sponsa gemebunda*: "E tantes feiz pur tei an luinz guardét. / Si revenisses ta spuse conforter, / Pur felunie nïent ne pur lastét" (And I searched the horizon for you so many times. If you returned to comfort your bride, it would be no perjury or frailty) (*VSA*, lines 473–75). It is symptomatic and no less unfortunate that this passage has proven such a puzzle.[101] Like Alexis's own confession of terror before the wedding bed, it is one of the rare moments (I count a possible three) when the underlying ideological conflict is actually acknowledged by the protagonists themselves. Notably, the bride evokes their vows, understood as mutual, and chides her husband for shunning her very presence rather than solely the conjugal embrace. The double threshold of chaste marriage and flight from the *domo patris* receives a moment of self-conscious reflection. The bride does not participate in the parents' lament over blindness, and with these lines she shows why: the problem in her case is not that she could not see but rather that no acknowledging gaze from Alexis ever returned her own.

This is the crucial point, but before we examine it further, a brief glance at the Latin life of Alexis is instructive. The *Acta sanctorum* text, which is thought to represent a common Latin redaction standardized early in the Western tradition, is generally regarded as the best basis for comparison.[102] In this text, the wedding chamber scene displays none of the anxiety that is so apparent in the vernacular version; the entire encounter is devoid of emotion. Alexis simply enters the room, and, because he is "so highly knowledgeable in Christ," begins to instruct his bride "and to discuss some of the sacraments with her," whereupon he hands over his ring and sword and departs, with the words, "May the Lord be between us."[103] The bride's presence in no way provokes a flight nor does Alexis deflect her embrace by instead engaging her to her heavenly spouse. Accordingly, in her final lament, the bride makes only a leaden statement of her own position, in which she sees neither future nor hope: "My mirror is shattered and my hope has perished. A sorrow has just now begun which has no end" (*LA*, p. 49). Far from declaring continuing devotion to husband or God, such despair is barely compatible with Christian faith and serves to underline, as do the parents' laments, how hopelessly bound she remains to the vanities of worldly life in contrast to her husband's apotheosis. With neither beginning nor end as a *sponsa Christi*, this bride can enter no heavenly embrace; neither does she function, then, as a focus of audience identification or as an alternative to Alexis's radical renunciation. Yet this portrayal is entirely consistent in itself, and what is more, it is fully consonant with the legend's model of sanctity as embodied in Alexis.

Not so the bride in the vernacular poem. To return to its moments of acknowledged dissonance: all three turn on vision. Alexis *sees* the bed, *looks at* the bride. In lines 473–75, the bride's seeking gaze serves as a metonym for her long-suffering desire, the antithesis of

101 See the notes in *VSA*, pp. 117–18; and *LA*, p. 129; also Gaiffier, 158–62; and Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 98n107. The line is found only in the St Albans MS and in MS *V*, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, Vaticani latini, 5334.

102 *LA*, p. 34; Uitti, *Story*, pp. 42–43; Hunt, "Alexis," pp. 218–19; for a close comparison of the relevant passages, see Burger, "Mariage," pp. 227–30.

103 *LA*, p. 37.

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his fear. The third moment we have also already encountered: "I shall serve God, the king who rules over all. He will not forsake me, *if he sees me* serving him" (*LSA*, 494–95, emphasis added). The last two instances are part of one speech, the moment when, in fact, she all but takes over the poem. Without this lament there could be no final embrace, and it merits a closer look. But the central statement is here: God, the true bridegroom, will not fail her, because *he will see her*. The failure in her case resides not in blindness but in a dichotomy arising from opposed conceptions of the body: the one renounces what the other embraces, the one flees while the other does not move, the one seeks transcendence, the other integration. The aporia persists to the very end; if it appears to dissolve, then only because, as with Christ at the Ascension, Alexis can be recognized once his "flesh," his worldly self, becomes cloud.

In this sense the audience experiences the poem as a negotiation between the spiritual aspiration to the divine and the suffering incapacity of a female humanity. The *gent de Rome* and the audience alike are to understand the story of Alexis and his bride as a re-enactment of the *copula sacra*, a narrative understanding of the Song of Songs and Mary's reunion with Christ at the Assumption. In an essay that offered fundamental reflections on the ideas of the holy woman, the vernacular, and history in this period, Karl Uitti argued that such an understanding pertains generally to the early vernacular lives of female saints; moreover, "the woman saint—and we must never forget this—is invariably assimilated to the figure of the bride of Christ."[104] The focus on fidelity as the repository of female holiness is characteristic of the emergence of vernacular hagiography; in fact, the process of vernacularization itself appears to signify a feminine embodiment of scriptural truth "among us," in the world of lay experience. The old Provençale "Song of Saint Fides" completes this idea of re-embodiment twice over: a seemingly unrelated story appended to Fides's song and portraying the persevering fidelity of a noble couple can be seen as an indispensable consequence of the vernacularization of Fides's life. It completes the embodiment of the *copula sacra* on a third level, "where that 'life' is lived, so to speak, by all of us in the world of human history, in the very specificity and reality of the Occitanian 'vernacular' community."[105] Thus, "She is rooted in our own 'vernacularness,' which, in turn, her story does much to define for us. We too are *of her*."[106]

This, I believe, is the best explanation for the oddly anonymous position of a figure who nevertheless becomes so pivotal to the poem. Alexis's bride cannot properly be called a saint, but she does allow the story of Alexis to remanifest the sacred narrative, making it present here and now.[107] The people's impression of embracing the divine in Alexis determines their joyful response over his "return" and also constitutes their recognition of the inner truth through the body. Before God, *la gent* share the bodily weakness that is woman's, and they

104 Uitti, "Women Saints," p. 249.

105 Uitti, "Women Saints," p. 259.

106 Uitti, "Women Saints," p. 260.

107 This explanation finds unexpected support from historical linguistics, in that the graphy *spuse* (as opposed to *espuse*), unique to the St Albans copy, appears to be a a reflex of the Latin *sponsa*, and thus may insist on such as properly the bride's identity; see Sampson, "Reluctant Bride," 137–54.

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experience the truth in the same way. When the bride is received into Heaven to embrace her spouse, she thus stands also as a human intermediary between their dependence on the body and the severity of Alexis's self-mortification.[108] In this way, the position of the bride in the poem becomes part of the explanation of how a vernacular narrative found its way into the Psalter: here as in the other "prefatory" additions, the medium itself is part of the message on the place and use of corporeal vision. In the same way, what we see in the staging of the Alexis as it occurs in the Psalter is something very close to the birthplace of identification with the bride as a focus of vernacular narrative poetics. She represents body in a new way of reading that allows our experience and its medium, the vernacular, to contain and reveal divine truth.

Enter the Widowed Bride

To understand fully the significance of this moment we must do as the text does and look with one eye back and another forward. The rapidly spreading popularity of the Alexis legend in the first half of the eleventh century is easily understood when one recalls the penitential severity of the eremitic and apostolic movements that seized the imagination of the time.[109] One of the few sermons on Alexis to survive from the period was written by Peter Damian, whose circle of self-flagellants can be taken as an extreme espousal of the model of holiness Alexis represents.[110] I suggested earlier that Alexis is engaged in the attempt to make his flesh weightless, that is, sinless, like Christ's. The motivation for this self-mortification lies in the idea of a distance between Christ and humanity that is unbridgeable, by reason, paradoxically, of the body both share. A body born in sin could never hope to recompense Christ's sacrifice of his sinless flesh, and this led to a terror of the judge who would arrive, as some imagined, in the very image of his suffering.[111]

Alexis's fear of recognition is a fear of the persistence of the sinful flesh with which he was born. There is no other motive for his words, "cum fort pecét m'apresset!" (*VSA*, line 59) on entering the bridal chamber; the same lapsarian sin is acknowledged by the bride when, in her first response to his departure, she cries, "Pechét le m'at tolut" (Sin has taken him from me) (*VSA*, line 108).[112] It is this fear that leads him progressively to disfigure and flee his own worldly identity; the only solution was to configure oneself in advance to the crucified.[113] As Peter Damian wrote, it is

> as if the holy penitent were saying to God, "There is no need, Lord, for you to order your officer to punish me. … I have laid hands upon myself, I have taken up my own defence, and I have offered myself in place of my sins." … This is the victim, which is sacrificed

108 Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 112.

109 Mölk, "Culte," 353–55.

110 See Mölk, "Culte," 355; and PL, 144:652–60. Damian extols the saint's heroic feat of conquering his own emotions to the point of indifference to his family's suffering.

111 *JP*, pp. 142–43 and 153.

112 This line, too, has been a point of dispute. Compare the translation in *LA*; Uitti, "Women Saints," p. 251n4; Gaiffier, "Intactam sponsam relinquens," 159; and Burger, "Mariage," p. 233.

113 *JP*, p. 143, paraphrasing Peter Damian.

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> while still alive, born away by the angels and offered to God; thus the victim of the human body is *invisibly commingled* with that unique sacrifice that was offered on the altar of the cross.[114]

To enter into the presence of God, "the victim" (for which Damian writes both *hostia* and *victima*) could only hope to have become effectively invisible. Such was the outlook on judgment within a view of the crucified Lord as perfection in the flesh obliterated by human hands. The broader undercurrents of these sentiments played their part in the rise of veneration to Alexis in the West.[115]

The story of how this view was displaced by another in the transition from the later eleventh to the twelfth century has been told often enough. The two aspects that specifically interest us, however, have only recently moved into the historiographic field of view. The first, which I have evoked before, is a shift in the way identification is configured: for the judge is substituted the man of sorrows, and between him and the penitent devotee a third figure was interposed, Mary. In this constellation Mary was not primarily an intercessor but a model of *human* suffering, that is, a model of response. As *sponsa et mater*, she was likewise not only a bereaved mother but also a widow, the bereaved bride. The second aspect is a profound shift in the nature of identification with these same female roles. The idea that the *sponsa Christi*, once an allegory of the church as a collective, became humanly identifiable and furthermore (sexually) embodied in the lives of women is by now familiar; we have seen it in Hildegard as in Christina and I have only just cited its importance for the advent of vernacular hagiography.[116] But only recently have we begun to take note of an equivalent shift in the role of the widow. The conjunction of this figure with that of Mary at the Passion serves to represent and promulgate a new idea of identification with Christ's suffering, the significance of which is nothing short of epochal.

By the twelfth century, the "three orders" of the married, the widows, and the virgins had served for nearly 800 years to distinguish the differing heavenly rewards—thirty-, sixty-, and a hundred-fold, respectively—for differing ways of life within the church, regardless of sex. As Bernhard Jussen has shown, this hierarchy of remuneration underwent a crucial transformation in the course of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, not such that its categories changed but such that they signified differently: rather than an immutable correspondence between the social stations of the sexual body and heavenly reward, merit came to be defined instead by the truth of inner commitment.[117] A "virgin" was no longer merely one who lived under vows of celibacy but rather one who maintained the corresponding degree of inward integrity. All humanity was, metaphorically, a widow—as Augustine had said—but this was no merit in itself; it was rather

114 *Opusculum 43* (Letter 161), chap. 4, as quoted and trans. in *JP*, p. 103; emphasis added.

115 Mölk, "Culte," 353–55.

116 Excellent historical overview is found in Bugge, *Virginitas*, pp. 59–110.

117 Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 147; see also pp. 91–92, 140–47 and passim.

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a way of recognizing the true moral significance of humanity's place in the world and its history.[118] Moral progress lay in *knowing* the widow's experience as one's own.

Corresponding to this shift to merit in inner growth or inner truth was another that saw the categories become increasingly literal and gender-bound. Women now themselves embodied the earlier ideas of humanity's relationship to its heavenly exemplar.[119] The two shifts, despite the seeming contradiction, are in fact interdependent. As we have seen, woman as body embodied humanity's search for truth in the body; her varying dispositions to body thus emerge as if the biographical manifestations of eternal truths; that is, of the three dispositions of the sexual body: virgin, bride, or widow. Within this equation, however, women, with no possibility finally to overcome the weakness they embodied, were barred from Heaven unless allowed the exemption of inner truth, the recognition of service of the heart, which was, *sui generis*, not manifest as physical struggle or accomplishment.

Jussen identifies the inner life of the widow as the exemplar of penance and contrition; in this her loss and mourning made her the singularly appropriate figure of *ecclesia* on earth.[120] "Das Heil liegt in der Buße" (Salvation is found in penance), is the formula she represents, and this continuously, despite and beyond the shift just evoked.[121] This idea turns out to be incomplete: the penitent's position assumes a debt that can be repaid in order finally to be found worthy of a renewed embrace, and this is essentially Alexis's endeavour. For the woman, however, there could be no "castration solution," as Heloise passionately argued to Abelard, no weightless flesh such as Alexis is seen to seek but only a path that integrates her experience into the love of God.[122] Thus, the woman reached Christ by reversing the male's spiritual trajectory, not by reaching beyond herself but by sinking into the truth of her bodily roles as remanifestations of the experience of the *sponsa et mater* and thereby discovering the truth of her unity with the bodily Christ. It is precisely the difference between the two, between the spiritual athlete and the suffering bride, that we see exhibited in the incommensurability of the legend of Alexis with that of his *sponsa beata et gemebunda*. Two different trajectories in the history of Christian devotion are here found collapsed into one narrative. This bride is a preliminary representation of the life of the New Eve and of the new widow.

It was not that the new widow knew no compunction or needed no penance but rather that she discovered a path around and beyond these, a path to surmount the insurmountable, in Mary's role at the Passion.[123] Throughout the twelfth century and especially in its later decades, the minimal scriptural account of this role was dramatically

118 See p. 132, above.

119 Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 154; see also Bugge, *Virginitas*, pp. 59–110.

120 Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 35–36.

121 Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 35.

122 See Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 264–67.

123 Jussen acknowledges Mary's place as the widowed bride but is unable to penetrate further the significance of her role: Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 232–35 and 238–40, esp. 233. Devotion to the Passion receives only peripheral consideration in his investigation, for example, Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 241–42.

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expanded in a number of highly influential texts,[124] thus giving voice, body and a capital place in scriptural narrative to the *sponsa derelicta.* The more this narrative expansion progressed, the more humanly contemporary—that is, the more like every grieving woman—Mary became. This triple convergence of Mary, the *sponsa derelicta*, and the worldly widow in a new sanctification of human suffering will concern us increasingly in the chapters to come.

Mary's position as mother and widow at the Passion was unique, as she alone could know no penance, did not share in the sin that was repaid but rather knew the full depth of *compassio cordis* felt entirely and selflessly for love alone; that is, simply by remaining true to who she was. As a woman therefore, Mary (thus it would be pronounced more and more forcefully), by suffering with Christ as one flesh, originally and perfectly accomplished a human reciprocation of Christ's inestimable sacrifice where no possibility otherwise existed for satisfactory recompense.[125] Peter Damian's aspiration was finally no more attainable than was Christ's weightless flesh. The keys to the alternative were two: the widow's virtue, that is, a woman's unfailing fidelity even to the bitterest end (Bernard of Clairvaux would soon imply that Mary's sacrifice was equal or even somehow greater, as the pain she endured in the soul was greater than any suffered in the body),[126] and a reciprocal gaze.[127] Christ looked on his bride and mother and knew the full extent of her pain, and if he assented, twelfth-century writers were certain, he also felt and acknowledged her sacrifice. Here was the diametrical opposite of the dilemma experienced by Alexis's bride. As Mary attested in one of the most popular and influential Passion tracts, attributed in the Middle Ages to Bernard and known today by its incipit, "Quis dabit" (ca. 1200): "Ego videns eum et ipse videns me, plus dolebat de me quam de se" (I looking on him and he looking on me, he grieved more for me than for himself).[128] The idea is well in evidence by the middle of the twelfth century, as attested with remarkable eloquence in a sermon by Odo of Morimund (d. 1161). Odo addresses his audience from within the characteristic configuration, as the spectator to Mary's suffering with the suffering Christ:

> Quid putas quod cogitaverit, quam plena singultibus fuerit, cum oculis lacrimosis intueretur oculos liuidos innocentis filii ad se directos? O vere stupendos radios visionis! O sacratissima lumina matris et filii, ad quorum mutuum respectum non immerito solis radius in tenebras conversus est! Quam profunde infixus est radius huius visionis in corde tuo, mater sancta, quo te mundi dominus, iam moriens, intueri dignatus est![129]

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124 See above, pp. 64–65 and 65n75.

125 *JP*, pp. 143–46.

126 *Dominica infra octavam Assumptionis*, par. 14, as cited in Kraß, *Stabat mater*, p. 106. The idea was also voiced by other writers; see *JP*, 304, 425–26.

127 Mertens Fleury, "Klagen" pp. 150–52, 160–65, sees the compassionate gaze as communication that succeeds where words, language and the voice itself fail.

128 "Quis dabit capite meo," ed. and trans. Bestul, p. 170; translation modified. See also below, p. 331 note 19.

129 "Homilia super Stabat iuxta crucem Iesu," lines 72–79.

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(What do you think might have gone through her mind when, her throat constricted by inarticulate sobs, with eyes full of tears, she beheld the leaden eyes of her innocent son directed at her? O what a stupendous axis of vision! O most sacred light of mother and son, for the sake of whose reciprocal gaze not without reason the sun's rays converted to darkness! How deeply the axis of this gaze fixed itself in your heart, holy mother, by which you were made worthy to behold the Lord of the world even as he died.)

When their gazes meet at the cross, each acknowledges and understands the other's suffering and God and his widowed mother are one. This was the full meaning of *compassio* as it emerged in the twelfth century.[130] Alexis's ascetic excellence, grounded in utter indifference to human suffering, itself shuns every gaze; this moment of recognition is his anathema. By contrast, humanity as the widowed bride holds forth her "blackened" body as the very testimony that she is worthy of the embrace communicated in Christ's compassionate gaze.

At St Albans in 1119—by which time a chapel had been consecrated to Alexis, and, it has been conjectured by some, this very poem may have been compiled and sung[131]—we are still far from the expression of such a visual epiphany of reciprocal suffering. Mary in her role as humanity *suffering with* Christ was only beginning to come into view, but it is amply anticipated in writings avidly received at St Albans and originating at the same Abbey of Bec where, according to one widely held view, the Old French Alexis itself was first composed.[132] These are the prayers and meditations of St Anselm (d. 1109), in which, as Thomas Bestul writes, already "the role of Mary is especially crucial: she, in actually witnessing the events, suffered greatly, and Anselm finds in her emotional reaction to the Passion an ideal model of [response]."[133] Still, it was Anselm who had pleaded directly to Christ,

I want you, I hope for you, I seek you;
to you my heart has said, seek my face;
your face, Lord, have I sought;
turn not your face from me.
…
my soul is like a widow.
turn your gaze and behold my tears
which I offer to you till you return.[134]

130 Mertens Fleury, "Klagen," passim; *JP*, pp. 199–200, 232–41, 424–28.

131 Goldschmidt, *Albanipsalter*, pp. 34–35; now further argued in Gerry, "Alexis Quire," 606 and passim.

132 Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 342–43; Cingolani, "Normandia," pp. 281–93. The Alexis Master's team appears to have illustrated a copy of Anselm's Meditations at St Albans and copied the same for other houses. As Rodney Thomson concludes, "The abbey seems to have played an important role in popularizing St Anselm's devotional works" (Thomson, *Manuscripts*, p. 41, see also pp. 39–40).

133 Bestul, *Texts*, p. 37; also *JP*, pp. 232–41.

134 *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 98.

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To write these lines Anselm did not need Mary as intermediary; he does, however assume the position of the widowed bride, a soul whose highest, concluding aspiration was one day to hear the words, "Soul, behold your bridegroom."[135] The aspiration of this devotee was not invisibility, to become the host on the altar, but visual acknowledgement and an embrace. How not to hear, then, in a monastic world that was being reshaped in the image of Anselmian piety, the same plea in the final words that the bride addresses to her now definitively departed bridegroom, *Or sui jo vedve, sire …* ? Does the bride turn to God because she has recognized the emptiness of her hopes in earthly marriage or rather by way of fully assuming her new role as Alexis's widow? There is a note of opposition, it is true, between her disappointment over the gaze ever-denied by her earthly beloved and her own confidence that God will, in Anselm's words, "turn [his] gaze and behold [her] tears." The conclusion assures us that He did, and this was her *suverain cunsolacion* as promised the followers of *les noces virginels* in the St Albans prologue. But we can hardly presume to hear in her chiding of Alexis a corresponding rejection of the earthly bridegroom, whom she will shortly embrace in Heaven. This is a vernacular bride; she lives her love in the world and subject to its imperfection, but her conviction is as her nature demands and her story tells; that is, that there is no unbridgeable gap between human experience and the divine embrace. It is the depth of her own commitment, the ability to "sink into" her own earthly role so completely and unquestioningly, that finally forces a fusion of the two experiences, of love human and divine—and in this she joins Mary at the cross. This is a moment we will encounter repeatedly at the centre of an avowedly vernacular poetics of truth in romance narrative. It is to some extent in itself responsible for the possibility of identification between the vernacular and narrative as "bodily media" and women's reading or women's knowing—identifications too easily oversimplified and too often wrongly understood—because, essentially, it redelivers the moment that first enabled Mary to "read."

Anselm does in fact rely on Mary in the same prayer to Christ, and in conjunction with a particular anxiety that he cannot quell: his sense of failure and loss over not having accompanied, in fact reciprocated, Christ's suffering: "Why, o my soul, were you not there / to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow / when you could not bear the piercing of the side of your Savior with a lance?"[136] The question, "Why were you not there," he repeats over and over again as his own way of recapitulating the events of the Passion, but nowhere more tellingly than in these lines, perhaps—at least as seen in retrospect.[137] They offer one of the earliest known occurrences in which the sword of sorrow, the *gladius doloris*, is referred to as *gladius compassionis*. Simeon had foretold at Christ's birth (Luke 2:35) that a sword would pierce Mary's soul as the complement of Christ's own demise, and from the twelfth century onward the idea that the prophecy

135 *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 98.

136 *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 95.

137 "Why could you not bear to see the nails? … Why did you not see the blood? … Why did you not share the sufferings of the most pure virgin?" *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 95. See also Constable, *Reformation*, p. 203; Bestul, *Texts*, pp. 36–37.

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was fulfilled at the cross served to confirm Mary's union, her true oneness in one body, with Christ in his pain; the sword, it would be said, pierced her heart—her soul—even as the lance did his, but *she did not die*.[138] The reciprocal gaze was thus one with a reciprocal wound, but, like Mary, the emulating Christian was left behind as a "widow" to long for her bridegroom's return.

The focus of Anselm's anxiety in this passage is, however, not the extent of the pain but instead his own absence: how could he claim to suffer with Christ, if he had not seen, had not "been there," if, still worse, as these lines indicate, he "could not bear" to stand at the cross as Mary had? "What do I know," he confesses to Mary,

> of the flood that drenched your matchless face,
> when you beheld your Son, your Lord, and your God,
> stretched on the cross without guilt,
> when the flesh of your flesh
> was cruelly butchered by wicked men?[139]

In his quest to know Mary's tears and, through them, know the reciprocal wound and the reciprocal gaze, Anselm's longing all but fully anticipates that expressed in Odo's sermon, or even, as we shall see in a later chapter, that of the author of the "Quis dabit." What occurs in this perfect alignment of human suffering in the divine and the human heart is a renewal of the embrace of the Word that Mary experienced in the conception. It is possible because of that conception, because Mary and Christ are one flesh. The continuation of Odo's portrayal of the gaze clarifies the relationship between the two embraces as reciprocal wounding, using Canticles 4:9 in a way characteristic of the twelfth century's understanding of the conception as God's response to a wound of love:

> Ecce reddit tibi amoris sagittam, quam a te missam acceperat. Ipse namque dicit ad te: Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea, sponsa, in uno oculorum tuorum, et in uno crine colli tui. Tu autem nunc dicere potes: Vulnerasti cor meum, fili mi, in visione qua me de cruce respexisti, et in colloquio quod mecum iam moriens habuisti. Et ista fortassis est ille gladius, de quo prophetavit symeon, ad te dicens: Tuam ipsius animam pertransivit gladius.[140]
>
> (Even thus he returned your arrow of love, which he had accepted at your hand. And now verily he said to you, "You have wounded my heart, my sister, bride, with one of your eyes and with one lock of hair from your neck" [Canticles 4,9]. And now you can truly say, "You have wounded my heart, my son, in this gaze which you cast upon me from the cross, and in the thoughts you exchanged with me as you died." And this undoubtedly is that sword of which Simeon foretold, when he said to you, "And a sword will pierce your soul through and though" [Luke 2:35].)

The "arrow of love" Christ had accepted is a wound to his divinity that brings him to assume Mary's human flesh, through which the two experience one pain.[141] The promise

138 Kraß, *Stabat mater*, pp. 99–132, and p. 114; also *JP*, p. 199.

139 *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 96. See also *JP*, pp. 191, 235–40.

140 Odo of Morimund, *Homilia*, lines 79–91.

141 See also below, pp. 251–53 and 269–70.

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of the Incarnation was that it made God and all humanity share one flesh; hence Mary's *compassio* extended the same possibility to all who followed her. To experience the reciprocal wound was to acknowledge and sustain the body's weakness, which was prerequisite to the reciprocal gaze as recognition of *compassio* achieved. As it was proper to Mary, this conjunction of wounding and recognition, knowing and suffering was proper to the female body, and it is at the root of the role of women's grief in romance poetics.

In lamenting his absence from this possibility, Anselm in effect accuses himself *a priori* of the failing of the men, the disciples who slept as Christ prayed in Gesthemane or fled rather than accompany their lord to Golgotha. This was the key: whether ontologically, that is, by nature, or historically, that is, by experience, the male was denied this privilege of presence, the ability to immerse and lose himself in the fullness of a "historical" moment (that is, of and in *historia*, the letter and the body), which might compensate for his factual absence, which could collapse time and space and allow a true witnessing of the event with all the psycho-emotional terror this would bring. This, so wonderfully and paradoxically, was instead the privilege of weakness, the privilege of the reading bride, accessible to men only through her and above all through her realization in history, Mary.

The shift from awe before and emulation of the spiritual athlete Alexis to empathy and identification with his bride thus effects *in situ* a transformation of audience that corresponds to a devotional transformation of profound proportions. An audience that was doubtless a male monastic elite (at least for the Latin text) becomes identified with women and laymen and in this new *persona* is initiated into a "female" experience of the presence of God in this world. The new audience is in a passive position of suffering and searching, waiting for return and reunion; in short, "she" is a widow. Parallel to this shift is a corresponding alteration of narrative genre, a movement towards a structure of union, separation, and reunion, and either appears to be enhanced with the vernacularization of the legend. The new genre has been called "a hagiographic romance."[142] While this term is appealing as a metaphor for the hybrid quality of the text, to suggest the text truly moves in the direction of later courtly romance as a genre is, I think, mistaken: as I see it, the opposition at stake is not one between *legenda* and romance, but rather between two different monastic models of reading.[143] The new structure creates a narrative mould in which to accommodate and articulate the suffering of a "female" soul. The bride of Alexis is as Anselm sees himself: no sooner a bride than also a widow, a widow who lives on, nevertheless, in the sole hope of a renewed embrace. Clearly then, this shift does not mean that the text no longer includes its former male, learned and monastic audience. But in substituting the vernacular for the Latin it also displaces the demonstration of ascetic excellence to accommodate identification with human emotional needs and a narrative in which the bride "reads" alongside the bridegroom. The body is introduced into the prospect of a noetic union.

142 Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 90.

143 Cf. Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 87–99.

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Just as in Anselm's text, this bride's lament cannot yet fuse with Mary's suffering, the suffering of the woman for whom Jesus was "flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone."[144] But the *spuse* reveals herself in a number of ways as a precursor of telling developments to come. One is her use of the image of the *turtrele*, the turtledove, to declare lifelong fidelity to her absconded bridegroom. The turtledove had been known from bestiary lore since patristic times as the image of unfailing widowed fidelity. Beginning in the early twelfth century (if not before) it became, with the dove (*columba*) and through the images of either in the Song of Songs (Canticles 2:11, 2:14), both a symbol of Mary and the exemplar of devotion to Christ's Passion.[145] The *spuse* refers her fidelity to this model in both the Latin and the Old French texts, but in the latter, the mother joins her with an uncanny anticipation of the identity between Mary, widow, and *compassio* that the image would come to express: "Let us grieve together for the loss of our beloved: you for your husband, I shall do it for my son" (*LA*, 154–55).

By contrast, the *Chanson*'s treatment of the mother's mourning of the dead Alexis emphatically illustrates the distance between the understanding of female grief at the century's beginning and end. She runs up in a dishevelled state (*eschevelede*) "as if a woman bereft of her senses" (*cum femme forsenede*), and then falls to the ground in a faint. Then we see her beating her hands together, beating at her chest, tearing at her hair, disfiguring her face, throwing her body about, and, finally, embracing her dead son.[146] The description reads like a catalogue of the most extravagant gestures of medieval women's grief, and they may be noted to purpose: Laudine's grieving psalter-reading was our point of departure, and these gestures will take on a quite different significance when we reconsider her in the final chapter. And once again, a retrospective view from the end of the twelfth century would reveal a number of these gestures—notably the fainting, the beating of the head, chest or neck, and the embrace of the dead beloved—as Mary's own in the *planctus Mariae* and related Passion tracts, where she increasingly becomes the image of the original wellspring of human grief.[147] The mother's grief in the Alexis remains instead a portrayal of worldly loss obscuring spiritual vision. The Pope accordingly calls the family to order once each has had their say: "My lords, … What is the meaning of these outcries, this sorrow and this clamour? / Although one may grieve, he is, in our need, a joy" (*LA*, lines 502–3). Even the mother's tears—despite those that

144 The transfer of Adam's words on the creation of Eve in Genesis 2:23 to Mary occurs in William of Newburgh's commentary on the Song of Songs (second half of the twelfth century): "Assuredly, the pious mother (*pia mater*) shared all the sufferings of her most sweet son through her maternal affection (*per maternum affectum*). In him she was afflicted with abuses, scourged, spat upon, and crucified for him, because he was bone of her bones, and flesh of her flesh (*os ex ossibus eius et caro ex carne eius*)." *Explanatio sacri epithalamii in matrem sponsi* 3 (Canticles 3:6), as cited and translated in *JP*, p. 428.

145 On the dove and widowed fidelity, see Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 210–42; on the association with Mary and the *sponsa*, see Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 80, 111, 150–53.

146 I follow the corrections suggested in Zufferey, "Tradition manuscrite," 41–44, to address the textual oddities of this description.

147 An insightful treatment of this complex subject is Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 97–109.

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Anselm evokes in a flood over Mary's face—might still be understood in the Alexis as a mark of excessive worldly attachment.

As Ambrose had pronounced of Mary at the cross, with lapidary certainty and an authority that endured beyond the millennium, "I read that she was standing; I read nothing of weeping."[148] Accordingly, in her own lament, Alexis's bride is never said to weep, and she completes no physical gestures of mourning—this in contrast, once again, to the Latin *vita*.[149] The contrast with the mother, coupled with her distance from later portrayals that would allow the mourning *sponsa Christi* to fuse with the *mater dolorosa*, displays this bride once again on a threshold where these human sentiments remained marginal within Christian devotion but were nonetheless beginning to claim their future place.

Rather than the mother's bitterness, which goes so far as to declare that her son must truly have hated her to be so cruel (*VSA*, lines 433, 446), we find in the bride a resigned, almost wistful reflection that professes profoundly disappointed desire but also enduring love, looks back in sadness but also embraces (as already seen) her new future. In reflecting on Alexis's seventeen years under the stairway she makes no reproach, no lament of blindness, but rather a moving testimony of her ability to see the inner truth:

> Se jo't soüsse la jus suz lu degrét
> Ou as geüd de lung' afermetét,
> Ja tut gent ne m'en soüst turner
> Qu'a tei ansemble n'oüsse conversét:
> Si me leüst, si t'oüsse guardét.
> (*VSA*, lines 486–90)
> (If I had known that you were there under the stairs,
> Where you lay in your long infirmity,
> All the world could not have prevented me
> From being together with you.
> Had it been permitted me, I would have watched over you!)
> (*LA*, lines 486–90, translation modified)

Here, if not before, the bride's place as *sponsa Christi* is secured. For her, there would have been no question of restoring Alexis to his rightful place in society, her love is selfless and would have conformed to him as if to the apostolic dictum, *nudus Christum nudum sequi*. But this is likewise the antithesis of the family's idea of recognition: she would have remained devoted to the inner truth—in explicit disregard for worldly judgment—and served, or "looked after," the man in his abject and surely physically abhorrent state.[150] Once again, this devotion, like the bride's profession of undying love, can only be seen

148 'Stantem illam lego, flentem non lego', *De obitu*, par. 39, 1371. See also *JP*, pp. 205–14; and Kraß, *Stabat mater*, p. 109 and passim.

149 The Latin text sees the bride run up in a "tattered garment" and then seized by sobs (*LA*, p. 49).

150 The verb *guarder* carries a double meaning, "to regard, look at," and "to care for."

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as fully motivated with reference to the "man of God," that is, to the holy individual first revealed to her and to the city by Alexis's *cartre*, which has only just been read. The bride claims, in other words, that she would have "recognized" and embraced her true spouse, or the true Alexis *beatus et electus*, an *alter Christus* (already) in the beggar under the stairs. She does not say so explicitly, but it seems he needed only to reveal his own heart, that is, to cast a loving gaze. How else should we understand, "Si me leüst" (Had it been permitted me)?[151]

Only with the dignity of this lament and its transformation of the Latin text does one begin to grasp the full depth of voices in opposition that I have argued is nonetheless central to the vernacular poem. As portrayed for us in the St Albans Psalter, the bride is a model of Christian devotion still in progress. From her initial tacit acceptance of the chaste marriage—an acceptance only affirmed in retrospect—she progresses to the position of the *turtrele*, in her case a devotion in lifelong fidelity to an *absent* spouse, and finally to the position of the widowed bride, the *sponsa Christi* who will be embraced only in Heaven.

The fate of this abandoned or widowed bride runs like a red thread through the development of vernacular literature, and, as I will argue, is bound up again and again with the articulation of a vernacular poetics of truth. The same is implicitly elucidated for us in the St Albans Alexis, where the widow's fate emerges to view as the indispensable resolution of a fundamental opposition, that is, as the focal point of an inverse poetics of body, such that not an ability to renounce, erase or simply cast off the outer shell, but rather an attempt to manifest the truth in the self results in a body that no longer obscures but reveals. This possibility, cast invariably as the privilege of bodily dependency or of a weakness for the flesh, was in fact extremely exacting in its uncompromising abhorrence not of body, but, as we saw in the last chapter, of the discontinuity between semblance and truth.

The Mediatrix and Her Last Gifts

It would distort the preceding argument and overstretch the evidence to make these claims for the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* standing entirely on its own. The real affirmation of the ideas just expressed comes from the poem's embedding in monastic devotion as embodied in the rest of the Psalter. The two models of vision that—taken over from the Ascension and fundamental to the Psalter's adaptation of the Emmaus story—connected the latter so pointedly with the Alexis and both with Gregory's letter are encountered in the Alexis itself as the opposition between a male and a female relationship to the body, virile renunciation and female integration. As the implicit viewer and audience of these reflections, the *sponsa gemebunda* stands for the possibility, indeed the necessity, that human experience can be continuous with the experience of the divine; earthly marriage

151 See the entry for *leisir* in the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, www.anglo-norman.net/cgi-bin/forms1. Mölk, "Épouse," 169, proposes reading the line as if the bride suddenly retracts her protest in self-doubt, as in "If I had been capable." This is neither lexically justified nor logically sustainable in the passage itself. Uitti, *Story*, p. 54, reads "If only she had known he was there."

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becomes a vessel through which to experience love of God—that is, she lends the speculative ideas articulated in the quire their grounding in human *historia* and, most significantly, an affective centre in loving desire. This is the "reader" for whom this media revolution in a binding was undertaken, although we have no more discovered his or her historical identity than we could ever stipulate that only one individual necessarily was intended to use, or ever used, the book.

The entire Alexis Quire is inserted as it stands in the Psalter as if an appendage to the great sequence of visual participation in Christ's life, what we might imagine as the efforts of Anselm's "widow-self" to regain presence at the crucial events of *sacra historia*. Aelred's text for his sister expanded on the same need and projected before her mind's eye entire scenes into which she could insert herself, thereby dramatically collapsing the same distance that caused Anselm such despairing self-recrimination. Somewhere in between these two the St Albans artists actually dared to embody such verbal stage settings on the pages of a psalter in resplendently material form, as the monumental extension of the same gendered gaze into a veritable personal theatre, a space in which the tension between corporeal and spiritual vision has dissolved into a "physical" encounter with *historia*—just as we saw the same spectacularly played out for us in the Christmas Emmaus experience recounted in Christina's *vita*. There is no further need in these pictures to overcome the dread felt by Peter Damian before the crucified Christ nor even to weep over the soul's tardiness or cowardice that kept it from actually accompanying the sufferings of its saviour. Instead, now guided by Mary's own conception and bearing of the Word, the female gaze could draw into the self those same scenes. The obligation that now fell upon her was to bring forth a mirror of that truth in her own body, to become the loving mirror of Christ's sufferings in his human form. How better to encapsulate this transition, all these ideas, in one image, than by fusing the Crucifixion with the Descent from the Cross (fig. 4.5) and thereby collapsing not only the otherwise unbridgeable distance between Christ crucified and the devotee but also—impossibly, it should seem—transforming the Crucifixion itself into an embrace, a moment of reciprocal ascent and descent that enabled the agonized gaze to alight on its object in a caress and flowing tears. Do the women weep in this scene? Their gestures certainly seem to imply as much, and in this possibly to differentiate between them and the men. Aelred, in any case, left no doubt on the point:

> Draw near to the Cross with the Virgin Mother and the virgin disciple, and look at close quarters upon that face in all its pallor. What then? Will your eyes be dry as you see your most loving Lady in tears? Will you not weep as her soul is pierced by the sword of sorrow?[152]

This woman, whether sister, widow, or *sponsa*, reads to restore an embrace, to regain an experience of voice and body that, on the one hand, is itself a secondary representation, a performance "she" once heard and saw (the liturgy, its dramatic presentation, the *Life* or the life of a saint); and, on the other, an unmediated apprehension of the Logos, a visionary gnosis in which she is witness to the embodied truth. This is the meaning

152 *Rule*, p. 90.

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of the *sponsa derelicta* when understood as a figure of the human dispensation before the divine, a metaphor for the body that once knew, carnally and wholly, its beloved but now is consigned to a life of conjuring that presence from the relics of his passing, the *vestigia* available in this world. As the inscription reads that appears to encapsulate the entire visual narrative on the opening page of the Alexis Quire (fig. 4.10), "Ultima pudice donantur munera sponse anulus et remge verboru[m] finis et ave" (The final gifts are given to the chaste bride: a ring and a sword belt, last words, and hail!). The items consigned by bridegroom to bride, and with them the contents of every page of this expanding image-text corpus, are the *ultima munera*, the gifts the bridegroom has left behind and through which he can be found again. The viewer sees the bride accept these gifts; she sees her alone, watching, waiting; she sees the bridegroom exit and leave—and on the same threshold her own meditation and her own life begins, at the point of separation and promised return. United by this desiring female gaze, the Alexis Quire and the picture cycle become an inseparable pair—not in production, certainly, but in the experience they are designed to serve—the one a multi-medial and still somewhat ambivalent reflection on its way to the monumental expression found in the other. Together, they embody and all but inaugurate the new experience of women's psalter-reading, or reading as a psalter-literate woman.

What then do we make now of the idea of Christina of Markyate as the sometime owner and user of this book? To the extent that we know this Christina, she is the one who is portrayed in the *vita*, and the woman encountered there is every bit the *mediatrix* anticipated by the pages of the Psalter itself. When the initial to Psalm 105 was supplied with all its visual reminiscence of the display that was already there, the gesture was doubtless intended to mark this very relationship and complete the circle: the embrace mediated over and over again through the pictures and texts in the Psalter between *sponsa Christi* and *sponsus* was now realized visually on the page in its mediary function for the monks of St Albans, who had made the book and written the *vita*. The insertion of the initial adds as if a final affirming seal to the intricate relationship between the woman-as-reader in the codex and the protagonist of the hagiographic text. But the hermeneutic circle of representation remains unbroken: was Christina's actual use of the book thus commemorated or rather only recognition after the fact of the complementary nature of the two projects in themselves? This is the question we can never answer, and one that we do well to force to the background as long as possible. The same directive applies still more in the following chapters, where the focus turns to cameo insertions such as the Christina initial represents into the narrative body of texts, not as pictures, but no less as reflections of historical women in a poetic mirror.

Having arrived at the end of our consideration of the Psalter, it remains instructive to pull Geoffrey and Christina back into the foreground, that is, to recall their place in a larger historical context. One might consider the surprisingly parallel example of a roughly contemporary body of texts that has fascinated readers for centuries in the belief that it, too, was personal and confessional: the peculiar dossier of correspondence between Peter Abelard and his own beloved *sponsa Christi*, Heloise. Abelard's penultimate letter, with its portentous title, "On the authority and dignity of the holy order of nuns," offers concentrated exposition of the same themes as have emerged

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from this chapter.[153] Not only does Abelard begin from the same concern for physical immediacy and a specially favoured bodily closeness to Christ to delineate the privilege of the female religious but his favourite scriptural witnesses to the point are also the women who persevere at the cross when all the apostles have scattered, the women who stand vigil alone at the tomb, and the Annunciation of Mary Magdalene—together no less reminiscent of the St Albans picture cycle than they are of Aelred's meditation for recluses. The women's lesser strength, their more fearful constitutions and their tears are all emphasized as the characteristics that, for the very reason that they highlight women's lesser capacity for such trials, make their fidelity and suffering far more dear in the eyes of Christ.[154] At this juncture then, Abelard pauses to wonder over the nature of this "intrinsic dignity of women," over this "privilege of the weaker sex," *infirmioris sexus praerogativa*, a special favour with God that allowed a woman to consecrate the King of Kings,[155] that made women "the first to see and touch the risen lord," and "set them as if female apostles over the apostles themselves … such that the apostles had to learn first from the women what they then preached to all the world."[156] Such was the privilege granted her as "humility itself," though she was "invested with no distinction of office but solely with the merit of her devotion."[157]

Abelard's first reply to Heloise, concerned more immediately to obtain the nuns' intercession with their heavenly spouse on his own behalf, is a longwinded exposition of the special hearing their prayers find with God, "most especially the prayers of women for such as are dear to them, and those of wives for their husbands."[158] There, too, he cites his scriptural examples of women's steadfastness at Christ's death and their witness to the Resurrection. In fact, as I have argued at length elsewhere, within the monastic context that produced it, the entire correspondence between Abelard and Heloise is best understood as a staging of the narrative of the widowed, or "black bride" as a model for the nuns and as embodied in the experience of Heloise herself.[159] Together with Abelard's own story, the *Historia calamitatum*, and his subsequent insistence on the "castration solution" as his personal victory over the flesh, the dialogue between these two voices offers a surprising parallel to the opposition we have only just observed embedded in the Alexis—even if the protagonists there are allowed only a faint whisper

153 *Epistres*, 7, pp. 107–47.

154 Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, pp. 111–13.

155 "Quae est ista, quaeso, Domini benignitas, aut quae mulierum dignitas … Quae est ista, obsecro, infirmioris sexus praerogativa, ut summam Christum omnibus Sancti Spiritus ungentis ab ipsa ejus conceptione dleibutum, mulier quoque inungeret." Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, p. 109.

156 "… demum ipsum Dominum prime viderunt et tenuerunt. … Ex quibus colligimus has sanctas mulieres quasi apostolas super apostolos esse constitutas, … ut per eas apostolic primum addiscerent quod toti mundo postmodum predicarent." Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, p. 114.

157 "Humilis mulier … hec in Christo sacramenta peragit non prelationis officio, sed devotionis merito." Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, p. 110.

158 "Quantum autem locum apud Deum et sanctos ejus fidelium orationes obtineant, et maxime mulierum pro caris suis et uxorum per viris …" Abelard, *Epistres*, 7, p. 55.

159 Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 255–86.

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when compared to the celebrated drama of the philosopher and his sometime pupil. Thus, the major themes that run through and shape both the portrayal of the relationship between Geoffrey and Christina in the *vita* and the representation of reading in the St Albans Psalter are also those marshalled to define a new female monastic spirituality. The Paraclete was founded in 1129; Abelard's letters of direction and the compilation of the correspondence most likely took place around 1140. The case of Abelard and Heloise is without doubt one grounded in a true effort to establish a woman's monastic community and provide it with a body of texts made necessary, as Heloise is seen to protest in her third letter, because women's needs are in countless ways not those of men. And yet, until recently, these letters were thought of as a scandalous confession of illicit passion behind cloister walls. We would do well, then, while not subordinating our understanding of the St Albans Psalter to a literary creation (the *vita*), to take no less seriously the engagement of women's spirituality and devotional needs that forms at least one side of the representational coin in either case.

Great fascinations feed on real historical presence, but they are not necessarily born of such nor at all limited by historical identities. The fascination with the position of woman as reader is at the centre of nothing less than a revolution in monastic reading practice, where reading is the metaphor for human apprehension of the divine and the objective is finally an alternative bodily gnosis. The first notable breach in the learned wall of exegesis occurred not as the attempt to address the needs of a woman or women, but rather in Rupert's rejection of the *patres* in favour of the reading subject as *auctor*, a new theology of the Word as experience that he articulated as female, occurring in the body, and modelled on Mary's conception and bearing of Christ. Behind Abelard's articulation of a spiritual place for his wife's widowed passion, behind Geoffrey's assiduous efforts and extravagant expense to provide for and sanctify his beloved Christina, behind the intensity and extended eloquence with which Aelred indulges what are supposed his sister's affective needs there stands a man's longing for a closeness to God and an immediacy of experience that the spiritual male could explore only through a female intercessor, a bodily other for whom bodily gnosis was the *cunsolacion* for an otherwise insurmountable incapacity.

Geoffrey's relationship to Christina, not only as it is portrayed in the *vita* but also as it is apparently, one way or the other, incorporated into the Psalter, tells this story in uniquely scintillating fashion. However the two projects began, they end up as complementary commemorations of a woman's privilege to enter the presence of her absent spouse—and to bring this presence into others' lives. The reading practice that the book shaped and served brings about an expansion and materialization of Rupert's exegetical figures as narrative and pictures even as it recalls a layman's fascination with the reading practice of noblewomen and their devotional books. As seen earlier, Malcolm of Scotland's love and admiration for his wife's devotional reading brings him, under her guidance, to learn to read as a woman, keeping "even the nocturnal hours … with a sighing heart and abundant tears."[160] The lavish codex he commissions for her represents

160 *Vita S. Margaritae*, 2, 330C; see pp. 34–35, above.

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his gratitude over this gift. If Geoffrey was indeed the designer of the St Albans Psalter, then he, too, learned to read as a woman, in part through his relationship to Christina, but most of all by intently exploring the possibilities to represent that reading, to shape it as a process and an experience through the varying and increasingly bold implementation of new mediary vehicles for the Logos as presence. As sometime dramaturge whose experience with the staging of the Word as flesh informed much of the staging of this bridal reading, Geoffrey the *magister* and abbot exemplifies perfectly the meeting of the art of the pastor and that of the jongleur, a meeting in which liturgy and prayer make common cause with pictorial narrative and vernacular poetic performance.[161] All of this would then occur, however, in the same way it does for Malcolm, because the abbot of St Albans—like many other prominent religious men of his time—was smitten with the spectacle of the psalter-reading woman, the devotion of the forsaken, or widowed bride. This was the twelfth century's reinvention of the woman as reader and sign to be read.

The same movement will recur as a generative motor of romance narrative when Yvain is smitten with the devotional reading of his own *sponsa derelicta*, Laudine. Learning to read as a woman cannot, for Yvain, take the form just postulated for Geoffrey; it operates instead through the form in which the codex's patron offers it to the reading bride, through *historie*, or *aventure*, a narrative structure that will teach Yvain how to love the woman who is the embodiment of human suffering and loss. Only one more step remains to bridge what seems the great gap between the devotional book and the staging of vernacular narrative poetry as we know it: the substitution of audience. The religious woman reverts back to the layman on whose position her reading diorama was based, but she will retain her place in the mirror of the text, both as a model of audience response and as guarantor of an "illiterate's" epiphany.

161 While still a schoolmaster at Dunstable, Geoffrey staged and possibly composed a play of the life of St Catherine, triggering the first extant reference to the performance of a miracle play; see *Gesta abbatum*, p. 73.

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PART TWO

READING THE WIDOWED BRIDE

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Chapter 5

QUAE EST ISTA, QUAE ASCENDIT? (CANTICLES 3:6): RETHINKING THE WOMAN READER IN EARLY OLD FRENCH LITERATURE

En romans traire: Translating Reading Experience

Few cultural developments of the High Middle Ages are more far-reaching in their consequences for later centuries than the definitive emergence in the later twelfth century of literatures in the European vernaculars—and few are so poorly understood. As argued at the outset of this book, the hypothesis that sees this development as a response to the needs of literate women for reading material is sooner a product of the habits and assumptions of the modern literate mind than a viable interpretation of historical evidence. Conversely, as demonstrated in the intervening chapters, the idea of the woman-as-reader has a history of its own within the textual culture of the twelfth century that we have scarcely begun to grasp.

We have seen how the song of the bride came to be understood as the fundamental Christian reading endeavour and how this bride's reading had been accomplished in the body, as history, by one woman, Mary. The same could be re-accomplished by any Christian soul who assumed Mary's position, that of the humility of the abject body, the receptive position of woman opposite the omnipotence of the (male) spirit. The reading of the Song of Songs as Mary's experience thus enabled a redefinition of the reading subject as female, weak and unlettered. This woman now read in and through the body and the media of its expression, which resulted in a new inclusion of both images and the vernacular. Alexis's bride is first interpolated into his story and then assigned a role as the complementary opposite of his attempt to obliterate the flesh; the text becomes the vernacular body of this new reading trajectory even as the pictures in the same codex appear as if the material realizations of a meditational practice, and each is to lead the reading bride to a heavenly embrace. This bridal reader was the epistemological fulcrum of a media revolution that began in the expansion of monastic reading—the aspiration to know the Word as experience—ostensibly to comprise non-learned subjects. The seemingly straightforward image of a woman reading in or reciting from a vernacular text thus appears as the highly compressed visualization of a much larger web of associations, one that, rather than simply cameoing the use of texts, instead visually encapsulates their place within a new range of mediary practices and their relationship to gnosis.

With the *Speculum virginum*, the reading position of the bride was expanded into a method of women's *lectio* that takes Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs as its two arch-texts, its authorizing models and prophetic prefigurations in scripture. In the next two chapters we will see how the same scriptural songs of the bride and her heavenly wedding were transferred to the vernacular stage, allowing us to witness the socio-linguistic

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translation of women's *lectio* to the courts of the lay nobility. The two key texts, both in Old French and neither of them well known, could hardly be more intriguing, not only for their status as missing links but also, and most fortuitously, for the information we have or that they provide on their relationship to a literary and social context.

In the first case, known by the incipit of Psalm 44 as the Old French *Eructavit* and most likely composed between 1180 and 1187, reference to *ma dame de Champaigne* and *la jantis suer le roi de France* have led to the conclusion that the text was commissioned by the celebrated patron of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie, Countess of Champagne.[1] This conclusion—while tenable in itself—foreshortens consideration of a larger argument revolving around Marie as the text's inscribed addressee. The text presents itself as an instructor's offering to Marie as his spiritual daughter; but this offering is none other, so it claims, than the *chançon* sung by a jongleur, David, to the heavenly couple at their wedding—that is, Psalm 44, here expanded into over 2,000 vernacular octosyllabic verses. In other words, the text represents a perfect transposition of the instructive communication articulated in the successive openings of the *Speculum virginum* onto the stage of courtly literature. It is addressed to Marie as the reigning princess of that stage. Whether or not she factually had an interest in the *Eructavit*, then, its author seeks her ear as a way of performing a marriage between sacred and secular poetic forms for his general audience. The text reshapes the Spirit's seduction of the bride into instruction for the woman seen to preside over the poetry of courtly seduction. By evoking Marie it is not, first and foremost, relating factual history. It is shaping itself as fact within a poetic history of the vernacular text and thereby creating the facts of such a history.

The Old French translation of the bride's reading of the Song of Songs is found in a commentary by Landri of Waben (ca. 1200), which survives in only one manuscript in Le Mans.[2] In an excursus redolent of courtly lyric, Landri makes a riddling reference to his "Lady," which scholarly commentary has most often taken as a reference to his patron. Closer attention to the text reveals that this lady and another, the bride of the biblical arch-text, are indistinguishable; once again the basic identification between bride and present female addressee is intertwined with the text's account of its genesis. The real patron, however, in the nearest approximation of fact available to our reconstruction, was no woman at all, but rather Baldwin II of Guines, eminently learned *illiteratus* and creator-collector (so we are told) of a veritable vernacular library. Taking the two ideas as they stand, we are confronted with a text that teaches Baldwin to read as Mary did,

1 "*Eructavit*," lines 3, 2079. Further references are parenthetical. The editor, T. A. Jenkins, "Introduction," pp. ix–ii, dated the poem 1181–1187; several revisions have since been proposed, the most recent and conservative, 1179–1198, by Ruini, "Appunti," 215; further literature is also found there. Philip Augustus, half-brother to Marie de Champagne, was crowned late in November 1179 and ascended the throne in September 1180; Marie died in 1198. While Marie's death offers the only firm *terminus ante quem*, Jenkins's argument for composition before 1187 should not be dismissed.

2 Le Mans, Mediathèque Louis Aragon (formerly Bibliothèque municipale) MS 173, on the dating, see below, 38.

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and the elusive reference to the poet's lady serves as the point of variable identification enabling this reading.

A similar instance of riddling reference to a woman as audience occurs in a text of a very different sort, and the third to command our attention in the next two chapters: the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (1160–1165). In this case the author-narrator's bow to a *riche dame de riche rei* (powerful lady of a powerful king) among the imagined audience has led to the assumption that the poem was written for Eleanor of Aquitaine, mother of Marie and likewise presumed *grande doyenne* of new vernacular poetry, in particular of the adulterous persuasion. The assumption is as factually dubious as it is imaginatively suggestive; once again, it is the riddle and the identities it evokes as possible solutions that truly count. If Eleanor is potentially one of these, then she, like Marie, figures as a representative of the audience in any given performance of the text; her primary function lies not, or not merely, in the realm of historical fact. She rather figures as a link between the present performance and the author's project, a work that initiates the appropriation of pagan history—the *matière de Rome*—for a Christian and courtly audience and the vernacular stage.

The three texts would seem initially to make odd bedfellows, and they have doubtless never been considered as part of one argument before. Their association runs counter to several categorical distinctions habitually assumed to apply in medieval literary culture. No less within the texts than between them, liturgy meets entertainment, exegesis meets narrative, history meets fiction, pagan meets Christian, and sacred meets profane. Beyond the fact that each is purportedly addressed to a woman in whom scholarship has persistently also seen the historical patron, they would appear as a group to have only their French vernacular verse in common. But this seeming incongruity is instead the oddity that portends a discovery: to pursue "the problem of the woman reader"[3] through early vernacular texts is to discover a body of texts and literary aspirations that is as apparently disparate as it is inwardly unified. It is, in fact, to discover a different history of the emergence of vernacular texts—a history as it was being written into the texts themselves.[4] A fourth text and our only source of information pertaining to Landri's Song commentary, the Latin chronicle of the counts of Guines by Lambert of Ardres, provides us with just that: an account of the genesis of vernacular literature as if telescoped into the lives of two illustrious members of one family. The history being written in these texts is aware of the prominent position of certain key figures in a new cultural development and uses this prominence as a way of communicating, legitimizing, and aggrandizing the objectives and significance of the text at hand and, no less, of the vernacular literary project as a whole. In each instance, the woman invoked as the receiving ear of the authorial address is the centrepiece of a strategy for the transformation of the vernacular performance space into a restaging of Mary's reading, a poetics of the vernacular

3 Cf. Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4, quoted below, p. 208.

4 As argued of a different selection of texts in Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," chaps. 5 and 6.

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text in which its performance becomes the site of the woman's audio-visual *lectio* and vernacular literature poses as a layman's scripture.

This female instance, in a sense, writes a different history of the emergence of vernacular texts, and it is the task of the remaining chapters of this book to explore this history. Despite the central position of notable patrons within it, whether supposed or confirmed, it is not a history of patronage any more than it is a history of new readers. It is a history of the reading bride and her successor, the widow; it is likewise a history of the new possibilities of written texts devised for oral performance. Finally and above all, it is a history of new ways of mediating the truth.

The idea that with vernacular renditions of the reading of the two great scriptural epithalamia, Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs, the project of a woman's *lectio* becomes one of a layman's scripture is, logically speaking, not difficult to grasp. The idea that a romance of antiquity, a seemingly endless account of warfare and revenge, the *Roman de Troie*, could share in such a project will meet with greater scepticism. Precisely this discovery, however, is what hinges on Benoît's riddle as to the nature and identity of his female addressee, the question, *Quae est ista?* that echoes like a refrain through the Song of Songs itself (Canticles 3:6, 6:9, 8:5).[5] As others will after him, Benoît confronts his audience with this question as a call to assume the role of the reading bride. The gesture intrudes on the text at a highly conspicuous juncture, raising the equivalent of a red flag over the element of the tale most blatantly in contradiction with the author's claim faithfully to follow his historical source, the story of Briseida, which is entirely his own invention. This story of a woman vacillating between two loves presents readers with a conundrum, yielding no clear avenue of moral judgment, even while embedded in an epic tale of the immeasurable destruction wrought by the changeable love of women. As I will argue in the next chapter, Briseida's story is an exercise in learning to read as a woman, which, for Benoît (and for Landri of Waben no less), means learning to read love as suffering and suffering with a woman in love, that is, learning to recognize Eve's part in Mary and reliving Mary's transformation of Eve. This mirror of suffering love in itself contains the meaning of Briseida's story. Still better, it alone allows the meaning of the story of Troy, as Benoît retells it, to be understood. *La vertez*, the very truth, of the story of Troy is thus discovered through the interpolation of a woman's story into history and of woman's reading into learned tradition.

Several concepts rather surprisingly conjoin in this construction: the truth of history is subordinated to the truth of experience, and the key to this experience is a woman's suffering for love. The discovery of truth through such experience is the reading project shared by the various texts discussed in the conclusion of the last chapter, whether *La Chanson de Saint Alexis*, Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*, Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse*,

5 The words *quae est ista quae ascendit sicut aurora consurgens* … (Canticles 6:9) began the liturgy of the Assumption feast at Lauds, thus more or less at sunrise. The response, *Hodie Maria virgo coelos ascendit* identified the woman who realized the truth of the prophetic text, in whose honour the feast was held. It seems reasonable to assume that even many lay people attending the celebration would have been well aware of the meaning of this much, if not more, of the chants. See Fulton, "Quae est ista," 104–5.

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or the meditation on Mary's experience of the Passion, the "Quis dabit." Benoît flouts the rules of his own claim to truth, the claim to relate the story as told by an eyewitness, by inserting a fiction through which the audience could discover history not by "being there" but rather by "being her." The truth of the eyewitness is displaced by the woman's ability to mediate presence through affective experience. Briseida's role in the poetics of the *romans* recalls that of the suffering bride as a model for audience or reader identification; she is, like Alexis's bride, a prototype of the new widow in vernacular literature. Exegesis and history meet in the rediscovery of *historia* as reading through the body of Christ's humanity. As the later chapters of this book will argue, this is the project, in fact, that has thus far been discussed in the scholarship as "the discovery of fiction" in romance narrative of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. It is not a project committed to a literary experience "liberated … from the horizons of religious meaning" (as Walter Haug most prominently argued)[6] but rather, and most profoundly, one that articulates a layman's way of knowing the Word and produces a body of cultural monuments that affirm the place of lay identity within God's plan for human salvation.

If the idea of romance as the (re-)discovery of a narrative aesthetic of fiction has become the prevailing scholarly consensus, it is not least because the many attempts to discover how romance texts might transmit a religious meaning have met with little success. Research in this direction has, however, inevitably relied on hermeneutic models that derived either from the traditions of the schoolman's exegesis or from Latin antiquity.[7] The very nature of the project, as understood here, predetermines the failure of such efforts. A literature that translates reading experience for the use and needs of the non-learned—and these texts are often emphatic, even belligerent, on this point—could not employ the hermeneutic methods of the *litterati* to effectively appropriate the layman's stage. But neither should such an adversarial stance be taken entirely at face value. Modern scholarship has had a good deal invested in the discovery of a literature ca. 1200 in which lay courtly culture lays the foundation for the secular literary aesthetic that flourished in later centuries. It has thus too readily embraced the assumption that this literature rejected not only the learned methods of religious reading but also the objectives they served.

For a cultural achievement that looms so large in the eyes of posterity, vernacular literature appears to have commanded very little attention within the literate and intellectual discourse of its own time, but notable exceptions exist, and one of them, found in Thomasin of Zirklaere's *Der Welsche Gast*, will serve to inform us of a conservative cleric's critique in chapter seven. Another, far more incidental, but better known and widely cited exception has been consistently misread as reinforcing the existing assumptions rather than revealing what it otherwise might. I am referring to the comments of Peter of Blois in his *Liber de confessione* on the tearful response of his contemporaries to

6 "… die neue, vom religiösen Sinnhorizont abgelöste Literatur," Haug, "Autorität," p. 124; similarly Haug, "Neue Poetologie," 70.

7 The last to receive serious consideration, *integumentum* theory, is decisively rejected as model for narrative poetics in Bezner, *Vela veritatis*, pp. 69–88.

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Arthurian tales. Peter's words are worthy of detailed consideration, as they touch on the very juncture between sacred and secular that will be increasingly at the centre of our attention, that of a compassionating response to performance.

A consummate *litteratus* and familiar of some of the most fashionable and influential courts of his day (among them those of Henry II Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine), Peter of Blois composed his short treatise on the confession of sins towards the end of the twelfth century. The text would no doubt have remained obscure in our time but for its rare mention of performances of Arthurian tales, a passage seldom overlooked wherever such witness is sought. Only occasionally acknowledged, however, is Peter's extensive debt—we would call it plagiarism—to Aelred of Rievaulx, specifically to his *De speculo caritatis*, a treatise for the instruction of Cistercian novices written towards the middle of the century.[8] Not only is nearly all of Peter's brief digression on tears lifted directly from Aelred's text, but this entire section of his text is likewise a patchwork sewn together from various sections of *De speculo caritatis*.[9] In other words, Peter's text generally is engaged in a translation from one social milieu to another, from the spiritual discipline of a Cistercian monastery to the pastoral care of the courtly laity. Where Aelred evoked tales of tragedians and jongleurs and, for example, a "fellow called Arthur" as the spectres of a novice's distant past, for Peter's audience the last example is part of a very present and now literary (that is, written), reality.[10] Comparison with Aelred's text thus reveals precisely how Peter handles this transition. The result is an amplification of the Arthurian side of the comparison on the one hand and of the specifics of compassionating response on the other, in addition to a parallelism in suffering that points suggestively to Christ's Passion. As printed below I have placed in italics the terms and phrases that constitute Peter's contribution:

> Vera siquidem poenitentia non in lacrymis momentaneis, aut horaria compunctione consistit. Nulla etiam affectio pia meritoria est ad salutem, nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat. Saepe in tragoediis et aliis carminibus poetarum, in joculatorum cantilenis describitur aliquis vir prudens, decorus, fortis, amabilis et per omnia gratiosus. Recitantur etiam pressurae vel injuriae *eidem crudeliter irrogate*, sicut de Arturo *et Gangano et Tristanno*, fabulosa quaedam referunt histriones, quorum auditu *concutiuntur ad compassionem audientium corda*, et usque ad lacrymas *compunguntur*. Qui ergo de fabulae recitatione *ad misericordiam* commoveris, si de Domino aliquid pium legi audias, quod extorqueat tibi lacrymas, nunquid propter hoc de Dei dilectione potes dictare sentientiam? *Qui compateris Deo, compateris et Arturo*. Ideoque utrasque lacrymas

8 The textual dependency was first noted, it seems, by Von Moos, *Consolatio*, pp. 213–14. See also Cotts, *Peter of Blois*, pp. 9, 14, 234; where extensive use of Aelred's *De spiritali amicitia* is noted in Peter's treatise on the same subject, but not the reliance on *De speculo caritatis* in *De confessione*.

9 From columns 1087 to 1089, at least four-fifths of the text is assembled and adapted from Aelred's. I have identified material that ranges from sections 23 to 66 of *De speculo caritatis*; there is undoubtedly more.

10 *De speculo caritatis*, 2:17, par. 50, p. 90. In Aelred's text Arthur is mentioned only once and then only by the novice in response. The master's remarks concern "fictitious" (*fabulosus*) tales generally.

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> pariter perdis, si non diligis Deum, si de fontibus Salvatoris spe scilicet fide et charitate, devotionis et poenitentiae lacrymas non effundis.[11]
>
> But true repentance does not consist in the tears of the moment or the compunction which lasts for an hour, for no pious disposition contributes to salvation unless it issues from the love of Christ. Often in tragedies and other compositions of the poets or in the songs of the jongleurs you will find descriptions of a man prudent, worthy, strong, amiable, and agreeable in all things. You will find also the account of the trials and injuries *cruelly inflicted on him*, just as actors repeat certain tales about Arthur *and Gangano* [Gawain?] *and Tristan*, at which *the hearts of the audience are stirred with compassion and pierced* to the point of tears. You therefore who are moved to pity by the recitation of romances, if tears are drawn from you by something pious that is read to you about the Lord, does that mean that you are able to make pronouncements about the love of God? *You who are moved to compassion for God are no less moved to compassion for Arthur*. *Therefore you are wasting your tears on both counts* if you do not love God, if you do not shed tears of devotion and repentance from the fountain of the Saviour; from the fountain, namely, of faith, hope and charity.)[12]

Almost invariably, ever since it was pointedly brought to the attention of literary scholarship by Erich Auerbach, this passage has been read more or less as Auerbach did himself: Peter was "obviously disturbed by the effect of courtly poetry on a public of developing sensibility," and thus wished to make clear that

> Tragic compassion with persons involved in earthly tragedies is not compatible with religion, which has concentrated all tragedy in the cardinal point of history, the divine sacrifice of Christ. This event has absorbed all the grief in the world; worldly grief has lost its independent value and has no further claim to tragedy in its own right. … The tears shed over such tragedy are worthless, so much so that the tears shed over Christ by those who weep for King Arthur or Tristan lose their value.[13]

This is decidedly not what the passage says, not even in Auerbach's translation (given above).[14] No causal connection pertains between weeping for Arthur and vainly weeping, that is, worthless tears for Christ; the one does not impinge upon the other.[15] What is at stake is readily grasped through context: Peter's subject in this section of his

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11 Peter has not only lifted and adapted the passage from *De speculo caritatis*, 2.50–51 but also included within it points made elsewhere in Aelred's discussion. Thus, for example, Peter's statement, "Nulla etiam affectio pia meritoria est ad salutem, nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat," taken together with the last sentence of this passage, effectively summarizes Aelred's point in section 63, where he specifically addresses Peter's subject, tears and penance.

12 Translation slightly modified (see below, note 14) from Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 304.

13 Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 305–6.

14 I have modified only the statement on parallel compassion for God and Arthur. Auerbach's text reads, "You who lament over God lament also over Arthur." There is no mention of vocal lament; on the other hand, Peter's use of *compassio* and *compatior* merits retention.

15 This misunderstanding continues, despite more differentiated treatment in the most recent scholarship; see for example, *JP*, pp. 441–42; and Mertens Fleury, *Leiden*, pp. 6–7. More typical is Ursula Schaefer's use of the passage to demonstrate "keen competition" between courtly and religious literature, thus resulting in the former's "unconditional condemnation" in texts such as Peter's; Schaefer, *Vokalität*, p. 98.

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text is compunction; that is, distinguishing what can be judged to signal the soul's true repentance as opposed to mere outward display. In this regard, he rejects the simple testimony of tears: they are too transitory (*momentaneis et horaria*) and too easily feigned; that is, their true source is never assured (*nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat*).[16] Here, *characteristically* similar responses to romance narrative serve his purpose: how can one claim that tears manifest true repentance, given that they are as easily shed in the aesthetic pleasure of entertainment? On the relative value of these tears versus those no point is made; still less do the protagonists of romance steal tears from Christ. Nevertheless: prompted by Peter's own modifications of the earlier text, one might well ask the converse question; that is, what to make of tears, whether for Arthur or for Christ, when they stem from the proper source, when the affective movement in either case indeed manifests a loving heart?

In this regard Peter's specific diction reveals something beyond or behind his foregrounded meaning. It tells us that tears for Arthur and those shed "over the story of our Lord's suffering when read or sung in church or pronounced publicly in a sermon"[17] arose from a strikingly similar and intensely physical, no less profoundly painful response. One that shook the heart and pierced it, thus bringing forth its essence, tears.[18] Tears explicitly ascribed —in Peter's preferred language—to a fellowship in suffering, a *con-passio*. Again, as if to underline this point, Peter speaks of "punctured" hearts, *compunguntur*; that is, he literalizes the term whose figural meaning is that centrally at stake: *compunctio*, the heart's repentance. This language of the punctured or pierced heart, which we shall have reason to revisit in later chapters, comes from the ancient exegetical tradition of another heart-wound, this time received by the bride through the "arrow" cast by the bridegroom.[19] Hence, Peter's testimony on the reception of romance suggests that the response to Christ's Passion and the response to romance heroes could be felt as one thing; they did not (necessarily) differ in quality nor did they, judged in and of themselves (and not by their object), differ in value. Monastic devotion (as Aelred expounded it) and love *en romans* met, for better or worse, in the wounding of the compassionate heart—and Peter regarded the same meeting as a commonplace useful to bring his own meaning home to a lay, courtly audience ca. 1200.

This, as I hope to make clear, is no small contribution to our understanding of the reception and meaning of romance narrative at the time. The value of the remarks does not lie where most have seen their emphasis—in a comparison, favourable or not, between the achievements and sufferings of romance heroes and those of the Christian saviour; it lies instead in what they say on audience response and the way

16 As Peter says in the preceding paragraph (1088B), "Si ergo senseris in te gratiam compunctionis et affluentiam lacrymarum, non tamen ideo te statim arbitreris Domino reconciliatum."

17 Aelred, *De speculo caritatis*, 2.51.

18 "Hearts moved to tears," is to be understood literally, as the other verbs suggest. The heart was held to be the physiological source of tears no less than of blood. Many examples in Weinand, *Tränen*, pp. 127–29, 186.

19 Arising from the passage "Ego charitate vulnerata sum" (Canticles 2:5, Old Latin and Septuagint versions). See pp. 253–55, below.

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this was understood. *Compassio* was proposed as the possible key to a religious experience of romance narrative long ago, in particular for Wolfram's *Parzival*;[20] it has been resuscitated in recent decades to some profit but without decisive success.[21] To realize the full potential of the idea, it must first be recognized that what is at stake is not a key to interpreting the texts, a key to their moral or ethical "meaning"; still less is it an exemplary function of the hero for the audience. At stake is, instead, a model of audience—in fact "female"—participation in the experience of the text, which alone delivers the experience of a larger truth. Second, the premise that *compassio* as experienced for the suffering of fellow men and women could share in the meaning and religious experience of the *compassio* Christians increasingly sought in following Mary to the cross has been disputed on theological grounds, grounds that Peter's text has been wrongly assumed to endorse.[22] His remarks do not so much deny this premise as they acknowledge its currency among his audience. As Katharina Mertens Fleury shows in her investigation of the meaning of *compassio* in courtly society of this period, the same premise finds prominent support in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, among others. The experience of one's own suffering was the foundation of the ability to recognize the suffering of others, of one's neighbour and thus of Christ, and this idea "was the basis of Bernard's Christology, which foresaw that Christ had to experience human suffering and human compassion to release the world from its sins through his own suffering. Thus, to gain experience of compassion for one's neighbour could be understood in some sense as an *imitatio Christi* and as affording access to God."[23] *Compassio*, in this historical and social context, could be seen as "engaged in hermeneutics, [as] an art of understanding."[24] Paraphrasing Peter with none of his possible misgivings then, we can surmise that the tears of compassion he cites as a commonplace of romance performances could be understood by those who shed them as evidence that the message had arrived, that they were touched by the suffering they saw in a way that afforded an experience of truth of the type first communicated to humankind by Mary's experience at the cross. This surmise contains in a nutshell what the ensuing chapters will derive from reading the bride's reading in vernacular texts that place their performance under her banner.

The history of the new vernacular text revealed here thus acknowledges no incompatibility between the sacred and the secular or even between the sacred and the profane. The texts are keenly aware of their position as mediating instances between *got*

20 Above all in three essays by Julius Schwietering: "Parzivals Schuld," "Wandel," and "Tristan."

21 Schwietering's ideas (see the preceding note) are taken up anew with stimulating insight by Krass, "Mitleidfähigkeit," 282–304; and further developed with reference to *Parzival* in Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*.

22 Störmer-Caysa, "Mitleid," pp. 64–93.

23 "Bernhard von Clairvaux leitet daraus seine Christologie ab, nach der Christus das menschliche Leiden erfahren und Mitleid erlernen musste, um die Welt durch sein Leiden erlösen zu können. So bedeutet in gewisser Weise sogar das menschliche Erlernen von Mitleid mit dem Nächsten noch eine *imitatio Christi* und einen Zugang zu Gott." Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 46, also pp. 24–27.

24 "*Compassio* [bietet] aufgrund ihrer Erkenntnisfunktion also eine Hermeneutik, im Sinn einer Kunst des Verstehens," Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 46.

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und der werlde, the formula featured in more than one German romance for the balancing act between God's claim to the soul and society's claim to the body.[25] They likewise witness no true rivalry between clerical learning and the layman's vernacular stage. The new literature designed for this stage was, on the contrary, a bold attempt to use the advantages of the latter to better transmit the content—or rather the experience—of the former. Conceptually speaking, it was written by preachers to be performed by jongleurs. In actual fact the cleric doubtless appropriated the stage himself with the promise to deliver better—and in some texts he declares no less. In *Parzival*, conversely, we will overhear the narrator as knight-jongleur as he in turn ousts the cleric from the new literary experience the latter has only just established. But these literary rivalries no more reflect operative historical or personal circumstances than the women the texts purport to address were the actual patrons or necessarily the audience of their performances. The voice of the text instead makes use of such roles to communicate a new literary project, to define the relationship between audience, message and messenger such that, as proper to each case, the original communication of the Word to the bride is refigured and recreated and thus claimed for a present vernacular audience. The woman we have been trying to locate as historical patron is in fact constructed in the text to elude identification or rather to be available for identification with each new audience and audience member. She exists as much within the text as beyond it, is as much a member of the audience as she is an unattainable ideal or a figure of their reading process.

To discover this identity, the answer to the question, *Quae est ista?* from the Song of Songs, was the key to an experience of the vernacular performance as the embrace of the Word. The discovery begins with the beginning, as we have first encountered it: with Mary's experience of the Annunciation as the conception of the Word through the Spirit. This inimitable and miraculous gnosis is more and more overlaid with one that must have felt far more immediate, more accessible and likewise more present in the lives of the participants: Mary's experience of the sufferings of her son, bridegroom and saviour, in which the perfect connection between God and humanity was re-established through a communion in human pain, an epiphany of empathy.

Riche dame de riche rei? Eleanor of Aquitaine and *Le Roman de Troie*

In the account that went unchallenged for over a century, no historical personage was held to have played a more crucial and broadly influential role in the irruption of vernacular literature in France than Eleanor of Aquitaine (ca. 1122–1206), sometime queen of France, later queen of England, duchess of Normandy and Aquitaine, and countess of Poitou, Anjou and Maine. Eleanor has been credited with having brought troubadour lyric to the northern regions of France, being the driving force behind the adaptation of the great epics and legends of antiquity into French, and introducing the Celtic legends

25 Cf. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, lines 8016–17; Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, lines 10125–29; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, lines 827, 19–24; see also Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, pp. 428–30.

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surrounding King Arthur into France where they gave birth to Arthurian romance.[26] Together with her daughter, Marie de Champagne, she is the object of satire in the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus (ca. 1185) as the female arbiter presiding over a cult of "courtly love" and has therefore been seen as the central inspiration not only for literary projects but also for their content.[27]

More recently, this broad-stroke picture has been subjected to rigorous re-examination and revision. In a study of the patronage of both Eleanor and her second husband, Henry II of England, Karen Broadhurst shows that "not a single text can be said to have been commissioned by Eleanor"; moreover, only three texts contain even possible references to her.[28] One of these, found in Philippe de Thaon's vernacular translation of the bestiary, is an explicit dedication, but it clearly postdates the work's composition by at least two decades.[29] In a second, Bernart de Ventadorn sends off a poem to "the queen of the Normans."[30] The third is doubtful indeed; it is the passage from the *Roman de Troie* that will occupy us shortly. Leaving aside all debate over the appropriate criteria for patronage, not one of these three references can be stretched into evidence of active interest on Eleanor's part.

Broadhurst was not the first to have raised such objections, and the consensus today regards Eleanor's patronage of literature as at best a probable conjecture.[31] But the idea of Eleanor as a driving force behind this great literary birth is difficult to dispense with. A development as significant as the arrival of courtly vernacular literature in the twelfth century begs for an explanation of transformative proportions, and we have as yet found little to put in place of either Eleanor's captivating and charismatic personality or the considerable power and influence she wielded for a large part of the twelfth century in all the crucial regions in question. More important, however, is the argument that Andreas's characterization suggests. While his is the sole known representation of Eleanor as connected to the culture of literary developments that dates from her own lifetime, by the mid thirteenth century at the latest it seems she was often *understood* to have filled such a role, whether this was merely legend or remembered fact.[32] This,

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26 The foundational studies are Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire," 5–57; and Bezzola, *Littérature courtoise*, pp. 247–311.

27 See Bourgain, "Aliénor," 29–36; and Turner, *Eleanor*, pp. 196–200.

28 Broadhurst, "Patrons," 82. See also Broadhurst, "Patronage."

29 After the death of his former patron, Adeliza (d. 1151), the second wife of Henry I of England, Philippe—in one of three extant manuscripts (Oxford, Merton College MS 249)—re-dedicates his work (dated to 1121–1135) to Eleanor with a plea for her legal intercession on his behalf; it must therefore postdate her coronation in 1154.

30 "Pel doutz chan que l rossignols fai," *Bernart von Ventadorn*, p. 197; verses 43–45 read, "Huguet, mos cortes messatgers / Chantatz ma chanso volenters / A la reïna dels Normans."

31 Varvaro, "Corti anglo-normanne," pp. 283–84, also 253–54; also Turner, *Eleanor*, pp. 167–93, 196–204. For Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 394–413, the revisionist view has in some cases gone too far. In Ferrante, *Glory*, pp. 112–18, the standard portrayal of Eleanor is still alive and well; likewise in Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 213–17, and 250.

32 The mention in Layamon's translation of Wace's *Roman de Brut* (early thirteenth century) that Layamon used as one of his sources a copy of Wace's text that Wace had presented to Eleanor, may

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I think, is the crucial point. Literature speaks to the imagination of its audience, and when the texts offer vague or suggestive allusions in the direction of historical figures, they may be accomplishing something entirely more useful to their reception than puzzles for future historians.

Given a closer look, Benoît de Sainte-Maure's supposed homage to Eleanor reveals itself as the textbook example of a rhetorical strategy that we will encounter repeatedly in other vernacular texts:

D'icest vers crien je estre blasmez
De cele qui tant a biautez,
Qui hautece a, pris e valor,
Honesté e sens e henor,
Bien e mesure e seinteé
Noble largece e honesté,
En qui mesfait de dames maint
Sunt par le bien de li esteint,
En qui tote scïence abunde,
A la quel n'est nul secunde
Qui el mond seit, de nule lei.
Riche dame de riche rei,
Sans mal, sans ire, sans tristece,
Puissez aveir toz jorz leece![33]

(But I fear much to be blamed for these verses by that lady who is of such great beauty, she who possesses nobility, esteem and merit, virtue, judgment and honour, goodness and temperance and holy purity, noble generosity and probity; she through whom the failings of so many women are by her excellence again undone; she in whom all knowledge abounds, and who is without equal in all the world, regardless of faith. O powerful lady of a powerful king, free of evil, free of anguish and of sorrow may you live forever in happiness!)

Critical judgment has vacillated over whether to call this passage a "dedication" to Eleanor or rather a "delicate homage" or, more recently, an "apology," but few indeed are those who have doubted that the lines are addressed to Eleanor.[34] One of these is Roberta

well belong in this category; see Broadhurst, "Patrons," 70–72. For an account of both the historical and legendary dimensions, each in its own right, see Owen, *Eleanor*, esp. pp. 37–42.

33 I cite the text from the partial new edition of the Milan manuscript, Biblioteca ambrosiana D55, ed. and trans. Baumgartner and Vielliard; here lines 13457–70. For passages not included there I have cited the earlier critical edition by Constans.

34 "Dedication" goes back to the text's first editor, Leopold Constans, *Roman de Troie*, pp. 189–90. For "homage" see Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire," 23, and Bezzola, "Littérature courtoise," p. 289; the French term *excuse* is used by Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 32. The *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age* (rev. 1992), speaks of a "dédicace allusive"; for Baumgartner and Vielliard, "Introduction," p. 18, "Tout permet de penser que la *riche dame de riche rei* longuement célébrée aux vers 13457–13470 est bien Aliénor d'Aquitaine"; similarly: Petit, *Naissances du roman*, p. 820; Flori, *Eleanor*, p. 409; and Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 213, 250.

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Krueger, who called attention to the immediate context of the remarks and pronounced the connection with Eleanor to be problematic at best.[35]

Benoît's authorial intrusion interrupts the narration of the most celebrated love story in his voluminous romance, one also of his own invention: the ill-fated love of Briseida and the Trojan prince, Troilus.[36] Briseida is the daughter of the arch-traitor, the Trojan priest Calchas, who, leaving her behind, fled to the Greeks before the war had even begun.[37] Calchas later succeeds in negotiating his daughter's release from the city, and the scene preceding our crucial passage recounts the lovers' last night together and their parting. A narratorial digression deflates the scene's pathos entirely, however, by revealing that Briseida will quickly—"within three days"—bestow her love on another, the Greek hero Diomedes. The narrator's disapproving remarks broaden to become an indictment of women in general; these are the "verses" for which he fears reprimand: "Women's woe does not last long: she cries with one eye and laughs with the other." Worse, "no matter how grievous an offense they've committed or who may have seen it, as women would have it, they are never to blame. They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest."[38] The ensuing apology excepts from these remarks the one lady who is the object of his apposite praise.

Krueger's reservations are based on the "antifeminist framing" of the passage; she argues that the preceding remarks could only have offended a woman or women in the audience.[39] Indeed, if the apology is taken as directed at Eleanor in particular, its purported praise sooner smacks of sarcasm. Briseida is condemned for opportunistically changing horses, and sides, midway through the war. Assuming close association of the poem with Eleanor or her court, how could such an invention fail to evoke parallels with Eleanor's jilting of one husband's crown for another's? She is the one noted to have most avidly sought the annulment of her marriage to Louis VII of France, finally granted in 1152, and her second, to the king of England, Henry II, was completed within less than two months. The parallel is intensified in that her former husband was reputed (much in Troilus's vein) to have doted on her somewhat desperately. Is an apology to Eleanor then more in order than one might have believed?

If that is the case, Benoît's gesture can hardly suffice. Its exorbitant praise only exacerbates the wound by flying in the face of what was popularly believed and chronicled of Eleanor's behaviour. As early as 1146–1149, when Eleanor and her retinue accompanied Louis on the second crusade, if not before, the rumours of

35 Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 5–7, although she still sees Eleanor as "a recognized patron for many early works" (*Women Readers*, p. 4). See also Varvaro, "Corti anglo-normanne," p. 284; Jaeger, "Patrons," p. 57; and Hansen, *Frauengestalten*," p. 150.

36 Modern readers recognize Troilus's beloved as Cressida. On her remarkable literary afterlife, furthered by no less than Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare, see Barbara Nolan, *Roman Antique*.

37 Curiously, Benoît attributes royal descent to this lineage, calling Briseida "Fille de rei," near the end of the romance (*Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, line 27947).

38 Lines 13441–544, see below, pp. 260–61.

39 *Women Readers*, pp. 5–7.

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Eleanor's infidelities—to that point evidenced by no more than her husband's obsessive jealousy—were treated as certainties.[40] Later times would enlarge these into stories of her running off with the pagan ruler, Saladin.[41] But even the most reliable contemporary sources—most notably John of Salisbury, writing in the 1150s—do not paper over the fiasco of Antioch. The royal couple was received there by Eleanor's uncle, Raymond, "and his constant, indeed almost continuous conversation with her, aroused the king's suspicions."[42] Other contemporaries explicitly report a sexual affair.[43] His jealousy now given apparent cause, Louis made to leave early, but Eleanor refused to accompany him, with Raymond joining in her entreaties to remain at Antioch. Louis, not to be duped, then resolved the issue by conducting a night-time kidnapping of his wife! But perhaps even more significantly, John reports that it was at Antioch that Eleanor first announced she wanted the marriage annulled, at which "the king was deeply moved."[44]

The historical accuracy of these reports is not the issue here. They leave beyond doubt that amorous adventures, political scandal, and even disloyalty in war were an established facet of Eleanor's celebrity by mid-century.[45] They likewise show that popular understanding of the divorce saw it as her ardent desire; this, coupled with her swiftly contracted marriage to Henry, would have made her appear to Benoît's audience in a rather worse light, even, than his Briseida. The ensuing "apology" would then be nothing of the sort, but rather a thinly veiled jab in Eleanor's direction encouraging the audience to make an unfavourable comparison. And the sole textual support for Eleanor's encouragement of new vernacular narrative would be quite irretrievably lost.

Still, what remains in its place? As Krueger tellingly stated, Benoît's *Roman de Troie* "marks an important step in the development of courtly romance's literary self-consciousness. It also marks the beginning of the woman reader as a problem."[46] Krueger's understanding of "the woman reader" nonetheless misses the point in that

40 On the crusade and in particular the episode at Antioch as the origin of the "légende noire" surrounding Eleanor, see Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 295–335. Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 107, summarizes the progressive elaboration of the events over the ensuing century, and concludes, "In Eleanor's progressive vilification regarding her relationship with her uncle [Raymond of Antioch], we have seen her possibly tactless behaviour the subject perhaps of general rumour followed by spiteful hints, then accepted as a guilty liaison, and finally turned into a poisonous brew of half-remembered history laced with lust and treason." See also McCracken, "Scandalizing Desire," pp. 247–63.

41 Owen, *Eleanor*, pp. 104–5. See also Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 311–12, 328, 332.

42 John of Salisbury, *Historia pontificalis*, as translated in Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 104; also Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 318–19.

43 Owen, *Eleanor*, pp. 104–5; Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 315–21.

44 John of Salisbury, *Historia pontificalis*, as translated in Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 104.

45 Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 302–7; 323–24; O'Callaghan, "Tempering Scandal," pp. 248–50. Even the passage in Wace's *Roman de Rou* (1160–ca. 1174), so often cited as a dedication to Eleanor along with the patron, her husband Henry, acknowledges that Eleanor and Louis "went to Jerusalem on a long pilgrimage" where "each suffered distress and pain. / When they came back, by counsel of their baronage / the queen left him with her rich kin" (p. 208, lines 27–30, as trans. in Ferrante, *Glory*, p. 112). See also Pappano "Marie de France," p. 358.

46 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4.

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she assumes that a woman apostrophized or represented in the text was identified by the medieval audience as a representation of women *as opposed to* men, or of women as "woman."[47] Benoît's gesture, on the contrary, first undercuts audience sympathy with his protagonist by declaring her depraved "as all women are," then undercuts this stance in turn by protesting that one woman's excellence nevertheless disallows such generalization. Women—or a hackneyed battery of misogynist jibes—are compared with one woman, and it is our sympathy that is at stake and called to judge between the two. The position of the audience is that of the recipient placed between opposite manifestations of the equation between woman and body, Eve and Mary, and understood as identifying her own position between the two. The identities at stake are left unnamed, and this, along with the pointed narratorial address, is the signal that the audience itself is included among them.

On the surface of things, Benoît's romance remains authentically placed in a pagan world whose protagonists know only of *li deu*, the multiple gods of antiquity.[48] But his praise of an unknown model of female perfection can easily be read as a signpost for the Christian audience to a new and better world that began in Mary. One manuscript actually supplies such a reading:

> Riche fille de riche roi,
> Sanz mal, sanz ire et sanz tristece,
> De vos nasquié tote leece
> Le jor de la Natevité:
> Vos fustes fille et mere Dé.[49]

(Powerful daughter of a powerful king, without evil, without anger or sorrow, from you all joy was born on the day of the Nativity: you became daughter and mother of God.)

Through a mere exchange of feminine for masculine pronouns, the lines preceding this passage in the same manuscript (13457–69) are addressed to God.[50] The alteration is not entirely successful and in any case shows little appreciation for the subtlety of Benoît's riddle. But it demonstrates how easily this catalogue of female excellence could be transferred to divine persons in the minds of the medieval audience. The original text almost indisputably invites a similar interpretation. The woman "through whom

47 Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 3–4, 6, 12–13, 30 and passim.

48 Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, pp. 249 and 327–31; this is not to deny that the characters frequently invoke "deus," that is, one god alone.

49 Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS 3340. The manuscript is dated in a colophon to 1237. These verses would correspond to 13468–70 a, b, c. They are printed in Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 138, and *Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, 6, p. 25. Benoît's complex gesture would seem to have puzzled not a few of the poem's later copyists: while seventeen manuscripts retain it, four of these omit the crucial line, *riche dame de riche rei*. In another thirteen manuscripts, the entire passage is omitted. As noted by Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 32, the changes occur independent of the filiation of the manuscripts and therefore require a different explanation.

50 "Dicés vers crieng estre blasmez / De celui qui tant a bontez." This (following Constans's critical apparatus) renders lines 13463–64 incoherent: "Qui les mesfaiz des dames veint / Sont par le bien de lui esteint." See also Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 138.

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the failings of other women are again made good" can hardly be identified as anyone but Mary; the list of her virtues includes sanctity (*seintée*), in her all knowledge abounds, and in all the world—under any faith (*lei*, or "law")—no woman can second her.[51] The passage immediately following (lines 13471–91) sees the rare intervention of biblical authority as Solomon underscores the narrator's opinion with his praise of the *mulier fortis* ("fort femme") from Proverbs 31:21–24, who was understood to prefigure Mary or the church awaiting Christ's return. Moreover, the words *riche dame* need not be altered to *riche fille* if one considers Mary as the *sponsa et mater*, the position that corresponds to her reversal of woman's failing.[52] Benoît has not only offered a persiflage of Eleanor, he has identified the praise that would be hers with a model to which she cannot compare. Eleanor, if she figures here at all, is left aligned with Briseida; more certain is that Briseida, as Mary's counterpart, is another Eve.

Thus, the juxtaposition of "women's failing" as represented in Briseida with the narrator-poet's praise of an anonymous female ideal rather more suggestively inscribes Eleanor in the text than would either alone. The narrator steps forward in the guise of the author who appears to take his bow before a woman as ultimate judge of his work, but in so doing invites his audience to locate their own response to the narrative somewhere between two opposing representations of woman, one inside, one outside the text; that is: one whose qualities and dilemma they "see" before them and doubtless understand, the other, supposedly among them, whose qualities constitute the first woman's indictment and rejection—and are all but unattainable. The result is an ingeniously crafted trap in which the audience must either reject the narrator's judgment to identify with Briseida's dilemma or align its response with one only allowed a supreme model of female moral perfection. The ploy recalls the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). If the narrator takes the lead with his verbal lashing, the audience is left inclined to hold its moral punches, suspended, for the time being, in Bloch's conundrum of the "contradictory abstracted double," which "no living woman can resolve."[53] Certainly Eleanor could not—and this may be the real meaning of the author's wink in the direction of the most powerful woman of his time. But the experience of narrative, the experience offered the audience-as-woman, can, and it will. The elucidation of this experience in Benoît's text awaits us in the next chapter.

Benoît's "Apology" is the only point at which the narrator problematizes "out loud" the reception of his text, and women, or a woman, are chosen to represent this act.[54]

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51 These phrases in particular receive a neutralizing treatment in the translation of Baumgartner and Vielliard (*Roman de Troie*, pp. 287/89): *seintée* becomes "pureté," *toute scïence* becomes simply "sagesse," and the phrase *de nule lei* (under any law or faith) is suppressed.

52 Gautier de Coinci frequently refers to Mary with the adjective *riche*, and calls her a *rich dame*. See *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, 1:140, 173; 2:23.

53 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 91.

54 As Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 6–7, writes: "What is remarkable about this digression in its entirety (lines 13429–94) is the way it so conspicuously problematizes the woman within and beyond the text … Benoît's dedication inscribes the problem of gender and interpretation. The clerk signals the female reader's centrality to the project he is undertaking: "she" is the only member of the audience whose response he so engages."

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In construction, posture and relationship to the narrative in which it is embedded, this gesture found clear successors, the most notable in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*; but we shall also encounter it shortly in Landri of Waben's commentary on the Song of Songs and in Thomasîn of Zirclaria's *Der welsche Gast*. Krueger was indeed correct to identify Benoît's text as "the beginning of the woman reader as a problem,"[55] but not in the sense she intended: this is the beginning, in courtly vernacular literature, of the problem of reading as woman, of woman as the key to a poetics of vernacular texts in performance and to their claim to deliver sacred truth.

As for Eleanor, then, her position and reputation are in play, but not by way of flattery, solicitation or even thanks. She represents a point of vulnerability, a point of entry through which the tale hits home. It is no less the point that serves Benoît to communicate the audience's position in relationship to *la letre*, as he refers to his Latin sources, and thus to justify the mediating position of his text between these and the vernacular performance space. In this way, Eleanor's presumed role as hub of a vernacular literary wheel undoubtedly enlarges the significance of the gesture and is perhaps even why it is there.

Benoît's romance, as evidenced by the number of extant copies and adaptations of his text, was without doubt among the most popular of its time, demonstrably more popular that any by Chrétien de Troyes, and this popularity extended over two centuries, if not more.[56] And yet, if it has found modern attention, then rarely as more than a prototype of its genre, a contrast or prelude to study of Chrétien's romances. But we have little indication that contemporaries even recognized such a genre. Vernacular romance narrative was not born as the singular project our literary canon often lets it appear to be. Rather, the same interest in vernacular writing that produced these texts transgresses indiscriminately our definitions of genre and subject matter and evinces rather different interests from those fancifully ascribed to an impetuous and passionate queen furthering a new doctrine of love. The texts considered in this and the next chapter are a reminder of both the breadth of those interests and of the fact that scholarship has only very selectively attended to them.[57]

Translating Scripture for *Ma dame de Champaigne*

Compared to those of her mother, the literary interests of Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne, are better documented. They were not limited to illicit or adulterous love,

55 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4.

56 Three manuscripts survive from the late twelfth century to around 1200, one of them complete. Another thirty-three copies have survived in at least fragmentary form from the thirteenth century alone; see Jung, *Légende de Troie*, pp. 19, 22–23. As noted in Kelly, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 1, these numbers far surpass those associated with the romances of Chrétien or, for that matter, of any other twelfth-century romance. In addition, and also beginning in the thirteenth century, Benoît's romance was the object of multiple prose adaptations in French as well as two verse translations into German, the first already around 1200.

57 For a parallel discussion of the same period in the Middle High German tradition, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 281–310.

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the witness of Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus notwithstanding. While the former attributed *matiere et san* of his *Chevalier de la Charrette* to Marie, and the latter placed her "judgments" in the "courts of love" alongside similar ones attributed to her mother—both purportedly insisting that true love existed only outside marriage—Marie is equally well attested as the patron of literature of religious instruction and biblical exegesis.[58] One such text, a commentary on Genesis by a poet who identifies himself as Evrat, was first edited in 2002.[59] Another, the so-called "paraphrase" of Psalm 44 known as the *Eructavit*, has found more attention, but far less than it deserves.[60] The *Eructavit* is extraordinary for its manuscript transmission alone, which comprises fifteen copies of the full text.[61] No fewer than ten date from the thirteenth century, ranging geographically from the southern to the northern reaches of France.[62] The text demonstrates an acute awareness of Marie's celebrated literary position: the princess of a purported cult of adulterous love stands in here for the contemporary audience of courtly vernacular literature as a whole and of romance in particular; by evoking her as the poem's audience, the poet makes the religious instruction for a courtly lady that it is announced to be into a reformation of the vernacular performance and its audience in the image of Mary's conception of the Word. Marie as courtly audience is another Ooliba; the poem's performance is the means of her transformation into the New Eve. No text more clearly illustrates the hybrid project of adapting women's *lectio* for the courtly audience and the vernacular performance space, a new form of cultural mediation between the clerico-monastic and the courtly elites, and this fact doubtless largely accounts for its pre-eminent position among comparable texts of the twelfth century.[63]

An adaptation of David's "chançon de chambre" (2075), or epithalamic psalm, undertaken for a prominent noblewoman in the second half of the twelfth century could scarcely have been seen otherwise. As noted in the discussion of the *Speculum*'s *audi-et-vide* address, the eleventh verse of the psalm was seen as David calling Mary to the perfect act of seeing and hearing at the Annunciation; this verse and another from the same

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58 *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, lines 1–2 and 26–27. Marie is the most frequently cited authority for decisions in Andreas's "courts of love"; see Andreas Capellanus, *Art of Courtly Love*, pp. 167–77. On the evidence for Marie's literary interests, see Zaganelli, "Corte di Champagne," pp. 303–25; and Benton, "Court of Champagne," 551–91.

59 *La Genèse d'Evrat*, edited by Wilhelmus Boers, PhD diss., Leiden University, 2002. See also *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. 6.2, no. 1824.

60 Three contributions since 1999 offer a foundation for further study: Ruini, "Appunti"; Powell, "Translating Scripture"; and McCash, "Sacred Love." Ruini provides an overview of the scant previous scholarship and main questions surrounding the text.

61 Among other biblical verse "translations" of the twelfth century only one is transmitted in more than two or three manuscripts: see Varvaro, "Traduzioni," pp. 496–97.

62 Jenkins listed fifteen manuscripts in his edition, one of which merely excerpts the concluding Gloria, lines 2131–68 (Le Mans 173, see note 2, above). Unknown to him was the thirteenth-century copy contained in St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Fr. F. v. XIV 9 (fols. 264r–277v); since described in Ducrot-Granderye, *Etudes*, pp. 73, 241; and identified for *Eructavit* scholarship in Powell, "Translating Scripture," p. 102; see also Ruini, "Appunti," p. 216.

63 See Varvaro, "Traduzioni," pp. 496–97, 505, 508.

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psalm (Psalm 44:3) were seen as prophetic images fulfilled in the Annunciation, and the *Speculum* demonstrates how Mary's experience was to be relived in women's reception of the text. The wedding that calls the *Eructavit* into existence is identified as that between God and holy church (86) and, shortly thereafter, as Mary's *conceptio a voce*: Deus … an son precïeus cors se mist / a la voiz que li angles dist" (God … entered her precious body through the voice [word] that the angel spoke) (119–21). Accordingly, communication is very much at the centre of the *Eructavit*'s presentation, constructed in a distinctly parallel configuration to that seen in the *Speculum*. David, as "uns des prophetes," is granted a vision of Heaven that is recommunicated through the poet's delivery of his song; with the same song and in the same "voice," however, David calls the heavenly bride to the embrace of the bridegroom. The frontispiece of the *Speculum virginum* displays the same transfer and simultaneity of communication on three analogous levels: the prophets receive and communicate God's plan above, Peregrinus reiterates this communication to Theodora below—and both exchanges are equally involved in the communication at the centre, which portrays Mary's reception of the common message as her conception of the Word. The purpose of this construction is the same in either case: to demonstrate that what happens in the central communication, the wedding of the Word and the soul, happens in analogous form on its borders, that is, in the framing before and after of prophetic and present-day communication.

The *Eructavit* identifies neither its author nor its recipient by name. The text instead foregrounds a relationship between an unnamed personal spiritual adviser and a woman named in the poem's opening lines only as "ma dame de Champaigne." He is her "true friend" who "has taught her all she knows."[64] The poem literally performs a fusion of prophetic speech and oral performance, of religious instruction and courtly *chanson*, that is suggested in its opening lines:

> Une chançon que David fist
> Que nostre sire en cuer li mist
> Dirai ma dame de Champaigne,
> Celi cui Damedés ansaigne
> Et espire de toz ses biens
> (1–4)
>
> (A song that David composed
> That our Lord placed in his heart
> I will recite to my Lady of Champagne,
> She whom God teaches
> And inspires in all her virtues)

64 "Li bons maistre don vos avez / Retenu quanque vos savez, / Si comme il est verais amis," lines 2097–99; s.a. line 3. Based on this relationship, the author has been conjectured as Adam de Perseigne, who is known as the spiritual adviser of several prominent noblewomen and members of Marie's family and to have been called to her bedside before she died. The poem offers no further indication of his identity.

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The chain of communication suggests an equation between God's, David's, and the poet's songs and instruction that is amply born out in the poem as a whole.[65] The equivalence is manifest as an apparent simultaneity, accomplished through a continuous blurring of boundaries between David's audience, the poet-instructor's and the narrating performer's. One example is reminiscent of Benoît's supposed address to Eleanor:

> Rëine estes de riche cort,
> Veez la joie qui vos sort!
> …
> Ceste chançon que ge vos chant,
> Par quoi je vos guarnis avant
> Ainsi con Dex le me consoile,
> Vos dirai je pres de l'oroile
> Quant ceste joie iert avenue
> Que j'ai en vision vëue
> (1951–1960)
>
> (You are the queen of a powerful court
> See the joy that awaits you
> …
> This song that I sing to you
> —With which I prepare you in advance
> As God advises me to do—
> I will whisper in your ear
> When this joy has come to pass
> That I saw in a vision.)

These lines are ostensibly addressed by David to the heavenly bride, another vivid reminder that Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei* need not refer to a worldly woman at all. But here, as there, the full meaning can only be grasped by allowing the worldly and the heavenly audience a moment of conjunction, as two images superimposed. The vision David evokes as past (line 1960) in fact makes up much of the poem's narrated present; it is the vision that allows David to attend the heavenly wedding and thus both to receive and to deliver his song as his knowledge of those events. As part of the same vision the bride has no use for advance preparation for the wedding or *joie*; in this David can only be speaking to his "daughter" the church.[66] From the audience's perspective, however, the lines read as addressed by the poet-instructor to his lady. Like the woman addressed as the bride of the psalm in the original opening of the *Speculum virginum*, she is the bride, the daughter, and the representative of the present audience. This suggests a portrayal of the several senses of scripture through the persons of various brides, all

65 Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 85–91 and passim; also Zink, "Dédicace," pp. 591–600, esp. p. 596.

66 As the narrator explains of the eleventh verse: "David, qui sainte eglise apele / Sa fille comme une pucele / Qui de son paranté fu nee" (1343–45).

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simultaneously the recipients of one communication, and the poem does indeed stand as a recasting of such a quadripartite understanding.[67] But to read it as such would be to efface precisely what the author's work of translation has accomplished: to suffuse such theological knowledge, or rather the truth it expresses, into the experience of narrative and performed speech. For the audience, this truth is an experience grasped through the simultaneity of various levels of communication in performance, an experience they grasp on their own terms and in their own language and even through their own literary experience.

The author's initial identification of his audience as "Ma dame de Champaigne" is not the result of mere reticence over the use of her name. In the opening lines of *Le Chevalier de la Charrett*e, Chrétien used the identical phrase to make the extraordinary claim that Marie, not otherwise named, was responsible for both the content and the meaning, *matiere et san*, of his romance of adulterous love between Lancelot and "la reïne."[68] This queen in turn is named only after more than a thousand lines as *Guenievre*.[69] The *Eructavit* poet's only subsequent allusion to the identity of his addressee, near the end of the poem, apostrophizes her with a circumlocution that emphasizes her royalty: "La jantis suer le roi de France" (The noble sister of the king of France) (2079);[70] while David's addressee is named as *la reïne* throughout. The use of a phrase identical to Chrétien's in the same crucial position and for the same purpose—only one of several allusions to Chrétien's *oeuvre* in this poem—announces the poem's overarching objective of claiming its place on the courtly vernacular stage.[71] More than this, it implicitly evokes Marie (and with her the courtly audience) as a "queen" poised in her literary life (her life as audience) between the scandalous love of Guenievre and that of the true bride and queen. The same idea may echo behind the sole remarks the poet makes on her character: she is given to an excess of largesse, which may "all too often trouble a noble nature with worry and hardship."[72] Chrétien had written (at the outset of his *Cligès*) of Largesse as the queen of courtly virtues; in romance generally it has a more ambivalent role to play.[73] In particular one thinks of Arthur's ill-fated boon that puts his queen's life in jeopardy

67 The church as *sensus allegoricus*, Marie or the present audience as *sensus tropologicus*, and the queen of Heaven as *sensus anagogicus*. Mary is also amply present as the *sensus historicus.*

68 *Charrette*, lines 1–2 and 26–27. The romance is usually dated from 1177 to 1181.

69 Guenievre is named at line 1099. While consistent with Chrétien's oeuvre as a whole, in which Arthur's queen is rarely named, the fact remains remarkable in a romance that turns so entirely around her person.

70 See note 1, above.

71 Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 92–93 and n20; the reverse hypothesis (that Chrétien's "dedication" alludes to the *Eructavit*) is argued (unconvicingly, I think) in Zink, "Dédicace." On other allusions to Chrétien, see note 78, below.

72 "Largecë et li hauz despans / Metent cusançon et espans / Mainte foiz an jantil corage" (lines 11–14, s.a. 6–9).

73 Que largece est dame et reïne / Qui toutes vertuz enlumine" (*Cligès*, lines 193–94). Zaganelli, "Corte di Champagne," pp. 318–19, sees a possible reference to problems arising from the largesse of Marie's husband Henry, which was so notable as to provide his epithet, "the Liberal."

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and thus sets in motion the entire plot of the *Charrette*, eventually leading to the queen's excessive "largesse" towards Lancelot. *Ma dame de Champaigne*, whether or not she is truly the poet's patron and avid pupil of religious wisdom, is in any case evoked in her position as the *grande dame* of literature *en romans*, she presides over this courtly performance space as the queen of Heaven (with the king) presides over David's. She presides no less as a psalter-reader; this text is a reading of the psalm as fit for a queen of courtly literature—it is "her" reading, presented for us as a poetic performance. *Dame*, bride and the present audience are all one, and this fusion of identities is content and objective, *matiere et san*, of this poem, the central purpose of which is to bring Mary's reading to the courtly vernacular performance space.[74]

To further collapse the distance between the original and the present communication, David, not the courtly poet, poses as the *jongleur* in the authorial duo. The poem tells the story of David's original composition and performance of his *chançon* as one of many *jugleor* who, upon hearing news of the impending heavenly wedding, set out to perform there. The song he performs is, however, not simply the text of the psalm. Instead the verses of the biblical text are embedded in a presentation that expands them to over 500 lines, or a quarter of the Old French text. To perform the verses "God placed in his heart" for his audience, guests at the heavenly wedding, David adapts and expands upon them. The poet of the Old French *Eructavit* does the same in his turn: the narrative frame that stages David's performance is itself the result of the poet's *dire*, his retelling of the Song for Marie de Champagne and the courtly audience. The narrative context and exegetical comment that make up this "third saying" (God's, David's, poet's) constitute expansion by another 1500 lines. This despite the poet's claim to "add not a word, except where rhyme requires using a different one with the same meaning."[75] That is: the expansion is a necessary aspect of proper translation of the message as appropriate to a new audience. The author's narrative embedding of the poem and its staging as David's performance are part and parcel of translation into *romans.*

The poet's narrative begins with the announcement of a great feast: "It is the custom and a familiar one, that a king who wishes to crown his son or give him a bride spreads the news well in advance. … God who is king and lord acted similarly in his own realm" (cf. lines 21–25, 35–36). The focus of the analogy is the communication of knowledge, the way "the news" is made known. With this idea the poet situates his vernacular

74 It is worth noting that, of the text's ten thirteenth-century copies, only one, MS B in Madrid, is thought to originate in Champagne (Varvaro, "Traduzioni," p. 502). Two can be situated on its northern reaches (the St Petersburg MS possibly comes from Soissons; see note 62, above; as does MS I, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 25532). Four thirteenth-century manuscripts are notable for expunging the two references to Marie. Three of these (H, I, K) possibly do so by way of appropriating authorship of the poem for Gautier de Coinci, whose *Miracles de Nostre Dame* they also transmit. Conversely, reference to Marie was retained in roughly half of the thirteenth-century transmission, showing that her role in the text implied neither personal nor geographical limitation. See also Ruini, "Appunti," pp. 233–27, 247–48.

75 "Oianz toz bons clers dist il bien / Qu'il n'i a antrepris de rien / Fors la androit ou rime faut: / S'i met le mot qui autant vaut" (lines 141–44).

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exegesis in relationship to courtly poetry and liturgical performance in relationship to court entertainment. In the earthly sphere, the news is spread by the purveyors of vernacular poetic entertainment and through its familiar forms:

> Jugleor font sonez noviaus,
> Chançons et notes et fabliaus,
> Que droiz est que chascuns s'atort
> Contre la joie de la cort.
> (31–34)
>
> (The jongleurs spread the news,
> Songs and melodies and tales,
> That everyone should make ready
> To attend the court celebration.)

This description stands in complementary apposition to a description of God's messengers, called prophets, "Por ce qu'el verroient de loing / Et nonceroient sa venue" (because they saw from afar and announced the Lord's coming) (48–49). Their role is described in similar, but liturgically transposed terms: their "songs" too, are "read and sung" by holy church as messengers of the *joie* to come, now formulated as "la joie de paradis" (66).

The phrases *joie de la cort* and *joie de paradis* thus encapsulate the entire analogy, and the former phrase is once again a pointed citation of Chrétien. At the court of Champagne it could hardly fail to remind the audience of the grand concluding *avanture* of *Erec et Enide* (ca. 1170). In Chrétien's text, the name of this exploit, *joie de la cort*, comes to comprise all that the hero, Erec, seeks and must deliver, leading to a double coronation in conclusion on Christmas day.[76] The *Eructavit* poet reminds the audience from the outset that they know the psalm from its recitation *en latin* within the Christmas liturgy (lines 15–17). Both at the *joie de la cort* and at the earlier wedding of his protagonists, Chretien gives memorable accounts of the variety of entertainers present at great court feasts and their arts.[77] The sum total of this positioning is to place the *Eructavit* and its performance in dual analogy to the various forms of secular poetic entertainment on the one hand and to the liturgy on the other. The poet/performer injects the liturgy into the court literary context and performs his own song for the "guests" of the weddings of courtly romance. Thus, the wedding recounted in the course of the *Eructavit* is treated not only as a heavenly dimension of Chrétien's romance; it is also an appropriation of its voice, the voice of vernacular poetry, to a more exalted end—the same rhetorical appropriation implicit in the address to *ma dame de Champaigne*.[78] Identified as both prophet and jongleur, David

76 *Erec et Enide*, lines 5459–60, 6551–54.

77 *Erec et Enide*, lines 2031–50 and 6371–79; see also Powell, "Translating Scripture," p. 92.

78 McKibben, *Eructavit*, p. 43, saw "a strong resemblance in style and rhetoric to Chrétien"; see also Jung, *Etudes*, pp. 230–31; Sampoli Simonelli ("Parafrasi francese," 28–36) attempts to demonstrate a direct dependence on *Erec et Enide* and the poems of Bernard de Ventadorn. At the least, the author of the *Eructavit* is well versed in courtly poetry and imitates its masters intently and adeptly.

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himself authorizes the assimilation of poetic modes; indeed, he proclaims its arrival and its special privilege as a layman's key to the gates of Heaven.

As David sets out with high hopes of performing at the wedding, we are told that he was well aware that through his descendant, Mary, God would be born of a woman.[79] The poet apparently alters history to allow this to come about, as he explicitly places David's vision at 714 BC, some 300 years later than the standard account of David's life found in patristic sources, but also at a point subsequent to the first biblical announcement of Christ's coming, Isaiah's prophecy on the *virga ex radice Iesse* (Isaiah 11:1–2).[80] The same foreknowledge will emerge as crucial to his plea for entry into Heaven. Here as in the *Speculum virginum*'s "Tree of Jesse," then, David is Mary's direct predecessor in the gnostic event whose recommunication is the central objective; he partakes of and authorizes the same privileged gnosis.[81]

The crucial scene for the entire narrative restaging of the *Eructavit* is found in David's encounter with the guardian of the gates of Heaven; without it, there would be no visionary experience of the heavenly wedding and thus no song to relate. The scene has no direct trigger in the text of Psalm 44. It derives instead from an ingenious conflation of three psalm verses, of which one is from a different psalm entirely. The idea of audio-visual reception from verse 11 is conflated with the second verse as a statement on composition ("My tongue will write faster than any scribe"); together these serve to unite all levels of communication in the same mode, the mode of the eleventh verse.[82] The idea of entry or opening the gates of Heaven, however, belongs to the tradition of Psalm 70, verses 15–16: *quoniam non cognovi litteraturam introibo in potentiam domini* (Because I have had no training in letters I will enter the dominion of the Lord) (Psalm 70:15–16). What the poet has done is highly intentional and unmistakable to his contemporary audience: the privilege of an illiterate's access to divine knowledge is identified with the signal text of women's *lectio* and the prefiguration of Mary's conception of the Word—and all together are claimed in no uncertain terms for the oral performance of vernacular poetry.

David arrives to find the gates securely closed—with the sword of the angel who drove Adam and Eve from Paradise—and, not daring to knock or call, he strikes up a song with his *vielle*, or fiddle ("Por ce qu'il n'osa apeler / Si comança a vïeler" 201–2). The song is the elaboration of the psalm's first verse, *Eructavit cor meum*, and forms a humble entreaty for entry that is at once the poet's appeal for divine inspiration: "Sainz esperiz, ovrez moi l'uis! / Je chanterai s'antrer i puis" (Holy Spirit, open the gate for me! If I am allowed to enter, I will sing) (211–12). The guardian's reply contains the first echo

79 Bien sot que de ses hoirs seroit / La virge ou Deus s'aomberroit; / De ce n'ot il nule dotance / Ainz I mist tote s'esperance, / Que puis que Deus naistroit de mere … (lines 87–91). The passage continues in an extended discussion of the Annunciation and Incarnation (lines 87–134), to which I will return below.

80 Jenkins, "Introduction," pp. xxiii–xxiv.

81 Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 141–42.

82 Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 88–89.

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in the poem of the *Audi, filia et vide* (Psalm 44:11); tellingly as well, the doorman does not so much refuse entry as he chides David for wanting to see "what no man of the flesh may know":

> Li rois se desduit et repose;
> Ne seroit pas sëure chose
> A ton hues oïr ne veoir
> Ce qu'hon charnés ne puet savoir;
> Ne puet savoir nus hon charnés
> Qués est la joie esperités.
> (220–22)
>
> (The king is taking his pleasure at rest;
> It is not at all likely he will hear or see
> Your clamouring:
> What mortal man cannot know,
> Can be known by no mortal man;
> That includes the heavenly wedding.)[83]

The second verse of the psalm is then introduced by way of the guardian's suggestion that David content himself instead with written transmission:

> Mais la chançon que tu viaus dire
> Escri la en chartre ou en cire,
> Et je ferai bien tant por toi
> Que je la mosterrai le roi.
> (225–28)
>
> (But this song you want to sing
> Write it on parchment or in wax,
> And I will do this much for you:
> I will show it to the king.)

This suggestion is met with David's defiant defence of his art:

> Merci, sire, ce dist Daviz,
> Se je laianz antrez estoie
> Avuec mes moz viëleroie.
> Juglerre sui, sages et duiz;
> Se le roi plaisoit mes desduiz
> Ce sai je bien que les sodees

83 The phrase "a ton hues" can mean "to your good," but the resulting translation is less satisfying and introduces a contradiction. The issue is not whether entry would do David any good, but rather a categorical exclusion from the ultimate good. It is thus preferable to assign *oïr ne veoir* to the king and assume a derisory use of *huëiz*, for which Tobler/Lommatzsch gives "Geschrei, Kriegslärm." Not surprisingly, the manuscripts show a good deal of confusion over this line.

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Me seroient mout granz donees.
Ne dites pas que je l'escrive;
La langue cui li cuers avive
L'escrivra sanz doiz et sanz mains
Assez miauz que nus escrivains.
(232–42)

(Thanks, sire, says David,
But if I could get inside there
I would accompany my words with the fiddle.
I am a jongleur, skilled and adept,
If my entertainment pleases the king
I know well that there will be
Plenty of coins coming my way.
Don't tell me to write it down;
The tongue, which the heart quickens,
Will write it without fingers or hands
Much better than any scribe.)

Writing has no place in the art of performance. The spoken word delivered in physical presence is privileged to a more immediate apprehension of truth—writes faster than any writer, to use the formula of the biblical text. What happens next resoundingly affirms David's belief: the guardian repeats at length that no "man born of woman" (line 243) can ever enter the gates or see what lies beyond them until the sins of his ancestors are atoned for and God comes to earth in the Incarnation. David refuses to despair, and begins to implore (*losangier*, line 282) the guardian to open the door just a bit so that he may see

Commant li glorïeus fiz Dé
Vandra par naissance novele
En la sainte dame pucele
Qui doit estre de mon lignage.
(288–89)

(How the glorious son of God will by a new birth come into the holy virgin lady who is supposed to descend from me)

He then rests his case in a humble attitude of prayer. At this point, the doorman's catechism is apparently tossed to the winds, as with a great thunderclap God opens the door.

While David's art precludes the resort to writing, it is the twin significance of his affinity, in the literal sense, with Mary that finally forces the gates of Heaven and allows him to perform. This woman will bear a man who opens the gates of Heaven for all, at least inasmuch as the Word will be revealed in its full meaning. But the same woman is the bride and the *filia*, as audience in turn indistinguishable from the other Marie, countess of Champagne, even as the mode on which David insists is the mode of the present performance of the poem. In seeking entry to Heaven, moreover, David's rejection of writing begs a privilege for the art of oral performance claimed in Psalm 70 not for Mary,

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but for the *illitteratus*.[84] On these combined terms, which in the poet's contrivance have become inseparable, God agrees.

The construction of David's visionary authority thus proceeds along lines very similar to those chosen by Theoderic for Hildegard's.[85] Theoderic's account of Hildegard's visionary awakening explains that "all this had been opened to her by David's key, the key that 'opens and no one closes, closes and no one opens.' " The scriptural image comes from Isaiah 22:22, but it is repeated in Revelations, where David's key becomes a key to the gates of Heaven and one that affords visionary knowledge. Admonished continually to see and to hear, John is told "these things saith the Holy One and the true one, he that hath the key of David; he that openeth, and no man shutteth; shutteth, and no man openeth" (Revelations 3:7); and "I have given before thee a door opened, which no man can shut" (Revelations 3:8). Theoderic thus fused the idea of psalter literacy with the revelatory notion of David's key, as suggested by the tradition of Psalm 70:15–16, to establish a woman's privilege to visionary knowledge. To arrive at his scene in which David rejects written communication as a way of begging entry into Heaven, the *Eructavit* poet combined these ideas with the second verse of Psalm 44, *lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis* and recast the whole as a narrative of David as jongleur. The illiterate's entry into visionary knowledge thus becomes the privilege of the oral performer, and (in the context of a vernacular *chançon*) the privilege of his lay audience—who in this case is the *filia* of Psalm 44 and the audience of women's *lectio*.

The poet's idea of David as *jongleur* is not a new one, but his activation of this idea to grant special entry to Heaven to an itinerant performer certainly is, and it stands in stark contrast to the church's view of performing artists. In keeping with Jerome's indictment of "poets and comedians … and … pantomimic actors," they were seen to manifest satanic, not salvific, forces, and to rely on a seduction of the senses aligned with woman and carnal desire.[86] Honorius Augustodunensis put it bluntly: "Habent spem joculatores? Nullam" (What hope have jongleurs of salvation? None).[87] John of Salisbury admitted the giving of alms to jongleurs—the *soudees* David is so sure of—only if they had previously renounced their profession.[88] The resort to flattery, or *losangier* (the use of the same verb in our poem appears gratuitous in that David does not fulfil its action) was frequently noted as one of the jongleur's standard vices.[89] Christopher Page has argued that

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84 The understanding of *litteraturam* in Psalm 70:15–16 shifted between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries from the Augustinian idea of an opposition between the letter of the law and the grace of salvation to one between learning and simplicity and finally even the *litterati* and laymen; see Ohly, "Wolframs Gebet," 5–12.

85 See above, pp. 38–39 and 83–84.

86 Casagrande and Vecchio, "Clercs et jongleurs," 25–43.

87 *Elucidarium*, 1148; see also Page, *Musical Life*, p. 8.

88 *Policraticus*, p. 241. Not renouncing this profession left them to burn in Hell. Such opinions were the clerical commonplace; see Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 15–19.

89 Casagrande and Vecchio, "Clercs et jongleurs," 915; Faral, *Jongleurs*, p. 154; Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 21–22. The verb occurs once more in the *Eructavit* to evoke the Devil's flattering temptation of sinners (line 649).

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a more tolerant attitude towards jongleurs can first be detected with Peter the Chanter in 1183—contemporary, then, with the composition of the *Eructavit*. Peter and others in his circle cautiously differentiate between "good" and "bad" jongleurs, and damnable and useful aspects of their art.[90] But David makes no effort to distinguish himself as a *joculator dei*; on the contrary, his attitude is doubly provocative in that he is assigned behaviour and remarks that play on the standard points of the invective against his proudly announced profession.[91] There is more afoot here.

The "vernacularization" of this psalm makes the performing voice of vernacular poetry into the audience's key to Heaven and their access to Mary's knowledge of the Word. "The tongue quickened by the heart" that David claims for his art is the performing complement to the reception of "the voice that touches the heart." David's song is received via the ear (and the eye) by the heart—whether originally, in God's voice, or as David repeats it to the bride and the poet delivers it to his *dame*.[92] David sings of this voice once more on the occasion of the verse *Diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis* (Grace pours forth from your lips) (Psalm 44:3), beginning: "La vostre bele sainte boche / Don la voiz ist qui les cuers toche" (Your beautiful, sacred mouth, from which comes the voice that touches hearts) (375–76). As mentioned earlier, this verse was another understood to prefigure the Annunciation, and the continuation of the passage makes clear that the Word of John 1:1–3 is rendered in this poem as voice.[93] Thus Mary experienced the conception "A la voiz que li angles dist" (through the voice that the angel spoke) (line 120). In performance, as the *Eructavit* shows, the voice of the text is both here and now and one with the voice as originally received. The voice that inspires David's song is one with the art of the jongleur, and the same voice is the Word that entered Mary's body to become flesh. The *conceptio a voce* applies equally to all "brides" of the performed Word.[94] With this idea, the *Eructavit* demonstrates in programmatic form one of the most fundamental tenets of a new vernacular poetics of truth and offers its own contribution to the history of the same.

Later in the poem, when David reaches the eleventh verse and addresses the bride, the point of his song will be to summon her to the same knowledge the gatekeeper had

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90 Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 19–33. To David's credit, Peter and his circle are most generous in their concessions to "string-players who also sing" (Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 25–26).

91 As noted by Casagrande and Vecchio, "Clercs et jongleurs," 917, Bernard of Clairvaux compares himself with a jongleur as a gesture of humility and identification with the basest of men—and at the same time with the image of David as dancer. Such a humility pose illustrates at once the topos on which the *Eructavit* author can draw and the reversal implicit in the positive inflection he has given it.

92 See lines 1399–400 and 1423–28.

93 "Puisse si les noz cuers tochier / Que vers vos nos face aprochier. / Ce est la fontaine et la doiz / De quoi sordra la sainte voiz / Dont sainte eglise iert replenie / Et confermee et establie" (lines 377–84).

94 Cf. also the passage that explicates the "bow" as the Old and New Testament, with its arrows as "la voiz et la parole … Qui si perce li cuer del vantre" (lines 724–26), thus renewing Mary's conception of the Word among all humanity.

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denied him: "Hear, daughter, and see, … for the king desires your beauty." Where the gatekeeper begins by dismissing David's entreaty—"David, trai t'en sus!" (David, get out of here!) (217)—David's address will coax the bride to draw near: "[Un] po va avant et si voies / Se Dex a bien la chose feite" (Go just a little closer and see if God has done his work well) (1402–3), or, "Vien avant, file, oevre les yauz" (Come forward, daughter, open your eyes) (1413). Finally, the formula of the psalm, *Audi filia et vide*, occurs, but only in the perfect tense:

> File, or as öi et vëu;
> Trop auras le cuer decëu
> Si tu n'i mez si t'antandue
> Que ta biautez li soit randue.
> (1423–26)
>
> (Daughter, now that you have heard and seen;
> Your heart will be much deceived
> If you do not make it your sole intent
> That your beauty be rendered unto him.)

The paraphrase of the eleventh verse is reserved to express a seduction accomplished. This is a transformative touch, for it makes the entire preceding thousand lines, in which David praises the bridegroom (Psalm 44:3–10), into the content of her seduction. The bride's response is one brought about by the present performance, and the entire psalm, in effect, is delivered for "her" benefit—exactly as the parallels in the staging of the poem would demand.

I suggested at the outset that the opening lines of the poem implicitly position its female addressee somewhere between the adulterous queen of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette* and the queen of Heaven, that is, somewhere between the Old and the New Eve. Both ideas are fully realized in David's instruction to the bride (lines 1423–686), which also encapsulates the essential process of the bride's transformation as encountered in the *Speculum virginum*. Through the audio-visual presentation of her instructor, she progresses from the false to the true woman, manifest as the deceptive exterior versus truth in intention, inner as opposed to mere outer beauty. From the outset, the poet makes clear that this "women's instruction" is intended for all Christians. "Every baptized soul … is espoused to the king" (cf. 1377–80), and therefore "Se doit oïr, que dist Daviz, / Ses anseignemanz et ses diz. / Ce qu'il dist et ansaigne a l'une / Doit a son oés oïr chascune" (All should hear what David says, his teaching and his words. / What he teaches for the one / Should be heard for the good of everyone) (1381–84). Once again, this poem makes explicit what is elsewhere implicit. Thus, when the bride is told "to beware above all things, that your love prove false or feigned" (cf. 1488–89), that "God never had any love for hypocrites," and to "preserve her body from all taints" for the embrace of her bridegroom—with this latter fully elaborated as the embrace of lovers in the language of the Song of Songs (cf. 1535–76)—all this is addressed, in fact, to "Bishops, abbots and deacons," to "canons, priors, nuns, lay bothers and monks," as it is to "barons, kings and counts, … and all the lesser folk"; in short then, to the entire church (cf. 1503–32).

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The warning against the failings of the false virgin is followed by a description of the true, Mary—whom David must address prophetically. The text focuses once more in detail on the physical fact of Mary's virginal conception and bearing of Christ; this idea of the divine enclosed in Mary's "sainte vantree" (holy womb) (1647) corresponds, as the commentator then explains, to Mary as a manifestation of beauty as inner truth:

> Sa biautez fu de grant merite
> Qu'ele venoit devers le cuer;
> Dedanz en ot plus que defuer.
> (1664–66)

> (Her beauty was of such great merit
> Because it came from the heart within;
> She had more of it within than without)

Mary's beauty, the beauty of the Incarnation, is that of the diaphanous body, the woman who has ornamented herself from within:

> El cuer sont les frengetes d'or,
> Li trecëor et li anor,
> Le jöel, li tissu de soie
> Que la pucele li anvoie
> (1673–76)

> (In her heart are the golden fringes, the hairpins and earrings, the jewels, the silken cloth that the young girl offers him.)

Mary is the archetype of the perfectly instructed woman who has assimilated the seductive finery of the daughters of Sion to her inner life. As such she is not only the one-and-only who will experience the miraculous conception and birth; she is in that specific experience a model for the addressee of this religious instruction for *ma dame de Champaigne*. To realize this form of beauty is to relive or actualize the conception and incarnation of the Word, because it manifests the truth in and through the body.

The analogy with which the poem opens, between a heavenly and a courtly wedding, is therefore first and foremost an indication to the audience of how they are to experience the poem. The heavenly wedding is not merely to be imagined as a more glorious version of those seen in the world; it is the event for which the poem prepares, or "dresses" its audience, a bride *in spe* poised between the Old and the New Eve. Both in mode and in process, the instruction of monastic "virgins" is restaged for the courtly audience. But the implications for the further development of my argument are greater still.

As the poem nears its conclusion, the poet offers a dramatic "translation" of heavenly joy into the audience's own realm, the fulfilment of the *joie de la cort* announced at the outset of the poem. At the fulfilment of all things, they are promised an entry into David's experience: "Lors overra li rois sa gloire / Si verrons la procession / Que David vit en vision" (Then the king will reveal his glory, and we will see the procession that David saw in his vision) (1743–44). The performance as experienced in the present then offers the next best thing, what the poet calls a "samblance," which allows "us to hear

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and to perceive" (*entendre et aparçoivre*) "la grant joie" (1755–56). He first asks for his Lady's special attention: "Cist vers aprés conte la joie, / Si est bien droiz que ma dame l'oie" (This next verse tells of the rejoicing, it is thus most fitting that my lady hear it) (1750–51), and then conjures once again "the way it is done in the world when the king summons a high court" (cf. 1761–62)—but this time the celebration is of a coronation. The ensuing description bears all the marks of a skilled dramatic artist, setting the stage, evoking the assembled nobles—so many that the earth trembles beneath their feet—the pressing crowds, the ringing church bells. But the culmination turns out to be the entry of the queen: "Toz li siegles fremist et bruit / Vers la reïne esguardent tuit" (All the world trembles and murmurs / and all gazes turn to the queen) (1774–75). The point of the *samblance* is to evoke the queen's "great joy," "the consolation," and "the sweetness that infuses her heart," such "that she entirely forgets herself."[95] Finally, the poet makes clear that this is the experience that David's vision promises us all:

> Cel joié que la rëine a
> Ansi con Dex li destina,
> Ce dist David, et mout greignor
> Avront devant notre saignor
> Cil et celes qui sauf seront.
> (1783–87)

(This joy that the queen knows as God ordained for her, David tells us—and greater still—will know before our Lord those men and women who are saved.)

The audience is to identify with the experience of the bride as a foretaste of their *joie* to come but also as the culmination of a process of their own transformation through the text; they not only will know as she does in this *vision*; they do know, in part, as she does, through their experience of the poem.

The truth of the text's "analogy," what it calls a *samblance* and the audience sees as the staging of scriptural images in a narrative of their world, is revealed in this experience. It seeks moments of identity between the woman's experience inside and outside the text and thus reveals continuity between our *historia* and sacred *historia*. *Memoria*, the act of revivifying the *historia* of a sacred life, occurs as a process that calls upon the participants to recognize and perceive, *entendre et aparçoivre*, continuity between Mary's *historia* and their own as the key to knowing the truth of the images of the sacred text, to unlocking the experience they contain. This process is what I have called Mary's reading.

The remanifestation *en romanz* of this experience as derived from the Song of Songs will concern us shortly. With his narrative redelivery of Psalm 44, the poet of the *Eructavit* offers the other biblical ephithalamium to a lay audience; but more than this, he transforms the liturgical experience of *memoria* and identification as just described into one fully accessible to that audience. This gesture is not presented as a second best,

95 "Ele s'oblie antre lor braz / De la grant joie et del solaz; / Une douçors au cuer le vient / Si que de li ne li sovient" (1779–82).

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but rather as one that depends in its very efficacy and authenticity on delivery in "their" world by "their" entertainers to a bride who is placed among them, given historical existence as Marie de Champagne. The *Eructavit* makes explicitly manifest as does no other work in this period the continuous relationship between the bride of the Word, the vernacular audience, and the individual woman whose presence, whether as character or inscribed audience, is "living proof" that the transformation of the bride, the realization of the heavenly wedding, is happening "here and now," in the event of the text as performance, "in the very specificity and reality of the … vernacular community."[96]

We are on the threshold here of a meeting between sacred and secular narrative that occurs as a meeting between the truth of Mary's *historia* and its remanifestation in the lives of her "daughters"—queens, *dames*, and *puceles*, who live and walk not only in the layman's world, but also in that of the new layman's narrative. Both through Marie's presence as "audience" and through the analogy of the heavenly wedding with the *joie de la cort*, the *Eructavit* poet acknowledges and exploits this meeting as the venue of his own poem, accomplishing its crucial identification in concert with the voice of vernacular narrative as represented by Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien's romance of the *joie de la cort* does not conclude with a marriage but rather with a double coronation; the protagonists are married at the conclusion of the *primerain vers*, the initial cycle of the story, which requires another, much longer double to achieve true union between them. The narrative development of the relationship produces the true "marriage"; this then corresponds to the enormous celebration of the coronation—and Enide's triumphant reinstatement to her rightful place—which follows Erec's successful accomplishment of the *joie de la cort*. If we cannot finally know how intentionally the conclusion of the *Eructavit*, with its celebration of an earthly coronation as a figure of the bride's fulfilled *joie*, is meant to recall the structure of Chrétien's romance, it is hard to deny that that structure itself would have called to mind Mary's *historia* as the path of the *sponsa annunciata*, *dolorosa et derelicta*, *regina assumpta et coronata*—not as an allegory concealing hidden meaning, not as personification or *imitatio*; not, then, as one whose "true meaning" is contained in Mary or church as signified but rather as an experience that authenticates "our part" in salvation history, because through it the truth of Mary's experience is remanifest as "our own."

No less an idea may lie behind the *Eructavit* poet's modest term *samblance*. It occurs only once previously, in the opening exposition, where it denotes the *imago dei* and the physical body that Christ assumed in the Incarnation.[97] That is, rather than "analogy" or allegorical figure, the poem's concluding *samblance* seeks the expression of the spiritual in and through the historical and corporeal, *historia* and *corporalia*. It stands in the same relationship to the truth of the Word as does the poet's female addressee to the scriptural bride, and I am suggesting no less of Enide. The most extraordinary feature of Chrétien's first romance is undoubtedly the fact that its narrative path can only

96 Uitti, "Women Saints," p. 259.

97 "Por voir bel homage li fist [that is, Christ to his father] / Quant an forme d'omme se mist, / Et li douz pere voirement / Li redona an chasement / Toz cés qui sont en sa samblance" (95–99). Similarly, Mary is said to *faire samblant* when she gives birth to the Christ child (125–26).

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be completed in that the bride, Enide, accompanies her bridegroom, Erec, every step of the way—to the extent that their successful reconciliation is first signalled when they together ride one horse. Enide's path is itself a *samblance*, the earthly transposition or bodily translation of another narrative; it stands no less as the path of the audience, who also "rides along" on Erec's adventures.[98] The bride "reads" through love and suffering both inside and outside the text. Chrétien's emphatic inclusion of the woman-in-the-narrative has a function that is closely related to Marie's vis-à-vis the wider audience of the *Eructavit*: Marie is not only audience, possibly patron but, like Enide, also a character in a text, the mirror of audience participation in its reading path. The inclusion of *ma dame de Champaigne* acknowledges the arrival of a layman's narrative that is built around identification between the seeking and suffering bride and her "accompanying" audience—and Chrétien's Enide may best be understood in the same way. We cannot know what role she was given in Chrétien's sources, the oral versions of the story contemptuously rejected in his prologue as the "shredded and corrupted" account given by "those who make their living telling tales."[99] With the intervention of this author—thus his unparalleled boast—there begins a new *historia*:

> Des ors comencerai l'estoire,
> Que toz jors mais iert en memoire
> Tant con durra crestïentez.
> De ce s'est Crestïens vantez.[100]
>
> (And now I will begin the story that will remain forever in memory so long as Christianity endures. This proud claim Christian has made.)

Is this merely a better story, more high-brow, no tall tale to fetch a meal? Or does it claim to be a new Christian narrative, to *renew* Christian narrative? What project—assuming my suggestion is correct—would be more deserving of this claim? Wolfram von Eschenbach, the German "adaptor" and continuator of Chrétien's last romance, *Le Conte du Graal*, is given to boasts similar both in tenor and content and, as we shall see, leaves no doubt that the claim they stake is serious, indeed.

With his "translation" of Psalm 44, the *Eructavit* poet has explicitly realized the sacred dimension of this new reading model by presenting one of its arch-texts as a poem in which exegesis is performed through narrative and women's instruction becomes *romans*. In so doing, he reveals for us with a backward glance, as it were, where "the problem of the woman reader"—one should better speak of an epoch-making opportunity—opens onto the problem of truth in fiction. The constitution of

98 The idea that Enide's service and suffering alongside Erec might be read as a transposition of Mary's alongside Christ finds, in fact, ample suggestion in the text—suggestions that become still more explicit in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*. The attempt to resolve the analogy in an interpretation of Erec's path through *aventure* as *imitatio Christi*, however, proves unsatisfactory—as do all readings that fail to place polysemic play at the centre of the experience of the text: cf. for example, Tobler, "Ancilla Domini."

99 Cf. *Erec et Enide*, lines 20–22.

100 *Erec et Enide*, lines 24–26.

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meaning through the experience of the text as process is the idea around which the thesis of the twelfth century's "discovery of an aesthetic of fiction," or "fictionality," has been advanced, most influentially by Walter Haug.[101] But what appears from our point of view as a radical new beginning emerges from the contours drawn here, in its own time, as the development of the idea of narrative actualization of truth as a "reading" of the arch-text, a renewed experience of *la letre* that occurs through identification in performance. More important, however, than the dispute over the innovative quality of the "discovery" is the difficulty in accounting for a claim to truth—what must, by the poets' own acknowledgement, be a sacred truth—in view of what Haug evokes as a new "literary autonomy," a "liberation from all subservience to theology, philosophy, and ethics, as well as political interests."[102] We have just brushed up against one solution to this problem, one that points to the same identification with the woman-as-reader with which the present journey through the landscape of medieval concepts of gender and use of media began. This solution would reveal Haug's idea of literary autonomy as, in the medieval understanding, both programmatic—how else make "a new *historia* that will endure to the end of time?"—and exaggerated. Achieved is an autonomy from lettered and learning-based models of the mediation of sacred truth—but not from this truth itself. Chrétien's statement illustrates a claim to deliver better, to deliver an experience, no less, in which the truth *reveals itself*, rather than an *argumentum* or *allegoria* in which it is concealed. An experience that partakes, somehow, of one that Mary had, one time for all; the experience that David and his courtly adaptor orchestrate through the simultaneity of their performances, that of identification achieved between the audience and the bride of the Word.

101 Argued extensively in *LDMA* (1985), reiterated under consideration of the ensuing scholarly debate in the second, revised edition of 1992 and continued in a variety of more recent essays, many of which are collected in Haug, *Wahrheit der Fiktion*; see therein esp. "Autorität," pp. 115–27; and "Entdeckung," pp. 128–44; also Haug, "Poetologie"; and Haug, "Mündlichkeit."

102 "Poetologie," 70: see also note 6, above.

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Chapter 6

EGO DILECTO MEO ET DILECTUS MEUS MIHI (CANTICLES 6:2): MARY'S READING AND THE EPIPHANY OF EMPATHY

WE ARE ON the edge of a discovery: what began as an inquiry into the historical value of references to women as patrons of new vernacular literature has led instead to a conception of truth in the experience of text that is equally the object of and authority for the vernacularization of scripture and the inscription of vernacular tales. The "history" of the Word is suddenly of one stuff with stories of heroic adventure cast and performed as if in "our world," of our experience. Sacred and secular reading have conjoined in a movement that proceeds equally from the opposite poles of *Scripturae* and *cantilenas*, and this conjunction is revealed in the woman as bride and reader, mirror of suffering in love and audience of text in performance.

This discussion only seems to have strayed far beyond the bounds of Benoît's project. His riddle, the trap that suspends his audience between the poles of the "contradictory abstracted double" of woman as body, Eve and Mary, remains intrinsically relevant. Nor should it be forgotten that his project is a *romans*, a vernacular recasting of crucial events from a collective past, history conceived of as collective *memoria*. No less a *romans*, in its author's parting words, is the text that concerns us next, a so-called "commentary" on the Song of Songs written near the end of the twelfth century by one Landri of Waben. Our literary vocabulary fails here. The text actualizes the reading experience of the bride for a courtly audience, it brings about a remanifestation of the "historical" dimension of the biblical text in the audience's present—just as did the *Eructavit.* Both texts engage in commentary, as they also engage in paraphrase, but they are thereby no more accurately described than a romance is adequately described by the various techniques that make up its narration. The problem is here: all three texts, the examples of courtly exegesis and the courtly history, are *romans*, they pour a reading experience from one mould into another, from the Latin-mediated textual community of the monastery or cathedral school to the vernacular-mediated and equally textual community of the aristocratic courts. This is their genre distinction, what makes them coherent and distinct elements of the medieval world of reading.[1] As Friedrich Ohly wrote, with Landri's *romans*, "the exegesis of Canticles stepped for the first time into a new world … We find it uprooted from the theological schools and the monasteries and transplanted to the courtly garden of a dukedom."[2] *Romans* describes cultural appropriation accomplished as a new reading

1 The debate over the meaning of *romans* in the twelfth century, that is, whether it is still strictly linguistic or rather was already associated with new narrative genres, and thus secondarily with narrative invention, is thus, in my view, committed to anachronous distinctions.

2 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 280.

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experience. The genre's various representatives—narrative or exegetical, historical, or fabulous—approach this common ground from different directions rather than departing from an existing norm in new, divergent directions. This last idea is verified with singular clarity in an account of the genesis of Landri's text found in Lambert of Ardres's Latin *History of the Counts of Guines and the Lords of Ardres*, to which we will turn later in this chapter.

Benoît's *romans* of ancient history and Landri's of monastic *lectio* display surprising complicity in overall objective and the way this is communicated and made accessible to the audience. The story of Troy's fall is the story of a world that collapsed as the result of a woman's desire or desirability. Rather than telling Helen's story, however, Benoît interpolates one of another Eve, Briseida, a story whose outcome and message—the narrator's claims to the contrary notwithstanding—must first be discovered as narrative experience, as the revelation of truth in the abject body. The story effects the redemption of Eve and even of Helen herself but can do so only through the woman's painful recognition of her own weakness: to love is her nature and her excellence as it is her fall. The romance bends the ancient tale of pagan warfare and revenge into a succession of narrative realizations of the widowed bride, in effect anticipating a model of Christian reading *avant la lettre*, or allowing its audience to re-read ancient history through a lens borrowed from the experience of the reading bride. The effect is to recuperate that history and its figures for a Christian world-view, which amounts to a revaluation of human history such that it mirrors and participates in God's plan for human salvation.

Landri's text, on the other hand, fuses the images of the Song of Songs and their explication into a continuous dramatic narrative staged for several voices. The prophetic images of God's plan for the union of *humaine et divine nature* are recast as *historia*, the staging of truth in and through human experience. The human protagonist is the fallen bride, the *sponsa derelicta* who, like Eve before her, seeks to regain a lost state of union, the kiss of Canticles 1:1. The text is a process that continuously renews the redemption of Eve; that is, to read this text is to experience the reversal of the fallen body and the possibility of its renewed elevation to join with the divine as this occurred once and for all time in the Incarnation, but will recur in Landri's text as befits the widowed bride, through communion in the "blackened" flesh of the Passion, the experience of *compassio*.

What Benoît's romance effects upon pagan history differs from Landri's reshaping of reading through the fallen bride not in nature but only in kind: what the one effects as the renewal of a sacred love story the other undertakes as the recuperation of a mythical past; each is a *romans*, even as in each the new reading experience is conceived for *puceles*, that is, for a vernacular, lay audience. Accordingly, each announces this fact through a riddle on the identity of the elusively present, singularly significant woman-as-reader. And each aims at the same end: the realization of truth in the body as an epiphany of empathy accomplished through woman as the suffering body of love. This woman-as-reader is to be able to speak the words of Canticles, *Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi* (Canticles 6:2), as an expression of union in shared human pain.

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Espeuse and *Damoisele*: the Song of Songs *en romans*

Landri's adaptation of the Song of Songs has two outstanding features, one of which has been repeatedly recognized as such, although its significance is somewhat disputed. The other has sooner bred confusion. The first is the author's expansion of the scriptural text into dramatic dialogue, a kind of commentary that is cast in large part as the textual voices elaborating—as we heard Christ and Mary do in Rupert's commentary—on their own experience as the reconstitution of a narrative context. The second is that the poet appears to state that his text is written at the behest of an anonymous lady; the same statement would imply that he is her spiritual adviser or religious instructor, yet also remove her to the highest reaches of power. Dramatic re-presentation of scripture and a woman who presides over its performance: these are the same pillars that sustain translation from *lectio* to performance, women's instruction to *romans*, in the *Eructavit*. There, too, the bride has several identities, among them one grounded in the audience's historical reality, Marie de Champagne. In Landri's poem, neither the bride nor his *dame* are given proper names, and indeed, this is possibly because the poem was in this case known to have a male patron, Count Baldwin II of Guines; the bride and the lady, "cele por cui jo travail,"[3] cannot so easily assimilate his identity to their own. Put differently, Baldwin cannot so easily assume a role in the *dramatis personae* of this poem as Marie could in the *romans* of Psalm 44. Landri's "patroness," moreover, like Benoît's, is only evoked once the poem is well under way; she emerges as the result of a performance in progress. It is thus highly likely that the poem's two outstanding features are interrelated; that is, that the poet's address to his *dame* is itself part of and to be understood through the *mise-en-scène* of the Song of Songs.

The definition of roles and distinction between their voices is the first concern the author puts forward, once he has introduced his audience to the *matere*, or content, of this biblical *saint livre*, "which is entirely made of love" (1–32, cf. 7). The lead role is held by the *espeuse* or *amie*, the bride, who speaks nearly a third of the entire text and two-thirds of all that is not left to the poet-narrator. This bride is given two identities, if not names, as holy church and the devout soul (27–28). The narrator then turns to his audience with an address that acknowledges both the novelty and the difficulty of the approach:[4]

> Or aiez bon antendement:
> Quant vos orrez diversement
> Parler ceste sainte escriture,

3 Landri of Waben, *Song of Songs*, line 2367. The text is cited, with corrections, from Pickford's edition, which remains the only one available, despite the unanimously devastating appraisal of its quality by scholarly reviewers. As there is only one extant manuscript, I have been able to remedy this problem for my purposes by first consulting the extensive lists of corrections offered in the reviews and then comparing them myself with a microfilm of the manuscript. Translations are my own. On the edition, see Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 267–80, esp. 278 (where the reviews are also listed); reviews I consulted for corrections to the text are listed with the edition in the list of works cited.

4 There is thus little point in arguing that the dramatic presentation merely reflects sermon technique, as does Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 274–78.

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Por cho ne vos soit pas oscure,
Ne soit de ço nuls esmariz.
(43–47)

(Now be sure to listen carefully:
When you hear in diverse voices
This holy scripture speak,
Let it not therefore be obscure to you,
Nor anyone be troubled by this.)

The poem is thus announced as a dramatic presentation of holy scripture, and throughout its "first book" (lines 1–1446, somewhat less than half of the poem), the unidentified narrator who makes this announcement remains just that. No authorial "I" is allowed a voice, still less an identity, either in the prologue's exposition or in the text.[5] The narrator's interjections generally supply necessary context, accomplishing transition from one exchange to the next, addressing his audience with explanatory remarks on the action—and at times with instructive indications as to how to understand the speakers. These last can expand into a rudimentary form of commentary, but this is experienced as the voice of a narrator who presents the dramatic action to the public, directs their attention, orchestrates their absorption into, and reflective distance from, what is seen and heard. He is more a puppeteer than an exegete, a performer who exploits a special space between audience and action—the mediator of a *romans*. In fact, he is as much a player as the other voices cited, takes on multiple roles (author, narrator, exegete, instructor and lover), and at times assimilates his own voice to those of bride and bridegroom.

Landri's exposition introduces the story on two levels, corresponding to the two identities of the bride and referred to as the meaning according to *allegorie* and *moralité*, respectively (113–20). The first is the story as it has already once been completed. This bride enters as Eve, though named only as *la damoisele* (35), laments the loss of her beloved through the eating of the apple, *sun ultrage* (36, see also 87–92), and longs for the kiss that would reconcile her with him. Her lament can serve as an example of the emotional immediacy the poet achieves with his dramatic elaboration of the words of the biblical text:

Repairs a moi, viengne e me baist,
Por Deu sen maltalent abaist!
Port moi le baisier de sa boche,
C'est ço ki plus al cuer m'atoche!
Ja mais n'avrai ne bien ne aise,
Se ses baisiers ne me rapaise!
(75–78)

5 An unobtrusive exception occurs at lines 699–700: "Cele respont—si com jo pense / al paroles nient al sens."

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> (May he return to me, come and kiss me, and put off his ill humour for God's sake! Bring me the kiss of his mouth [Canticles 1:1], that is what my heart most dearly desires! Never more will I be at ease, unless his kiss bring me peace!)

This desire was fulfilled in the Annunciation to Mary (cf. 89–98), when God "came to reclaim his bride, and bestowed the kiss that had been so ardently desired" (cf. 97–100). In this kiss "divers cuers" (differing hearts) and two bodies were joined, "Si s'asemblerent sens desjoindre / Deus natures: humanitez / L'une, l'autre fu divinitez" (110–12). From this perspective of salvation history, then, the *damoisele* is, properly speaking, Eve's daughter, holy church.

Thus concludes the first account of this text, its "sentence premeraine" (113). At this point the narrator introduces the meaning according to *moralité*, in which "there is more sweetness and devotion" (118). "Al cuer touche plus dolcement / Cho ke chascons de soi entent" (That which each understands as pertaining to himself touches the heart more sweetly) (119–20). This "new meaning" begins exactly as the other did: the bride is introduced in the midst of her lament, which repeats in large part the first one, but this time with no mention of a sin or fall. She is likewise tormented, but her torment arises from languishing in love (*languir d'amour*, cf. Canticles 5:8); her dilemma is that love will not let her remain silent, whereas she hardly dares speak for fear she will displease. The motivation for this shame is identified only vaguely as "si mal," her faults or unworthiness (125). The tension between speech and silence in the loving heart, which might seem a first feature of courtly cultural adaptation, becomes a leitmotif of the poem and is bound up with its inner meaning. Here, as in what follows, *amor vincit omnia* and compels her to make the same daring plea: "May he come, my sweet, and kiss me, and with one kiss put my soul at peace" (cf. 147–48). The main difference between this presentation and that of the first bride is that the bride herself, not the narrator, elaborates on what the kiss means: "Sa presence me doinst sentir, / Cho est le baisiers ko jo desir. / A soi me joigne par esperit" (That he let me feel his presence / This is the kiss that I desire. / That he join me to him in spirit) (149–52). The fulfilment of the kiss is now projected into the future and follows from fidelity in loving and serving God. She who fulfils this charge, as this bride has "found it written, is one spirit with him," *un esperiz est avec lui* (157–58). The objective of this reading of the Song of Songs, then, is for this bride to regain a feeling of the presence of the Word, of oneness with Christ.[6]

Neither bride offers a suitable presentation of "her" meaning of the text, the allegorical or tropological senses; rather, each serves as the focal point of a narrative that dramatizes an understanding of the prophetic text, the first as it occurred once, in history and the second as it occurs now, "in our lives." Beyond the opening exposition, both the exegetical terminology and the distinction between two meanings recede entirely into the background. Eve's story is not presented as another level of meaning but is nevertheless ever-present, because this story is simply a repetition of that one or an attempt to relive its meaning, an experience of the union, separation and reunion of *humaine e divine nature*. Such reunion occurs as moments of identification between the

6 Similarly, Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, pp. 58–60.

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original *sentence*, Eve's and Mary's story, and that of the bride who instructs this audience. Recurrent references to and recapitulations of the capital events, the Incarnation and the Passion, accompany and punctuate the text, for these are the windows through which the new bride will experience the kiss of reunion, the events that open onto a revelation of the divine in the human. The identities of Eve and Mary as the original brides thus always loom behind the text and its present characters.

Reading and performance, prophetic image and narrative realization, the Word and its (present) fulfilment in the life of the bride: all are combined here as they were in the *Eructavit*, with the positions shifted as appropriate to the biblical text and the voices it reveals. What these two *romans* finally show is that the act of adapting *la letre* to the venue and audience of vernacular poetry, *en romans traire*, is one of narrative expansion that renders truth as an experience grasped in performance. This experience operates both through identification with a protagonist (David/bride) and through the text as process; that is, the protagonist in the text is not only a figure in a narrative, but also a figure of how narrative is read, how the audience reads in the body—the way I suggested earlier that we should read Enide. These brides are vernacular translations of the reading life of the *sponsa derelicta*. The later emergence of poet-exegete and then *dame* in the text, presented as the very communication that renders it as a present performance, are, as we shall see, a demonstration of this renewal of scripture as experience; their emergence into speech shows the power of the text in action as it applies to different readers.

Beyond the first book extensive stretches of the text are spoken by an exegete to the audience, and he frequently announces his interventions as such. This exegete at times consults other *livres* or *feuills* to interpret what the speakers say, but he also presents his commentary as his own experience of the *saint livre*.[7] "Jo vos dirai cho ke j'en sent" (I will tell you what my feeling is about this) (1501), is the way he announces his first intervention in book 2; he also claims God's inspiration for the same: "Cil ki tot seit, Deus, m'I ensent" (He who knows all, God, instructs me) (1502).[8] The intervention of the exegete or instructor does not mean that the original dramatic conception has been abandoned or displaced. Something quite different occurs, something that was significant enough to divide the poem into two parts and bring an author and exegete to step forward and speak in his own voice.

The transition from the first to the second book rather remarkably interrupts a crucial address by the bride, which then continues in the second book; that is, the transition does not correspond to a division in the biblical text but rather interrupts the treatment of one of its parts, the description of the bed and litter of Solomon (Canticles 3:7–10).[9] This is because the event it announces is the "awakening" of the exegete out of

7 Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 290–91.

8 *Ensent* could also be read as a subjunctive (as proposed by Hasenohr, Rev. of Pickford, 292; see note 3, above), which would see the poet requesting divine inspiration rather than claiming to receive it. In view of the way this authorial emergence is staged, I think the indicative reading is justified. See also lines 1438–39, 1799–800, 2362–64, 3159–60.

9 Hunt's conjecture—that this division corresponds to the end of Bernard's commentary and the beginning of Geoffrey's continuation—is of little help: Bernard's sermons conclude with Canticles

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the "sleep" of the bride: she reports her own experience of the biblical text at this point as a *vision* received in sleep, while she was "gone to the world, rapt in God," and now reported to her "followers," the *puceles*, once she awakes (1323–26).[10] The vision, which appears not to derive from previous commentary, shows the bride Solomon's palace.[11] The author/exegete emerges seamlessly from between the lines of the bride's account with the words, "Volez ore ke je vos die / Kel preu cho fait a nostre vie?" (Shall I tell you now / What boon this brings *to our lives*?) (1357–58). From this point on, a new communication between this exegete and his audience occupies the stage side by side with the dramatic exposition.

The division between the two books, which occurs slightly later, constitutes the formal introduction of this communication. The new *jo* identifies itself as one "in the school of love" (1443) and requests permission to speak: "Deu le soverain pere / Parler me doinst a son plaisir, / O se che non del tot taisir" (God the sovereign father grant that I speak to his pleasure, or, if not, that I remain entirely silent) (1438–40). But silence is no more an option for him than it was for the bride, as it is love that spurs him on to "enter the second book" (cf. 1445–46). Book 2 then begins with the explanation that love cannot be held in any prison; once it has progressed so far as to burn the heart, it will not be silent, it must be made known, whether in speech or actions—as evidenced in abundance "par les paroles de cest livre" (by the words of this book) (1447–54). The drama resumes with the words, "L'Espeuse ne s'i puet taisir, / E ne.l fait pas por mielz plaisir; / Mais grant amor ki son cuer art / Le torne tot de se part" (The bride cannot keep silent, and she does not speak merely to please; rather the great love that burns her heart turns her entirely to its purpose) (1455–58).

The text has staged the emergence of an authorial communication through an experience of loving identification with the bride. The entire passage is introduced when the bride announces she will ensure that holy church will embrace the beloved just as she has; to this purpose the bride-protagonist prepares "a beautiful bed in [the] heart" of the reader-as-bride.[12] In fact it is the author-exegete who, awakening as the reading bride, now knows something of the experience of love that the bride has thus far related; his voice thus takes its place alongside the others of the biblical text and with an authority like theirs. In the text as it progresses, the same voice is frequently indistinguishable from the bride's; it also displays a special complicity with her, occasionally addressing her directly in the second person familiar. The exegete shares in the love of the "damoisele"—and thus in her vision and authority to expound on the *matere de cest saint livre*, love.

3:1—some 260 lines earlier in Landri's text—as Hunt concedes. See idem, "O.F. Commentary," 271, 274 and 289.

10 The exegete himself will refer to the account as a vision: "Ne cuidés pas k'en vision / Aviengne riens se por nos non" (1357–58).

11 Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 289; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 293–95.

12 "S'ele bien vuelt, n'i faldra mie: / Pose a k'il l'apele s'amie. / Tant ferai jo k'ele l'avra, / E en son cuer le guardera. / La li ferai un molt bel lit, / Molt precios e molt eslit. / Ja nel laira, s'ele m'en croit, / Ainz le tenra molt bien estroit" (1225–32).

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This emergence of the exegete in the text is strongly reminiscent of Rupert's exegetical awakening and the way it transformed not only his text but also exegesis itself. In Rupert's treatment the crucial point of conjunction between his experience and the bride's occurred at the opening verses of the fifth chapter of Canticles, where the half-waking vision of a young woman allowed his experience to become the double of Mary's and thus take the place of hers in Rupert's text as the historical dimension of the biblical images. The same juncture of the biblical text is the site, in Landri's work, of a second lengthy passage (to be examined later) in which the bride relates her experience for her audience, the *puceles*, to follow, this time called an *aventure*.[13] Experience has equal authority in either text; it can reveal truth whether "inside" or "outside" scripture, that is, this experience can occur in sacred history or in our history. Increasingly in this text the exposition works to put forward human experience, as known by the bride, as a double of the divine meaning of the text and as revelatory of that meaning.[14] When the exegete steps forward to introduce a meaning "in our lives," he initiates a process through which the communication experienced by the audience is included in and fuses with that between bride and bridegroom, in which it is equally engaged in revealing the truth of the biblical text.

All the more significant, then, is the emergence of a relationship between poet-exegete and "Lady" that completes a parallel between the "original" (divine) communication of the text and its recommunication in the (human) present. Most immediately revealing is the manner and place in which the poet steps forward to pay his respects:

Ceste nostre exposicions
Que nos de ces deus venz faisons
Solonc le sens que Dex nos done,
Plairoit a une altre persone.
Mais cele por qui jo travail,
Quar tot est suen, se jo rien vail,
Certes most s'esmerveilleroit
S'ele altre chose n'en öoit,
Quar jo li ai maintes foiz dit
Qu'aster signe Saint Esperit.
Cist sens li plaist, cestui atent,
Cist li savroit plus dolcement.
E quant jo sai le sien plaisir,
Jo ne m'en puis mie taisir,
Quar faire vueil qu'ele por moi
Prie son ami, li Sovrain Roi.
(2363–79)

13 Discussed below, pp. 247–50.

14 Particularly emphasized by Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 295–302, esp. 298–99, who saw the text as daringly innovative in this regard, possibly even heretical (Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 300).

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(This exposition of ours
That we make of these two winds
According to the meaning that God gives us,
Might please another person.
But she in whose service I labour—
For all is hers, if I'm worth a jot—
Would surely be much surprised
If she did not hear something else thereof,
For I've told her myself often enough
That the South Wind announces the Holy Spirit.
She likes this meaning, it's what she expects,
Its savour to her is the sweeter.
And when I know her pleasure,
I cannot help but speak accordingly,
For I wish her to speak on my behalf
To her beloved, the sovereign king.)

Once again, the author thematizes speech and silence, thus echoing his earlier emergence into the text. This echo accounts for the judgment that the passage at hand contains hidden homage of "courtly" love to the poet's patron, but there is no mention of the "school of love" or the poet's burning heart here.[15] The same idea already confuses the supposed patron with the bride of the earlier passage and a love supposed to exist outside the text with one experienced inside it. The confusion is difficult to avoid. In fact, it is the very point of the newly introduced relationship, as the last line above already suggests: this woman and the bride are intimate with the same beloved.[16]

The parallels with Benoît de Sainte-Maure's apology are notable. The poet's confidant is the powerful *amie* (queen?) of a powerful king; this woman's displeasure over a preceding statement is the scandalon that forces the poet to explain himself in a direct address; he acknowledges that she would much prefer a different tune. She thus takes a position as the ultimate judge of his work, a position that places her among its audience—whether or not she is physically present. But most importantly, despite the implication, here quite marked, that she might be understood as the patron, neither poet names his all-important *dame*; that she finds mention at all appears an accidental consequence of the poet's position between two audiences, one with a general interest in the text, the other especially, even intimately implicated in its composition.

15 For example, Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 282–83.

16 At line 2378, the manuscript reads "Prist son ami," which yields little sense; both Hunt and Hasenohr, Rev. of Pickford (see note 3, above), correct it as given here. A similar doubling of identities troubles reading of the epilogue in the only other mention the poet makes of this relationship. Verses 3497–500 can only be resolved, as I see it, by taking their seeming contradiction as the overlay of two relationships: on the one hand the poet "presents" his lady (his charge as instructor) to God, on the other, no doubt as Mary, she is to plead with God for him. Thus once again identity is circumscribed with a riddle.

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In both cases, the remarks are a riddle teasing audience participation in their conceit. This is where the differences between the two become of interest: missing in Landri's address is the contrast drawn between this woman and one in the narrative itself and thus the opposition between Mary and Eve; instead of enumerating "his lady's" praises, then, the poet remarks obscurely on the content of his conversations with her, further defining their relationship. In Benoît's riddle, it is above all the terms of the contrast that point to the lady as Mary; in Landri's, identity is invested in a contrast between two readings of one passage of the Song of Songs.

The two contrasted readings—in the preceding passage, the poet identifies the south wind with prosperity and the north wind with adversity; in the apology to his *dame* he refers to a reading that sees them as the Holy Spirit and the Devil, respectively—are not treated in the commentary tradition as either competing or contrasting but sooner complementary. They occur alternately within the same texts, notably in the poet's preferred source, Geoffrey of Auxerre, but also in earlier commentaries, among them the *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* of Honorius Augustodunensis.[17] The question, then, is rather one of the significance of the lady's preference. "Who is she," the audience is led to ask, "for whom this distinction should be of such importance?" *Quae est ista?* And the riddle's solution is found—at least for us—in Honorius's first commentary on the Song of Songs, not the *Expositio*, but the *Sigillum beatae Mariae*.

The *Sigillum* was written as an explanation of the verses within the Song of Songs that had become a fixed part of the Assumption liturgy. Its project is announced as revealing how these verses could apply *specialiter* to Mary's life, when they also apply *generaliter* to the church.[18] On the "South Wind," then, Honorius has something else, or something more, to relate than in his later *Expositio*. In words originally spoken by God and reported by "Christ of his mother," the text defines the north wind as the Devil, "who shall have no part in you," and the south wind as "the Holy Spirit, who shall possess you as my garden. 'And its spices shall flow,' that is, through you shall my only Son become flesh." The next verses of the biblical text, beginning "Veniat dilectus meus" (Canticles 5:1), are treated as "the words of the Virgin, desiring Christ to enter her."[19] In a Marian understanding, then, the Holy Spirit blowing through the garden is the prophetic image of Mary's conception of the Word. This is not a different or competing meaning, but rather one that manifests the biblical text as a single, historical event, to which one "lady" in particular especially holds—for it is (and was) *her* experience.

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17 Geoffrey of Auxerre, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*, p. 349, lines 15–17, and p. 268, lines 19–20; Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio*, 429C–430A. Other corroborating readings are given in Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 292. For a detailed overview of the commentary tradition see Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, pp. 895–910.

18 On the importance of the Marian reading as Honorius treats it, see Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 102; and *JP*, pp. 247–88.

19 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum beatae Mariae*, 508A–B. Rupert of Deutz reads the bride's "veniat" and the bridegroom's "veni" (Canticles 5:1) in the same way as Honorius does, but does not explicitly identify the blowing of the south wind with the Spirit's descent into Mary's womb (*CCC*, 4, pp. 93–95).

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"Ecce in medio nuptiarum sumus" (We are now in the midst of the nuptials).[20] Thus Rupert opened the fourth book of his *De incarnatione Domini*, which had arrived at this same passage, crucial in his treatment, describing the bride as the garden enclosed, the *hortus conclusus* (Canticles 4:12–16). The biblical text at this point reaches the culmination of the bridegroom's praise of the bride, which will lead, as both Rupert and Honorius saw it, to their union in Mary's conception through the Spirit. At this stage of Landri's text, in the midst of book 2, the passages spoken by the biblical voices are generally introduced as such and thus made discreet from the commentator's elaboration on them. This procedure continues through most of the bridegroom's praise of the bride (Canticles 4:1–10; lines 1715–2282), but at its culmination in Canticles 4:11–16, all distinction between the voice of the bridegroom and that of the exegete disappears, and the audience hears instead one lyric voice in loving praise of the bride (lines 2283–356). The poet, in effect, borrows the voice of the biblical text to praise a female addressee as yet unannounced. This vocal harmony concludes when the poet is obliged to acknowledge that *his* lady requires a reading of the Spirit in the garden *specialiter*, according to her experience, thus also acknowledging her presence as his "special" addressee.

The poet-exegete in Landri's text has staged the emergence of his *dame* much as he previously staged his own: his experience there was the mirror of the bride's on Solomon's bed; it was "awakened" by hers to speak and thus remanifests in the here and now the love she felt there and then. Here, in "the golden hour,"[21] the address to the bride is suddenly acknowledged as one made to a lady here and now—an address made in the voice of the bridegroom about to descend into his garden, the womb of the mother-bride. The voice that is made flesh in a woman's reception of the Word is identified with the poet's speech to his lady; indeed, this voice causes their relationship to take shape in the text. In this moment, then—in a rhetorical gesture that, as in other texts, doubles as a colophon—the text has accomplished the identification of audience and the *sponsa et mater*, of poetic voice and the voice of the Spirit, that is the objective of women's lectio and reading as Mary did.

Quae est ista? The lady's identity is a mystery and a riddle because her very significance depends on its multiplicity; the riddle is meant to initiate reflection on the different possible meanings of the scriptural image for differing manifestations of its "female" audience. Benoît's version, cast in terms of the distance from Eve to Mary, best suits his project as the recuperation of pagan history for a Christian present. Landri's version points to the origins of the multiple identities of the bride in exegesis itself. His *dame* represents a reading as *historia*, one of special importance to a specific woman who is here, among us—and also as far removed as the queen of Heaven. This woman is my patron, the poet says—"because, after all, everything is hers, if I'm worth a jot" (cf. 3678). That is: if I have anything to say to you, it is because she gave it to me; without her,

20 *CCC*, 4, p. 85.

21 "Quant bise cesse e auster vente, / E la dolce ore se presente (2395–96). The translation, which assumes a pun on "gold" and "hour," is Ohly's, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 283.

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the text could not be "ours."[22] This lady brings both poet and audience into the presence of the Word as personal experience. Her specificity, her "historicity," we might say, makes her experience of the text a "real" one, and this is why she and Mary appear to be one. Through her, the two experiences of the text, the one historical in time, the other *historia* as renewed experience of *la letre*, are collapsed into one. "Cele por cui jo travail" is then no conceit, no mere "patroness," no ploy to curry favour with a woman or women. She is the *clef-de-voûte* of this textual architecture, the point at which all arcs of meaning meet. This is her role as well within the same architecture in other texts; Landri's *Song of Songs*, however, shows us the construction returned to the text that is the original authority for the reading path it describes.

Landri's *romans* delivers the Song of Songs as the song of two voices longing to be joined, and the event that is announced as its objective, the kiss between divinity and humanity, is accomplished when the song of a woman's suffering for love elevates human experience and human weakness to the point where the audience can know what Mary knew. The primary focus of this knowing shifts, however, from Mary's conception of the Word to her perfect *compassio* at the cross, God's descent into the pain of human flesh. The divine and the human approach each other equally, each in the attempt to know the other's pain. As conduit and enabler of this experience, Mary is the image of a possibility of human empathy in which physical individuation is overcome and the bride can say to the bridegroom, "I am you," or, in the words of the biblical text, "Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi" (I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me) (Canticles 6:2). This experience is not simply that of union in compassion with the suffering Christ but also, and primarily, a realization of human pain and compassion as a mirror of the divine. For this reason, it too depends essentially on identification with the woman as spectator and audience. She collapses the distance between the human and the divine even as she allows sacred history to become human history—and, finally, for this is where our argument aims—allows an *estoire* that reproduces a similar experience of empathy to partake of the same epiphany, an experience of truth in stories of human suffering, or "fiction." But before we follow through on this idea as it is articulated in Landri's text, let us see how his fellow at the court of Guines, Lambert of Ardres, represents the same literary developments in a larger context.

Lambert of Ardres, the Counts of Guines, and the Mutations of Lay Literary Identity

Not to apprehend the riddle on the woman-as-audience as such is clearly to miss an opportunity. In the scant scholarship on Landri's case it has meant a double loss: the idea that the poet's "Lady" is his patron or at least a historical personage who inspires his writing has obscured the value of a rare witness to the genesis and nature of the text. In his *History of the Counts of Guines and the Lords of Ardres*, Lambert of Ardres

22 The formula "Quar tot est suen," applied to the lady in this line is another nod to her divine status. At line 2484, the bride makes a similar statement of her dependence on God: "Or face tot, quar tot est sien." Elsewhere, Mary is referred to as "Ki de totes est damoisele" (line 2876).

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leaves no doubt that "Landericus de Wabbanio" wrote his "translation" of the Song of Songs at the behest and for the personal edification of a prolific male patron, Baldwin II of Guines.[23] Such a text was almost certainly an *unicum*, not only one of a kind but quite likely the first of its kind anywhere in Western Christendom. Nowhere else, so far as we know, had anyone undertaken to make the monastic reading experience of the Song of Songs into a *romans* for a secular court, and when word got out in the Picard region just south of Flemish-speaking Guines that someone had, the Cistercian General Chapter of 1200 ordered that it, in particular, be burned, "and any other such books along with it."[24] Lambert, as we shall see, is in full agreement on the capital significance of this particular *romans*, and the text found in MS Le Mans 173 concludes with a gesture perhaps intended to temper the scandal: "Mais tant requier que cist romanz / Unques ne viengne en main d'enfant" (But I stipulate that this *romans* should never be given into a child's hands) (3505–6). And yet, solely on the basis of Landri's riddling nod to a lady "for whom I labour," some scholars would have us believe that, at the same time and in the same region, a second (female) patron and another author ventured the same thing—rather than, that is, entertain the idea that Baldwin might lurk behind the poet's *dame*.[25] The greater loss, however, may lie in missing the converse opportunity to see in this supposed contradiction the simple truth, for once, about "the problem of the woman reader" in the history of vernacular literature: the woman as audience stands in for an audience-as-woman. Baldwin's patronage does not stand in contradiction to the *dame* who enables and inspires the poet's work; it is simply the wax into which this seal, the seal of Mary's reading, was impressed.

Lambert's *Historia* is itself a *mise-en-scène* of the arrival of vernacular literature. As such, it yields very little in terms of historical "facts," but does offer something in many ways much better: a unique "glimpse into the budding awareness around 1200 of the way the various elements [Lambert] evokes began to constellate as the image of an

23 Lambert of Ardres, *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

24 "Praecipitur abbatibus Ursi campi et Caricampi, ut venientes ad Carolilocum, librum qui dicitur: *Canticum canticorum* translatum in romanum [MS J: in vulgari gallico], incendi faciant, et si quos huiusmodi libros aliquis abbas invenerit in domo sua faciat eos concremari." *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium*, p. 255, par. 34. The location in question is Chaalis, today in the department of the Oise. Vernacular books became the object of incendiary orders elsewhere at this time as well; see Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, pp. 447–48.

25 Pickford, "Introduction," pp. xxiv–xxv, deemed Landri's authorship a "possibility rather than a probability," because of "the reference … to a Lady for whom the author was working." Baldinger, Rev. of Pickford (see note 3, above), reiterated the objection, while Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, pp. 54–55, attempted to resolve the "contradiction" by proposing that Baldwin's wife, Christine, "perhaps showed more interest in the work than he did"—a suggestion that is chronologically prohibited by Christine's death in 1177. The following regard the attribution to Landri as established: Bonnard, *Traductions*, pp. 152–62; Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," pp. 164–66; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 282–83; Ohly first proposed the idea that Landri's *dame* should be seen as a "Kunstfigur." Curschmann also rebuts the additional objections based on dating raised by Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," pp. 271–72, who makes no mention of the issue of Landri's *dame* (see also note 38, below).

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epochal turn."[26] Lambert seeks a representation that will "render this radical turn comprehensible, both as such and in its consequences" as he perceived them.[27] Under this lens, nothing is mentioned for its own sake, but rather only "by way of measuring and testifying to cultural activity."[28] All the more valuable, then, is the testimony given on a text that we still possess—once this is appropriately evaluated.

The advent of vernacular literature is featured in Lambert's chronicle as part of the "praise of princes" that necessarily makes up a large part of its content. He divides the development into three clearly discernible stages, two of which take shape in two successive chapters of the history of Count Baldwin, in whose employ Lambert spent most of his life. The third is reserved for the reign of Baldwin's son, Arnold II of Guines (r. 1206–1222). The first stage, entitled *De sapientia comitis Baldwini*, is entirely devoted to the "astounding" contradiction between Baldwin's status, *omnino laicus et illitteratus* (in all ways a layman and illiterate) and his achievements in learning: "he was an indescribable man of both wonderful ability and wit, a pupil of every philosophy, and a most learned son!—although he was, as I have just said, completely ignorant of the arts," Baldwin was able to dispute with the best doctors and get the better of them.[29] Lambert makes it explicit that Baldwin's learning occurs as a result of his clerical instructors' oral vernacular delivery of Latin texts. He "was a most diligent retainer of what he had heard," Lambert writes, and "was more instructed in many things than he needed to be by the clergy."[30] The content of Baldwin's learning is given as defined by the scriptures and their deeper meaning, and its imparting is treated as a marvel that has all the qualities of an illumination: "Since he was no deaf auditor of theological writing, he grasped and heeded with his attentive hearing the pronouncements of the prophets and not just the literal meaning of divine histories and evangelical doctrine, but also their mystical power. … Indeed, he received divine eloquence (*divinam eloquium*) from them." It is at this point that the "matter" of vernacular poetry is introduced: "in exchange [Baldwin] told and related to them popular trifles (*gentilium nenias*) that he got from story-tellers (*a fabulatoribus*)."[31]

The precise value of this last, seemingly incongruous gesture becomes apparent in the second stage of the account, which is the subject of Lambert's next chapter, *Quomodo translatari fecit multos libros* (How he had many books translated).[32] Because "he was

26 "Was wir damit an liebgewordenen Gewißheiten punktueller Art verlieren, wird allerdings mehr als wettgemacht durch den Gewinn an Einsicht in das Bewußtsein, dem [sic!] sich die herangezogenen Details bereits um 1200 zum Bild einer epochalen Wende zusammenfügen," Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," p. 166.

27 "… diesen Umbruch als solchen und in seinen Konsequenzen verständlich zu machen…, das … wollte Lambert offensichtlich," Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," p. 165.

28 "… als Maßstab und Zeugen kultureller Aktivität," Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," p. 165.

29 English translation, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines* trans. Shopkow, here 80, p. 113.

30 *Counts of Guines*, 80, p. 113.

31 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 80, p. 598; *Counts of Guines*, p. 113.

32 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598; *Counts of Guines*, p. 114.

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not able to retain all knowledge in his heart," Baldwin begins to commission written translations into the vernacular.[33] This change reflects neither one in his reading abilities nor one in reading practice. Baldwin remains *omnino illitteratus*; the translations are rather read to him out loud over and over again: "sepius ante se legere fecit."[34] Rather than listening to an ad-hoc prose translation, however, he now hears a fixed text, doubtless in verse (as in Landri's *Song of Songs*), and can thus memorize rather than simply "retain." Eventually this activity expands to include the Sunday Gospel readings and the appropriate sermons, the life of St Antony, treatises on physics and philosophy and even the craft of building and architecture. Finally, although their recording is never made explicit, his library is said to include as well a comprehensive collection of vernacular literature, from the *chansons de geste* to courtly romance to the fabliaux (*cantilenas gestoriae*, *eventuras nobilium*, *fabulas ignobilium*).[35]

It is unlikely, to say the least, that the Christian equivalent of an Alexandrian library could be compiled by a minor provincial lord to comprise a literature that had only just begun to appear in writing during his later lifetime. But Lambert's appraisal aims elsewhere. It is retrospective and establishes Baldwin as a major force in a development that had likely not reached anything approaching such proportions until shortly before his death, if at all within his lifetime. That is, Lambert is projecting the logically constructed account of an epochal transformation onto the history of the houses of Guines and Ardres. He shows us that transformation as his patrons preferred to remember it and have it remembered. The recording of the stuff of vernacular poetry, layman's entertainment, is inserted into an account of one lay nobleman's extraordinary desire for instruction and learning; in an imperceptible transition, it is assimilated to that same endeavour just as its texts are listed as part of the same library. Oral tales figure as part and parcel of an exchange between cleric and nobleman that results in their in-scription; they become books, and this in itself places them in the same library, so Lambert's text would have it, as Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite. Moreover, this inclusion is seen to result not from Baldwin's interest but from that of his clerical instructors!

The vernacularization of exegesis and the inscription of vulgar tales, then, approach the same centre of interest from different directions. This centre of interest is an interchange of knowledge and poetic forms between clerical and lay culture; its medium becomes the oral performance of written vernacular texts. And at the point of transition from the ad-hoc interpretation of orally expounding instructors to the creation of new literary experience inscribed in the vernacular, Lambert gives priority and pride of place to one text in particular. Thus begins his crucial account of "how Baldwin had many books translated":

> But because the count avidly embraced all learning and was not able to retain all knowledge of all things in his heart, he commissioned, while the county of Ardres was in his dominion, the services of the most erudite master, Landri of Waben, to translate the Song of Songs for him from Latin to French and then read it to him frequently; a translation to

33 *Counts of Guines*, 81, p. 113.

34 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

35 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

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> be made not only according to the letter, but also according to the mystical understanding of spiritual interpretation, so that he could both understand and taste the mystical power of the words.[36]

The passage goes on to mention other texts as named above. By comparison with the remarks on Landri's text, however, the other works are little more than items in a list. The parallel with the description of Baldwin's wondrous learning in the preceding paragraph is only too clear: Baldwin "grasped … not just the literal meaning of divine histories … but also their mystical power. … Indeed he received divine eloquence from them."[37] That is, the remarks on Landri's Song of Songs stand as the model of a project and a procedure in which the others are included; moreover, this particular text is made the keystone within that project. It is featured as the foundation for a new level of experience of the same material, one shaped around a new form of delivery with a fixed text, which insures that the experience is the same from one performance to the next—and allows the listener "to taste" in their full power the words of the Spirit. The impetus for change thus stems, apparently, from an extension of the use of texts in performance to include and exploit the power of the vernacular and its poetic forms.

What Lambert tells us is doubtless of little chronological value. The circumstances surrounding the transfer of power in Ardres from Baldwin to his son, Arnold, are complex, such that Lambert's time frame—Baldwin's dominion over Ardres—is open to diverse interpretation, even should it be accurate in itself.[38] But the more important point is this: Landri's text need no more truly have been the chronological *primus* in

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36 "Sed cum omnem omnium scientiam avidissime amplecteretur et omnem omnium scientiam corde tenus retinere nequivisset, virum eruditissimum magistrum Landericum de Wabbanio, dum Ardensis honoris preesset comes dominio, Cantica canticorum non solum ad litteram, sed ad misticam spiritualis interpretationis intelligentiam de Latino in Romanum, ut eorum misticam virtutem saperet et intelligeret, transferre sibi et sepius ante se legere fecit." *Historia comium Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598. The translation is my own; cf. *Counts of Guines*, p. 114.

37 *Counts of Guines*, 80, p. 113.

38 This question is in need of further investigation. Baldwin's dominion over Ardres began in 1176, but partial rights of rule were conferred on Arnold well before Baldwin's death in 1206, apparently with great reservation (see *Counts of Guines*, 92, p. 125). On the date of this probationary transfer of power, Shopkow is willing to state only that it "seems to have happened sometime after 1177" (*Counts of Guines*, p. 231n310); while Bonnard, *Traductions*, p. 154; and Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," p. 271, state conclusively and without explanation that Baldwin ruled Ardres from 1176 to 1181, apparently taking the date of Arnold's knighting as decisive (if so, this deduction finds no support in the text). Pickford, and after him Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," p. 150, state (likewise without explanation) that Arnold's rule began in 1187. Based on Lambert's words *dum Ardensis honoris preesset comes dominio*, the date of Landri's text could fall anywhere between 1176 and 1206, when Arnold fully assumed all his father's powers. Similarly in need of review is Hunt's objection ("O.F. Commentary," 271–72) that Landri's text, because it relies on Geoffrey of Auxerre's *Expositio de cantica canticorum*, cannot be dated earlier than about 1200. According to the *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, Geoffrey was born between 1114 and 1120; as for his death, we know only that he was still alive in 1188. But if his commentary was not completed before the mid 1190s, as Hunt, following Geoffrey's modern editor, maintains, then he wrote the lengthy work at a very advanced age.

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Baldwin's patronage of translations than we need seek a lady at his court to stand in for Landri's *dame*. Both features tell us something, instead, about how the text was conceived and received. Together, they suggest that the recasting of the bride's reading for a courtly audience-as-woman was seen as the key to a new layman's learning and an enabling precondition of the phenomenon that follows: the vernacularization of letters and the in-scription of vulgar entertainments.

What of Lambert's third stage in the development? The actual emergence of vernacular literature in its own right and its patronage by the lay nobility he reserved for the next generation. As Curschmann elucidates, Arnold, who succeeds his father as Count of Guines on the latter's death in 1206, is provided with all the trappings and experiences of a new layman's chivalric culture (including a youthful romance gone awry, in which he ends up disgraced and imprisoned as just dessert for pursuit of a wayward beauty). Along with the texts it produces, this culture ascribes spiritual aspirations and legitimacy to the life of the *miles* by way of promulgating its emancipation from clerical caretakership.[39] Arnold's orally expounding instructors—and such they are, no less than his fathers' were—are not only clerics, but also older noblemen whose areas of expertise now divide along the lines we know from other (literary) sources: the matters of Britain, Rome and France. In similarly comprehensive fashion to the catalogue of his father's library, this vernacular "learning"—*veterum eventuras et fabulas et historias*, which are made the vehicles of *moralitatis seria*—now receives expanded treatment, including, in addition to the general categories, mention of histories of the crusades and tales of the orient, Tristan and Isolde, Gormond and Isembard, Merlin, and Solomon and Marcolf.[40] That is, the content of Arnold's *sapientia* is now given almost entirely through the "history" of his own kind. The last item in the list is then a history of the lords of Ardres, "de Ardentium gestis," a fact that reflects tellingly on the place of Lambert's own work, which culminates in Arnold's reign, although remaining, unlike the *veterum eventuras* of which he reports, committed to the Latin language.

With this transition the Lord who rivals the *doctores* in his illiterate learning (*quasi litteratus*) is transformed into one whose "illiterate's literature" rivals Latin tradition as a vehicle of knowledge and truth. Taken together with the representation of audience in Landri's "Song of Songs"—where, as we shall see shortly, *seignors* become *puceles* who follow the bride, herself encoded in a parallel communication as the poet's *dame*—we also witness a transition in which the cleric's instruction for the illiterate layman is displaced by Mary's reading. The same basic building blocks that make up Lambert's representatively staged and ideologically charged transition we will find similarly and still more noticeably configured to advance romance as a layman's scripture in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Wolfram, and Lambert no less, uses this argument as a platform from which to launch his own claim to mediate truth for his audience. But Lambert still casts himself as the literate, mediating cleric; Wolfram, as is well known, steps forward in the pose of a militant illiterate.[41]

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39 I am summarizing in this paragraph from Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," pp. 158–61.

40 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 96, p. 607; *Counts of Guines*, p. 130.

41 See Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," pp. 149–51, 166–67.

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Reading as the New Eve—*en romans*

According to Lambert of Ardres, then, Landri of Waben's *romans* on the Song of Songs was a bridge to new realms of knowing, exemplifying an extension of the illiterate's learning into new reading experiences, an extension that founded an autonomous tradition in so far as this learning was no longer dependent on the oral recapitulations of another's reading. And so far as this momentous claim is concerned, Lambert's testimony can be affirmed, because Landri's text is every bit an attempt to render the Song of Songs as a reading path both accessible to the "weak" and body-bound and leading to Mary's embrace of the Word. It is a layman's initiation into how to read as a woman, as Eve on the way to becoming Mary.

The poet's emergence in Landri's text occurs as a reading performance that models identification with the love and suffering of the bride. What remains to be seen is how, and in what terms, this experience is constructed for the larger audience: the *seignors* whom the narrator apostrophizes only once, when he first intervenes in the exposition to comment on the plaintive lament of the second bride. By way of explaining the oddity of Canticles 1:2, in which the bride praises her beloved's *mameles* (breasts) (165), the narrator delivers a crucial point behind a touch of humour:

> Seignors, ci nos convient entendre
> Ke nos en puissoms raison rendre,
> Kar mameles, al dire voir,
> Seulent femmes nient homme avoir.
> Or sachiez donc ke par figure
> Parole ici Sainte Escriture.
>
> (173–77)

(My lords, here we must exercise good sense to recognize what is meant, for breasts, in truth, only women have and not men. Know therefore, that here holy scripture is speaking metaphorically.)

As with the reference to meanings according to *allegorie* and *moralité*, the poet masks the innovation undertaken in his adaptation of *lectio* to *romans* behind conventional terminology. The notion that the bridegroom can be seen to have breasts *par figure* suggests that, in this text, women may be men and vice versa. The *seignors* receive no further mention, because they are to see themselves throughout the text as *puceles* or *jovenceles*, terms we have encountered before as equally applicable to young women, to nuns, and to those who follow the bride, her *adulescentulae*. Landri defines them several times in his text; they are "those who have just begun to love" (cf. 1492), who are "less wise" for lack of experience (cf. 251–52). The common denominator to all these identities is the weakness or incapacity proper to the female as body; we have also seen how this overlaps with both illiteracy and the privilege to a different gnosis, the defining characteristics of Lambert's portrait of Baldwin. "Outside" the experience of Landri's text, Baldwin is an illiterate lay nobleman; "inside" that experience, he is one among the *puceles* who seek to read as Mary did. As surprising as it would seem to an uninitiated modern reader, Baldwin is no less the type of the psalter-reading woman than Hildegard was—but where she used this platform to step forward as a prophet and visionary, in

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Lambert's portrayal of Baldwin it is presented as the self-image of a male patron of vernacular *letteratura*.

Until the poet/exegete emerges at the end of the first book, the primary, directive address of the poem comes not from a narrator addressing an audience, but rather from the bride to her *puceles*. Just as in Rupert's commentary, the audience is drawn into the biblical drama through the role of the young women, who serve as a witnessing "chorus" to the dialogue between bride and bridegroom. Landri of Waben expands the possibilities of this technique by interpolating several occasions for which no prompt exists in the biblical text and by making the bride's addresses into explicit directives to follow after her. The two most important sections of the text in this regard are the bride's vision of Solomon's palace and her later *aventure*, mentioned earlier. But the bride's first address to her followers is that of the "black bride" in Canticles 1:4, which could hardly be more opportune for this poem and its project. The narrator comments by way of introduction that "the bride … exhorts [the young women) to follow her well, by her example she encourages them to seek a glorious life" (cf. 259–62). The bride then explains the words "I am black but beautiful" as referring to her inner beauty in an ignoble exterior:

> Se jo sui noire par defors,
> Dedenz sui clere come ors.
> …
> Dedenz le cuer, la o Deus voit,
> Est ma beltez, com estre doit.
> (297–98, 307–8)

(If I am black on the outside, inwardly I am bright as gold. … Within the heart, where God sees, lies my beauty, as it should.)[42]

The narrator concludes: "The bride speaks thus to her young women, whom she wishes to render inwardly beautiful" (cf. 311–12).

Thus begins the bride's explicit instruction to her followers, couched in the now familiar rhetoric of inner truth vs. outer appearance, here seen as a blackened exterior and a golden heart. With this initiation of her followers as young women seeking the beauty of the abject exterior, the diaphanous body, the bride has implicitly identified their search for the "kiss"—a reunion of divinity and humanity—with a mirroring-in-the-body of Christ as the divine in abject human form. The New Eve follows the same reading path here, in a text for *seignors*, as she did in the *Speculum*'s instruction for virgins. Both groups read in the body because the body is their way of knowing the Word. The black bride's body, moreover, is such in one sense because her *amis* "discoloured" her (299) and, in another, because of the blows and insults, the humiliation she suffers at the hands of sinners (300–304). All of this is as it should be, "For he on my account suffered sorrow, and I want to suffer the same for him."[43]

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42 This passage is distinctly reminiscent of the treatment of the black bride and the problem of inner truth and outer appearance in Abelard's third letter to Heloise; see Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 272–78.

43 "Mais sofri por moi ennui / E jo le vueil sofrir por lui" (305–6).

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When Landri's text next evokes the "blackness" of human flesh—towards its end—it will be to recall this same idea of inner beauty, but a beauty manifest as *compassio*, as a suffering in the heart that mirrors Christ's bodily suffering on the cross. The black bride's introduction opens the same parenthesis as do the words of the seeking bride in the initial narrative staging of the poem. Her blackness corresponds to the shame that makes it so difficult for her counterpart to speak; the golden interior is, as we shall see, the sincerity of the loving heart, *devocions de cuer*, as Landri calls it. It is finally the sheer weakness of this loving heart—that is, its inability to remain silent despite its shame—that testifies to its sincerity. In a later passage that displays all the art of Landri's text, this fragrance of sincerity all but delivers the response to the question of the choric refrain, the *quae est ista* of the biblical text. Canticles 3:6 enters the drama such that the bride's heart produces the "tendril of smoke rising from the desert, fragrant with frankincense and myrrh" of the biblical verse.[44] This smoke is like incense or "the powders of all perfumers" because it is produced by the heart of the bride burning on the coals of love, and is thus "dear to God" (1304).

How the bride's path is accomplished from the disadvantaged position of weakness and simple understanding is in large part communicated by the other two most prominent passages of her instruction. The first contains the bride's *vision* of Solomon's palace, but actually extends, despite interruptions by the bridegroom, the commentator, and the author, from line 1172 to line 1604. The bride begins—in an address to the *puceles* that has no corresponding prompt in the Song of Songs—by saying, "Ladies, I want to tell you of this lord for whom my heart yearns, in what way I seek him, and what trouble I have taken in this search. Much there is that you can learn, if you will only lend me an ear. I remember well that I was lying then in my bed and resting."[45] She concludes in a passage inspired by Canticles 3:11, calling the *damoiseles* forth to see Solomon in his glory for themselves, after which the narrator summarizes:

> Par tels paroles les envie
> Totes l'espeuse, sains envie.
> Ne vuelt pas seule avoir se joie,
> Mais les altres en met en voie.
> (1601–4)

(With these words the bride encourages them all, selflessly. She does not desire to keep her joy for herself, but rather sets the others on her path.)

The text seeks to lead its audience towards the bride's experience of *joie*, and offers this experience by allowing them to be present as she recapitulates it, sharing her visionary experience as an imitable reading path. That it is, indeed, imitable, is then revealed by

44 The biblical text in the margin reads, "Que est ista que ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi ex aromatibus mirre et thuris et universi pulveris pigmentarii?"

45 "Damoiseles, jo vos vueil dire /De cel Seignor o mes cuers tire, /En kel maniere jo le quis, / E al querre kel paine mis. / Molt i porrez de bien aprendre, / Se vos a moi volez entendre. / Bien m'en sovient ke jo gisoie / Ja en mon lit e reposoie" (1171–78).

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the emergence of the authorial voice, which reports to the audience as if *he* had only just awakened from *her* sleep.

The same is true of the later passage, lines 2489 to 2684, only here the bride's search in the biblical text, Canticles 5:2–8, is announced with the words "A ses compaignes s'est tornee / E lor reconte une aventure" (She turned to her companions and told them a story) (2486–87). This "story," which is thus introduced as the audience knew story-telling from minstrels or jongleurs and romances, begins much as the last one did: "I am sleeping, but my heart keeps watch, this marvel occurs not seldom" (cf. 2489–90). The subsequent verses that recount the bride's waking, the mysterious touch of the beloved's hand "through the hole," and her ensuing search for him are then taken as a past experience in which she "held her Beloved in the fealty of love" (cf. 2492). At the conclusion, the narrator reports: "Tot cho conte la Deu Amie / As puceles, puis se lor prie / Que, s'eles voient son ami, / Ne.l oblient, mais dient li" (All this is related by God's beloved to the young women, and then she begs them not to forget, if they should see her beloved, to tell him) (2631–34). The narrator thus makes a parenthesis of the address to the "daughters" at Canticles 5:8 such that it both opens and closes the account, framing verses two to seven of chapter five as an *aventure* related for their benefit. This *aventure* is, in fact, another "visionary" experience, one not unlike Rupert's, in which the Word is known as presence in a loving embrace. The conclusion, however (here the biblical text, *si inveneritis dilectum meum annuncietis*, perfectly fuses with the author's purpose), would indicate that the bride's audience relives the same story, or undertakes the same *aventure*, also called "une anciene entrepresure" (an ancient quest; 2488), such that they might encounter the beloved in her stead. What are they to tell him? Just as the biblical text says, "how she languishes in love for him" (cf. 2636 and Canticles 5:8). This they will know not only because she has told them, but also because they have felt it themselves—just as, at the earlier juncture, the poet revealed of his own experience on the bed of contemplation.

Reading through *aventure*, in this case an extraordinary experience retold by the protagonist to whom it occurred, follows the previous, analogous presentation through *vision* as an alternative way of staging Mary's *lectio*. It is in fact the bride's *aventure* that most closely resembles the story of Rupert's *adulescentula* as "the foundation of mystery in historical things";[46] the same recalls the *Eructavit* poet's use of a *samblance* to allow his audience "to see and hear" the *grant joie* felt by the triumphant bride. *Historia* in this understanding is very close to story; it is a way of understanding figures of scripture through their contextualization in situations and relationships, a world of human contingencies that allows the words to appear as if spoken by persons like "ourselves," with motivations and emotions that relate to "our" experience. We are at the productive centre of a realm of imaginative representation that allows the report of a woman's visionary gnosis to overlap with the report of the bride's experience as *aventure*, with both offered as ways of presenting scripture for *puceles*, that is, *estoire* for "simple folk," as we shall see shortly. The apparent equivalence between the two derives from the

46 See above, p. 69.

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capacity they share to deliver an experience of presence. Refracted as it is in Landri's text through the commingled voices of poet and exegete, lover and instructor, this call to follow the bride through her visionary and narrative experiences is a call to experience how a woman loves and reads, or reading as a profession of love. Loving devotion to this "Lady" is a commitment to a reading path of empathy, a desire to become one with her desire. What we see here, then, is the same identification with the feminine that motivated the transformation of reading among the male monastic elites—a sustained preoccupation with a woman's way of knowing the Word and the construction of corresponding reading practice—which has in this case precipitated into a *romans* of the life of the *sponsa derelicta*. The narrative dimension of women's reading experience is now the poetic vehicle for its presentation to a courtly, lay audience.

The vehicles of vision and narrative are privileged, here as elsewhere, for mediating an experience of presence that is the reward of those who seek the beloved in the simplicity of loving devotion alone. The text frequently indicates that its instruction is not intended for *sage gent*; but rather offers the milk that is appropriate to the immature—its final warning against "the hands of a child" notwithstanding.[47] Just preceding the bride's *aventure*, then, the narrator speaks of the different groups that have found their place in the "spiritual garden" of the beloved—the same garden through which the South Wind blows—and special, final mention goes to "the fervent hearts" who in earthly life were dependent on mediation through their instructors (*maistres*), "E ki de pure estorie peurent / La simple gent, quar plus ne seurent" (And who nourished themselves on pure *historia* / The simple folk, for they knew nothing more) (2459–60). This bride who relates her experience as a coalescence of *vision* and *aventure* is presented through *historia*, or rather, she re-presents, makes present the historical dimension of the biblical images. As she relates it, moreover, her visionary experience makes this *historia* into a layman's access to the presence of the beloved that can dispense with, or "bypasses" learned intervention.

In a surprising passage that precedes her vision of Solomon's palace—expressly introduced as showing "in what way I seek him and what trouble I have taken in this search"[48]—the bride tells how she first asked her way of "the good masters who know the depths of the scriptures." But it was only by "passing beyond" (*trespasser*) these "guards" that she finally found her beloved—and she clarifies: "It is fitting that one leave them behind," because "many of them tell us much that is useful, but don't practice what they preach … mere words without actions will never find him."[49] The only true precondition is found in the heart and divine grace: "Devocions de cuer le trueve, / Kant il Deu plaist ke il l'esmueve" (Devotion of the heart finds him, / When it pleases God to be so moved)

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47 Here lines 185–98; see also 1571–76, 1983–86, 2027–40. Further passages are discussed below.

48 See the text in note 45, above.

49 "Li buen maistre, quant il s'an painent, / Ke del parfont de l'Escriture / Sevent traire buene peuture. / Kant ses guardes oi trespassé, / Donc trovai je le desirré. / Pluisor nos dient molt de bien, / E il meisme n'en font rien. / En cho covient c'on les trespast / Ainz ke om Deu tiengne e embrast, / Kar par dirre e neint ovrer / Ne le puet om mie trover" (1199–208).

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(1209–10). The path reserved for these simple but pure of heart is then revealed in her vision of Solomon's litter with its purple ascent (Canticles 9–10): "The steps leading to it were steep it is true, but charity had softened the slope. For the weak, for the *puceles* who have only begun to love, the king made a passage between the other steps that was much easier."[50] The exegete (awakening from the same vision), elaborates, interpreting the litter much as he will later the "spiritual garden," enumerating the different "hearts" that repose there—the martyrs, who arrive by their blood, the doctors by their eloquence, and *nos foibles* (we the weak), the "little ones," the *jovenceles*, who arrive by the tempered ascent of love (cf. 1549–80).

This is how, then, the audience is taught to read as a woman. The bride's experiences, communicated as *vision* and *aventure*, are ways of initiating an unlearned, lay audience into its own way of seeking the beloved, the equivalent of Gregory the Great's *historia* in pictures wed to Mary's *lectio*. By locating the ability of the soul to know the Word in *historia* and *pictura*, Mary's experience and Ooliba's gaze, Rupert of Deutz had implicitly pointed the way to this layman's gnosis in which the weakness of humanity before God, figured as female, meets the incapacity of the *illitteratus*. In figures such as Hildegard and Christina and even Marie de Champagne, historical women's lives could be conceived of as the bodily remanifestation of Mary's experience, *sponsae corporaliter* who represent fulfilment of the historical dimension of scripture as "our history," in our world, among us. The license to translate the Word into bodily media, shaping new experiences of presence, walks hand in hand with an understanding of human experience as revelatory of the divine. The woman as a figure of suffering in love is the lightning rod and original vessel of a divine descent into human form, the crucible of a transformative moment in which divinity is "visible" in base matter, experienced as a symmetry of inner truth and a knowing from heart to heart. To the question why this should be the case, Landri's text articulates a response that perfectly reflects the most far-reaching devotional developments of the later twelfth century, one that takes the position of Alexis's *espuse* a step further and sees the woman's capacity for compassion as the way her bodily weakness mirrors and reciprocates Christ's supreme sacrifice.

This poem is the song of humanity seeking its complement in the divine—but not through an ascent that leaves the flesh behind. The flesh and body as bride seek their complement in Christ as the flesh and body of divinity in an act of reciprocal recognition and reciprocal wounding—through a gaze—that allows each to know the other in the experience of human pain.[51] Beginning from opposite poles, the two are to meet in a chiastic symmetry of the body diaphanous, the original image of which is Mary's union in suffering with Christ as "flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone,"[52] Mary's suffering as bride and mother who could speak the words *Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi* in

50 "Voirs est ke roiste ert la montee / Mais charitez l'a atempree. / Por les foibles, por les puceles / Ki d'amer estoient noveles / Fist le rois entre les degrez / Une voie legiere asez" (1489–94).

51 In addition to the passages discussed below, see 1007–16 and 2683–712; see also Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 287–89; and Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, p. 59.

52 See above p. 185 note 143.

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their most uniquely fulfilled sense: "I am of him as he is of me." The locus of Mary's suffering was her heart, both because it occurred through love and because Simeon's prophecy of the *gladius doloris* that would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35) was identified with Longinus's spear piercing the heart of the crucified son.[53] She felt there—some said all the more intensely—all that Christ felt physically.[54] In this experience, the twelfth century discovered the Passion as the humanly comprehensible and physically sensible counterpart of the noetic union of the conception and Incarnation. Landri's idea of *devocions de cuer* as the loving devotion that merit's the embrace of the beloved from the position of human weakness thus empties into a union that sees conception and compassion as one. With a notable difference: Mary's loving devotion in the Passion could be relived as human suffering in love, and for love, of others.

The Incarnation as a "leap" in which God "took flesh from the Virgin" finds repeated mention in the text, also occurring in conjunction with corresponding review of Christ's suffering in the Passion.[55] But the key passage chosen to allow the bridegroom to speak of his descent is Canticles 4:9: "You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and one of the locks of your neck." Here, contrary to more established tradition, the wound is not seen simply as Christ accepting the Passion and Crucifixion on humanity's behalf, that is, for man's redemption.[56] Instead, it is inflicted by an "arrow of love," as a heart-wound that moves God to embrace his bride, that is, to assume human flesh. The wounding of the Incarnation, as a later passage makes clear, consists not so much in real wounds as it does in knowing another's pain:

> il prist char en la pulcele
> Ki de totes est damoisele.
> Par cui nos Deu trovons plus prest,
> Quar or seit il coment nos est,
> Seit voire par experiment,
> Se reguarde plus dolcement
> A nos, e a no povreté,
> Que il prist par sa volenté.
>
> (2873–82)

(he took flesh in the Virgin who reigns as lady over all others. For this reason we find God closer to us, for now he knows how it is with us, he knows truly by experience, and thus looks more kindly on our miserable state, which he took on by his own will.)

53 See pp. 182–83, above.

54 See p. 180, above. Landri's principle source, Geoffrey of Auxerre, refers to the same idea in company with the *gladius doloris* as part of his discussion of the "wounded heart" of Canticles 4:9: *Expositio*, 3, p. 243.

55 For example, lines 865–70 and 879–82, and lines 1757–64.

56 For an overview of the patristic tradition, see Cabassut, "Blessure d'amour," 1727–29; for the Middle Ages, Schleusener-Eichholz, *Auge im Mittelalter*, pp. 787–97. Discussion and commentary on specific examples in Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, pp. 841–46.

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The Incarnation is not only an act of grace in which the divine becomes knowable to humanity; here is it also the act of a loving will that wishes more completely to know its beloved.[57] This insistence on reciprocal identification is then also what motivates the innovative treatment of Canticles 4:9, *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea, sponsa*, … The passage's meaning is revealed through the image of a reciprocal gaze between the bride's contemplative eye, seeking in vain to comprehend the divine, and God's own gaze, which "the king" explicitly adds to the equation:

Cho dist li Rois:—Espose, suer,
Molt as parfont navré mon cuer
D'un te tes crins et d'un tien ueil
Cui jo resguart, si con jo sueil,
Molt m'atalant tes mameles
Ki tant sunt nobles e tant beles.
(2211–15)

(Thus speaks the king: "Bride, sister, you have deeply wounded my heart with one hair of your head and one of your eyes [Canticles 4:9], which I look upon as is my wont. Your breasts greatly arouse my desire, so refined and beautiful they are [cf. Canticles 4:10].")

This heart-wound so moved the king that he "descended into the virginal womb" to assume our humanity.[58] The central passage intertwines past and present even as it entangles gazes divine and human, the ever-recurrent desire to understand and the unique descent of the Incarnation:

Li altre uels tent a le haltesce[59]
Nostre Seignor e sa grandesce,
Mais comprendre ne puet mie
Parfaitement en ceste vie.
Cist esguarde cum cist est pius,
Cui comprendre ne puet nuls lius,
E vint el ventre virginal

57 Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," p. 294, finds no source for this passage. The ideas expressed may be indebted to Bernard of Clairvaux, although not to his sermons on Canticles. As Bernard relates, before the Incarnation, Christ existed in a blessed state of impassivity (*impassiblis*) like to the father, "sicut miseriam vel subjectionem expertus non erat, sic misericordiam et obenientiam non noverat experimento. Sciebat quidem per naturam, non autem sciebat per experientiam" (*De gradibus humilitatis* 3.9; as cited in Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 69). See also Köpf, *Religiöse Erfahrung*, pp. 214–16; and Miquel, *Expérience spirituelle*, pp. 56–82, esp. pp. 61, 63.

58 The reciprocal gaze was perhaps suggested by Geoffrey's *Expositio*, which speaks of the wound as struck by the bride's gaze, or *aspectus*, with *spicula* (arrows), and then evokes Christ's reaction with the words "Aspectus aspectum provocat" (her gaze provokes his) (*Expositio*, 4, p. 339). The idea of the "eye" as the soul's *intentio*, or inclination towards God, and of the one hair as her *cogitatio*, or attempt at understanding, likewise occur in Geoffrey's text (*Expositio*, 4, pp. 339–40), but the development of these ideas as found in Landri's text appears to be very much his own.

59 Lines 2231–36 first discuss the eye of "the active life."

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Prendre armes e destruire mal.
Il esguarde la pieté
Par cui Deus prist humanité,
E que por nient, u por petit,
Done as siens le sovrain delit.
Cist est li uels ki Jesu Crist
A si plaié, com Il nos dist.
(2237–50)

(The other eye is turned to the loftiness of our lord in his magnificence, which it cannot possibly comprehend perfectly in this life. This eye contemplates the great mercy of his gaze whom no vessel can contain, but who entered the virginal womb to take arms and destroy evil. This eye sees the compassion that moved God to assume our humanity, that grants to his own the greatest gift for next to nothing. This is the eye that so wounded Jesus Christ, as he tells us himself.)

There was precedent for reading Canticles 4:9 as Christ's or God's words on his own descent into the flesh, but it was, as one would expect, confined to the understanding of the text as Mary's experience rather than the church's or the individual soul's.[60] Rupert of Deutz provided what may be the earliest such reading, in terms that find distinct echoes in Landri's complex passage: Mary's eye is for Rupert, too, an eye of contemplative prayer, her exclusive orientation to the will of God; and with this gaze, as Christ tells her, "with this one of your eyes you wounded my heart, whence in your regard I could not restrain my inner longings" (*viscera mea*). The result? "You are mother and virgin, and this is the fruit of one of your eyes."[61] It is Rupert, too, who (uniquely) identifies the lock of hair with a sharpened dart or arrow thrown by Mary.[62] As Landri goes on to explain:

De celui crin ki l'a navré
Vos redirai la verité
La sainte arme dont nos parloms
A crinz, ses meditacions,
Ki li naiscent de la pensee

60 The Middle High German *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied* (ca. 1160), begins its remarks on Canticles 4:9 with the words "this was spoken to the mother of God" (cf. 54,10) and then says it was her loving gaze that brought Christ to descend to this world (cf. 54,15). As Ohly notes, the Marian reading originates in the twelfth century (commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, p. 841, see also p. 843).

61 "In hoc uno oculorum tuorum vulnerasti cor meum, unde et viscera mea super te continere se non potuerunt" (*CCC*, 3, p. 80). With regard to Canticles 4:10, in which the bridegroom praises the bride's breasts, Christ then announces, "Amici ascultant haec, … quia mater et virgo es, et hunc esse fructum unius oculorum tuorum …" (*CCC*, 3, p. 81). The text thus gives Mary a role in bringing about the Incarnation, a remarkable motif that it once again shares with the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied*; see the preceding note. As part of the same exposition, Rupert has Christ remind Mary of the lament of the sterile Anna, whose tearful prayers so wounded God's heart that he granted her a son (*CCC*, 3, p. 79; cf. 1 Samuel 1:2–20).

62 "… unum illum crinem tuum … in me iecisti veluti spiculum praeacutum, et vulnerasti cor meum" (*CCC*, 3, p. 80). Rupert apparently transports this arrow from the traditional reading of Canticles 2:5 (see the following note).

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Ki chiés del anme est apelee,
Ausi come li crins del cors
Naiscent del chief cha de defors.
Un en a cui Deus tant aime
Que saiete d'amor le claime
Quar il dist qu'il en est navrez
Si com vos oï avez.
(2251–62)

(Of this same lock of hair that wounded him I will recount the truth to you: the holy weapon that we're speaking of, the strand of hair, are her meditations, born of her mind, which is called the soul's head, just as locks of hair on the body are born of the head to extend outward. One among these is so beloved of God that he calls it an arrow of love, for he says that it has wounded him, as you have just heard.)

The "arrow of love" properly belongs to the tradition of a different verse, Canticles 2:5, as it was known from the Septuagint version: *Vulnerata charitate ego sum* (I have been wounded by charity/your love). In this case, the wound was inflicted by Christ, who, as an arrow or sword, filled Mary or the soul with love and longing.[63] Rupert's reading imports the arrow of love from this tradition into the reading of the obverse wound, which itself had long been identified with Christ's Passion. Odo of Morimund relies on the same understanding when he speaks of an "arrow of love" that Christ "had accepted at [Mary's] hand," and that he returns to her in his gaze from the cross, thus identifying either gaze and either wounding with Canticles 4:9.[64] Landri's text, in adopting the Marian understanding of Canticles 4:9 along with the arrow of love, reflects a coalescence of the two readings and the two woundings that develops over the course of the twelfth century: both Mary and Christ are twice wounded, at the conception and at the cross, and either event is a reciprocal wounding for love inflicted through a reciprocal gaze.

Landri's treatment of Canticles 4:9 thus provides a particularly pregnant demonstration of what occurs in his text as a whole: the singular events of Mary's experience provide the basis for, the very origin of, his portrayal of the bride and thus for the audience's understanding of the biblical text; moreover, they model that text as experience here and now. The focus of attention is thus not contrition or remorse over Christ's suffering for our redemption, but recognition and gnosis, a knowing as Mary knew, experienced as reciprocal vision that induces, or rather inflicts, a symmetry of suffering in love. One more witness to the wound of love in Mary's experience, from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs, makes these ideas particularly clear. Speaking for his part of Canticles 2:5, Bernard says, "The special love of Christ" came to Mary in the conception and "not only pierced [her] soul but penetrated through and through [cf. Luke 2:35],

63 The "arrow of love" entered commentary on the Song no later than with Origen's reading of Canticles 2:5 and was known to the Middle Ages through him; cf. Origen, *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*, 3.8, p. 194. John of Fecamp saw this love-wound in reciprocal relationship to Christ's wounds; see Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles*, p. 74; and *JP*, pp. 169–70.

64 See above pp. 180–81 and 183–84.

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so that even the tiniest space in her virginal breast was permeated by love." The arrow (or sword)

> transpierced her thus that it might come down even to us, and of that fullness we might all receive. She would become the mother of that love whose father is the God who is love. … In this process she experienced through her whole being a wound of love that was mighty and sweet. I would reckon myself happy if at rare moments I felt at least the prick of the point of that sword. Even if only bearing love's slightest wound, I could still say: "I am wounded with love" (Cant. 2:5 Septuagint version).[65]

Bernard's passage incorporates the language of Simeon's prophecy on the *gladius doloris* even as he speaks of the conception and Mary being filled with the sweetness of love; the arrow (*sagitta*) cited at the beginning is, further on, called a sword (*gladius*). Meditation on the embrace of the Word is poised between the two events, Conception and Passion, and for this reason, Bernard, in this sole instance in his sermons on the Song, makes use of Mary as the protagonist of the text: her experience makes the two embraces into one and knowable as such, "that it might come down even to us."[66]

With the idea of the Incarnation as provoked by Mary wounding the heart of the bridegroom we have arrived once more at a point of surprising convergence between the reading brides of vernacular exegesis and secular narrative. Chrétien's *Yvain* likewise conjures the image of a "god of love" descending to his *pucele* as the result of a wounding through love's dart: "he … would have had her love no man if not himself. To serve her he would have changed himself into a man, would have given up his divinity and wounded his own body with the arrow whose wound does not heal."[67] The oddity derived from Amor wounded by his own arrow only recalls the reciprocal wounding native to the sacred image and the fact that God's plan effects the wound; it is thus self-inflicted. That Landri's *pucele* is likewise a "reader" in her garden is suggested not solely by the metaphor of the eye's vain attempt fully to understand the divine, her *meditacions*. The passage we have just examined is part of the bridegroom's praise of the bride, which turns next to the "garden enclosed" and the north and south winds, where the author is brought to speak of reading the text (in a garden?) with his own lady-bride. Both author and *sponsus* are equally smitten with their "reading" *damoisele*, and her reading culminates in the wounded descent of "the God who is love" (to use Bernard's words) to claim her as his own; the Holy Spirit blows through the *hortus conclusus*, the garden enclosed. I suggested in chapter 1 that Chrétien's young bride-to-be who reads aloud from a romance in the secluded garden while Yvain looks on as an uninvited guest is the "secularized" double of Laudine's suffering reading; that is, as we can say now, she stands at the conclusion of a narrative transformation of the grief of the *sponsa derelicta*

65 *On the Song of Songs*, 29.8, pp. 109–10.

66 Similarly, *JP*, pp. 304–6.

67 *Yvain*, ed. Hult, lines 5374–78; see above, p. 17. Chrétien may be playing as well on Apuleius's story in which Cupid strikes himself with his own dart for love of Psyche; this story, however, was all but unknown to the Middle Ages until Boccaccio. See Kern, "Iwein liest 'Laudine'," pp. 396–97.

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into the image of another form of reading—as the fulfilment of the idea that both reading brides enable a special gnosis, itself a fusion of desire and empathy, love and suffering.

No less important is the complementary extension of the same wound to the general audience that, in Chrétien's *Yvain*, causes the relationship between the narrator and his audience to participate in the relationship between Yvain and his reading brides or between the god of love and the *pucele.* Both texts see wounding in love as a moment in which the divine can be revealed in the body—and as the result of participation in a reading process that occurs both "inside" and "outside" the text, or rather itself creates continuity between readers then and now, here and there. Chrétien's *pucele* doubles the narrator's delivery of the text not because young women often prelected romances in secluded gardens, but because a woman's knowing is the image and medium of this experience. The same doubling occurs in reverse when, in Landri's text, the poet emerges with his wounded heart from the bed of the bride's vision.

How did such a parallel come about? Was the distance between Champagne and Guines less significant, were communications more frequent than we might expect? Is there a common textual ancestor that might have served equally well for either poet? The full answer may comprise such factually traceable connections, but another applies in any event, that between Marie de Champagne and Baldwin of Guines as patrons of literature *en romans*, of the *dame* and the *illitteratus* as the twin focal points of the construction of a new reading experience whose claim to truth is equally dependent, in either case, on the idea of an audience-as-woman inside and outside the text.[68]

For now, though, our central concern is with the wounded God whose wounding embraces his earthly bride, making her suffering his and his suffering hers. I mentioned earlier that the idea of the bride's "black flesh"—that which reveals her inner beauty—resurfaces late in the poem as the suffering of Christ in the Passion. Christ is "blackened by tribulation," by "humiliation, pain and derision" (cf. 2779–80); which is then enumerated as the injuries that deformed his flesh in the Passion (2785–90), of which the bride herself says:

> De cez griétez chascune amaine
> Noirtume a la char humaine
> Dont coverte est la deiteiz
> En Jhesu Crist, bien le saveiz.
> (2791–94)

(Each of these wounds brings blackness to the human flesh with which the deity is covered in Jesus Christ, as well you know.)

68 Composition of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Le Chevalier au Lion* is widely acknowledged to have been concurrent, taking place between the years 1177 and 1181. Moreover, the allusions to the central problem of the *Charrette* in *Yvain*, which embed the former narrative in the latter, all but force the conclusion—in the absence of conflicting evidence—that Marie is the operative addressee of either romance. In "Missing Prologue," Barbara Sargent-Baur argues that the prologue to the *Charrette* should be taken as applying to both romances. More important to my argument, however, is the idea of the two centres of literary activity, each with a prominent patron who is given literary representation as such.

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But the same blackness reveals even as it conceals. It is the black hair that covers a head of fine gold, "that does not allow the head to be seen in all its true beauty" (2803–6). "This hair is the nuptials of the Virgin, and her restoration after childbirth; it is the place where the child was born and the manger where he was found … all of this covers the purity of the holy head, and the truth" (2809–16). In other words: Christ's blackness, the flesh that obscures his divinity, is also the very humanity that allows his bride to know him—the equivalent of the "cloud" as an intervening medium mitigating the brilliance of divinity otherwise intolerable to human eyes.[69] In blackness, then, in the shame and compassion that make her flesh the mirror of his on the cross, she is also closest to him, she becomes "one spirit with him," receiving the "kiss" she sought at the outset of the poem:

L'espose Crist ki tant est sage,
Quant se porpense k'il sofri
Sains son mesfait e tot por li,
Les comps tant durs e les liens
Que il sofri, tien ele a siens.
Li clous k'il eut par mi les piez,
Est en son cuer fort enfichiez.
Les clos des mains, tot la croiz,
Met en son cuer li granz destroiz.
Cele corone del Saint Chief
Li fait al cuer dolors molt grief.
Trestot par compassion sent
Qua[n]qu'il sofri corporeilment.
El est uns espirz avec lui,
Se sont comun tot li anui.
(2075–92, emphasis added)

(The bride of Christ, who is wise, when she considers that he suffered with no fault and all for her, feels the heavy blows and the bonds that he suffered inflicted on herself. The nail that pierced his feet is fixed hard in her heart. The nails in his hands, the entire cross makes her heart seize up in pain. This crown on the holy head brings a dolorous pain to her heart. Verily she endures by co-passion whatever he suffered in the flesh. She is one spirit with him, all the injuries are common to each.)

The text itself announced this moment as the culmination of the bride's desire when she described the kiss she sought with the same words (157–58). Three times this passage locates the bride's compassionating pain in her heart. It is not the exterior, physical affliction that constitutes the "kiss," but rather one that pierces the heart; a fulfilment of perfectly reciprocal suffering in love, or *devocions de cuer*. To enter into this radically loving empathy as Mary did is to manifest the same truth that she did, the truth of the body diaphanous, which becomes in its abnegation of exteriority the manifest vehicle of inner truth, the female humility that merited conception and bearing of the

69 See above, pp. 30–31, 33; and Deshman, "Disappearing Christ," 520–29.

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Word—and merited the *gladius compassionis*, the sword of "co-sufferance" that made Mary's suffering of the heart into the mirror of Christ's in the flesh.

This is a momentous conjunction. Where the kiss of the Annunciation joins the kiss of the Passion, the search for truth in and through the blackened exterior—the *materia* of our experience that, in all its abject, fallen unworthiness, is nevertheless and for this very reason the humanity that Christ displayed on the cross—joins the ineffable, unknowable bliss that was Mary's own in the original conjugal embrace of the Word. Therein lies a dimension of the new devotion to Christ in his humanity, and with it a dimension of devotion to the Passion and of the *imitatio Christi*, that has thus far been largely overlooked. The promise it holds was by no means Landri's invention—as we saw earlier, the reciprocal wounding of *sponsus* and *sponsa* in love was articulated beginning early in the twelfth century as the conjunction of suffering and knowing, pain and love human and divine, that made the cross itself not so much the site of a victory over human flesh as a sinking into and embrace of its weakness, a marriage of Heaven and earth: "The Mediator of God and men hangs midway between Heaven and earth, unites the heights with the depths and joins the things of earth to the things of Heaven. Heaven is aghast, earth marvels."[70]

Devocions de cuer is the site of this conjunction, the humbly inadequate human reciprocation of Christ's inestimable pain that by its very incapacity wounds the heart of God and moved/moves him to descend to this most abject point, to the cross, where his sacrificing love could become one with the loving devotion of his bride. This integration of human pain and suffering *for love* into the hermeneutics of the Word is among the most momentous cultural achievements of the High Middle Ages. What was unknowable as bliss became knowable as pain, what the Spirit had performed "without the intervention of man" and, most incredibly, without the slightest injury to human flesh; this, or some part in it, could now be re-experienced through the loving embrace of a body lacerated, mutilated, crucified at the hands of men. An experience perhaps more accessible, but requiring a capacity for suffering and a tolerance to pain—pain of the heart—that the medieval imagination did not reserve for male stoicism but rather for the body of humanity, the mother whose love could not turn away—whatever her fear, whatever the agony, finally without regard for self-preservation.

It is all the more startling to find such a moment placed at the centre of meaning of one of the earliest attempts to make a *romans* of the Song of Songs, to shape a layman's way of knowing the Word out of an only recent transformation of monastic reading. The most essential point for our inquiry is that a different "historical" truth is made in the idea of the truth of truths of the Christian faith: if God became man in order "to know our experience," then we know God through that same. The Song of Songs is the archtext of this reciprocal knowing, because it contains the prophetic images, once fulfilled and ever to be renewed, of the same mystery. If "every woman's" experience can manifest that of the bride, if Marie is Mary, *dame* is *sponsa*, then truth resides not finally and not only in what happened once in the historical fulfilment of the sacred text, but in a

70 Aelred, *Rule*, p. 89.

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renewed experience of text that makes it happen now—and this same idea is itself the "why" of the mystery lady, whose identity, even as it is withheld, is also made essential to the genesis and meaning of the text. Just as our experience, our history becomes a manifestation of sacred history, so the truth of "being there" (the truth of history as an eyewitness account) gives way to a truth of "being her"—a truth of empathy in which human experience can reconstitute the epiphany of inner truth originally accomplished in the continuity between Christ's flesh and Mary's. And, surprisingly enough, it is just this point that brings us full circle, back to the concerns that lie at the centre of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*.

Mutations of the Old Eve: Reading Woman as History

Two points of difference stand out between Benoît's *romans* and, on the one hand, the texts of vernacular exegesis just considered, and later Arthurian romances on the other. Both are essential to an understanding of the position of the *Roman de Troie* in the development of a new poetics of truth in narrative. For Benoît and his audience this narrative is not a "romance," but rather history, the re-presentation of past events.[71] The poet's task is not to make the events "believable," but rather to make them present, to allow his audience to experience them anew. Second, Benoît does not overtly assimilate his narrative into a Christian world-view; true to the historical nature of his project, its characters act in a world that still awaits its salvation. Benoît's task is to perform on secular history an operation that allows the capital tale of pagan warfare and destruction to open onto a redeeming Christian reading experience. Briseida's story is the fulcrum this *translatio*, because, being Benoît's invention, it can replicate Helen's story as one in which the audience is asked to seek itself somewhere between opposed images of the identification between woman and body.

A femme dure duels petit,
A un oil plore, a l'autre rit.
Molt müent tost li lor corage,
Assez est fole la plus sage:
Quant qu'el a en set anz aimé,
A ele en treis jorz oblïé.
Onc nule ne sot duel aveir.
Bien lur pareist de lur saveir:
Ja n'avront tant nul jor mesfet
Chose ne rien que si seit let,
Ce lor est vis, qui que les veie,
Que l'on ja blasmer les en deive.
Ja jor ne quideront mesfere.
Des folies est ce la meire.

(13441–54)

71 Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 153–55; and, more generally, Knapp, "Historische Wahrheit," 581–635, and 585–87 on Benoît specifically; also Knapp, "Fiktionales Erzählen," pp. 3–22.

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> (Women's woe does not last long: she cries with one eye and laughs with the other. Their hearts are quick and easy to change and even the wisest among them is but a fool. Though she might have loved for seven years, she'll forget it in three days! Not one of them knows what it is to suffer—that's clear enough from the way they see things: no matter how grievous an offense they've committed or who may have seen it, as they would have it, they are never to blame. They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest.)

The most remarkable thing about the narrator's misogynist excursus in the *Roman de Troie* has consistently been overlooked in modern discussion: it is not prompted by Helen. Scholars have recognized in Briseida's story a chiastic parallel to that of Paris and Helen, with the woman passing from a Trojan to a Greek prince rather than the other way around.[72] Rarely noted is the way Briseida's story both plays out and problematizes the audience's expectations of Helen. Helen was held up in the courts of France and Germany around 1200 (still) as the epitome of a negative female example; indeed, her story was so depraved as to be better left untold—especially where "young women" were concerned: "Young ladies cannot better their understanding through the story of the beautiful queen in Greece of those days; she did wrong whoever first read it, for bad examples sorely distort good manners and good instruction."[73] Thus a churchman from Friulia, Thomasin of Zirclaria, posing as mediator of French courtly mores for the courtly world of the German empire, pronounced judgment on the value of "reading Helen." The reasons for this judgment would have been apparent enough. In his Latin history of the Trojan War, written at the Angevin court ca. 1180, Joseph of Exeter's abhorrence of Helen is equalled only by the indulgent eroticism of his description of female desire: "With all her heart she opens up her loins; with eager mouth she steals his dormant love, … For shame, foul whore!"[74]

The discordant note in Benoît's emphatic gesture derives from two expectations, one fulfilled and the other denied. Affirmed is the idea that women's conduct in love plays a crucial role in the story; oddly disappointed and displaced is the expectation that Helen is the reason. For where Benoît's narrator spares no quarter in his condemnation of the female sex with Briseida as its representative, Helen's relationship to Paris can be read as expressing a courtly ideal,[75] and the reflection on women's treachery with regard to a minor and unknown character finds no complement in the portrayal of history's most treacherous woman.[76]

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72 O'Callaghan, "Tempering Scandal," p. 308; see also Nolan, *Roman Antique*, p. 110.

73 Thomasin of Zirclaria, *Der welsche Gast*, lines 773–78. Translations are my own; for the original text see below, p. 287. Further citations are parenthetical.

74 Joseph of Exeter, *Trojan War*, as cited in O'Callaghan, p. 306. On the importance of the fall of Troy in the medieval view of world history, see Jung, "Storici Troiani," p. 179.

75 O'Callaghan, "Tempering Scandal," pp. 305–8, with other scholarship cited there; see also Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 20–24.

76 An exception might be claimed to this statement near the poem's conclusion, when Helen, having been taken from the sacked city by the Greeks, arrives in Crete with her former husband, Menelaus (lines 28425–34). As Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, pp. 273–74, argues, however, this passage can only be read in the light of the romance as a whole, which has made more than clear

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Omissions frequently serve as the signpost of authorial intent in Benoît's romance, and this is one of his most conspicuous. Briseida's story is held up to the audience as a surrogate for their expectations of "reading Helen"; that is, of the Trojan War as proof of the wanton destruction wrought on the world through the daughters of Eve. In this way the poet invites the audience to consider Briseida's story—his invention—as the potential key to their experience of his retelling of historical *verité*. One suspects already that the truth is not found in the old interpretations of Helen, and if that is the case, then neither does it lie in the traditional poetics of body, for—as Thomasin likewise informs us—Helen constituted the archetype of woman as the false exterior. Benoît's project is no small undertaking, whether for history or for the idea of truth in narrative: to redeem Helen would be to redeem the body itself; conversely, to embrace the body as vehicle of truth, Helen must yield a different story, or at least a different way of reading.[77] Precisely this is what Benoît makes manifest through the audience's experience of Briseida's story.

With his narratorial trap Benoît communicates the point of conjunction between the pagan past and the audience's reading present, the way their experience of a secular narrative can remanifest Christian truth. When Briseida's story is juxtaposed with Solomon's *forte femme*, a scriptural ideal, Helen's story meets Mary's reading; the history of Eve—"our" history—is projected onto the account of pagan history such that her salvation through Mary—from a perspective available to the audience alone—comes into view as the vanishing point of Benoît's narrative geometry. "Reading Briseida" becomes a test of the narrator's credibility (in condemning women) on the one hand and of the audience's own worthiness (who recognizes itself in the fallen bride) on the other. The narrative then orchestrates an experience in which the audience will discover far more sympathy with Briseida than the narrator's judgment would allow; her story is not one of contemptible opportunism and deceit but rather one of suffering and remorse over temptation unsuccessfully resisted and a loving heart unsuccessfully repressed. The story thus displays its narrator as an unreliable witness; Solomon's scriptural authority, which he cites in support of the same conventional wisdom, fares little better. In their place is left the experience of the audience-as-woman, the audience who reads as the bride through the discovery of itself in her. The new truth of Benoît's history is born of this experience, of reading woman's suffering as object of desire and object of exchange, object of war and object of peace, as lover, concubine, wife, queen, and, in every case, bereaved bride. The truth of history as presence, purportedly mediated by eyewitness account, is in fact revealed through the truth of empathy, the experience of truth in narrative as self-recognition. This is the meeting of history and Rupert's *historia*, the identification of what happened then and there with an experience of the same as it happens now, of the truth of being there with the truth of being her.

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that Helen was not the cause of the war. Its refrain of "par qui … par qui …" with reference to all that has come to pass "through her" can thus only be read as a reflection on history and not on a woman's conduct, on which the passage is once again notably silent.

77 Helen is in fact Thomasin's prime example of improper reading, that is, a stage of perception that cannot see beyond the (false) exterior. See below, pp. 287–89.

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Benoît's prologue insists above all on *verité*, defined as the reliable reporting of truth in history, and he aligns himself with classical tradition by insisting on the account of an eyewitness to events. Homer is summarily rejected for having lived far too long after the fact; in his place Benoît relies on Dares, whose status as an eyewitness to the Trojan War was an established tradition.[78] All this is a fanfare for reversal, or rather a stage set for transformation. Benoît's expansion of Dares's terse brevity into well over 30,000 lines of octosyllabic verse reaches far beyond the bounds of simple *amplificatio materiae*, a patent fact he pretends to deny:

> Ci vueil l'estoire commencier:
> Le latin sivrai e la letre;
> Niul autre rien n'i voudrai metre
> S'ensi non cum jel truis escrit.
> Ne de mie qu'aucun buen dit
> N'i mete, se faire le sai,
> Mais la matire en ensirrai.
> (138–44)

(Here I wish to begin the story. I will follow the Latin text to the letter; I would not include anything except what I find and as I find it written—unless it be to add a few good words here and there, as I am able, but always faithfully following my source.)

The tongue-in-cheek tenor of this limiting statement is reinforced by the flexible limits of the term *dit* (142), which can mean anything from a few words to a short descriptive or narrative poem.[79] Like the rest, this claim is not made for factual value but rather to alert audience attention to the questions of historical truth and source translation and their respective value in assessing his *romans*.[80]

Benoît's version of the fall of Troy most notably amplifies the story by multiplying women's fates as objects of exchange in love and war. He launches his *estoire* with one of the most expansive examples: the story of Jason and Medea; for the same reason he insists the cause of the war resides in the first destruction of Troy by Hercules and the resulting rape of Hesione (Priam's sister and thus Helen's precursor in the previous generation). Dares had included brief mention of Jason's story—so brief, indeed, that it did not even mention Medea: "Thus, reembarking, they [Jason and his companions] departed from Phrygia, and set out for Colchis, and stole the fleece, and returned to their homeland."[81] For Benoit the treasonous heroine constitutes the very centre of interest. With this narrative preamble of over 1,300 lines he attunes his audience to the point of the sequence of love stories, which becomes increasingly prominent in the latter half of his text. Each is the story of a woman changing sides in an epic struggle; in all but

78 See lines 45–116; Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 153–55; and Jung, "Storici troiani," pp. 182–83.

79 See Godefroi, *Complément*, p. 397, and the entry "dit" in *Electronic Dictionary of Chrétien de Troyes*, www.atilf.fr/dect (accessed August 12, 2019).

80 See, for example, Haug, "Autorität," pp. 121–22; *pace* Knapp, "Fiktionales Erzählen," p. 22.

81 *The Trojan War*, p. 135.

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Briseida's case this action also clearly jeopardizes or (in Polyxena's case) could save a people: the course of history hinges on a woman's heart. These women are daughters of Eve. And yet, just as he will later Helen, Benoît all but exonerates Medea; in his account she is the victim of love ill-bestowed (2030–44). Her filiocidal revenge receives no mention, making up another of his conspicuous omissions, and for this fact Benoît then makes his "source"—that is, *verité*—responsible! Concluding, he takes another ironic bow, asserting that no more is known to him of Medea's fate because Dares told no more (Ovid, from whom he lifted the rest, certainly did), and Heaven forbid that he should "lie":[82] "Ne Beneeiz pas ne l'alonge, Ne pas n'i acreistra mençonge" (Benoît neither enlarges on his source nor does he amplify it with lies) (2061–66). The message, for those who knew "the truth" in Medea's case, is twofold. On the one hand, truth is to be constituted differently in this romance than through exclusive reliance on the eyewitness; on the other, preconceived moral distinctions—with reference to women's stories in particular—are highly questionable.

Benoît's restoration of Medea as a central figure highlights what the narrator will make unmistakable with his intervention preceding Briseida's story: women's stories are the thing wherein he means to catch the conscience of his *dame*—the audience in general. With his misogynist excursus the trap is set; it is sprung only gradually, as the narrative reverses the tale of woman's treachery to offer portrayals of woman's suffering in its place. The succession of love stories continues in Helen's with Paris, Briseida's with her two loves, and Polixena's with Achilles. These become the narrative backbone of Benoît's *roman*, "devising a space for love in material traditionally dominated by the theme of warfare."[83] But they accomplish far more: the men's epic of the siege and destruction of Troy plays the supporting orchestra here to a succession of soloists' arias on women's treason for love and its final inversion—and of their suffering in either case. The injection of these women's fates redirects audience identification in the same way observed in *La Chanson d'Alexis* but with appropriately substituted pre-Christian identities, that is: from the heroism of pagan warriors to the suffering of their proto-Christian widows.

With the exception of the preamble on Jason and Medea, the couples' stories are concurrent and carefully interwoven with each other and with the account of the war. The increasing interdependence between the two culminates in the story of Achilles and Polyxena, in which the very outcome of the war hangs in the balance of love.[84] The chronological interweaving of the latter three stories allows their conclusions to occur as a trio of women's laments, moving monologues of self-examination and remorse that have few equals among Benoît's vernacular predecessors or contemporaries. These are distributed over the last third of the narrative in a rising crescendo, and their effect is

82 For Benoît's reliance on Ovid, see Nolan, *Roman Antique*, pp. 99–102.

83 Green, *Beginnings*, p. 156; see also Nolan, *Roman Antique*, pp. 96–118, esp. 117. The original study of the love stories as the structural key to the *Roman de Troie* is Lumiansky, "Structural Unity." Thereafter, see Adler, "*Militia et amor*"; Jones, *Theme of Love*, pp. 43–59; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 86–164; Petit, *Naissances du roman*, pp. 463–83; and Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, pp. 111–21, esp. pp. 116–17.

84 Petit, *Naissances du roman*, p. 475.

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a resounding reversal of the narrator's blanket condemnation of women's fickleness in love and incapacity to suffer; above all, they give the lie to the fault he singles out as their worst: "They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest." The narrator's misogynist excursus is the starting point of a narrative transformation that will conclude in the image of its reversal: the golden likeness of Polixena as a woman's sorrow transfixed for eternity, a sorrow so truly represented that "no one ever looked upon it without believing that she wept."[85] The virgin "widow" of the story's most formidable hero stands bearing his funerary remains atop a monument ostensibly erected to his memory, making of the same a monument to women's sorrow that will endure not merely for three days but rather, we are told, "until the end of time."[86]

Of these three stories, only Briseida's case, the case of the fictional invention, is traced in detail, or rather, from the inside; in this way it stands as the centrepiece of reflection through which to interpret the others, the "historical" figures. By contrast, beyond the account of her initial submission to Paris during the sea passage, we are privy to nothing of Helen's inner life or development; the same is only more true of Polixena, who before her final monologue is evoked only as the object of Achilles's love and negotiations with her parents. Once again, conspicuous absence is a key to authorial intent. The absences are filled, so to speak, with the unique tale of a woman gradually falling in love,[87] which thereby acquires a weight in the poem far exceeding quantitative proportion.[88]

The author's rant against women's inconstancy emerges from similar remarks about Briseida (13828–37). The word "soon" repeats three times in these nine lines alongside other adverbial expressions emphasizing speedy change of heart; slightly later the narrator will specify that it took four (not three) days (13859–61). Briseida's story, however, is told in four scenes that span a period of more than two years and only in the last does she finally acknowledge and declare her love for Diomedes.[89] If the story complies at all with the narrator's initial description of women, then only in that Briseida's affections do change; why they do so or precisely when remains inscrutable. We are told repeatedly that Diomedes's incessant attentions avail him nothing, not so much as a favourable word—until the conclusion of the third scene, when, following another lengthy and eloquent protestation of love, Briseida—without comment or explanation—gives him her right sleeve to bear into battle. Even the final scene is no lovers' tryst, as Diomedes lies moribund with a wound suffered at the hands of Troilus and we see and hear only Briseida, who delivers not a fervid declaration of love, but rather a lucid and mournful confession of her own guilt.

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85 Ja hom l'image n'esgardast, / Ne li fust vis qu'ele plorast" (22471–72). The image, we are told, is no less visible to and no less admired by the Trojans (lines 22479–82).

86 Cf. lines 22489–90.

87 Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 236.

88 Other points support this judgment: the poem's midpoint occurs within the scene in which Brseida gives her sleeve to Diomedes—the first indication of a transfer of her affections. Similarly, in Benoît's catalogue of characters that precedes the outbreak of the war, Briseida is introduced at the point of transition from the Greeks to the Trojans (lines 5275–88).

89 Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 235; O'Callaghan, "Tempering Scandal," p. 304.

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Briseida is decidedly, as her initial description states, "a woman who was much loved and loved as much" (5285), and in this role her behaviour is, or becomes, duplicitous. The moral conundrum that results is not meant to yield conclusive judgment but rather to be experienced in all its ambiguity and complexity, such that the audience finds an easy way into Briseida's dilemma but no easy way out. If we accept her loving heart as her nature and thus her love as a mark of sincerity, then she cannot be condemned. Certainly, the narrator's charge of never recognizing her own fault is soundly contradicted, as it will be in other women. But is the weakness of a loving heart sufficient justification? Can *devocions de cuers* excuse a heathen harlot?

On this point biblical authority ought to be decisive. Solomon, however, figures as its only prominent representative in this text, and his testimony works to similar effect as the narrator's. Nothing in the world is more rare, Solomon chimes in, than a "fort femme" who combines beauty with a firm disposition that is proof against "fols corages" (13471–81). But it is not Solomon's *mulier fortis* who turns out to offer the measure of virtue as the story progresses but rather his own (notorious) experience in love and that of other men, notably the story's premier hero, Achilles. Before the *mulier fortis*, Solomon is evoked twice in the text: once, prominently, in the prologue and again in a somewhat obscure reference to Jason's spurs. The connection to Jason may not be trivial, as it would point to the two heroes' *confrerie* in the medieval catalogue of men who were fools for love. The same allies them with Achilles, an idea made explicit in the only two other mentions of Solomon in the poem. In these later references Solomon is no guarantor of wisdom but rather proof that no degree of strength or wisdom, male or female, can resist the force of love. This perspective carries double credibility, being first represented by Achilles, who evokes Solomon's example alongside David's and Samson's in his own defence (18043–50), and subsequently espoused in almost identical form by the narrator commenting on Achilles's demise: "Who can keep his wits in the face of love? … Solomon fell under love's spell, and little good all his wisdom did him then. With all men, love does as it wills. Belief and faith, father and lord, even great lands and kingdoms have been abandoned more than once on its account. He who falls into the grip of love has no refuge in sense or reason."[90]

Solomon as "fool for love" belongs in a discourse on the power of women who brought great men to their fall—precisely the perspective Benoît has omitted from his tale of Helen's Troy. What Benoît offers instead is the parallel portrayal of a woman's (Briseida's) and a hero's (Achilles's) fate, placed severally under Solomon's aegis and confronting love in conflict with loyalty and reputation. Within this understanding Solomon might sooner have lamented his own moral inferiority to the *mulier fortis*. Once again, the shoe is on the other foot. How should Briseida resist, in all her female frailty and desolate state, where the greatest of heroes cannot? The question is pressed on the audience by the way Benoît interlaces the concluding episodes of Briseida's story with the progress of Achilles's *fole corage*. By the time Briseida finally succumbs to her new love the Greek hero's fate is likewise sealed; to keep his agreement with Hecuba and

90 Cf. lines 18044–50.

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Priam for Polixena's hand he has pled with the Greeks to abandon the siege and forbidden his Myrmidons to fight. Moreover, the parallel undoing of the two protagonists—the Greek hero smitten with the Trojan woman and the Trojan woman resisting the Greek hero—can only underline the reversal of the narrator's authority along with Solomon's: not only does love make putty of men's moral constitutions as easily as of women's, but the woman also resists, in fact, far longer than the man does. Achilles needs no three days, still less two years, to turn his back on the Greek cause; rather, like Diomedes, he is instantly and entirely the slave of love once he lays eyes on Polixena's beauty.

"Women may fall," Shakespeare would write, "when there's no strength in men!"[91] Such was also the argument presented on this point in the contemporary literature of women's instruction, where it serves to underline women's inability to deny the flesh—and thus her search for an inner integrity that shuns all outward display of virtue.[92] The woman, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, seeks to embrace her weakness with an inner humility that reveals a different truth through the abject exterior. The difficulty in assessing Briseida, the fascination she holds in a narrative world accustomed to clear moral distinctions, lies here: her outward behaviour and its results prove to be an inadequate measure of her inner integrity; and where her inner strengths prove unequal to the challenge of her social destiny, this fall exhibits neither insincerity nor opportunism nor even inner inconstancy; on the contrary, it is represented as an eruption, long restrained, of pure feeling and its genuine manifestation.[93] This accounts for the primary oddity of her story: that she must fall in love differently from medieval convention, not immediately but only gradually and over time, as only this allows her predicament to develop and the audience to feel its way in; only this allows her and the audience alike to see how Diomedes suffers for her sake, such that she finally suffers for his sake and the audience for hers. Briseida is to be judged not against her promise of fidelity to Troilus but rather against the contemporary judgment of Helen. Likewise, Benoît shows his audience, his story of Troy is meant to display a new woman, not she who is the downfall of men (such as both the narrator and Solomon might have wished), but she who manifests truth in the corrupt flesh of our humanity.

It is not solely the narrator's comparison between Briseida and the woman whose virtue redeemed the faults of others of her sex that aligns Briseida with Eve. The poet dresses her as such before she enters into the story of her inevitable fall. Briseida dons a rich gown for her departure from Troy, a kind of investiture of all that she once had and

91 *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 3. The verses chide Romeo for his despair over exile.

92 After citing David and Solomon among examples of men who fell to the desire for worldly praise, the *Speculum virginum* exclaims on the even greater danger to women as the weaker sex: "mirum non est, etiamsi humilitatis callem professus est, quod vero mulier, quo sexu nihil fragilius est, in alta levatur, monstro simile est" (*SV*, 6, p. 173).

93 Here I emphatically differ with (among others) Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 234, who speaks of Briseida's love as a "rational" and "fundamentally prudent decision." According to Briseida, it is rather the inability to deny her own heart that leads her to abandon her better instincts; see lines 20275–76, and 20281–82. Only retrospectively, and by means of reconciling herself to this failing, does she declare "Des jués partiz ai le meillor" (20298).

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will now lose: "She adorned her body and dressed it with the richest garments that she owned," are the words that open the lengthy description.[94] The main attraction is a gown that "shaped her body so well that there was nothing else in the world she could have worn that suited her better."[95] The material is magical in origin and comes from "upper India"; "neither the rose so red nor the lily so white would retain their brilliance held next to it."[96] Its ornament contains all creation, for "there is under the sun neither flora nor fauna of which the gown did not display portraits, forms, semblances and figures."[97] The fur lining displays all the colours of God's creation; neither balsam nor incense nor thyme emits a more delightful fragrance; the fur of its border is of beasts that live in the river of Paradise, and so on.[98] What Briseida wears before her fall is the sum of the gifts man received when placed in the garden of Eden, the *stola prima amissa*, the original and lost garment that must be regained by "donning the new man," Christ.[99] That she wears this robe of bodily perfection is another, but different, sign of her impending demise, because with it she assumes the body of humanity and its fate.

Benoît never defines *fine amor*, the term that describes her love for Troilus, but he does, through Briseida, define its opposite, *male amor*, which would seem to be his own (and thus also her) invention.[100] Briseida accuses Diomedes of *male amor* when he has Troilus's horse, seized in battle, brought to Briseida as a prize to further his unrelenting suit. To his messenger Briseida replies:

> "Di mei," fet ele, "ton seignor
> Que ci me porte male amor;
> Quar, se rien se fait bien de mei
> …
> Tant com vers mei iert depreianz,
> Nel deit laidir ne damagier:
> Co qu'est de mei aint e ait chier.
> Bien sai, s'il m'aime de neient,
> Que mieuz en sera a ma gent:
> A toz en deit porter manaie."
> (Constans, ed., 14326–35)

94 Cf. lines 13331–32; the description extends to line 13409.

95 "… un bliaut … / Qui fu riches e avenanz / E a son cors se bien estanz / Qu'el mont n'a rien, que le vestist. / Qui plus de ce li avenist" (13335–40).

96 Cf. lines 13341–46.

97 "Si n'est soz ciel beste ne flors / Dont l'on n'ie veie portretures, / Formes, senblances e figures" (13348–50).

98 Cf. lines 13369–71, 13392–93, 13396–400.

99 Speaking of the new garment of salvation, Peregrinus states in the *Speculum viriginum* (4, p. 111), "Fontis gratia ista contexitur, ut homo stola prima amissa in secundo Adam decentius adornetur."

100 On Benoît's idea of *fine amor*, see Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 234–36; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 106–31, esp. p. 120; and Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, p. 283.

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("Tell your lord for me," she said, "that with this he brings me false love; for if he cared a bit for me as he has professed often enough, he should spare me from offense and harm: That which is mine he should hold dear. Well I know, if he loves me at all, then he will show more kindness to my people and should have mercy upon them all.")

Male amor acts in pride and self-interest; true love, in Briseida's view, would put the needs and feelings of the beloved above even one's own desire. To seek one's own in love is not *fine amor*, but vanity. It is the inner intention that is all-determining and not the outward show of favour or service—or fidelity.

This idea is at the centre of Briseida's moral conundrum. From the moment she enters the Greek camp, she shows more concern for her own reputation and safety than she does for her earlier love; in other words, she resists Diomedes more out of personal shame (concern for appearances) than out of inner fidelity to Troilus.[101] Where she is able initially to upbraid Diomedes for such false intention in professed love, in their next, and final encounter, the roles are reversed. If Diomedes seems at first the opportunistic seducer—of which his gift of Troilus's horse is the emblem—he now becomes the epitome of self-deprecation and suffering in *fine amor*. The narrator accordingly underlines his sincerity even as he maligns Briseida for calculating manipulation.[102]

The scene begins when Diomedes comes upon Briseida still contemplating the horse, wishing she could return it to Troilus. The initial image of continuing fidelity is undercut, however, in that her earlier promise to see the horse returned "within four days" has given way to concern for social position and personal well-being: "the lady does not dare, for fear of shame and displeasure; gladly she would have returned it, but she might have been the worse off for it and brought the wrath of the Greeks upon her."[103] Thus the apparent image of her constancy—her attention fixed on Troilus's horse—is in fact one of the opposite. If Diomedes sent the horse out of "false love," she evinces the same towards Troilus by retaining it.

The seemingly inscrutable reversal of Briseida's affections in this second scene comes about as a result of her susceptibility to "praise." Concern for appearances and others' perceptions makes her persist in feigned fidelity rather than faith of heart, while at the same time her delight over Diomedes's blandishments makes her for the first time a wilful coquette.[104] By contrast, when Diomedes, oblivious to her slights to his honour, accepts Troilus's horse for safekeeping, he not only accepts a rebuff of his former pride, but also agrees to care for the steed of his enemy because it is dear to his beloved (15136–40). Briseida's change of heart, or sleeve (which is all we know for sure), marks her acknowledgement of this change even as it marks her own slide into

101 See lines 13649–62; and Nolan, *Roman Antique*, p. 112; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 64–68, shows how the concern for reputation links the fates of Briseida, Helen, and Polixena.

102 See lines 15019–24, 15033–45, 15063–78.

103 "Se la danzele l'osast faire, / Que n'en crensist honte e contraire, / Voluntiers li eüst tramis, / Mes tost l'en peüst estre pis, / Car trop en fust en l'ost haïe" (15087–91).

104 That Briseida has a reputation to protect with the Greeks we learned earlier, when her entry into the camp finds her showered with praise: "Molt fu la danzele esgardee, / Molt l'unt entr'elz Grezeis loee: / "Molt est bele" ce dient tuit" (13815–17).

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manipulative self-interest in pride over her new conquest. The narrator's judgment of her, however, shifts at the scene's end in the opposite direction, from the vindictive to the ambivalent: "Ja est tochee de la veine / Dont les autres font les forfeiz, / Qui sovent sunt diz e retreiz" (Now she is tainted with the trait that has led to so many other tales of transgression told and retold) (15180–82). Victim as well as perpetrator, Briseida's failing is now not distinctly female, but sadly all too common human history. Nothing less and nothing more is the judgment demonstrated by the story as a whole—manifest with particular relevance to Briseida through favourable contrast with her traitorous father (whose manoeuvrings got her into this mess), and again by comparison with the behaviour of Achilles in his love for Polixena.[105]

Briseida's new position, while certainly duplicitous, is not yet that of the "fallen" woman—she still refuses to surrender her love to Diomedes, whether in public acknowledgement or private fulfilment. It is only after another lengthy interlude—with seven more battles fought, separated by truces lasting from one month to a full year—that the decisive point is reached. But here we find no further trace of the triumphant coquette. Instead, fear for her new suitor's life coupled with compassion for his suffering bring Briseida to Diomedes's pitiable state; she is no more the master of her affections than the "perilous wound" he has suffered in battle is within her control to heal. Her fall thus takes place not as a continuation of self-interested calculation (such would at this point dictate loyalty to the victorious Troilus), but rather as an eruption of true sentiment.[106] Hers is the loving heart that cannot help but speak: "Mes ne puet pas son cuer covrir, / Que plaint e lermes e sospir / N'isent de le a neisun fuer" (She can no longer hide her heart's desire and prevent her laments, tears and sighs from breaking forth) (20205–7). As a result, and very like Landri's bride, she suffers as intensely for shame and compassion as she does for a love whose sincerity will not be silenced. Moreover, this shame is no longer that of revealing her infidelity to others. This concern she tosses to the winds. It is rather remorse over a double unworthiness:[107] she has not been worthy of the sufferings of Diomedes on her account, but in her compassion for these she becomes unworthy of all that she earlier held dear. It is this dilemma and the self-effacement it demands that manifests her own *fine amor*: "From this moment she loves him," the narrator affirms, "From now on all can see that she has turned entirely to him her love, her heart and her thoughts."[108] No sooner is this said than the subject turns to her intense remorse: "E si

105 Tellingly, Achilles makes a similar comment on his own fate (lines 20812–13). With reference to Calchas, see lines 13862–66 and 13721–75.

106 Briseida's story can only be evaluated together with the relevant events of the warfare with which it is interlaced. In the preceding two battles, Troilus's fame in war reaches its apogee; in addition to Diomedes, he has also wounded the Greek commander Agamemnon.

107 The poet underlines her expression of grief and compassion over Diomedes's wound as an explicit reversal of concern for "reparlance" (others' opinions) (line 20214) and for the maintenance of appearances to which Calchas—the arch-traitor—would hold her by means of "reproaches, threats and interdictions" (cf. lines 20222–25).

108 "Des or l'aime, des or l'en tient, / … / Des or puet hom aperceveir / Que vers lui a tot atorné / S'amor, son cuer e son pensé" (20217, 20226–28).

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siet bien certeinement / Qu'ele mesfeit trop laidement" (And she knows only too well that she is committing a most repugnant fault) (20229–30).

Is she a picture now of self-serving infidelity or of suffering for inner integrity? Briseida's final monologue is no expression of new-found love, but rather a searing self-indictment, full of sadness and remorse—including the recognition that her new love will never be free of suffering over the circumstances that gave it birth (20308–17). Most of all, however, it operates as the manifest reversal of all that the narrator first promised, because in it the self-recognition earlier denied all women but one—her "through whom the failings of other women are again made good"[109]—is most eloquently attested to by her antipode, the woman who is the bane of her sex. Thus Briseida speaks as Eve after the Fall:

> Harront mei, et grant dreit avront,
> Les dames qui a Troie sunt:
> Honte i ai feit as damaiseles,
> Trop leide, e as riches puceles.
> Ma tricherie e mon mesfet
> Lur sera mes toz jors retret.
> Peser m'en deit, e si fet el.
> Trop ai lo cuer muable e fel.
> (20257–64)
>
> (They will all hate me, and well they should, the ladies of Troy: I have disgraced the ladies in the worst way, and the noble maidens as well, for my treachery and my misdeed will be held against them forever. This cannot help but burden my soul, and so it does. I own a heart too fickle and mean.)

In short, her constancy fails, but only under sore and desperate trial; she will suffer without end from the pangs of her conscience, and in recognition of her own failings she can be faulted only for lack of leniency. If she cannot be vindicated, she can certainly be pitied—that is, the audience recognizes and feels her pain. But more than this, if she "falls," she finally does so out of an experience of suffering for another as he has suffered for her. Not as stated, but rather as experienced, Briseida's story turns the tale of woman's weakness into one of an adulterated but no less authentic inner truth, that of knowing another's pain as one's own—with the *additional* pain of remorse over personal unworthiness. Briseida's experience transforms Helen's story into the story of Eve, but this is Eve as we met her in Landri's *romans*: Eve as the *sponsa derelicta* in search of regaining the kiss of redemption, Eve as the loving heart all but stifled for shame, Eve as the "reading bride" who seeks to join Mary at the cross. For the audience as Benoît evoked it, "reading Helen" has become an exercise in self-recognition, an exercise in compassion in which the suffering of the other acts as the mirror of weakness in the self.

The conclusions of Helen's and Polixena's stories reiterate and magnify the reversals in reading woman that Briseida's story first performs. Helen grieving over Paris's body

109 See lines 13463–64 and p. 206, above.

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is the image of inconsolable self-incrimination and remorse, indeed, "Her grief surpasses all other sorrows, no one ever knew greater distress." So much for the idea of the woman who "knows not what it is to suffer," or never assumes blame: "Oh may the earth no longer bear my weight, nor ever again a woman cause such terrible grief as have I!" Helen cries, and in this remorse she feels herself united for life, and death, with her dead husband:[110]

Ja sui je vostre douce amie,
Cele qui por vos se forsene,
Qui riens ne conforte n'asene,
Cele qui por vos sent la mort,
Cele qui ainc ne vos fist tort,
Ne qui ainc jor de votre vie
Ne pensa vers vos vilenie,
Cele qui ne desirre rien,
N'autre confort ne autre bien,
Ne mes m'ame o la vostre seit.'
(22992–3001)

(Always I will remain your sweet beloved, she who mourns you without measure, whom none and nothing can console, she who suffers death in your place, she who never once wronged you nor ever once in your life wished you harm, she who desires nothing, no other consolation or boon, than for my spirit to be united with yours.)

Helen the whore has become the image of fidelity even beyond death, the faithful wife who magnifies Briseida's suffering even as she evinces a higher level of personal integrity in the chastity and penance of the widow. The audience's intended response is amply displayed: Priam and what is left of the royal family now both love and honour her as never before, and as for the people of Troy, "Ne la poeit riens esgarder, / Hom ne femme, jounes ne vielz, / Qu'el ne feïst plorer des ielz" (No one could look upon her, man or woman, young or old, without tears coming to their eyes) (23026–28).

This final verdict on Helen finds its equivalent in the response to Polixena, whose statue fixed at the top of Achilles's tomb "no one ever looked upon … without believing that *she* wept." In Polixena the woman who recognizes her own guilt is displaced by the image of a woman who suffers for the guilt of all—just as her commemorative likeness is admired equally by Trojans and Greeks, from inside or outside the city walls.[111] This likeness as *virgo dolorosa* oddly forecloses on her fate, which is only sealed more than 4,000 lines later.[112] Thus Benoît postpones the final aria until after Troy's fall. Likewise,

110 Cf. lines 22916–29. Helen's monologue extends from line 22920 to 23011, followed by the narrator's comments (lines 23012–28) and a second scene in which Paris is laid to rest and others' sympathy and admiration for Helen is emphasized (lines 23073–88).

111 See note 85, above.

112 Polixena's monologue, the first and last time she speaks, occurs at lines 26475–539; Achilles's tomb is described at lines 22405–91. In the interim we learn only that Eneas absconds with Polixena at Hecuba's request during the sacking of Troy (lines 26190–94).

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the praise due the widow gives way to that merited by the virgin martyr, as Polixena's morbid defiance before her Greek executioners shows:

> Ne refus pas ma destinee
> O ma virginité morrai.
> Biau m'est, quant jo ne maumetrai
> La hautece de ma valor.
> Ne dei aveir ja mais amor
> O rien vivant: Ja Deus nel doint!
> (26510–15)

(I do not refuse my destiny and will die with my virginity. Happy I am that the nobility of my birth will suffer no corruption. God grant that I never again love any living man!)

As she walks to her death, Polixena's beauty recalls Mary's symbols of the lily and the rose. The same were evoked in the beauty of Briseida's robe, and Polixena's beauty similarly comprises all of Nature's perfection.[113] Polixena's virginity is the mark of her perfect sacrifice: though she could never truly love, she would willingly have been exchanged for peace;[114] had she changed sides it would have been not treason but her people's salvation. But she is not a mere allegory of Mary nor only a sign of Mary's coming. Polixena is slaughtered on the altar of human vanity, on the ambitions and ideals of a world inveterately committed to the pursuit of honour and revenge, a world that has not yet found its saviour—whose coming her golden likeness awaits in sorrow that will last "to the end of time." Her anguish and her suffering belong to all, and her image elevated to the heavens is the elevation of human pain to a level of recognition in which it will be worthy of divinity's descent into female flesh—the blackened body that is all that remains of Briseida's once splendid gown.

In her own defence, Briseida's final reflections recall her desolate state:

> E n'eüst pas ensi esté
> Se encor fusse en la cité:
> Ja jor mis cuers ne porpensast
> Qu'il tressaillist ne qu'il chanjast;
> Mes ci esteie sans conseil
> E sans ami e sans feeil;
> Si m'ot mestier tiel entendance
> Qui m'ostast d'ire e de pesance.
> (20283–90)

(And all this would not have been if I were still within the city walls: Never once did my heart then conceive that it could waver or change; But here I found myself without counsel, without even a friend to confide in; I had great need of some confidence that might relieve my pain and suffering.)

---

113 "Pitié en ont, n'est pas merveille / Le lis e la rose vermeille / Sunt envers li descoloré; Quant que ot Nature de beauté / Mist ele en li par grant leisir" (26449–53).

114 See Constans, ed. lines 21227–33.

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Briseida, too, is a worldly bride bereaved. Without hope of regaining her beloved Troy or Troilus, she must remain true to memory in a life of exile among enemies. Such was no less the language of Christ's virgins; the *Life of Christina of Markyate* describes her position no differently—although she struggles bitterly to escape betrothal to a second spouse, where in others' eyes she has none. Benoît's *romans* presents the pagan history of Troy through the multifaceted refraction of the *sponsa derelicta*, seen once through this mutable fate of the "married woman," the woman who knows worldly love; next through the widow, Helen, and finally through the virgin martyr, Polixena. In the resulting succession of women's reflections on their place in the destructive march of history, the *romans* presents the progress of this female consciousness on the way to a Christian recognition of self, a self that acknowledges and embraces its bodily weakness—its femaleness—as the sole source of its redemption.

With his *Roman de Troie*, Benoît, like Landri of Waben or the author of the *Eructavit*, offers his courtly audience the translation, in both the spatial and the linguistic sense, of a reading experience from the world of Latin learning to that of the layman's vernacular stage. "Le voudrai si en romanz metre / Que cil qui n'entendront la letre / Se puissent deduire el romanz" (I would like to put it into *romans* so that those who are not lettered may take delight in the *romans*) (37–39). Once again the term *romans* as clearly signals the mediation of knowledge for a new group of "readers" as it mediates in itself as a new literary form, what we would call a *genre*. This reformation of a literary experience promises as well a new or different truth. For although the *estoire* is "rich and great, telling of great acts and great feats" and "knowledge of how Troy was lost has been drawn from many sources; the truth has scarce been heard" (40–44); *la vertez est poi oïe*. What is at stake in this claim to truth is not entirely or even truly identified with the dismissal of Homer for Dares (and later, Dictys); rather, Benoît initially piggy-backs on the idea of the eyewitness as guarantor of factual truth in history to construct something quite different, a truth not of facts, but rather of experience, and a witnessing that is not dependent on the chronological proximity to events, but rather on restoration to the present of a true experience. Benoît's real eyewitnesses are, finally, the contemporary, present members of his audience, who witness the story in the immediacy of the vernacular performance and recognize truth by entering into the experience of characters who are most like themselves.

With his implicit exoneration of Helena-Briseida and the romance's multiplication of brides raped and bereft, Benoît orchestrates a reorientation of audience response away from a peremptory condemnation of woman as the root of all ills and towards an identification with women's inner struggle for integrity and fidelity in a world that cannot sustain "her" weakness. If Helen can be seen as a Christian widow, then only because Briseida's story has turned hers inside-out, such that it is judged not by her apparent actions or their consequences but by the testimony to inner integrity given by her final monologue. Briseida's story brings the heroically over-burdened tales of Medea, Helen or Polixena down to a level where the audience is forced to judge for themselves and of themselves; neither the narrator nor even a representative biblical authority prove to be of any help. Only the implicit recognition of a different, perfected image of woman evokes the truly Christian dimension of this task—and at the same time shows the

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audience itself in Helen's mirror. This *fictional* amplification of historical "truth," the fusion of "being there" with "being her," allows Benoît to transform the tale of tales from pagan antiquity into a kind of prefiguration of sacred scripture. By requiring his audience to descend into woman's failing, to know the body's fall from the inside rather than judging from without, Benoît squeezes the Christian truth out of the pagan past and, in so doing, offers a key to the experience of invented narrative as revelatory of sacred truth. The discovery must have captivated contemporaries and later generations alike, as is amply witnessed by Briseida/Cressida's extraordinary literary career.

Benoît's use of the Eve–Mary paradigm to orchestrate identity between his audience's experience and Briseida's shows us the point at which "reading as Mary did" becomes independent of the exegesis of scriptural texts to manifest itself entirely as truth in the body, truth found in narratives of the layman's *historia*. The point of such narratives is not to discover or uncover some symbolic arch-referent to which they defer for their meaning, but rather to offer an experience in which we rediscover our own weakness, our corporeality, its limits and its possibilities, its origins in Eve and its future in Mary; in which we discover ourselves in the other, then; "I am you" as also union with that which is most desired, the Word of God. This is the beginning, truly, of "the problem of the "woman reader" in romance. But "the problem" does not begin with romance or with courtly narrative nor can it be grasped through study that subscribes to genre distinctions indebted to our own literary experience. It signals a convergence of sacred and secular "reading" around a model of the experience of truth as presence that derived its legitimacy from the position of the woman as embodied bride. By identifying the reception of text with this identification between audience and bride, the narrator of vernacular poetry communicates that his performance of the text is a present manifestation of the life of the bride, an assimilation of truth to personal experience that mirrors Mary's conception of the Word.

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Chapter 7

A NEW POETICS FOR *ÂVENTIURE*: THE EXPOSITION OF WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH'S *PARZIVAL*

> Swelhem wîbe volget kiusche mite,
> der lobes kemphe wil ich sîn:
> mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn.
> (Where a woman keeps company with chaste modesty I'll be the fighting champion of her praise; her grief is my heart's sorrow.)
>
> (*Parzival*, lines 115,2–4)

THERE ARE FEW more conspicuous junctures in medieval romance narrative than the so-called "Apology" between books 2 and 3 of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.[1] The excursus comes at the audience with the force and belligerence of a jousting charger. It is sandwiched between narrative events of no less impact, events that form a radical transformation in the life of Parzival's mother, Herzeloyde. In the space of this transition (ca. 270 verses), the queen of three lands and wife of the flower of chivalry is widowed, becomes a mother, and then abandons both her crowns and her courtly existence. She is the figure who—quite "literally," as we say, but the fact is emphatically physical, a pregnancy of bodily meaning—carries the narrative and its hero from book 2 to book 3, from the old story to the new, as she brings them from her womb into the world. *Both* are "flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone."[2]

The three verses cited above form the midpoint of the narratorial excursus; they are the pivotal point of a renewal that was first announced at the conclusion of the poem's prologue:[3]

> ein mære wil i'u niuwen,
> daz seit von grôzen triuwen.
> (4,9–10)

(I will renew a tale for you that tells of great faith and devotion.)

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1 The division of the text into sixteen books reflects manuscript evidence and cannot be attributed to the author with any certainty. The division between books 2 and 3 is, however, clearly authorial. See Schirok, "Einführung," pp. 84–87. The paradoxical use of the term "book" for these units—where the author/narrator explicitly forbids the same term—has unfortunately not been questioned in the scholarship and I retain it despite misgivings. The scholarship on *Parzival* is vast, most especially on the passages under consideration in this chapter. I cite below only the most recent or significant contributions on most points. For a general introduction and overview, see Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. Scholarship on the relationship between the Gahmuret and Parzival narratives is reviewed in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 1:394–407.

2 See p. 185 note 143, above.

3 Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht," 9–73. I do not subscribe, however, to a "typological" understanding of the relationship between the two stories; that is, Gahmuret's story is not an "Old Testament" to the "New" revealed in Parzival's (cf. Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 1:396–402).

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With these words, an unnamed poet embarks on the unspecified tale of an unnamed protagonist, for this latter is, in a curious turn of phrase, "as yet narratively unborn," *mæreshalp noch ungeborn* (4,25). Neither the tale's hero nor, in some sense, the tale itself yet exist; the introduction of either awaits the conjunction of *niuwen* and *triuwen*, a renewal through suffering in love and loving devotion that is the key to Wolfram's narrative poetics and is first realized in the description of Herzeloyde at the conclusion of book 2, where we learn:

> hiest der âventiure wurf gespilt,
> und ir begin ist gezilt:
> wand er ist alrêrst geborn,
> dem diz mære wart erkorn.
> (112,9–12)

(Here at last *âventiure* has cast her dice and her beginning has its direction, for only now has he been born for whom this tale was destined.)

This image of woman is then the basis of the narrator's proud claim, Swer nu wîben sprichet baz, deiswâr daz lâz ich âne haz" (Should anyone now give a better account of women, truly, I'd be the last to object) (114,5–6); her transformation is the moment that enables this narrator to emerge and lay claim to his tale, no less than, by giving birth to its hero, she enables the tale to begin.[4] The hiatus that follows, the passage so long misunderstood as an "apology," should rather be seen as the work's second prologue: it is the delayed and indispensable continuation of the first. It is likewise a poetic credo of a sort that had never before been heard.[5]

The narrator's part in this transition is staged as if also a poet's conversion from the flattery of courtly love lyric to chivalric narrative, from a previous "misreading" of woman to a new song in her true praise; that is, this moment is a kind of narrator's metanoia. "Ich … Wolfram von Eschenbach" (114,12)—who, no less a character in this performance than any of the others, introduces himself for the first time here—has rolled three more "births" into the one: the woman, the story and its narrator are all born anew—born, as was all humanity, of a woman.

These observations notwithstanding, the portrayal of Herzeloyde's transformation is most notable not for the account of Parzival's birth but rather for the surprising images which precede and follow that event. The first sees her acknowledge her husband's death and the child's coming in an auto-lactation; that is (in her words) she "baptizes" herself into a widowed maternity by pressing milk from her own breasts (110,22–111,12). In the second she describes herself as if a *Madonna lactans*, nursing her son as Mary nursed Christ (113,17–26), while the narrator's remarks have been seen to evoke a pietà, saying she feels as if by nursing her son she also holds her dead husband to her breast (113,13–14, 113,27–114,3).[6] The entire crescendo is rhetorically orchestrated to

4 Kuhn, "Wolframs Frauenlob," 200–202. On the significance of Herzeloyde's name, see below, note 36.

5 Curschmann, "Erzähler," 25; see also Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:365.

6 I am suggesting only that the descriptions spring from the same visual ideas—and not from examples in visual art. The earliest examples of the *Madonna lactans* date from the late twelfth

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fix this visual moment in memory, absorbing the rush of events into an iconic stasis that extends over thirty verses (113,5–114,4).[7] With this eruption of the sacred into the text and Wolfram's quasi-iconographic invention of grieving lactation, a *Lactans dolorosa*, something is achieved that constitutes the essence of his narrative project and that only the narrative arc from the first prologue to this transition could accomplish, something that brings forward the authentic voice of a new tale—one that is to be seen and heard, in particular by women, so long as they recognize that it will tolerate "no help from books" (cf. 115,8–10, 21–30). Herzeloyde's transformation is the microcosm of a much larger web of meaning; a woman is once again the keystone of an intricate poetic architecture in which the myriad forms of a narrative world, the world of *âventiure*, combine and collude to shape an experience of Christian truth.[8]

As Alois Wolf puts it, "Herzeloyde *is* the exposition of Wolfram's *Parzival*."[9] Moreover, with the insistent coalescence of divine and human, sacred history and human history that confronts us in her transformation, "Wolfram had arrived at an art of integrating the Bible into the earthly world of romance narrative that was entirely new."[10] For Karl Bertau, the concluding image of Herzeloyde marks an "epochal" divide, "heralds a new human authenticity," and shows Wolfram "lending voice to the discoveries in human sensibility of his time."[11] Others have made similar statements, but dissenting opinions and even disapproval have been no less common.[12] Still more controversy surrounds the exposition that Herzeloyde so iconically comprises, the argument that must begin in the first prologue and find its at least preliminary conclusion here. The integral interpretation of this exposition remains the unsolvable puzzle confronting our understanding of Wolfram's Grail romance.

The preceding chapters have put key pieces of this puzzle into place. The woman who holds both a dead beloved and a baby to her breast is, in the reading of Rupert of Deutz, Mary's description of herself as the fulfilment of Canticles 1:12 ("A bundle of myrrh is my beloved is to me; he shall abide between my breasts"), as the woman who became *prophetissa* when she knew present joy and future suffering all in one loving embrace. Wolfram's Herzeloyde is very much a narrative re-embodiment of Rupert's Mary, of Mary's knowing as fulfilled in "our" lives. Wolfram's text recalls Rupert's in myriad ways, but one is evident already in that Herzeloyde's awakening into wisdom, as it might be called, prompts her narrator's emergence into his own text. But Wolfram's "bride" is (unlike Landri's) neither female ideal nor reading abstraction; like Briseida, she is presented as a woman of flesh and blood "who was much loved and loved as much," whose headstrong character and moral duplicity are as undeniable as they are

century; those of the pietà are more than a century later. See Bertau, "Regina Lactans," pp. 259–85; further literature in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:358–59.

7 Wenzel, "Herzeloyde und Sigune," p. 221.

8 See esp. Schröder, *Soltane-Erzählung*; and Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht."

9 Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht," 13.

10 Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht," 15–16.

11 Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 284–85.

12 An overview is found in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:333–34; also Heckel, "Interpretation der Herzeloyde," pp. 35–52.

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inscrutable. Thus, she too serves to force the issue of a woman's worthiness in suffering and love to the centre of audience attention, prompting a narrator's intervention in which the nature of woman and the proper reception of the tale—the discovery of meaning and truth, no less—are all at stake. The resemblance is by no means fortuitous or incidental, but neither need it point to textual dependency. Herzeloyde is like Briseida because each in her turn is a cousin to Landri's fallen bride, the *sponsa derelicta*; Herzeloyde demonstrates how a woman's suffering for love can elevate human experience and human weakness to the point where the audience knows what Mary knew. Wolfram's *Lactans dolorosa* is a logical extension into vernacular narrative of the way Mary's union with Christ as one flesh in the conception was reiterated and revealed anew through her suffering at the cross.

The point of this demonstration is, appropriately, a regeneration of narrative, for in it, through it, courtly vernacular narrative is relocated within a hermeneutics of truth that sees suffering for or with others as a way of embracing and revealing Christ's love of humanity in our lives. Benoît de Sainte-Maure used this idea to shape the audience's discovery of Christian truth through the fates of his own bereaved brides. The last chapters of this book finally reveal why the portrayal of women's suffering, and in particular women's grief, takes such prominent place in new vernacular narrative and why it is portrayed in such extremity. When Herzeloyde baptizes herself into life as widow, she does no less for the project of vernacular narrative, which Wolfram thereby formally initiates as an exercise in reading women's suffering. This was, however, not his invention, nor did he seek to present it as such. In a later excursus on Sigune, Herzeloyde's niece and personal extension into Parzival's story, he flags Laudine, the widowed bride of Chrétien's *Yvain*, as the romance touchstone of a widow's worth. Neither the relationship between this gesture and Wolfram's poetic exposition nor the relationship of either to Chrétien's romance has as yet been explored. These relationships will be at the centre of attention in my last chapter, as they are of capital significance for the understanding of either author's idea of romance as a mediation of truth.

If the relationship between narrator and Lady at the crucial juncture of Wolfram's exposition recalls the readers of reading brides, his narratorial persona is not therefore a "young woman."[13] On this stage it is emphatically the *miles*, the warrior in his specifically courtly guise as knight servitor, who claims the legitimate mediation of truth and the true praise of woman. Moreover, unlike the purveyors of *romans* we have thus far considered, "ich Wolfram von Eschenbach" does not pose as a cleric mediating reading for a lay audience; unlike his predecessors in German and French romance, neither does he claim qualification through a cleric's learning. The polemical and notably unapologetic stance of his narrating knight has a clear forebear, nonetheless, in the portrayal of David as an oral performer in the *Eructavit.* Translated to the stage of *âventiure*, this stance proclaims the arrival of a layman's literature that is to be seen and heard in defiant rejection of clerical models of learning and knowing. The voice that David claimed as

13 In a riddle on the lady's identity in the epilogue to book 6, the narrator appears to deny this very possibility: "Only from the mouth of one born by different feet than those wagging in my stirrups" will he assume the authority to continue his tale; cf. 337,27–30.

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authority for this privilege was none other than that of the Spirit in Mary's ear. Once we have traced the development of Wolfram's poetic positioning from its beginning back to this point, we will see that his own claim is no less ambitious. The objective is to establish an autonomous layman's reading experience with Mary's bodily gnosis not only as its authority but also and above all as a generative moment that gives birth to an all-inclusive narrative universe.

Already in its own time Wolfram's poem must have been seen as a narrative that exceeded all bounds, conformed to no model, and, in many ways, subsumed all others. As the speaker in the first prologue puts it: "You show me three such fellows as I, each of them no less capable a story-teller, and they would still need a wild imagination to manage the tale that I'm about to tell you on my own. It would keep them busy indeed!" (cf. 4,2–8). Wolfram's 24,000-verse Grail romance, completed by ca. 1210, is the romance of romances; it subsumes the Arthurian and the "historical" worlds, the Christian and the pagan, Occident and Orient, the antique, the heroic and the burlesque. Beyond its dependency on Chrétien's unfinished *Perceval* and the knowledge displayed of his other romances,[14] its explicitly cited literary horizons include Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneit*, Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* and *Iwein*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Spruchdichtung* of Walther von der Vogelweide, and the *Minnesang*. Implicit reference can be found to a number of other works in the vernacular tradition,[15] and the narrator delights in displaying medical, astronomical, and other areas of "scientific" knowledge.[16] Overarching this panoply is the search for the Grail, the ultimate layman's entry into communion with the divine. Wolfram's *Parzival* is more than anything else a romance of reading, that is, of the nature, limits and possibilities of knowing.[17] Its attempt to comprise and inscribe a layman's literature is akin in spirit and scope to the achievements of the counts of Guines as Lambert recorded them, but its aim is still more ambitious: if they had vulgar tales recorded and placed in a library alongside the church fathers, Wolfram is out to make a layman's library of romance in itself. And all of this, it turns out, is subsumed under the question of who speaks best for, of, or to, women.

Wolfram communicates with his audience primarily through a battery of metaphors that are grounded in a contemporary debate over knowledge, its legitimate apprehension and adequate transmission, which this book has sought throughout to discover

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14 Nellmann, "Wolframs Bildung," argues plausibly that in composing *Parzival* Wolfram most likely used a compilation of Old French romances such as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1450, which begins with Benoît's *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas* and inserts Chrétien's romances into Wace's *Roman de Brut*. Curschmann, "Erzähler," 11–32, suggests he was no less familiar with the Old French continuations to *Perceval* that were available before 1200.

15 Kern, "Iwein liest Laudine," pp. 399–400, sees Wolfram establishing a literary canon together with his fictional audience. See also Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 171–76; and Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, pp. 10–12 and 207–9.

16 In addition to the literature in Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, p. 7, see Kästner and Schirok, "Bücher," pp. 61–152; esp. 114–17.

17 Later scholarship has emphasized themes of perception and recognition, for example, Greenfield, ed., *Wahrnehmung im Parzival*; Bumke, *Blutstropfen*; and Green, *Art of Recognition*.

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anew. Without an awareness of the interrelated significance of the woman, the incapacity of the unlearned, seeing and hearing, performance and reading, inner truth and bodily cover—to name a now familiar few—in this debate, the would-be interpreter is adrift in a sea of indeterminate signs. The prologue itself has been pronounced irretrievably removed from our understanding, if not by reason of historical and cultural distance, then by reason of wilful obscurantism that is the author's own.[18]

Wolfram's argument for the presentation of his narrative puts forward the emancipated layman's literature as if superimposed on a map of the argument justifying woman's alternative reading. As such it becomes a poetological history of the genre and the manifesto of new narrative art. Such a *tour de force* is inconceivable without an audience that was both capable of anticipating the general thrust of the argument and familiar with its signal terms. In a new approach to the puzzle presented by the first prologue, I illuminated the basis of this communication by pitting Wolfram's argument against that of his clerical adversaries, as represented by Thomasin of Zirclaria.[19] The juxtaposition leaves no doubt over what was at stake in either author's understanding: the legitimate authority over the layman's reading path to salvation. Moreover, their confrontation shows that each was acutely aware of the need to displace the other's claim to the stage. *Âventiure*, whether for its champion, Wolfram, or its detractor, Thomasin, is no merely attractive new literary entertainment, still less is it an experiment in an as yet unarticulated poetics of literary fiction.[20] As Thomasin sees it, *âventiure* pretends to a capacity and an authority that are properly his own, those of the clerical instructor in mores and morality, and has all but succeeded in convincing his German-speaking audience to accept its claim. In this confrontation, then, we overhear something that scholarship has otherwise sought in vain: an account of the contours, the status, and the intellectual place of romance narrative within the lettered culture and larger developments of its time, expressed in terms appropriate to the courtly audience of German vernacular literature.

My larger concern, both in this chapter and in my earlier article, is to show how Wolfram's prologue presents a lucid and tightly structured progression through familiar ideas of the mediation of knowledge to in fact orchestrate an initiation of both audience and narrative into the female poetics of body and truth. This project can now be completed, and once again, Thomasin reliably traces—by way of rejecting them—a

18 "Der Prolog gehört zu den dunkelsten und schwierigsten Textpartien der Dichtung." This was Joachim Bumke's appraisal in the seventh edition (1997) of Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*; it remains unchanged in the latest edition (2004), with an addition to contradict directly the claims of the most recent interpretations: "Der Prolog enthält kein zusammenhängendes poetologisches Programm. Er enthält eine Reihe von Aussagen, von denen nicht sicher ist, ob sie sich auf die eigene Dichtung beziehen," (8th ed., pp. 40, 204). See also Ohlenroth, "Wolframs Widerpart," 28. I consider the most fundamental and troublesome issues to be resolved in Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," and rely on these insights here.

19 Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog."

20 For Haug and those who followed in the fictionality school, the prologue is the manifesto of the new fictional narrative: see *LDMA*, pp. 155–78; and Haug, "Konzept," 211–29.

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startlingly complete outline of the woman-as-reader and the arguments that serve the new poetics of body and narrative.[21]

Reading Women False and True: The Cleric's Instruction

Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* is a work of nearly 15,000 verses, completed, as he tells us, in 1216 by a prelate from today's Friulia for an audience of the German-speaking nobility. He is himself "the guest from *Romania*" who seeks, with his instruction in courtly mores and the ways of the world, a place in their "house."[22] The guest entreats the "German lands" to receive him as a *hûsvrouwe* (lady of the house) should one "who lovingly serves your honour."[23] This feminization of the German audience goes hand in hand with its identity, especially in the early stages of the work, as *diu kint*, "the children." In Thomasin's usage this term is best understood simply as those in need of instruction, regardless of age; it is the counterpart to *wîse liute*, or "wise folk," who dispense the same and among whom Thomasin counts himself (61–62). This treatment of the audience as at once "lady" and the immature is only the first indication of Thomasin's attempt to assume native dress, the operative arguments for an alternative layman's *lectio*.[24] As he states with reference to his decision to write solely in German, "der zühte lêre gewant sol gar / von sime gebote sin einvar" (the objective of moral instruction and its medium should be of one colour) (37–38). His prologue features this idea most particularly in relation to his use of German, but it is no less evident in the representation of delivery through performance and even extends to an accompanying cycle of pictures that visualize his moral instruction on the page.[25]

The guest is thus at pains to insert himself on a foreign stage, which he acknowledges in the same breath as the stage of Arthurian romance. Begging indulgence for his possibly awkward German verse, he apostrophizes the audience as if they embodied its protagonists:

> ich heiz Thomasîn von Zirclaria:
> boeser luite spote ist mir unmære.
> hân ich Gâweins hulde wol,
> von reht mîn Key spotten sol.
> (71–78)

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21 In Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," the argument was limited to the prologue's first half, the so-called "men's prologue"; similarly, I did not consider Thomasin's presentation of Helen as "bad reading," which follows below.

22 Cf. lines 55–95. Thomasin's adjective *welsch* designated the entire romance-language area, or *Romania*, as opposed to the German territories; he thus makes no distinction between his place as *welscher gast* and that of the new literature adapted from Old French, or rather intentionally allows the two to seem identical.

23 See below, note 26, for the original text and the full passage. The *hûsvrouwe* is apostrophized again at the prologue's end, line 127.

24 See Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 364–65; and Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 55–56.

25 Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 361–63, 365–68.

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(My name is Thomasin von Zirclaria. The scorn of scoundrels is no matter to me: if I'm in Gawain's good graces, then Kay's mockery is only to be expected.)

His remarks to the "lady of the house" then likewise acknowledge his predecessors in mediation from French to German: "You have often enjoyed hearing what is taken from *romans* (*welsch*), as adapted for you by German people. And so you shall hear today whether a man from Romania can perhaps treat in German such things as will please you."[26] Thomasin's ambition is thereby clearly announced and his later showdown with *âventiure* programmed in advance. The feigned indulgence of the opening is all part of the pose; this moral instructor is out to displace a literature that he considers—when he speaks candidly—little better than a highway to Hell. The "pretty dress" of the key passage in fact says as much, although the attack is cloaked in false assurances:

die *âventiure* sint gekleit
dicke mit lüge harte schône:
diu lüge ist ir gezierde krône.
ich schilt die *âventiure* niht,
swie uns ze liegen geschiht
von der *âventiure* rât,
wan si bezeichenunge hât
der zuht unde der wârheit:
daz wâr man mit lüge kleit.
(1118–26)

(These tales of *âventiure* are richly clad in a most beautiful covering of lies: deceit, indeed, is their crowning glory. Far be it from me to scold such tales—what matter that their counsel land us in a liar's bed?—for they do contain signs at least of virtue and truth: the truth is simply clothed in lies.)[27]

Thomasin's text offers one of only a very few contemporary witnesses to the reception of new vernacular narrative that have come down to us; as a discussion of *âventiure* per se, his is the only one we possess, whether from France or Germany. As a result, these lines (and the rest of the excursus, lines 1079–162) have found much scholarly discussion, and I have argued elsewhere that they at best consign *âventiure* to an understanding of narrative, body, and truth that is diametrically opposed to what this book has thus far discovered.[28] Thomasin goes on to discuss *âventiure* as the medieval equivalent of the comic book (of which his own illustrative programme is oddly reminiscent), citing Gregory's apology for pictures as the appropriate medium for, as he would

26 The whole passage reads: "Tiusche lant, enphâhe wol, / als ein guot hûsvrouwe sol, / dise dînen welhschen gast / der dîn êre minnet vast. / der seit dir zühte mære vil, / ob du in gern vernemen wil. / du hâst dicke gern vernomen / daz von der welhsche ist genomen, / daz hânt bediutet tiusche liute. / dâ von solt du vernemen hiute, / ob dir ein welhischer man / lîht ouch des gesagen kan / tiuschen daz dir müge gevallen" (87–99).

27 Translations of the text are my own, though I have also consulted the sole integral modern translation, recently provided by Marion Gibbs and Winder McConnell.

28 Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 371–84; and Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 55–62.

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have it, *kindes muot*, a childish disposition. Those who have not yet progressed beyond the understanding of a simpleton or a peasant can "find their 'pictures' there" (1091–92). Thomasin's term is *bilde nemen*, "to take examples." A double conflation occurs here that is most revealing for his argument. The one, between Gregory's *picturae* and exemplary behaviour, is made possible by two meanings of the Middle High German *Bild*, "image" and "example" (as in modern German *Vorbild*). The power of the image is admitted only as a cliché (literally speaking): it must transfer its value directly as if from one body to another. The other takes this use of moral models as interchangeable with a proposition that is, in terms of visual evidence, quite the opposite: truth hidden in allegory, or *bezeichenunge*.

The common denominator between the two possibilities Thomasin allows for truth in *âventiure* is given by his own bias: both are standard vehicles of clerical instruction for the layman. Morally exemplary character and the readable sign (*bezeichenunge* or *significatio*) stand here together, and exclusively so, for the legitimate mediation of truth, whether through narrative or in his own instruction. Of particular interest as well is the way Thomasin treats proper application of such vehicles as dependent, above all, on the idea of *muot*, with which he acknowledges the differing capacities and dispositions of different groups. Wolfram (as we shall see) had constructed his prologue with the same building blocks to reach an opposite end. As far as Thomasin's project is concerned, the following applies: he concedes to new courtly narratives a part in the legitimate models of truth only to reveal with the same gesture that that part is all but non-existent. To identify before a courtly audience this reduced value as suitable fare for peasants betrays the same intention. A later comment on Arthur works to similar effect: Thomasin speculates that, should Arthur be in Hell, then our high opinion is of no use to him; on the contrary, "our praise heaps sin on his sin, because he gives us reason for great lies without cease."[29] With these underhanded arguments, the tales of *âventiure* are forced from their own stage; in their place there should stand, unchallenged, the purveyor of "true" moral instruction:

> werz gerne tuon wil,
> der mag uns sagen harte vil
> von der wârheit, daz waer guot.
> er bezzert ouch unsern muot
> mit der wârheit michels baz
> denn mit der lüge, wizzet daz.
> (1143–48)

(Anyone who truly wishes to can tell us a great deal about the truth, and that would be best. He does us far more good by relying on the truth than by resorting to lies, be sure of that.)

Thus the supercilious gatekeeper reasserts his authority over the layman's access to knowledge.

29 Cf. 3539–45; Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 58.

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Thomasin is no less familiar with the opposite argument than he is aware of the appeal of the alternatives it serves, which is why so many of its requisite components turn up in his own. This becomes all the more evident when one considers the excursus on *âventiure* in the context Thomasin provides: as the culmination of a discussion of good and bad reading material, or "waz diu kint suln vernemen unde lesen" (what the young should hear and read) (1026–27). For the purpose of speaking to a lay courtly audience "in their own tongue," he in fact understands the entire problem of "reading"—the choice of subject matter, media and mode, as well as the nature of the audience's receptive experience—as defined by the nature of woman and the considerations governing her instruction.[30]

Thomasin couches this entire discussion within the contrast between the "false" and the "true" woman as the embodiments of false and true instruction; at the same time, he implicitly casts his audience as *juncfrouwen*, and this identification is constructed through a repeated insistence on the dichotomy between exterior form and inner truth. Beauty is once again synonymous with lies and deceit, even moral depravity, and the entire discussion of *boesiu mære*, depraved reading material, is carried by one figure alone: Helen of Troy. Thomasin's knowledge of vernacular narrative may thus be more penetrating than he has generally been given credit for.

The discussion begins by proclaiming that the *kint* should limit his "reading" to "guotiu mære" (virtuous tales) leaving aside "boese geschiht" (wicked stories) (761–65). This audience is then renamed as "wîp unde man" (woman and man) (767), and a few lines later Thomasin begins his prescriptions, starting, or so it would seem, with "wicked tales" (*boesiu mære*, line 779) and reading advice for young women (*juncvrouwen*, line 773). Some 250 lines later he announces his task as accomplished, *boesiu mære* have been properly defined, and now he will turn to "what young people should hear and read, and what can be of use to them" (cf. 1023–28). There follows a catalogue of "good" examples from romance narrative (a mere fifty lines), divided between *juncvrouwen* and *juncherren*. I will return to this passage below. But the implicit dipartite division between the sexes is never carried through. The much longer passage preceding never shifts from the young women to the young men, despite Thomasin's claim to have fulfilled his promise. Moreover, only two short passages within it, lines 773–82 and lines 821–28, give any explicit advice on "reading" material, and within them only one example is given of *bœsiu mære*: Helen. What Thomasin instead presents, and with tiresome repetition, is a continuous, if shifting, reflection on woman as the negative embodiment of the inner/outer dichotomy. Represented variously as *schœne/sinne*, *schœne/zuht*, *schœne/gemüete*, *lîp/sin*, and *lîp/muot* (beauty/wits, beauty/upbringing, beauty/character, body/intelligence or meaning, body/disposition), this basic opposition is what in fact unites the entire passage—and what ties it both to Helen and to reading. The advice offered, whether it pertains to morals and mores or to the choice of appropriate examples, applies not to women alone but to the audience generally and to women in particular. This last point is revealed through repeated shifts of address.

30 Argued in greater detail in Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 383–96.

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Helen is introduced with the remarks cited previously in chapter 6:

> Juncvrouwen bezzernt klein ir sinne
> von der schœnen küneginne
> diu wîlen dâ ze Kriechen was;
> diu tet unreht diuz êrste las,
> wan bœse bilde verkêrent sêre
> guote zuht und guote lêre.
> (773–78)

(Young ladies cannot better their understanding through the story of the beautiful queen in Greece of those days; she did wrong whoever first read it, for bad examples sorely distort good manners and good instruction.)

But this gives way almost immediately to thoughts equally applicable to women's condition generally: "swa ein wîp hât reinen muot, / hœret si dan übel ode guot / daz mag ir werren nihtes niht" (Provided a woman has a pure heart, it will make little difference whether she hears evil things or good ones) (783–85). In turn, these reflections, which pertain to the potentially harmful effect of Helen as *boesiu mære*, are then applied to both men and women with the phrase "swelich wîp und swelich man" (whatever woman and whatever man) (795). The advice on reading for *juncvrouwen* becomes a general comment on the ability to distinguish between good and bad for both sexes—an ability in which Thomasin has little faith as far as his specific audience is concerned. Thus his meditation on inner truth and outer form is launched.

Immediately attention shifts back to women: "Sumelîchiu wîp sint gemeit" (Some women are happy) (800), and then broadens to comprise men as well: "der und diu triegent sich gar" (man and woman alike are only fooling themselves) (812), and just as quickly shifts back to women: "dâ von ein biderbe wîp sol" (thus, a worthy woman should) (845). In the meantime Thomasin has all but abandoned the discussion of reading and ventured into general moral education. He picks up his ostensible subject, Helen, again at line 821, but this turns out to be only another tack in the same strategy. Helen is presented as the example of a woman who possessed "vil schœne und lützel sinne" (great looks but poor wits) (826). At this point, Thomasin has staked out the ground he wants to build on. The rest of the passage follows the same pattern of shifting address from woman to general audience and back again, as it expounds over and again on its one theme: the inherently deceptive quality of the bodily exterior and the necessity to "read" beneath it for the truth. Thomasin no doubt felt quite at home reading Tertullian and other representatives of the patristic poetics of gender and the body.

Behind this lengthy elaboration on her own nature Helen fades from view altogether, but she is more than a mere pawn. She is the point of departure for the whole discussion, because she constitutes the epitome both of the beautiful exterior that may deceive the immature "reader" (this Thomasin concentrates on in the first passage devoted to her) and, in her own dependency on *schœne* lacking *sinne*, of an unsuccessful "reader," one who has fallen to the seductive exterior. Through her alignment with the body, the woman is both the seductress and the seduced, both the *boesiu mære* and its misguided recipient. *Reiner muot*, the pure disposition, elsewhere placed in opposition to the *lîp*, or

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body, guarantees surety against such deception—that is, only the woman who has overcome her proclivity for external attraction can successfully read through the deception of external form.

To read woman is to read the world—as a woman. This is the underlying equation that subsumes the male readers under the category of the *juncvrouwen* or *wîp* and assimilates instruction on the inner and the outer to reading advice for women. The corollary is also true: to read the body, or *corporalia*, is to read as a woman. Thus the woman as embodiment of the inner/outer dichotomy is both reader and text, viewer and image: here too, the mirroring of the body is operative. These are the same equations to which Benoît and Wolfram subscribe. In Thomasin's case, however, they provide not a justification for women's reading or reading as a woman but rather a statement of her inevitable fallibility or "bad reading," which thus cannot dispense with the cleric's mediation of the truth.

If Benoît undertook to upend Helen's story, redeeming the body by redeeming its most infamous representative, Thomasin is under no lesser onus to reinstate her as she was previously known. Thomasin in fact stages his discussion of reading in the body—*boesiu mære*—in distinctly parallel fashion to Benoît, for he, too, makes a sudden heartfelt declaration of personal admiration to Helen's opposite at the passage's end, extolling the *mulier fortis*, who embodies continuity between beauty and chastity, truth and representation:

ist triuwe, stæte und senfter muot
an schœnem wîbe, so ist si guot.
diu mac mich âne netze gereichen,
durch sî wil ich mîn herze weichen,
und wil daz ir einvaltic herze
sî gar mîn angel âne smerze,
daz si mich ziehe swar si wil:
swaz si gebiut, dunkt mich niht vil:
wan guotes wîbes reiner muot
den widerwiget dehein guot.
(1013–22)

(When devotion, constancy and a gentle disposition are found in a beautiful woman, then is she good. Such a one can catch me without a net. For her sake my heart would soften, I would gladly accept her simple heart as my painless hook and follow wherever she leads: whatever she commands, it seems to me not much. For the pure disposition of a good woman is truly an incomparable possession.)

Benoît had placed his audience between Briseida-Eve and the *mulier fortis* to force consideration of what, in the audience's knowledge, was unworthy: Helen's story, the story of Ooliba. The audience was thereby engaged in a narrative process that revealed truth in the fallen body, the body in search of its saviour. When Thomasin wrote, Wolfram had gone one step further and posited a new female ideal as one realized through that process; the woman, in effect, redeemed the narrative body. For Thomasin neither

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possibility could apply. As indicated above, the strategy is always the same: Thomasin indulges *mære/âventiure* only long enough to expose its immanent failings and induce his audience to "leave behind childish things" (cf. 1 Corinthians 11), that is, to hearken to his own moral teaching as the unadulterated truth.

Consequently, when Thomasin tells the story of reading in the body, the audience remains transfixed between clear moral models, images of evil and good, depravity and purity. The final alternatives are no different from those Benoît first frames in his misogynist intervention, and thus we find Helen restored as the image of the depraved woman, where Benoît had made her conspicuous by absence. Thomasin's scorn for "she who first read Helen's story"—an otherwise unclear remark—is quite possibly a sideswipe at Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei*, in this case limited to her identity as Benoît's ideal audience. But whether or not he has Benoît's Helen or Wolfram's exposition in mind, Thomasin is, at the least, fully aware of the significance of this "reading woman" to the layman's narrative. He undertakes to invert her significance entirely, and with it a competing poetics of body and truth. There can be no redeeming value in following a Helen or a Briseida through the struggle of a New Eve, for Thomasin posits no process for her transformation. Her value lies instead in her immutability, which serves as a warning to shun seductive form. The body and woman alike are here inherently suspect; no less suspect, then, is the "pretty dress" of lies that he ascribes to *âventiure* generally. Nevertheless, for him as for his rivals, the two, woman and *âventiure*, are one and the same. His indictment of this new reading is merely the reversal of a subversion, the reconstruction of a traditional view of gender and body in relation to truth built on the foundation of his opponents' best arguments.

Before turning to Wolfram's opposite treatment of these questions, it remains to consider the positive examples that Thomasin does cite from the world of the layman's narrative before making his definitive charge at *âventiure*. The catalogue initially makes no distinction between the Arthurian, the antique and the *chanson de geste*, listing Arthur alongside Charlemagne or Alexander. In conclusion, however, Thomasin focuses solely on *âventiure*, waxing apparently enthusiastic in imitation of romance poets: "wartâ, wartâ, wie si drungen, / die rîter von der tavelrunden, / einr vürn ander ze vrümkeit" (Look! Look! how they strove, those knights of the Round Table, to surpass one another in bravery) (1053–54). The examples that immediately precede (1051–52), however, deliver the real point: Segramors (oddly obscure, but not so for Thomasin's purpose) was the brash and reckless youth who ended up shamefully unhorsed in the snow. Kalogrenant, the next listed, tells a story of such shameful deport that Yvain/Iwein must set out to rectify it—which produces another tale of *âventiure* (we shall revisit this crucial juncture in the next chapter). And the inveterate adulterer and fool for love, Tristan, can hardly be taken seriously as a model of *vrümkeit*, upright virtue, from the mouth of a churchman and moralist.[31] All this then sets up Thomasin's regretful conclusion: Key, the

31 Haug (*LDMA*, p. 234), concludes similarly; see also the broad comparison of these characters across the different Arthurian tales in Düwel, "Lesestoff," 67–93, esp. 72.

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ubiquitous heckler and troublemaker of Arthurian narrative, is not at all dead (much to the contrary of Hartmann von Aue's statements in the prologue to his *Iwein*).[32] His own "children," or emulators, are so common that "I hardly know where to turn," Thomasin says (1062–66). As the *coup de grâce*, then, he concludes with a feigned lament, not on the dearth of apposite Gawans in the audience, but rather over Parzival: "of his kind it seems none are alive. … Alas, where are you, Parzival?" (1065/1075). Thomasin is explicit on his reasons for the choice: such a one would break another of Key's ribs—as Wolfram's Parzival does in the same scene and by reason of the same singularly inimitable moral oblivion that delivers Segramors into the snow (1072–74).[33] Moral ambivalence is found even here. As an object of *bilde nemen*, Wolfram's anti-hero is the least suitable of choices, and this is finally the point. Just so much *nütze*, or useful value (cf. 1028), lies in such a story, for a literature that cannot serve as a moral mirror, that offers no imitable models, is no *litteratura* at all but rather childish foolishness.

Thus, if the didactic churchman dons the mediary mask of a new layman's literary culture, then it is because he understands himself to be competing with the poets of *âventiure* for rightful authority over the layman's moral instruction. It is not that the new narrative art is a mere pack of frivolous lies that disturbs him. His entire stance proceeds instead from the assumption that *âventiure* must and does make its own claim to a mediation of truth; and truth, for him as for his audience, means that which legitimately leads to the soul's redemption. In this undertaking a new presence had emerged, a new way of articulating the relationship between layman and Logos that derived from an alternative women's *lectio*. In Thomasin's treatment, therefore, the woman's reading quest for an integration of body and truth is bound back into the old opposition between deceiving exterior and *sensus moralis*. Such was the usefulness of "new media" and alternative gnosis to this reactionary revisionist. His argument provides us with very nearly the photographic negative of the entire complex of questions at the centre of this revolution in reading. This extends right to his epilogue, in which the completed instructive compendium is sent into the world—"nu var hin, welhisch gast" (now be on your way, romance guest) (14681)—with the instruction to avoid lodging with a wicked man (*boesewicht*) and to seek out different audience groups, each defined by a qualification that assures his or her "good reading": "vrume rîtr und guote vrouwen und wîse phaffen suln dich schouwen" (Brave knights and virtuous ladies and wise clerics are to be your beholders) (14695–96).

The formula *pfaffen—leien—frouwen* (clerics—laymen—women) had some currency in early Middle High German texts, possibly as a way of acknowledging differing receptive tasks in one communication and communicative space.[34] Wolfram's Parzival prologue

32 Hartmann's prologue laments the loss of the "historical" figures of the Arthurian world as true moral models to claim we are nonetheless all the better off to be able to feel their presence through literary works. See *Iwein*, lines 4–20, 50–58; also *LDMA*, pp. 122–29.

33 At stake is the extraordinary scene in which Parzival remains transfixed before three drops of blood in the snow, which proves no hindrance to his ability to best the best of Arthur's knights when attacked (lines 282,23–300,5). The scene has a literature all its own; see Bumke, *Blutstropfen*.

34 Curschmann, "Hören–Lesen–Sehen," 251; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 306, 311–12, 369.

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addresses the same three audience groups and elaborates on his project through a discussion of their differing reading capacities and objectives—their *mout* and the *zil* of their participation. For Wolfram, however, these differences become the justifying argument for a new way of mediating knowledge with no lesser claim to deliver the soul's salvation than Thomasin's. For Thomasin the formula serves merely the reiteration of his moralist's aesthetic: placed in the epilogue it evokes not so much what his readers bring to the performance as it does the moral imprint his instruction is to leave on each audience group.

Reading Women False and True: The Knight's Narration

Sîn lop hinket ame spat,
Swer allen vrouwen sprichet mat
Durch sîn eines vrouwen.
(115,5–7)

(He who lauds his one and only such that all other women are left without hope, delivers crippling praise.)

Thus Wolfram's narrator continues after his declaration of suffering service to the suffering woman: "der lobes kemphe wil ich sîn: / mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn." Clarification is overdue on the connection of this declaration to Herzeloyde.[35] The verses avoid a direct identification, which in part explains why many have been reluctant to accept *herzen leit* as a pun on Herzeloyde's name.[36] Here, as so often in Wolfram's art, the deflection or defamiliarization of an image in fact reveals its true significance, one that is always more and less than simple identification: "I'll be the fighting champion of her praise; her grief is my heart's sorrow." The narrator's affective identification with his heroine, *his* ability to know her pain, is the key to *her* identity. The reverse is also true: this moment, in which the speaker reveals his new female ideal, allows him to declare his identity. At the same time, by not naming Herzeloyde, Wolfram does not single out one woman but instead the experience she embodies, one that is therefore open to all women, an idea underlined in the otherwise oddly unmotivated verses on the "crippling praise" of only one.[37]

35 First argued as such by Kuhn, "Wolframs Frauenlob," 200–202.

36 The reluctance (see, for example, Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:366–67, where the issue is passed over in silence) is not entirely comprehensible: such *klingende Namen* are all but a habit of Wolfram's, especially where major female characters are concerned: Sigune's name is an anagram of "Cusine" (she is Parzival's cousin), Condwiramurs's name means "love-guide," Orgeluse's name is likewise derived from the French "orgeuilleuse," Cunneware's suggests "true witness" or "true knowledge," as well as *verecundia*—to name only the most prominent. As has been noted before, *leide* would, in Wolfram's Bavarian dialect, have sounded much like *loyde*. Whether or not one can locate possible French inspirations for the name (such as have been proposed are considerably less compelling) is beside the point: the audience is far more likely to have made the connection available in their own language; indeed, it appears abstruse to argue that they could have missed it.

37 The images have long been recognized as borrowed from the *Minnesang* poet, Reinmar der Alte; see Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:377–79. The overlay of a position inherited from clerical authors with features from the *Minnesang* is characteristic of the second prologue.

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The verses in fact offer the solution to a riddle on Wolfram's female ideal that is initiated in the first prologue. They make up only the first of several such riddling representations on a female identity in his text, the *quae est ista* with which we have made repeated acquaintance.[38] Tellingly, this riddle, too, is announced by a pun on the name of a woman, but one who represents the opposite relationship of body to truth:

manec wîbes schœne an lobe ist breit:
ist dâ daz herze conterfeit,
die lob ich als *ich solde*
daz safer ime golde.
ich enhân daz niht für lihtiu dinc,
swer in den kranken messinc
verwurket edeln rubîn
und al die âventiure sîn
(dem glîche ich rehten wîbes muot).
(3,11–19, emphasis added)

(Many a woman's beauty is admired far and wide, but where the heart is false, the woman I appraise accordingly, as a bauble in a gold setting. But he who works into base brass all the *âventiure* of a noble ruby, this I hold to be no small feat—to this I compare the true woman's disposition.)

These verses constitute the first positive statement in the prologue on Wolfram's art as opposed to what he previously is concerned to reject, and I will discuss their larger context shortly.[39] The subject is once again, ostensibly, the true praise of women, and at this point the speaker aligns the false woman, that is, the false exterior, with a stock image of that discourse, the glass bead in a gold setting. This he would praise "as he should" (*als ich solde*) or, with more pregnant meaning, as *Isolde*. The opposite image, a ruby worked into "base brass," is linked to *âventiure*, and here again Wolfram obscures the simple identification. Woman is not *âventiure*; rather, the power of her inner truth is so named.[40] Moreover, the "name" of the opposite woman, Isolde's counterpart, has been cleverly withheld. In fact, if we are at all prompted (beyond knowledge of the topos) to see the false-hearted woman as an allegory of poetic representation, then it is because her counterpart is upstaged by an

38 The others are well known (though their significance has gone unrecognized): the "one" woman against whom Wolfram rages in lines 114,8–18; the woman who must desire the continuation of the tale in the epilogue to book 6 (lines 337,27–30), and the woman named as a triple hypothetical in the final epilogue to the entire poem (lines 827,25–30). Yet another play on the gesture occurs at the beginning of book 3, discussed below. Clearly, it is the idea of the changeable rather than fixed identity of this female instance that is at stake.

39 The full text of the prologue, with translation, is found in the appendix.

40 Schnyder, " 'Frauenpassage'," 5–7 and passim. The medieval idea that the ruby possessed an endogenous light makes it an apt image for the truth that shines through a base exterior; see Engelen, *Edelsteine*, p. 81. But contrary to all previous readings, Schnyder shows there is no lexical support for the idea of *âventiure* as such a "wondrous" or "magical power"; Wolfram's image therefore identifies the image of the ruby's inner light metaphorically with his narrative art—and both with the true woman (thus earlier also Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," p. 435).

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image of (poetic) craftsmanship. Woman is no longer the subject under comparison, tenor and vehicle of the metaphor all but change places: her excellence is not equivalent to a ruby in base brass (dim praise, taken as such); rather, the craftsman who can work the power of the ruby into a base material is the true master—and this (by the way) is akin to *rehter wîbes muot*, the disposition of a true woman.

To invoke the woman's position in this way anticipates a renaming of Eve and Mary as obverse archetypes of the identification between woman and flesh. Thomasin supplied Helen as the woman who falls victim to the false exterior, Benoît supplied a misogynist rant on women in general, by way of not naming the same "one woman." Wolfram, it has often been claimed, supplies Isolde as a reference to Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.[41] Such a reference would indeed be relevant if not chronologically precluded, but it is by no means necessary.[42]

Isolde (and not Gottfried's *Isot*) was one of the best-known female figures of contemporary vernacular narrative, whether written or not, although previous written versions of her story existed in Germany as well as France. Wolfram evokes her as a point of reference in the layman's literary experience as such; moreover, he did not need to invent the pun himself, nor even its use as a reference to rhetorically ornamented beauty. In his *Erec*, Hartmann von Aue's knight-narrator declines to describe Enite's beauty "als ich solde," that is, with the rhetorical flourish exhibited by other poets in the description of female excellence.[43] Enite/Enide figured as an "anti-Isolde" through the idea of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* as an "anti-Tristan," a romance in praise of marital fidelity. The poetic appraisal of Isolde's beauty figures for Hartmann (as for Wolfram) as a *non plus ultra* in the use of ornamental rhetoric, plainly with no possible reference to Gottfried, but all the more in a moral rejection of rhetorical show—which Wolfram's prologue aligns with the clerical mediation of knowledge.

The visual tradition offers another suggestive image of the popular understanding of Isolde (figs. 7.1 and 7.2). The lover's tryst in the orchard, with King Mark hiding above them in a tree, was the predominant medieval image of the Tristan story, serving in

41 Brall, "Programmatik," 26–32, gives a review of the overall thesis of a literary rivalry between the two authors; accepted by Haug, *LDMA*, p. 175. Nellmann, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 450–51, rejects the connection to Gottfried.

42 Those who argue for an allusion to Gottfried's *Tristan* see Wolfram later amending his text in reaction to Gottfried's remarks in the celebrated passage in praise of vernacular poets (*Tristan*, lines 4619ff., completed after *Parzival*). The allusion would be problematic in other ways as well, as detailed in Nellmann's commentary to the Deutscher Klassiker edition, pp. 450–51. If Wolfram alludes to any specific text, it is far more likely to be Eilhart von Oberge's *Tristrant*, as argued by Bertelsmeier-Kierst, "Verortung," p. 38.

43 *Erec*, lines 1590–603. The connection between the two poets' attitudes is striking: Hartmann professes incapacity by calling himself a *tumber kneht* who lacks the rhetorical expertise of the *wîser man* (lines 1592, 1595), thus setting up the same *tump-wis* opposition that Wolfram uses in his prologue (see below pp. 298–300). The entire gesture occurs as the poet's reaction to the change in his heroine's dress. She lays off the humble rags in which Erec first found her for the rich dress of the court. The narrator reminds us that her true beauty shone forth clearly enough before (lines 1585–89); his unwillingness to describe her now thus appears as an insistence on a more innate beauty.

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Figure 7.1. Tristan and Isolde in the orchard, bone casket, 1180–1200. London, British Museum, nr. 1947,0706.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.



Figure 7.2. Tristan and Isolde in the orchard, ivory mirror case, first half of the fourteenth century. Paris, Musée de Cluny–Musée national du Moyen-Âge, Cl. 13928. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Gérard Blot.

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numerous extant examples "as the pictorial emblem of the Tristan legend as a whole."[44] This distillation of the story as icon was constructed as if superimposed on the iconography of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge, resulting in a "visual conjunction of deceitful love and original sin."[45] Wolfram evokes Isolde as this manifestation of Eve within an autonomous culture of vernacular narrative and does so as a way of defining an alternative model of reading in the body.

The riddle, however, contrives to leave the counterpart to Eve/Isolde unnamed, instead shifting the terms so that the power of *âventiure* is compared to a true woman and the centre of interest becomes a craftsman's commitment to the inner truth. Like the other open questions of the first prologue, this one defers to the narrative, postponing its resolution to the second prologue, where the craftsman of *âventiure* names his female ideal, once again through a pun that refers to his response, his *lob* (praise). The same woman is not to be mistaken as "one and only," because she represents an ideal of a different sort than Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei* or Thomasin's courtly adaptation of the *mulier fortis*. This woman has more in common with Briseida, the new Helen, than she does with such a nonpareil, the woman whom "no other can second." She too serves a poetics of identification in love and suffering, and the images of her loving suffering, which re-embody Mary's experience, constitute proof of the same truth, one available to all who can feel her pain. Thus the parenthesis is closed once the new woman has emerged as the narrative embodiment of the new poetics.

All this has so far been couched in terms of the artist's relationship to his art (or to women). At the outset of the new narrative, the beginning of book 3, the Eve–Mary equation is reiterated and transferred explicitly to the audience. The opening address places the audience squarely in the familiar position, between opposite images of women: "It pains me to the quick, that so many claim the name of woman," the narrator begins, "many of them rush into falsehood's embrace, yet others are utterly free of deceit" (116,5–9). He next evokes the Christian ideal of poverty, espoused by an unnamed woman who is praised in terms that initially suggest the New Eve: "die dolte ein wîp durch triuwe: / des wart ir gabe niuwe / ze himel mit endelôser gebe" (Such poverty one woman endured for the sake of *triuwe*; thereof she made a heavenly offering both endless and ever new) (116,19–21). The audience—men and women alike—is then put to a shaming (self-)examination:

> ich wæne ir nu vil wênic lebe,
> die junc der erden rîhtuom
> liezen durch des himeles ruom.
> ich erkenne ir nehein.
> man und wîp mir sint al ein:
> die mîdentz al gelîche.
> (116,22–27)

44 Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," p. 16; on the body of medieval visual artefacts of the Tristan legend, see Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," pp. 7–8. "Nearly half" of these show the scene in question.

45 Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," p. 16.

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> (I'll wager there are precious few alive today who would in youth abandon worldly wealth and fame for the glory of Heaven. I can't make out even one! Whether man or woman makes no difference: they shun the idea all alike.)

Quae est ista? If not Mary, then surely another female saint similarly beloved. The following lines respond: "frou Herzeloyde diu rîche / ir drîer lande wart ein gast: / si truoc der freuden mangels last" (Lady Herzeloyde, once rich and powerful, abandoned her three kingdoms: she bore the burden of joyless days) (116,28–30). Thus the narrator not only concludes his affirmation of Herzeloyde's testimony but also now explicitly recommends her "reading" model to his audience.

In this resumed narration, the very name "woman" has acquired a value of which one must first prove one's worthiness; Wolfram evokes *wîpheit*, womanhood, as an "order" whose true nature—the substance of its rule, one might say—is found in *triuwe*: "wîpheit, dîn ordenlîcher site, / dem vert und fuor ie triuwe mite" ("Womanhood, the nature of your order was ever and remains to *triuwe* bound") (116,13–14).[46] The entire audience, *man und wîp ... al ein*, is bound to prove itself worthy of this order. Benoît's trap, which inverts audience expectations to enlist their participation in a narrative enterprise of "being her," has been sprung and instead reformulated as a solemn contract, for the woman transformed is in this case already manifest as the origin of the tale. In a statement replete with multiple meanings, the distinction between true and false women from the opening lines (116,5–9) is said to "divide the tales": "sus teilent sich diu mære" (116,10).[47] Placed on this all-important narrative seam, the words refer to Gahmuret's story and that of Parzival—the two lives of Herzeloyde. They may equally be taken to announce the same distinction as "the touchstone of this tale"—or indeed of all tales.[48] For these lines complete Wolfram's initiation of audience and *âventiure* into the new female poetics of body and truth. The all-determining distinction between the false and the true body thus alludes to the transformation in the text, to that envisioned among its audience, and finally to a transformation of reading itself. This was the argument's conclusion; it remains for us to trace its beginnings.

The primary task of Wolfram's first prologue is to set the stage with a progression of narrator and audience identities whose relationship to meaning and the narrative is finally left unresolved.[49] The first half (1,1–2,22), often called the "men's prologue" because it focuses on *mannes muot* (the man's disposition, 1,5)—the same that has proven such a conundrum for modern scholarship—sets up an opposition between clerical instruction and the knight's narrative. With this gesture romance seeks its place

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46 The term *triuwe* (loyalty, love, devotion) somewhat defies translation; see p. 308, below.

47 The first ten lines of the opening read: "Ez machet trûric mir den lîp, / daz alsô mangiu heizet wîp / ir stimme sint gelîche hel: / geguoge sint gein valsche snel, / etslîche valsches laere: / sus teilent sich diu mære. / daz die gelîche sint genamt, / des hât mîn herze sich geschamt. / wîpheit, dîn ordenlîcher site, / dem vert und fuor ie triwe mite" (116,1–10).

48 *Mære* is here a collective plural (cf. modern English "news"), which leaves the referent (this tale or all tales) ambiguous.

49 In what follows, I rely on the evidence and conclusions presented in Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog." See also Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 408–41.

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by impinging directly upon the traditional delivery of religious truth to lay folk. In an abrupt shift, the argument then makes a preliminary exposition of *wîbes muot* (women's disposition) (2,23–3,34). An audience position between false and true female beauty is put forward as a counterweight or complement to the preceding discussion of *mannes muot* and its own struggle to grasp the truth. Thus, for the contemporary audience, the players—*pfaffen, rîter, frouwen* (clerics, knights, women)—had been identified and the stakes were clear, but the translation of the solution, Mary's reading, onto their stage had yet to be performed. The narrator then breaks off this venture into Thomasin's territory, his moral examination of man and woman (*wîp unde man ze rehte prüeven*, 3,25–26), as "it would make a weary tale," and turns instead to the story itself: "nu hoert dirre âventiure site" (3,27–28), that is, "now hear how this story goes," its "custom" or "character." With the resumption of the narrative in book 3, audience, narrative and narrator alike have all been enlisted in the enterprise of reading in the body; the movement from the Old to the New Eve transforms narrative as it transforms body. The repeatedly repackaged riddle on the identity of the poet's Lady is no less than the key to Wolfram's poetics of narrative and truth.

The stated ambitions of the prologue are far larger than what it delivers. It proposes, at least implicitly, to mediate between extremes of the human condition poised between good and evil, to distinguish (*prüeven*) the moral worth of men and women alike, to serve as a touchstone for the soul's progress to Heaven or its fall into Hell, and to tell a story of such imaginative dimensions as would exhaust the capacities of three such as the narrator himself. Notably, all these, except the fourth, are unusual claims for a secular narrative; in Thomasin's moral instruction, on the other hand, we too would find them quite within their place. The subject of the prologue's opening is in fact the mediation of instruction across the divide between *clericus* and *laicus*, and it begins in the voice of such a clerical instructor:

Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
gesmæhet unde gezieret
ist, swâ sich parrieret
unverzaget mannes muot,
als agelstern varwe tuot.
der mac dennoch wesen geil:
wand an im sint beidiu teil,
des himels und der helle.
der unstæte geselle
hât die swarzen varwe gar,
und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
sô habet sich an die blanken
der mit stæten gedanken.
diz vliegende bîspel
ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
sine mugens niht erdenken:
(1, 1–14)

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> (Where doubt lives close by the heart, the soul is surely imperilled. Wherever the steadfast, manly disposition makes room for company, it is both debased and glorified, as in the colouring of the magpie. Such a one can still meet with a happy end, for in him both Heaven and Hell have a part. The wholly inconstant fellow is black all over, and will come to a dark end, while he whose intentions do not waver, holds fast to the light. This fluttering fable flies too fast for simple folk, they can't think it through:)

The opening fourteen lines are designated as a *bîspel*, a rhetorical figure that corresponds largely to the Latin *exemplum*, for it denoted the demonstration of a moral message through application of the methods of *significatio* (what Thomasin refers to in German as *bezeichenunge*) to an image isolated from the natural world or human behaviour—in this case the colouring of the magpie.[50] It was, then (this, too, is clear in Thomasin's presentation), a standard vehicle of clerical instruction.[51] With lines 15–16, the prologue thus identifies a rhetorical mode in one breath with the audience to whom it is directed: "diz vliegende bîspel / ist tumben liuten gar ze snel" (this fluttering fable flies too fast for simple folk) (1,15–16). That is: no sooner is the communication staged than it is also proclaimed unsuccessful.[52]

For nearly two centuries, interpretation of this passage was deflected into all manner of difficulties because this key identification of the audience was misunderstood.[53] *Tumbe liute* stands in Wolfram's usage for the *illitterati*, and it is especially notable that he takes this understanding from previous works in the German tradition that adapt religious learning for the lay public.[54] The same appeal to the *sermo humilis* tradition connoted a rejection of learning and eloquence as tainted by worldly vanity.[55] Read through this understanding, the opening confrontation between an audience of simple folk and the learned sophistry of the *bîspel* (critics' lack of success in resolving it stands witness) suggests for Wolfram's audience the presentation of an alternative.

Wolfram's *bîspel* is a travesty of a learned method of moral instruction.[56] As has been demonstrated often enough, the argument consistently assumes a continuity between

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50 Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 65–68; also Ohlenroth, "Wolframs Widerpart," 34–36. On the art of the *bîspel*, see Yao, *Exempelgebrauch*; and De Boor, *Fabel und Bîspel*.

51 Thomasin places *bîspel* alongside the role of the exemplary stories found in "the old books" as complementary vehicles of moral instruction. The one offers models from the past, the other from the visible world of daily life (*Der welsche Gast*, lines 10675–80 and 10899–905).

52 Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 62–64.

53 Ever since the text's first editor, Karl Lachmann, referred to the *tumbe liute* as "die Leichtsinnigen," the imprudent or foolish, it has been taken as all but given that "no audience member would want to find himself aligned with the *tumben*." See, respectively, Lachmann, "Eingang des Parzivals," p. 488; and Schirok, "Konzept," 75.

54 Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 62–64, 69–77. The term was a common audience designator in the *bispel* tradition. Wolfram's understanding, however, appears closest to that of Armer Hartmann in his *Rede vom Glouben*, a vernacular adaptation of the creed.

55 Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 71–73; more generally, Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 25–66.

56 Likewise Brall, "Programmatik," 17, 23.

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colour and character that it inconsistently applies.[57] The result is a conundrum: either the possibility of salvation is framed as a dualistic struggle between black and white, in which any admixture of the two would imperil the soul, or such a mixture is a given of the human condition (*parrieret sein*), and the object is then not to struggle against this condition but to attain salvation within or through it. But Wolfram's point concerns not so much this content as it does its delivery: the initiated communication, this delivery of instruction, fails, and it does so because *the mediating form* is inappropriate to the capacities of its intended audience. As he then elaborates, it flitters or flutters about, leaps this way and that (like a startled hare); finally, it is no more reliable than fleeting reflections in a mirror (*zin anderthalb ame glase*), or the visions of one who himself cannot see (*des blinden troum*): "this dim and darkling light offers little comfort indeed" (cf. 1,18–25).[58] Beasts and birds and their allegorical meanings, the *speculum* as the symbol of such "reading," and the exegetical interpretation of dreams: none of this is of any true comfort to the simple soul poised between damnation and redemption. This "flight into images"[59] of the initial exposition is a critique of the schoolman's poetics of material apparitions and their meanings, of a mediation of moral knowledge that claims on the one hand that all physical form is but a mirror that reveals God's truth, and on the other disparages all such form as both ephemeral and deceiving—a paradox that made the cleric's intervention indispensable, for it was only his learning that could decode the bodily cover as a symbolic map of the latent truth.

The initial staging of the communication, then, calls the clerical instructor onto the stage to indict and dismiss him. With the subsequent shift to remarks on *disiu mære* (Wolfram's tale) just such a *wîser*, or learned man, one seen to insist on the delivery of "good teaching" and the appropriate *stiure* (guidance) to seek it out, is treated to his just desserts. For, as Wolfram says, here he can get his fill of ins and outs, ups and downs and zigzagging meanings; here meaning is made in the saddle of the jousting knight:

> ouch erkante ich nie sô wîsen man,
> ern möhte gerne künde hân,
> welher stiure disiu mære gernt
> und waz si guoter lêre wernt.
> dar an si nimmer des verzagent,
> beidiu si vliehent unde jagent,
> si entwîchent unde kêrent,
> si lasternt unde erent.
> swer mit disen schanzen allen kan,
> an dem hât witze wol getân,
> der sich niht versitzet noch vergêt
> und sich anders wol verstêt.
> (2,5–16)

57 Brall, "Programmatik," 9; Stein, *Studien*, p. 173; Groos, *Romancing the Grail*, p. 2; For the principle different interpretations, see Nellman, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 445–47.

58 See the full text, with translation and explanatory remarks, in the appendix; also Martin, *Kommentar*, p. 6; and Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 64, 66–67, 82.

59 Haug, "Konzept," 221 speaks of a "Bilderflucht."

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(And I've yet to meet a man so very learned that he didn't himself need to ask how to approach *this* story and what good teaching it delivers. It's no slouch on that score! It'll show you its heels and then come charging, it will leave you the field and then take it back again, thus doling out both shame and honour. He who can hold the saddle through all these ups and downs, he has the gift of wit indeed: one who neither sits out the fight or takes to flight and other-wise knows where he stands.)

The "man's prologue" has been appropriately designated as such in that it confronts the cleric first with the layman's incapacity and then with his no less formidable expertise as knight or *miles*. Verses 2,9 to 2,12 serve to identify this latter expertise—the terminology describes tournament technique—with the necessary capacity to understand Wolfram's tale, *disiu mære*.[60] There is no place on Wolfram's wild ride for fellows (clerics) who would rather sit on their duffs (*versitzen*) or are likely to waver and wander from the field (*vergên*); here they would learn to "stand their man," which is to under-stand in a different way (*anders wol verstên*).[61] And with this brilliantly multifaceted retort, the project is launched. The perils and vicissitudes of a chivalric existence, the world of the *miles*, are the medium of this opposite way of knowing. The cleric's disingenuous sophistry, meanwhile, has drawn the ethical charge of *untriuwe*; the *wenken*, or fickle mutability, of his representations of truth call their purveyor equally into question:

wil ich triwe vinden
aldâ si kan verswinden,
als viur in dem brunnen
unt daz tou von der sunnen?
(2,1–4)

(Shall I seek true fellowship [*triuwe*] where it's as like to vanish as fire in a fountain or dew under the sun?)

His *muot* is therefore identified as the bedfellow of falseness and consigned to the fire of Hell—precisely where, and with analogous justification, Thomasin places Arthur:

valsch geselleclîcher muot
ist zem hellefiure guot,
und ist hôher werdekeit ein hagel.
(2,17–19)

(the disposition of false friends deserves the fire of Hell and batters noble bearing like a hailstorm.)

This stage belongs to the narrating knight. "Disiu âventiure vert âne der buoche stiure!" (This knight's adventure rides without a bookish bridle!) (115,29–30).

With this much in place, the prologue as a whole not only offers a transparent confrontation between two different models of knowledge and its delivery, it also reads like

60 Martin, *Kommentar*, p. 9; Brall, "Programmatik," 24.

61 I have intentionally offered different, complementary renderings of this passage in an attempt to capture the various layers of the puns.

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a map of the logical argument for woman's reading. In the first, the "men's" section, we are confronted with a dipartite division of humanity into the learned and the unlearned, with no distinction of gender necessarily implied; that is, *mannes muot* might comprise all humanity before God. This dipartite division results in an impasse, the failure of the cleric to provide for the layman's redemption. In the second section, the discussion abruptly shifts to women's dispensation, *wîbes muot*, and the distinction based on knowledge and learning capacities is apparently superseded by this introduction of a gender distinction. Man, then, is either humanity or only its male members or male principle, depending on the terms chosen for discussion, and intellectual capacity is the distinguishing factor only as long as man is all of humanity. This view of humanity as "man" results in exclusion and hierarchy based on access to learned methods. Insistence on the category "woman," on the other hand, makes an all-encompassing opposition between the ignorant and the learned into only one male half of a new gender equation, or an equation, perhaps, in which all humanity is one before God. If we can all be "man," so too we can all be "woman."

Despite what I have argued is the resultant transparency of this argument, its novelty in another regard should not be overlooked. Neither this adversarial valence of the *clericus–laicus* opposition nor even the tripartite audience typology of *pfaffen–leien–frouwen* had, before *Parzival*, been introduced onto the stage of *âventiure*, much less that of its more "historical" and learned predecessors, the romances of antiquity. In the same way, the other texts considered here, with the partial exception of the *Eructavit*, have been more concerned with a project of *rapprochement*, a negotiation of the distance between "readers" and "non-readers," than inclined to polemic. This is no less true of the self-proclaimed literate knight, Hartmann von Aue,[62] than it is of avowedly clerical authors like Benoît or Wolfram's other predecessors, Chrétien de Troyes and Heinrich von Veldeke. The shift in Wolfram's position is only comprehensible to his audience as a move to assimilate to the project of romance narrative a discourse thus far specific to religious reading, the mediation of the Word for lay audiences, and thus to present his narrative as a similarly alternative entry into knowledge. For this reason the layman discharges the clerical gatekeeper openly and as a prerequisite, no less, to the telling of his tale.[63]

But where is the substance of his claim, what is the content of *anders wol verstên*—aside from the tournament pun? The knight and his jousting do not signify, in themselves, a different reading path to the truth, whether or not they have successfully lifted the cleric out of the saddle. Thomasin began by foregrounding woman's failing as proof positive that beauty and body are never free of deceit and from there proceeded to concede to *âventiure* only so much truth as might be concealed beneath such deceiving

62 In his own prologues, Hartmann twice calls himself a "learned knight" who composed with the help of books; cf. *Der arme Heinrich*, lines 1–3; *Iwein*, lines 21–22.

63 There is therefore neither room nor need here for an adversary from within the realm of vernacular narrative itself (such as the scholarship has almost invariably assumed); the idea is nearly a logical contradiction. Wolfram "leaps" from a vantage point he owes to his predecessors and still in their cause. See Powell, " 'Parzival'-Prolog," 51, 60, 85–86.

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exteriors. His real point only emerges once read within this presentation of "good and bad reading"—in fact the restoration of a traditional view of woman, body and truth. The missing dimension in Wolfram's argument likewise first acquires real contours through his ensuing discussion of women's *zil*, their reading objective. It proceeds in the reverse direction, first indicting the learned manipulation of material forms to then advance woman and body as the abject vehicles of an accessible truth.

On its surface, we could easily mistake Wolfram's "women's prologue" for a page out of a standard book of instruction on morals and social mores, and, until recently, it was frequently dismissed as such.[64] It is instead where he shows his audience "how to read." Women's reading objective, as we saw above, is made one with the attempt to read woman, and the whole breaks off with an open parenthesis, an equation between the inner truth of *âventiure* and *rehter wîbes muot*, the disposition of the true woman. Here we discover in addition how this disposition is aligned with *triuwe*, long-suffering devotion. Together, *wîbes muot, âventiure* and *triuwe* form the substance of Wolfram's claim to pre-eminence in the layman's quest for truth.

The women's prologue opens with the narrator—who thus slips from his stirrups into the shoes of women's spiritual advisers—promising that his counsel (*râten*) will show them where best to bestow their *prîs* and *êre*, their reputation and their honour:[65]

> Dise manger slahte underbint
> jedoch niht gar von manne sint.
> für diu wîp stôze ich disiu zil:[66]
> swelhiu mîn râten merken wil,
> diu sol wizzen war si kêre
> ir prîs und ir êre,
> und wem si dâ nâch sî bereit
> minne und ir werdekeit,
> sô daz si niht geriuwe
> ir kiusche und ir triuwe.
> (2,23–3,2)

(But all these deliberations pertain by no means only to men. For the women I promise this reward: she who pays heed to my counsel will know well where to entrust her honour and her good name, likewise on whom she should thereafter bestow her love and her precious person, such that her chaste virtue and her true devotion not be abused.)

Mîn râten (line 2,26) does not refer to the lines that follow but rather to the entire process of the narrative; the speaker engages women as his audience by promising the

64 For example, Schröder, "Prolog," p. 187; and *LDMA*, p. 175. Among the few exceptions are: Schnyder, "Frauenpassage"; and Rausch, "Destruktion der Fiktion," 55–58 (further literature cited there). My own reading remains largely as presented in Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 430–41.

65 On the difficulty of translating *prîs*, see this passage in the appendix.

66 See the note on this passage in the appendix.

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means to their *zil*, their moral end, as well.[67] *Dâ nâch*, that is, after the performance, they will know where best to bestow their love such that their trust is not abused. Already in these lines, praise and judgment of women become synonymous with the impending narration and its reception, and *kiusche* and *triuwe* are as much aspects of this communication as of a potential love relationship.[68] The woman brings something to the performance, *triuwe*, an investment of loving constancy and faithful love, that the narrator promises will not be disappointed. By implication, and based as well on the preceding rejection of the cleric's *untriuwe*, the narrator promises equal returns, his own *triuwe* as their proper companion. Both the diction and the idea of reciprocity anticipate the later presentation of Herzeloyde and her place as the narrator's model of *kiusche* and *triuwe*. But here in the prologue we are speaking, ostensibly, of the audience's relationship to the narrator, while there it is the narrator's relationship to what he has narrated that is at stake. At opposite ends of the narrative arabesque we find the same woman, once as an audience, once as representational ideal. The task of reading woman is the same as that of the woman's reading; the identity between the woman inside and outside the narrative frames the entire exposition.

This contract between the narrator and his female audience is then solidified in an indirect prayer whose placement recalls that of a *Fürbitte*, a prayer in which the poet traditionally submits himself and his work to God's judgment:

> vor gote ich guoten wîben bite,
> daz in rehtiu mâze volge mite.
> scham ist ein slôz ob allen siten:
> ich endarf in niht mêr heiles biten.
> (3,3–3,6)

(Before God I pray that all good women might keep proper discretion as their constant companion. Modesty holds the key to all other virtues; I can wish their souls no greater help.)

The difference is plain enough: Wolfram does not pray for his poem or for himself, but rather for his audience.[69] The same audience, the *sinnec wîp* whom he calls upon in the epilogue to book 6, is the receptive instance on which the truth of his endeavour depends.[70] Narration thus becomes a form of service to women, or *Frauendienst*, but if this is true, then it is because the woman-as-audience performs a receptive act as a form of worship, or *Gottesdienst*.[71] We will discover the full meaning of this equation in the portrayal of Herzeloyde. The remainder of the remarks to women (as discussed above) then present the narrative, its proper reception, and the audience all at once within the

67 Schnyder, " 'Frauenpassage'," 11; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," p. 431.

68 Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 431–32; similarly, Schnyder, " 'Frauenpassage'," 11–13.

69 Schnyder, " 'Frauenpassage'," 11–12.

70 See the passage and the discussion in chapter 1, pp. 20–21.

71 Similarly, Schnyder, " 'Frauenpassage'," 15.

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opposition between the false and the true woman, false and true praise. Masterfully, this activation of the woman's reading position takes the form of a contrafact of the earlier discussion. The images of paradox that there defined and disparaged material representations here characterize the false woman (3,8–9), that is, only the *false* exterior, the brilliance of form and *schœne*. "Diu valsche erwirbet valschen prîs" (The false woman reaps false praise) (3,7), the narrator begins, and then identifies *this* woman with an image of inconstancy that recalls the same used to indict the cleric's allegoresis: her repute fades like thin ice in the August sun.[72] As an attribute of the body-to-be-read, then, an attribute of representational art, the true woman, or women's *triuwe*, is the antipode of the cleric's *untriuwe*. The false woman does not display bodily form as inherently deceptive, but rather stands in for the cleric's unreliable conceit, the (arbitrary) construction of continuity between representation and truth by means of rhetorical artifice. The proper orientation to *these* "pretty lies" is then made clear in an opposition between two women, the one defined by the "praise" her falseness deserves (*loben als ich solde/Isolde*), and the other, no less a poetic construction, identified with a craftsman's commitment to the inner truth; that is, the truth as conveyed in the base body of *âventiure*. The stage is now set to perform Benoît's exercise in leading the audience from Eve to Mary, a task accomplished in Wolfram's poem as a mere prelude to the "new tale."

Thus, in Wolfram's first prologue, the cleric's way to salvation through allegoresis is juxtaposed with a layman's (knight's) persevering struggle amid the vicissitudes of worldly experience; *clericus* and *miles* emerge between the lines of a reflection on signs (*bezeichenunge*) and salvation only to give way to woman as herself sign and embodiment of truth—and to the voice of her instructor. The tension between the principles of exclusion and inclusion, between the dualistic opposition of black and white and *parrieret sein*, that shapes the *bîspel* in fact governs the remainder of the prologue and is implicitly resolved there though an articulation of competing modes of reading, each of which mirrors one of the opening ontological positions as a hermeneutic task. The woman's life in-corporates the task of distinguishing between *varwe* and *muot*, exterior and character, body and truth as the attempt to realize a self-effacing exterior that no longer conceals: once again, she reifies the reading task that polarized the terms of the *laicus-clericus* opposition. Through these positions and their several relationships to one and the same enterprise Wolfram constructs his prologue to describe generations in a poetological history of his genre.

For Wolfram's *âventiure* as for the texts of the new *romans* tradition examined earlier, woman thus embodies the new poetics: it is not an exegesis of the outer form that will reveal the truth but rather the ability—or, as Wolfram presents it—the *willingness* to perceive truth in and through a base exterior; not knowledge, not method, but an audience response, *rehter wîbes muot*. As a designator both of the knight's experience and of the literary event, the key term, *âventiure*, is introduced such that narrative art, chivalric experience, and the appraisal of women converge on the as yet still incomplete

72 Cf. lines 3,7–10 in the appendix and the corresponding note.

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proposition of the knight's "reading." It is then also *âventiure*, the narrative process and its unexpected twists of fate, that finally gives the image of woman's perfection a name: *Herze-Leid*.

Lactans Dolorosa: Herzeloyde and Mary's Reading

Herzeloyde's transformation, as I have indicated, is a demonstration of how meaning is made in Wolfram's romance. The key moments in the demonstration are two, and each figures as a lactation, something medieval romance narrative had never witnessed before. These are made to emerge from the circumstances of Herzeloyde's life such that the whole functions as the restaging of Mary's reading in the layman's narrative world: it is not Mary's person or Mary's place as mother of God or *theotokos* that is at stake but rather the truth that is communicated to humanity through her fulfilment of the images of the biblical text. Herzeloyde's experience constitutes a re-embodiment, a vernacular renewal, of Mary's original experience as *sponsa et mater*, the experience that manifests woman as the body of the Word.

Herzeloyde's first lactation, an auto-lactation, occurs where the audience expects the exhibition of a woman's grief.[73] That the one exhibition can replace or repress the other is, to some extent, the result of an illusion: the audience only learns that the queen is pregnant once she already lies unconscious on the ground, having fainted at the news of Gahmuret's death. The woman who regains consciousness is thus newly widowed as well as newly an expectant mother; the narration contrives to compress the two as if the result of one event. Herzeloyde then affirms this impression as her own understanding of her new state, "ich … bin sîn mouter und sîn wîp" (I … am his mother and his wife) (109,25). These words stand on the one hand for her own confusion: all that remains of Gahmuret is the child she carries in her womb. On the other, they mirror Mary's experience as the words only Mary can truly speak: *sponsa et mater sum*.[74] The phrase itself contains the full meaning of Mary's reading: she is both identities at once, the letter and the gloss, the image and its living realization as *historia*. Herzeloyde's condition is reported such that she can plausibly make the same statement, that is, such that her experience begins to reveal Mary's own. That she then addresses her own breasts and their milk as manifest proof of her new state, herself sucks of their milk, besprinkles her body with it, and declares this her rightful baptism: all these follow, as we shall see, from the same principle of representation, her place as the revelation of Mary's truth in the body of the layman's narrative.

The same is true of the second lactation, when she nurses her infant son. Again, the mother "awakens" into new consciousness. The text uses the same verb, *versinnen*, in

73 Attempts to understand the passage as the expression of grief have not proved successful. See Greenfield, "Zweifache Witwe," pp. 135–39. Accordingly, Herzeloyde does not figure in the survey of courtly mourning in Küsters, "Klagefiguren."

74 The echo has been noted before, but with no satisfying explanation; see Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:336–37.

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either case, in the second without apparent motivation.[75] And again it is the compression of her experience of a mother's joy and a widow's grief that contrives to fix a lasting image for the audience: "it seemed to her that her desire had conjured Gahmuret into her arms," we are told, as she now weeps, in fact, over the infant son who also sucks from her breast.[76] The second scene is as if the material fulfilment of the first. What Herzeloyde foresees as her role in life in the first scene—"Often I shall sprinkle myself with you (her milk) and with my eyes, outwardly and inwardly, for I wish to mourn my Gahmuret"—that is, the promise contained in her swollen breasts and their milk is fulfilled in the second lactation.[77] This fulfilment applies as well to the baptism she evoked but in this case transferred to her son, who receives no other baptism.[78] In either case, the love for husband and son, the widow's grief and the mother's love, are experienced as one; her response to either and both is the same: grieving lactation. The *Lactans dolorosa*, as the text constructs the experience, is an image of the fusion of the Annunciation (*conceptio*) and the Passion (*compassio*) as the two moments in which woman as body was one with the Word.

As she thus carries his narrative from an old order to a new, Wolfram's Herzeloyde becomes a re-embodiment of Mary's entry into knowledge as Rupert had staged the same in his *De incarnatione Domini*. The experience cannot, however, be communicated by allusion to the text of a monk's *lectio divina*; it must instead be delivered in a language and a use of images that become in themselves comprehensible to the audience's understanding. A mother's breasts and breastfeeding offered Wolfram the necessary associations for this purpose; they are used in this scene to articulate *triuwe* as the human capacity to reciprocate God's loving sacrifice for humanity; to reach that state of humility, then, in which body can reveal truth.

Taken as parallel to Rupert's understanding of Mary's knowing, Herzeloyde's double lactation acquires a justification, if not an explanation: Mary first knew the Word in the kiss of Canticles 1:1, which Rupert saw as the Annunciation. This experience doubled with drinking from the breasts of the Spirit, which, as required by the oddity of the biblical text, the bride (and not the bridegroom) praises in the following image of the same verse. Thus, in Rupert's understanding, Mary, too, experienced two lactations, one in which she drinks and one in which she nurses, but the first did not involve her own milk.

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75 Line 109,18: "Aldâ wart ir versinnen kunt" (In that moment she recognized her consciousness); and line 112,21: dô diu künigîn sich versan" (When the queen gained consciousness). The translation of these passages is intentionally literal; see the discussion of *sin*, below, pp. 321–23.

76 "Si dûht, di hete Gahmureten / wieder an ir arm erbeten" (113,13–14).

77 "Ich sol mich begiezen vil / mit dir und mit den ougen, / offenlîche und tougen: / wand ich wil Gahmureten clagen" (111,10–13).

78 Also noted by Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht," 16n14, this point has received little attention elsewhere. The omission is no matter of narrative economy, as the parodic staging of the baptism of Parzival's heathen half-brother Feirefiz at the poem's conclusion—as a precondition of the ability to see the Grail—serves retrospectively to beg the question. Cf. Gnädinger, "Wasser—Taufe—Tränen," 67–69.

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Even if Rupert's treatment inspired Wolfram's, however, it was certainly not an exclusive source. Rupert was not alone in understanding the kiss of Canticles 1:1 as a conception of the Word through the Spirit, and the words of a more celebrated commentator come surprisingly close to anticipating Herzeloyde's initial thoughts and actions. In the following passage, Bernard of Clairvaux describes the experience of the soul seeking its beloved in prayer. The breasts of Canticles 1:1, first praised as the bridegroom's, as the breasts of grace, then become, secondarily, hers:

> Kissing her, the bridegroom satisfies her desire and thus fulfills in her the Word that is written, "Thou hast given her her heart's desire, and what her lips longed for, you have not denied her" [Psalm 20:3]. And this is manifest in the milk that fills her breasts. For the holy kiss is of such powerful effect that no sooner has she received it than the bride becomes pregnant, her breasts begin to swell and seem to burst with milk as proof of her new state. Those who persist in frequent prayer have experienced that of which I speak. … Thus the bridegroom can say, "Your wish has been fulfilled, my bride, and it is a sign of this that 'Your breasts are sweeter than wine' [Canticles 1:1]. You will know that you have received the kiss when you feel yourself to be pregnant. For this reason your breasts have begun to swell."[79]

Herzeloyde exhibits her breasts and their milk "as proof of her new state" and as proof of *gotes triuwe*. In her initial mourning recollection of Gahmuret, she recalls their conjugal embrace as the child's origin and pleads with God to show *getriuwe sinne* by bringing the seed to fruit (lines 109,26–110,1). In the next scene—Wolfram introduces it as "ein ander mære" (110,10)—she repeats this plea as "mînes herzen bete" (my heart's prayer) (110,16). She then tears open her bodice to expose her swollen breasts as proof of the chlid's coming, sent before him "since I first felt him living in my body" (cf. lines 110,30–111,2). Their milk would offer her a fitting baptism, for it is evidence of a covenant fulfilled between God and humankind, the answer to her prayer: "Diu frouwe ir willen dar an sach, / daz diu spîse was ir herzen dach" (The lady recognized her wish had been fulfilled, for the milk had become her heart's covering) (111,5–6). Thus, the milk is addressed with the words, "du bist von triuwen komen" (out of *triuwe* you have come to me) (111,7).

Bernard's text relies on knowledge of the relationship between pregnancy, swelling breasts and their milk, and impending birth to make the images of the Song intelligible as metaphors for spiritual experience. Wolfram's text uses the same knowledge to exhibit a woman's experience of these events as *proof of* a spiritual experience, a revelation of *triuwe* as reciprocal devotion between God and humankind. For this he relies, whether directly or indirectly, on Rupert's understanding of Mary's experience as the bodily realization of the scriptural images, as he likewise relies on other aspects of Rupert's

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79 "[Sponsus] annuit voto, dat osculum, impletque in ea sermonem qui scriptus est: Desiderium corids eius tribuisti ei, et voluntate labiorum eius non fraudisti eum. Quod et probat ex eius uberum repletione. Tantae nempe efficaciae osculum sanctum est, ut ex ipso mox, cum acceperit illud, sponsa concipiat, tumescentibus nimirum uberibus, et lacte qusi pinguescentibus in testimonium. Quibus studium est orare frequenter, experti sunt quod dico. … Dicat ergo, 'Habes, sponsa, quod petisti, et hoc tibit signum, quia meliora facta sunt ubera tua vino: hinc te scilicet noveris osculum accepisse, quod te concepisse sentis. Unde et ubera tibi intumuerunt." *Sermones super Cantica*, 9.7, p. 46.

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portrayal. To these we must return shortly. First it is instructive to follow Herzeloyde's presentation of the epiphany of *triuwe.*

Triuwe is in fact ascribed to all manner of characters and actions in Wolfram's text; it is one of the most commonly evoked positive attributes.[80] Most readily identified with *fidelitas* and *pietas*—and thus with the loyalty, or *Treue*, associated with feudal and filial bonds—in Wolfram's world *triuwe*, like God's truth, is potentially manifest everywhere.[81] It is nevertheless—or for this very reason—expressly identified with no less than God and God-as-love. As Trevrizent instructs Parzival, "got selbe ein triuwe ist" (*triuwe* is the essence of God himself) (462,19); furthermore, God, most especially as the Son, is likewise the *wâre minnaere* (466,1), the true lover. And in an excursus on "good" and "bad" love (lines 532,1–19), the narrator distinguishes erotic attraction from love as experienced by those who know *herzenlîchiu triwe* (heartfelt love). The latter is no temporary affliction but rather the constant accompaniment of their existence and incorporates joy and sorrow equally. He then states apodictically, "reht minne ist wâriu triuwe" (love properly conceived is true *triuwe*) (532,10). His authority to distinguish in this question can itself stem only from *triuwe*: "sol ich der wâren minne jehn, / diu muoz durch triwe mir geschehn" (If I am to speak of true love, then it must come to me through *triuwe*) (532,17–18). In Herzeloyde's case, as Sigune informs Parzival, "grôz liebe ier solch herzen furch / mit dîner muoter triuwe" (True love ploughed such a furrow in your mother's heart with her *triuwe*) (140,18–19). As Herzeloyde and later Sigune exhibit it, *triuwe* is best understood as the capacity to suffer for another in love, to embrace the other no less in pain than in love, that we have found at the centre of *romans* translation of Mary's reading and at the centre of "the problem of the woman reader."[82] As Wolfram develops the concept above all through these two figures, its function and significance make it closely comparable, in fact, to Landri's *devocions de cuers.* Both terms denote the potential of *fidelitas*, *caritas*, and *compassio* alike to move the soul towards God, to bring forth in humanity its innate resemblance to the divine, the *imago dei*.[83]

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80 For a comprehensive review of the place of *triuwe* in *Parzival*, see Schmid, *Studien*, pp. 111–86, esp. pp. 155, 168, 173–74, 179–84, and 186.

81 To insist on the term's relationship to the feudal bond is only to state the etymologically obvious. The extent to which Wolfram enlarges this concept to comprise a religious experience of *compassio* has been established at least since the work of Schwietering (see the following note and above, p. 203 note 20). See also Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 275, 279–84.

82 Julius Schwietering argued that Wolfram's *triuwe* reflects a new religious feeling of the twelfth century that focused on the sufferings of Christ and compassion from man to man: "Leiden ist *triuwe* und trifft ins Herz" (Schwietering, "Parzivals Schuld," p. 378).

83 As I have argued before, *triuwe* is remarkably similar both in etymological development and range of meaning to the twelfth century understanding of the term *devotio* and may be Wolfram's translation of that term, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 463–64; and Chatillon, "Devotio," 702–16 at 702–5 and 708. *Devotio* has likewise been identified with the experience of loving suffering that is the object of the text-image tradition that (later) precipitates in visual art as the pietà; see Schawe, "Pietà und Hoheslied."

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Triuwe accompanies the events surrounding Parzival's birth like a leitmotif, evoked all but exclusively by Herzeloyde herself.[84] Her testimony is affirmed and continued in the voice of the narrator in the transition to the new narrative.[85] This narrator's affirmation begins in the concluding lines of book 2, in the form of an echo of Herzeloyde's words: as she mourns Gahmuret, Herzeloyde rhymes *wîbes riuwe* (women's sorrow) with *manlîch triuwe* (manly *triuwe*) (lines 110,7–8); the same rhyme receives a chiastic echo within the narrator's concluding description of her: "si kunde *wîbes triuwe* haben … ir schimpf ertranc in *riuwen* vurt" (She knew the way of woman's *triuwe* … her joy was drowned at sorrow's ford) (113,30; 114,3). In the first instance woman's suffering, *wîbes riuwe*, evokes *triuwe* as the man's devotion to the woman, in the second this devotion is mirrored in the woman's devotion, *wîbes triuwe*, to her son.[86] Once again, before the birth, Herzeloyde evokes *mannes triuwe* as an expression of the conjugal act of love. With these lines—as she reasons out loud over the need to moderate her grief ("got wende mich sô tumber nôt" 110,17 [God keep me from foolish desperation])[87]—she speaks of the child she bears as the charge of her own responsibility to her husband:

> die wîle ich bî mir trüege
> daz ich von sîner minne *enphienc*,
> der mannes triwe an mir *begienc*.
> (110,20–22, emphasis added)

(while I carry within me what I conceived through his loving embrace who fulfilled a man's *triuwe* unto me.)

And as she fulfils this responsibility and manifests her own *triuwe* by nursing her son, identifying herself in this act with Mary, the same rhyme and parallel phrasing effectively identify the devotion (and act) of conjugal love with Christ's supreme act of devotion to humanity:

> [frou] Herzeloyde sprach mit sinne
> "diu hœhste küneginne
> Jêsus ir brüste bôt,
> der sît durch uns vil scharpfen tôt
> ame kriuze mennischlîche *enphienc*
> und sîne triwe an uns *begienc*."
> (113,17–22)

84 Lines 109,30, 110,7–8, 110,22, 111,7, 113,22.

85 Lines 113,30, 114,9–10, 116,14, 116,19–20.

86 The rhyme on *riuwe/triuwe* occurs elsewhere in contexts similarly marked in their significance, among them the first prologue (lines 3,1–2) and the passage just quoted in which Sigune reveals Parzival's name and its meaning (lines 140,16–20). See also lines 140,1–2 and 451,3–8; and Schmid, *Studien*, pp. 179–82.

87 Trans. Hatto.

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(Lady Herzeloyde spoke from true knowledge: "The queen of queens offered her breasts to Jesus, who later died our human death most cruelly on the cross, thus fulfilling his *triuwe* unto us.")

Triuwe is thus at the centre of the ideas behind Wolfram's creation of the *lactans dolorosa*; its meaning is articulated through the scene itself to reveal in turn the meaning of the image—in fact, both images and verbal concept are engaged in the same attempt to articulate the experience of truth through the layman's narrative. We previously saw that the one image, that is, Herzeloyde's first lactation, displays milk as the manifestation of God's *triuwe*. But Herzeloyde's statement, "out of *triuwe* you have come to me," has a double referent, or double origin: the milk comes both from God and from Gahmuret. As she says, "sînes verhes sâmen, den gâben unde nâmen unser zweier minne" (the seed of his flesh was given and received in our loving embrace) (109,27–29), and "I conceived through his loving embrace who fulfilled manly *triuwe* unto me." The exchange of semen in conjugal love thus manifests the same reciprocity expressed between Mary's nursing of her son and his dying on the cross; at the same time, Christ's death on the cross is analogous to Gahmuret's *mannes triuwe*.

This somewhat mysterious chain of association, the progression of *triuwe* from pregnancy as the bodily fulfilment of conjugal love through lactation to the crucified Christ, contains a still more startling equation: Gahmuret's *mannes triuwe* is to Herzeloyde's lactation as Mary's lactation is to her son's crucifixion—where *mannes triuwe* occurs in the release of semen, in the conception. Each act "nourishes" the other in love, but no less contains the seeds of a life of suffering. This is the underlying equation that Wolfram's text shares with Rupert's double lactation; that is, his development of the idea of *triuwe* works to transport the same equation. It is likewise accessible to the audience through the ideas associated in Wolfram's time with breast-baring and lactation.

The baring of a woman's breasts had been, from antiquity, a privileged gesture of supplication and the appeal for mercy; her breasts were a symbol of the universal bond between mother and child and thus of the love and compassion owed to one's fellow human.[88] Medieval ideas of human physiology, likewise inherited from antiquity, offer the underlying explanation, which is more visceral than we might expect. Stated simply, "breastmilk was transmuted blood, and a human mother—like the pelican that also symbolized Christ—fed her children from the fluid of life that coursed through her veins."[89] The breast-baring woman thus appealed for recognition of her physical sacrifice in the generation of human life. The analogy with Christ's sacrificial suffering is found as early as the second century, when Clement of Alexandria compared the blood of the Eucharist with "a human mother whose blood becomes food for her child."[90] In visual art

88 Schreiner, "Deine Brüste," pp. 103–4; also Panofsky, "'Imago Pietatis'," p. 302n75; and Seidel, "Ubera Matris," 41–98.

89 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 270. Beginning in the thirteenth century, lactation and bleeding—not only Mary's and Christ's, but also that of their devotees—could be seen as analogous acts of compassion and nourishment, Christ's wounds could be seen as nourishing "breasts" and a woman's breasts as bleeding wounds (*Holy Feast*, pp. 270–75).

90 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 270–71.

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somewhat later than Wolfram's time, this parallel appeared in images of Mary and Christ as twin supplicants for sinful souls to either side of God the Father: Mary appealed by baring her breast, cradled in one hand as if to nurse, while Christ did the same by indicating his own bleeding for the life of man, the wound in his side.[91]

Thus we arrive at an answer to why Herzeloyde so immediately refers Mary's nursing of Christ and hers of Parzival to Christ's bleeding on the cross: Either act was a sacrificial bleeding, one that was also "sacred" in a universal sense. In reference to Mary it was sacred in a quite specific sense. The "solidarity of the flesh" that joined all men as nourished in and on a woman's body was the same bond that joined Christ to mankind.[92] As Herzeloyde reminds her audience: Mary gave Christ his flesh and Christ suffered on the cross *mennischlîche*, in his—and our—human flesh (lines 113,18–22).

A similar solidarity pertains in the exchange of semen, for it too was understood as a kind of boiling-over of the blood.[93] Thus the connection, for Wolfram sublimated as *triuwe*, between coition, lactation, and bleeding resided in the fact that each required an equivalent bodily sacrifice. For Wolfram *triuwe* itself might be an abstraction but the experiences it calls forth and instils have undeniably visceral reality. Still, we might well note, Herzeloyde does not supplicate with her bared breasts; she rather proclaims. Moreover, none of this offers an explanation for her auto-lactation.

These remaining ideas have two explanations. The first lies, once again, in Herzeloyde's own testimony; the second lies in Mary's reading as the explanation for *how she knows these things*. For whether or not we can find symbolic ideas that render Herzeloyde's actions coherent to a medieval audience, it still remains to explain how the same are suddenly the manifest *wîsheit* of a woman who formerly showed no particular possession of wisdom.

In her testimony, Herzeloyde's pressing of her milk is a physical demonstration of her transformation from the old woman into the new, that is, from the old body to the new. When she addresses her milk with the words, "Out of *triuwe* you have come to me," she acknowledges it as the physical manifestation of the inner bond between wife and husband, woman and God; that is, as the inner truth of this entire presentation. The key statement is the narrator's, because it reveals this startling exhibition, a public display of bodily humility, as the female ideal left unnamed in the first prologue: "Diu frouwe ir willen dar an sach, / daz diu spîse was *ir herzen dach*" (The lady recognized her wish had been fulfilled, for the milk had become *her heart's covering*) (111,5–6, emphasis added). The odd phrase first occurred in the prologue, where it signalled the mere beauty of the exterior, *daz man siht*, by which the narrator would not judge a good woman, she who is instead "inrehalp der brust bewart" (steadfast *within* her breast) (3,22–23). In Herzeloyde, "the heart's covering" has become an inner fluid and the essence of human

91 The earliest visual examples occur in manuscript illumination in the second half of the thirteenth century, while the textual tradition is generally traced to Arnold of Chartres in the mid-twelfth. See Marti and Mondini, "Marienbrüste," pp. 79–85 and plates 48, 50, 51; and Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 272 and plates 28–30.

92 Brown, "Notion of Virginity," p. 439, see also pp. 437–38.

93 Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 17; also Bynum, "Female Body," p. 220.

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triuwe, which she then herself brings to view—in explicit defiance of decorum and other's opinions: "Diu vrouwe enrouchte wer daz sach / daz hemde von der brust si brach" (the lady cared not who might see her / she tore her bodice from her breast) (110,23–24). Just as her actions are a contrafact, to some extent, of the conventions of a widow's grieving, so too her breast-baring has finally no basis in public appeal: it is, in effect, an affair between her and God alone. The same self-effacing gesture accompanies her nursing of her own son; the reference to Mary, as has been pointed out often enough, in part serves to justify the flouting of social convention. Social standing, that is, *êre* and *prîs*, honour and reputation, dictated that a queen did not nurse her offspring. What the queen of Heaven deigned to do, however, this earthly queen will not refuse; "diemuot was ir bereit" (humility was her part) (113,16). In her two demonstrations of the solidarity of the flesh between humankind and God, then, Herzeloyde becomes the diaphanous body, the truth as revealed in "base brass."

Wolfram, however, goes still further. His queen does not merely press, but also sucks the milk from her breasts. It is here that we must return to Rupert's Mary.

As seen in the earlier discussion of Rupert's text, when Mary refers to "the moment that made me a mother" and her entry into knowledge (*prophetissa eram*) as one event, she is recalling the opening of the text, in which the enquiring exegete explored her conception as the realization of the bridegroom's kiss (Canticles 1:1). In Rupert's description—for Mary herself does not yet speak—Mary's conception of the Word comprised the transfer of two substances: God's *voluptas* (desire, delight, or semen), which entered her womb, and the milk she drank from the breasts of the Spirit, from which she acquired knowledge of all scripture.[94] Thus Rupert could perfectly preserve the juxtaposition of longing for "his kiss" with praise of "your breasts" in the opening verse of the biblical text: *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are sweeter than wine* (Canticles 1:1). Not only does Rupert's diction play insistently on either as a "drink" imbibed by Mary, but also the two are offered as alternative understandings of the one ineffable, unknowable moment:

> uberum laetificata dulcedine ineffabili, dum concipis, o virgo beata, dum tibi fit secundum hoc verbum angeli: "Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi." … Quid aliud diceres nisi quia "meliora sunt ubera tua vino"?[95]
>
> (When you were sucked with the ineffable sweetness of those breasts, even as you conceived, o blessed virgin, even as it happened to you according to the words of the angel: "And the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you" [Luke 1:35]. … What else could you say but "Your breasts are sweeter than wine?" [Canticles 1:1].)

For Mary as for Herzeloyde, then, the reception of *voluptas* and the drinking of breastmilk are twin predecessors to the *lactans dolorosa*, the embrace in which *sponsa* and *mater* are one and the Word is incarnate as human experience. The very oddity of

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94 As noted earlier (p. 72, above), *voluptas* could also mean "semen," a pun of which Rupert appears well aware.

95 *CCC*, 1, pp. 11–12.

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the biblical text, its conflation of the bride's "prayer" for the kiss and the praise she, not the bridegroom, speaks of the breasts and their milk; this oddity calls forth the chronological compression and attempted coalescence—for Rupert a simultaneity—of conception and auto-lactation in Wolfram's text; it likewise calls forth Herzeloyde's praise of breast milk addressed in the second person (111,7 ff.). More important still is the bodily wisdom with which she is filled—no less, as she says, than she is with the child and the milk it has sent before, "since I felt him living in my body." The merging of the two experiences, on which both the narrative and Herzeloyde insist, the continuity she expresses between before and after, reproduces the inimitable simultaneity of Mary's *historia* in our history, as we can know it. Everything in Wolfram's presentation operates to reinforce this one idea: Herzeloyde knows as Mary knew in this "same" moment, and we, in turn, are to know as Herzeloyde knows.

The *lactans dolorosa*, as spoken by either woman, is then the fulfilment of this knowing in loving and suffering, knowing as *sponsa et mater*:

> For I was a prophetess, and from the moment that I was made his mother, I knew he was going to suffer these things. When, therefore, I fondled such a Son, born of my flesh, at my bosom, carried him in my arms, nursed him at my breasts, and had always before my eyes such a death as was destined for him, and foresaw everything with a prophetic, nay rather, a more than prophetic mind; what kind, how much, and how extensive a passion of maternal grief, do you imagine me to have endured?: This is why I say, "My beloved is for me a bundle of myrrh; he will dwell between my breasts" [Canticles 1:12]. O sojourn sweet indeed, but filled with unutterable groanings!

This is the moment, in all its insistent physicality and tenderly human devotion, that Wolfram could re-embed in a narrative context in which the mother relives the embrace of her dead husband as she nurses the infant son and identifies this *memoria* with the *memoria* of Christ's suffering. Rupert's text prefigures not only the fusion of "widow" and mother, bereavement and nourishment, not only the viewer's/listener's introduction into a woman's intimate emotional and physical experience, but also the idea of reciprocity between Mary's lactation and Christ's Passion, between the mother's "bleeding" body and the bloodied body of the Word. That is, what Rupert's text introduces, above all, is the idea of this moment in Mary's life as the image that embodies the mystery of the bodily bride and makes it available to human apprehension, precisely what Wolfram's exposition requires.

Mary's experience, too, is designed to communicate a before and after, the progression from promise to fulfilment, conception to Incarnation. As Rupert witnessed it, she does not introduce the image of her grieving lactation as an "explanation" of Canticles 1:12. She rather offers Canticles 1:12 to her *amici* as their way of grasping the ineffable, how she was one with the Word (*dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*), how the fragrance of her humility "could rise so high as to reach him. O friends, this I have experienced!"[96] Thus Mary revisits her experience of the conception (here seen through Canticles 1:11) as the unspeakable grace that allowed her to reverse the failing of her sex in Eve: "Non possum

96 "... qualis ... usque ad ipsum spiravit vel spirare potuit. ... O amici, hoc ego experta sum" (*CCC*, 1, pp. 30–31).

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eloqui, non possum verbis consequi: res ista non est effabilis" (It cannot be uttered, words cannot describe it, this thing is ineffable).[97] The transition to Canticles 1:12 then introduces the "bundle of myrrh" as at once the movement from conception to birth and her attempt to give this mystery communicable form:

> descenditque de illo accubitu suo, et requievit in tabernaculo meo. Hic requievit, hic habitavit totis novem mensibus, et cuius erat Dominus, eiusdem ancillae suae factus est filius. Vultis audire, amici, qualis exinde fuerit iste dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi? Ecce dico vobis: "Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur."
>
> (*CCC*, p. 31)

> (and so he came down from his couch [cf. Canticles 1:11] to rest in the shelter of my womb. There he rested, there he lived for nine months and she of whom he was lord, of that same handmaid he became the son. Do you want to hear, my friends, how it could then be that "my beloved was to me as I was to him"? Here I tell you: "My love is to me as a bundle of myrrh, between my breasts he shall rest" [Canticles 1:12].)

The image of the *lactans dolorosa* is thus to be understood (by the audience) as the same mystery differently "spoken," as its manifestation in apprehensible reality. Conception and lactation, respectively, signify the experience of the Word as apprehended before and after the Incarnation. The ineffable union of the one experience is made knowable to humanity as the reciprocity in love and suffering, *passio* and *compassio*, that allows us to know God's pain as our own. "If you ponder this rightly," Mary says before she speaks Canticles 1:12 as the image of the *lactans dolorosa*, "truly, you will discover it in me, whence with me you will be pierced with pain and with me you will be sweetly consoled."[98] This knowledge lies in a communion of the flesh whose perfect realization pertained in Mary and Christ; the milk with which Mary nourishes her son is a sign for all to see of the invisible union that took place in her womb.[99] With it she completes the new covenant between God and woman, "that same sex from which the root of *superbia* came forth and corrupted the entirety of the human race."[100] The Old Eve has become the New.

Mary's knowing thus derives from the same equation—conception is to lactation as lactation is to crucifixion—that Wolfram manifests in the way Herzeloyde attests to her experience of *triuwe*. *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*: the experience of the New Eve is that of a reciprocity between woman and God and of a continuity between love human and divine, and no less between physical and spiritual experience. Herzeloyde understands her experience through this continuity and refers it to the same fact of Mary's experience: the mother's bodily nourishing of her child and the suffering each will endure for love of her son-spouse constitute (and this is one-half of the mystery)

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97 *CCC*, 1, p. 31, see also pp. 10–11; and above, pp. 74–75.

98 "Si haec scitis, si ista rite perpenditis, profecto in me invenietis, et unde mecum compungamini, et unde mecum dulciter consolemini" (*CCC*, 1, p. 31).

99 Rupert returns to this idea with still greater emphasis in the passage on Canticles 4:10, *Quam pulchrae sunt mammae tuae*, *CCC*, 3, p. 81.

100 "In isto … sexu, a quo initium superbiae generi humano superveniens totam massam corrupit" (*CCC*, 1, p. 30).

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the equal exchange between the mother's bleeding breasts and the son's bleeding body; they express and instil the same union in love. The other half of the mystery Herzeloyde expresses with her auto-lactation: the fulfilment of conjugal love as manifest truth in her pregnant body is a renewed experience of the covenant between God and humanity. The equation between semen and milk, coition and lactation, that is so remarkable in Herzeloyde's transformation is to be understood as the consequence and even the physical proof of her re-embodied reading. These fluids form the substance of her continuity with Mary's experience and the substance of a sacramental power in human experience.

When she announces her initial lactation as an experience of the original Christian sacrament, Herzeloyde testifies to this generative moment in her narrative as a "translation" of the fundamental moment of Christian *renovatio*. It is no less her Annunciation, the moment when the bride becomes aware of her impregnation through the Spirit—not such that she will bear another Christ, not such that Parzival becomes the second person of the Trinity, not such that she is Mary, but rather just as Rupert defined it: such that body becomes the diaphanous vessel of truth. The final image of the *lactans dolorosa* is the receptacle into which all of this pours. Herzeloyde's *Klage*, as it is known to the scholarship, is thus only a scene of grieving insofar as a woman's love and her suffering, one woman's grief and her audience's compassion, had come to represent the most humanly accessible way to know God's humanity.

Romans, or Wolfram's *âventiure*, was the vehicle through which such ideas were being translated to lay audiences. When the as-yet-anonymous narrator of *Parzival* finally steps forward to claim his poem by name and in the same gesture acknowledges this woman as his new female ideal, when he grounds his narrative art in his heartfelt identification with her pain, he, unlike Rupert, does not claim to be illuminated, touched by the Spirit. He instead holds up his heart as the mirror of her pain; he claims the truth of knowing this pain, of being her, as the truth of being there—that is, in the humble aspiration of feeling as she felt he has experienced what she did. Here the knight-narrator and man of action has learned a different way to truth, one that resides in entering the experience of the gendered other, in compassionating the woman.

This woman has known the truth as manifest and experienced in the body. This is the meaning of the intricate parallels between the two texts. The same idea is undoubtedly the key to what have proven her most inscrutable words. Here Herzeloyde explains, or at least elaborates on the identification between her experience and Mary's:

> [frou] Herzeloyde sprach mit sinne
> "diu hœhste küneginne
> Jesus ir brüste bôt,
> der sît durch uns vil scharpfen tôt
> ame kriuze mennischlîche enphienc
> und sîne triwe an uns begienc.
> swes lîp sîn zürnen ringet,
> des sele unsamfte dinget,
> swie kiusche er sî und waere.
> des weiz ich wâriu mære."
>
> (113,17–26)

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> (Lady Herzeloyde spoke from true knowledge: "The queen of queens offered her breasts to Jesus, who later died our human death most cruelly on the cross, thus fulfilling his *triuwe* unto us. He who denies his own flesh shall fare ill on Judgment Day, however virtuous he might be or have been: of this I have true knowledge.")

The interpretation of the final four verses of this passage has remained poised between readings that, oddly enough, fall as if on either end of the devotional shift that is at the centre of Wolfram's interest: the shift from the fear of Christ as judge to loving compassion for the suffering Man-God. What are the *wâriu mære* that Herzeloyde has learned? Not, surely, that Christ's wrath will land a soul in Hell. Quite aside from seeming as obvious as it would be unmotivated, such a final proclamation would deny the very import of the preceding testimony, a paean to God's mercy and compassion, his capacity to feel our pain.[101] Herzeloyde's statement must be taken in its entirety: the truth to which she attests is that expressed in the *lactans dolorosa*, in the reciprocity between Mary's lactation and Christ's Passion, their *triuwe*. This reciprocity is testimony, in turn, to the reality of the Incarnation and its import for our lives, what it enables us to know in and through the body, through, as Herzeloyde says, Christ's *triuwe* unto us. The fourth element in the analogy, the *triuwe* humanity owes Christ, is what she alludes to in lines 113,23–24; should it fail, this gift is lost, and the soul with it.[102] The translation above reflects this understanding of the passage as a whole. The words recommend Herzeloyde's response to her own bereavement, one that honours rather than flagellates the body, to her audience.[103] The truly significant statement then, is her last: "des weiz ich wâriu mære" (of this I have true knowledge). Just as Mary proclaimed before her with the words, "O amici, hoc ego experta sum," Herzeloyde proclaims the covenant of the Incarnation anew, a covenant between God and the vessel of his Word, woman.

The image of Herzeloyde as *regina lactans* is reiterated three times in this scene before it is finally replaced by that of Mary as her forebear. Wolfram uses the repetition not only to underline its importance but also to allow the one woman's experience to seep into the other's, to allow the earthly vernacularity of his Herzeloyde to coalesce with a sacred image. Initially we are shown a mother who "grasped those dun-red buds: I mean the little tips of her teats, and thrust them into [her baby's] tiny beak" (cf. 113,5–8). Then the statement: "she who bore him in her womb was herself his nursemaid" (where *wamme*, womb or belly, sustains the attention to a woman's sexual physiology) gives

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101 On the varying interpretation of these lines, also in relation to lines 110,17–21, see Elisabeth Schmid, " 'Swes lîb," 377–90; and Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:361–62.

102 As printed here, line 113,23 is Lachmann's conjecture, based on MS D, which reads, "swes sîn lîp zürnen ringet." Lachmann rejected the alternative found in MS G, *swes lîp sînen zorn erringet*; while Nellmann has argued for restoring the latter in "Zum zweiten Buch," 191–202. In the controversy over these two verses, the words *sîn zürnen* have invariably been seen to refer to Christ; I take then to refer to the subject evoked with *swes lîp*. This yields the meaning, "He who rages against his own flesh," or, to paraphrase what would then be Herzeloyde's meaning: "he who denies the flesh denies Him who suffered on the cross." *Ringen* I read as a transitive verb with the meaning, "sich umarmt halten … abmühen, quälen," following Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, 449.

103 In lines 110,17–22, Herzeloyde explicitly forgoes the self-flagellation that customarily accompanied a woman's mourning. See above, pp. 55–56.

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way to what seems a third repetition, "she nourished him at her breast," but instead introduces an incongruous epithet: *die wîbes missewende vlôch* (she who shunned woman's failing) (113,11–12). Finally, this image is transformed in Herzeloyde's imagination into that of her holding her dead husband in her arms, followed again by a generalizing comment: "she was not given to flattering foolery, humility was her sole intent" (cf. 113,15–16).

On the one hand, this progressive coalescence of bodily particularity and generalized exemplarity might be explained, and too often has been explained, as the narrator's attempt to forestall objections to unseemly behaviour.[104] To thus trivialize its import nevertheless flies in the face of the concluding statement to which it clearly builds. Why or how Herzeloyde remedies a failing inherent in her sex is unclear at best; the woman who indisputably "fled"—or reversed—such a failing is Mary, the New Eve. The idea that Herzeloyde might be charged with moral laxity or frivolity (*lôsheit*, line 113,15) is jarring at this juncture of the text, whatever judgment we may apply to her earlier life. The contrast *lôsheit–diemout*, however, completes one more circle in a narrowing spiral: Herzeloyde's bodily experience becomes, in the process of the narrative, a translucent vessel of Mary's; at the same time, Wolfram's vernacular diction becomes as if a blurred or reshaped imprint of biblical and liturgical imagery; his text as if a palimpsest of one written before, once and for all time. In her transformation from the manipulative and self-centred queen of the Kanvoleis tournament to widowed bride and self-immolating mother, Herzeloyde has relived Mary's redemption of Eve. The real meaning of both her words and Mary's is: "Behold the image of this truth, manifest in my experience."

The Layman's Key to Peter's Gate

Swer nu wîben sprichet baz,
deiswâr daz lâz ich âne haz:
ich vriesche gerne ir freude breit.
wan einer bin ich unbereit
dienstlîcher triuwe:
mîn zorn ist immer niuwe
gein îr, sît ich se an wanke sach.
ich bin Wolfram von Eschenbach,
unt kan ein teil mit sange,
unt bin ein habendiu zange
mînen zorn gein einem wîbe:
diu hât mîme lîbe
erboten solhe missetât,
ine hân si hazzens keinen rât.

104 Thus, still, Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloyde*, 2:354–61, where earlier interpretations are reviewed.

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dar umb hân ich der andern haz.
ôwê war umbe tuont si daz?
(114,5–20)

> Should anyone now give a better account of women, truly, I'd be the last to object: I'd happily hear them held in high esteem. Only to one among them do I deny my devoted service: I hold a grudge ever-new against her, since I found her untrue. I am Wolfram von Eschenbach, and have sung my share of love songs, but I'm like a pair of pincers where my grudge against one woman is concerned. She caused me, life and limb, such grievous injury that I can't help but despise her. And this all the others hold against me. Alas, why do they do so?

When the narrator steps between the concluding image of Herzeloyde as *lactans dolorosa* and his audience to speak these words, he does so as a poet-champion throwing down the gauntlet to any and all contenders: whoever might "now," that is, in the presence of *this* female ideal, best him in women's praise has his unbegrudged blessing.[105] This woman is the essence of his new narrative art. She is the manifest reversal of the old body poetics and "living" proof of the promise contained in the new.

The conclusion of Wolfram's poetic exposition in the second prologue stages the transformation from the old to the new narrative as that from the Old to the New Eve on several levels at once. The transformation of Herzeloyde is the primary and moving force that carries the rest. But next there is the narrator's own, ostensibly "biographical" conversion from a false to a true woman, from the woman *an wanke* to she who inspires his *herzeleit*, his loving compassion. This, in turn, is portrayed as a conversion from singing the praise of the One Lady of the Minnesang (lines 115,5–7) to a narrative art in which all women are equally entitled to his attention in as much as they manifest and inspire the same *triuwe*. And finally there is the audience's transformation, evoked in the narrator's admonishments on the resumption of the narrative in book 3. The transformation comprises protagonist and narrator, audience and medium, in a symmetry of *triuwe* on both sides of the narrative mirror.

As pointed out above, this juncture of the text exhibits parallels both to Benoît's introduction of Briseida's dilemma (likewise transferred to the audience) and to Landri of Waben's union of the heart with the reading bride and his "awakening" from her contemplative sleep. Wolfram's exposition incorporates both gestures, the one from history and the other from exegesis, and surpasses both: Like Benoît's, his text serves the articulation of a new experience of truth in narrative, like Landri's, it articulates this experience as a "translation" of the reading experience of the Song of Songs. The shifting voices of the speaker and changing identities of his prospective audience reflect the masterful manipulation of a discourse on media and truth previously proper to religious literature—and its appropriation for a new translation onto the stage of the layman's narrative.

The layman's advocate of the first prologue promised reliable counsel on woman's redemption somehow derived from chivalric experience, a model of reading in

105 Kuhn, "Wolframs Frauenlob," 200 and passim.

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experience to supplant the cleric's mediation of truth. Having now provided the proof before her eyes and ears, the narrator proudly steps forward to claim his literary spurs, the knight-narrator's right to the stage. The challenge from the end of book 6 ("swelhiu diz mære geschriben siht …"), with which the narrator calls women to witness the truth of his portrayal, is formulated here as an insistence on aural and visual evidence that corresponds to the proof of action as opposed to mere words or intellectual sophistry. *Reht* and *art* of this poetic project are established in personal risk of life and limb:

swelhiu mîn reht wil schouwen,
beidiu sehen unde hœren,
dien sol ih niht betœren.
schildes ambet ist mîn art:
swâ mîn ellen sî gespart,
swelhiu mich minnet umbe sanc,
sô dunket mich ir witze kranc.
ob ich guotes wîbes minne ger,
mag ich mit schilde und ouch mit sper
verdienen niht ir minnen solt,
al dar nâch sî sie mir holt.
vil hôhes topels er doch spilt,
der an ritterschaft nâch minnen zilt.
(115,8–20)

(Whatever woman now wishes to inspect my credentials, both to see and to hear them, she I shall not lead astray. My craft is that of the shield: Where my courage isn't put to the test, where a woman will love me merely for singing, I'd say she's weak in the head. If I seek a good woman's love yet fail to earn it with shield and lance—then let her favour me accordingly. He who woos for love with the knight's craft shows that he's playing for keeps.)

Narratorial legitimacy is here—as in the first prologue—grounded in steadfast service through thick and thin, guaranteed above all through a palpable experience of presence. Where there the clerical instructor was discharged for *valsch geselliclîcher muot*, manifest as the inconstant and insubstantial surface apparitions of *significatio*, here the polemic against the deceptive exterior discharges the rhetoric of the Minnesinger as *falscher prîs*, mere flattery that peddles a no less elusive and deceptive image-ideal. Either purveys a false reading of the body, the one its rejection as merely arbitrary form, the other its elevation to ornamental conceit. The summary preconditions for a continuation of what he has just begun are therefore two:

hetens wîp niht für ein smeichen,
ich solt iu fürbaz reichen
an disem mære unkundiu wort,
ich spraeche iu d'âventiure vort.
swer des von mir geruoche,
dern zels ze keinem buoche.
ine kan decheinen buochstap.

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dâ nement genuoge ir urhap:
disiu âventiure
vert âne der buoche stiure.
(115,21–30)

(If the women will do without the usual flattery, I'll gladly go on to tell you in this tale things unheard of, I'll continue the story for you. But whoever desires this of me had better not think it a book. I am no man of letters. There are plenty of that sort around: this knight's adventure rides without a bookish bridle![106])

Somewhere equally removed from the poles of merely flattering *vernacular* love poetry and instruction derived through *Latin* learning (*litterae*) and books lies the true vocation of *den wîben sprechen*, speaking for or to women—and with it this poet's audio-visual claim to truth. But praise and appraisal of woman had been at the centre of a debate over body and truth from the early centuries of Christianity; when *Parzival* was completed, "she" had been the pivotal point in a renewal of bodily media for nearly a century. Wolfram's exposition exploits the full consequences of this idea for a poetics of narrative experience. The proud defiance and exuberant confidence of his misnomered "Apology" stem from the knowledge that his audience will not only agree but also knows full well what is at stake. To read woman is to read the world—as a woman. To read as a woman is to endure the trials and limitations of bodily experience as the authentic medium of truth.

Reading Wolfram's poetic exposition from the perspective of a debate over the new body poetics repeatedly introduces a fundamental departure from previous interpretations that is also the fundamental departure of this book from previous ideas of what new vernacular narrative was: Wolfram is not primarily concerned with positioning himself against other vernacular poets nor even to position narrative against the lyric of the *Minnesang*. His real thrust is to champion a layman's *litteratura*, and this means a layman's entry into knowledge, a legitimate means to the constitution and apprehension of moral truth that operates outside the bounds of clerical authority and its monopoly over writing and hence over scripted and scriptural truth. The necessary antecedent is then clear: an alternative reading for non-readers, a layman's, or rather a woman's, *lectio.*

Thus, if Wolfram's narrator begins his second prologue from a position squarely within the culture of courtly poetry, if the motivation for his intervention is initially most reminiscent of Benoît's, the remainder of the second prologue is more readily recognized through its predecessors in women's monastic instruction and vernacular exegesis. The *Speculum virginum* modelled a woman's (that is, a non-reader's) *lectio* that derived its legitimacy from Mary's conception of the Word as the renewal of the body and bodily media—the promise of an audio-visual apprehension of truth through performance and physical presence. Landri's "teaching of the bride" was directed at *puceles*, those

106 More literally: "This *âventiure* needs no help from books!" Wolfram's second prologue has in fact proven no less resistant to scholarly interpretation than his first, precisely because the connection between reading and the appraisal of women has continuously eluded our grasp. For a detailed account of the points of controversy and the various interpretations, especially of Wolfram's denial of books and learning, see Kästner and Schirok, "Bücher."

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as yet unschooled in love who were privileged to a different path, the unlearned who received the milk of instruction as *estoire* from the mouths of their *maistres*—whose intervening role, however, the reading exercise at hand was designed to bypass. But it is the *Eructavit*, as the adaptation of women's audio-visual *lectio* to the courtly stage, and most particularly its performer-protagonist, David, that most clearly prefigure Wolfram's poetic positioning.

In the *Eructavit* we find all the same elements that seem so incongruously bundled together in the introduction of the German courtly narrative: The proud insistence on the vocation of the singer and entertainer paired with humble devotion to (a) woman as audience and inspiration, the idea of women's instruction conducted as if a moral step beyond the courtly *chanson*, the defiant confrontation between an entertainer's song and a cleric's catechism, between "the voice of the heart" and the dry learning of the written page; and all this in service of one objective: to lend Mary's reading a voice on the stage of courtly vernacular literature. David's defiant humility before the gates of Heaven (no less and no more a paradox than Wolfram's) claimed a privileged entry into knowledge for himself as for the poem's *dame*, Marie de Champagne, that was to take place through his audio-visual delivery of the call to the bride—vernacular *lectio* as no less than a reactivation of the *voiz* that performed the Annunciation to Mary. Such was the reading aspiration that could be ascribed to the "queen" of scripture *en romans*. We have seen that Wolfram fully espoused the same aspiration for his poem and the woman at its poetological centre. But here, there is no David and no elevation to heavenly vision; the vernacular bride is herself witness to the transformative power of the Spirit and the poetic voice; its medium is her own—and our own—bodily experience.

When Herzeloyde speaks the concluding lines of her testimony to this experience, so we are told, she speaks *mit sinne* (line 113,17). At the end of book 6, when the narrator challenges his female audience to authenticate his "true" portrayal of women, he qualifies their competence with the same term: not to just any woman, but to *swelch sinnec wîp* he submits his work for judgment (cf. line 337,1). The epilogue insists on the same qualification: "goutiu wîp, hant di sin …" (Good women, so far as they have *sin* …) (827,25). The woman with *sin* authorizes and presides over the performance of this narrative. Yet a connection between these three instances of the term has so far escaped recognition. None of the standard translations render all with the same idea; no more is there agreement among the translators on the meaning in any one of the three passages. As Wolfram applies the term to women, *sin* does not mean simply or alternately "understanding" or "discernment," still less "learning" or "cleverness."[107]

107 These observations are based on the translations of Hatto, Knecht, Kuhn, and Spiewok. *Sin* is generally taken in these passages as a reference to reasoning ability or education. Herzeloyde's words are qualified as spoken "pensively" or with reflection; *sinnec wîp* are taken as "educated," "sensible," or "intelligent" women—with a strong tendency to read the statement as a reference to women's literacy (for example, despite his earlier reservations, Nellmann, commentary to *Parzival*, p. 625); and the qualification evoked in the epilogue is rendered somewhere between "prudent" and "clever" (*klug*), or as "discerning."

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Much more has been made of Wolfram's use of *sin* in another highly conspicuous context, the prologue to his second epic poem, *Willehalm*. There it occurs in direct opposition to bookish knowledge as the source of his own poetic inspiration:

> der rehten schrift dôn und wort
> dîn geist hât gesterket.
> mîn sin dich kreftec merket.
> swaz an den buochen stât geschriben,
> des bin ich künstelos beliben.
> niht anders ich gelêret bin
> wan hân ich kunst, die gît mir sin.[108]

> (What is spoken of holy scripture derives truth from your spirit. My own inner ear [*sin*] is turned to you alone; what is written in books has been no help to me. I've had no other education than what I find in my craft, and that comes to me from within [*sin*].[109]

Willehalm derives from the *legenda* tradition, in which the poet serves as mouthpiece of the Spirit whose works he recounts as the life of a saint. *Sin/sensus* thus signifies the human faculty to apprehend the Spirit directly, access to a higher *wîsheit* (wisdom) that is granted by grace alone; similarly then, it stands for *sensus* in opposition to *litteratura*, the living wisdom of Christ as opposed "to the dead letter."[110] The same idea stands midwife to David's insistence on performance in the *Eructavit*, with additional scriptural authority lent through the psalm verse, *non cognovi litteraturam et introibo in potentiam domini.*

The parallels with the literary positioning in *Parzival* as we have pursued them are clear. The same have been repeatedly discussed in the scholarship to return always to the same conclusion: the poet of *âventiure* cannot pose *a priori* as the inspired vessel of the Spirit proper to the *legenda* tradition, and if he nonetheless invokes the illiterate's privilege through the authority of the psalm verse, it remains unclear at best where we are to locate his alternative guarantor of spiritual truth.[111]

Wolfram's claim, however, is not at all made *a priori* but rather in the presence of the manifest truth of Mary's reading. The truth of this narrative mode is not invested in the poet's inspiration, but rather in the woman's reception, her *sin*, through and of which Herzeloyde speaks with her *wâriu mære*. The key to this understanding of the term

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108 *Willehalm*, lines 2,16–22.

109 This translation, too, is inevitably an interpretation, which in this case must speak for itself. I have largely followed *LDMA*, p. 189. For detailed discussion and the various readings, see (most recently) Fasbender "*Dôn und wort*," 21–33; and Ochs, "*'Willehalm'-Eingang*"; also Ohly as in the note following.

110 "Der *sin* 2,18 ist der sensus als das Organ der Wahrnehmung des heiligen Geistes" (Ohly, "Wolframs Gebet," 19, and passim). Ohly continues: "Der schöpferische *sin* des heiligen Geistes macht im Empfangen auch den Menschen schöpferisch, so wie die ehrfahrene *triuwe* Gottes für Wolfram auch den Menschen *triuwe* lehrt" ("Wolframs Gebet," 19). This statement might serve to describe Herzeloyde's function for the genesis of the narrative in *Parzival*.

111 See Haug's discussion in *LDMA*, pp. 177–78 and 189–90. Bumke, *Blutstropfen*, pp. 134–35, argues anew that Ohly's conclusions are pertinent to *Parzival* as well.

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is contained in the moment when Herzeloyde experiences the transforming power of epiphany in the body that brings a transition from figurally concealed to bodily immanent truth. Just as the milk she drinks affords her a different *wîsheit* ("alsus sprach diu wîse," 110,28), so the narrator qualifies her recognition of affinity with Mary (lines 113,17–26) with the words: "[frou] Herzeloyde sprach *mit sinne*" (113,16). That is, either lactation and either awakening—each is announced with the verb *sich versinnen*—attests to her entry into Mary's gnosis.

It is thus neither the author of the Psalms nor another poet similarly inspired but instead Wolfram's lowly knight-narrator in the here and now who justifies, as David did, his "right" to perform for *diu wîp* as one that must be "seen and heard," with the same proud insistence on the insignia of his otherwise disqualifying social class. In effect, the position of the poet-exegete is now occupied by the *illitteratus*, the same who previously sat in the audience alongside Landri's *seignors* or Baldwin of Guines, while the positions of the heavenly and the courtly bride, of *sponsa et mater* and *adulescentula*, are collapsed into an experience witnessed by his indispensable counterpart, the woman as human mirror of divine truth. And if this narrator now insists both on his own status as *illitteratus* and on independence from bookish guidance, it is because he claims the privilege of a layman's entry into knowing—*non cognovi litteraturam et introibo in potentiam domini*—and then also proclaims the consequences. David's insistence on the privilege of his art as jongleur is literally a rejection of writing as mediation and implicitly a rejection of the written authority that the gatekeeper evokes and represents: "Don't tell me to write it down; / The tongue, which the heart quickens / Will write it without fingers or hands / Much better than any scribe."[112] Wolfram's is an explicit rejection of the authority that *litteras* represent and thus a claim to a layman's reading autonomy.

The illiterate knight-narrator who assumes his identity only once he has also "read" the tale of the transformation of Eve as *âventiure* has taken the implications of Rupert's reading to their extreme. Like Rupert's and Landri's exegetes, this new lady's champion poses as the voice of a new experience of the truth—but can only do so as an accessory to the *adulescentula*. The layman has assumed his position as a special category of woman, of humanity's weakness before God. The woman he follows is no longer Mary herself but a representative of that same weakness and its gnostic privilege in the here and now. The reception of truth through audio-visual experience now resides in a symmetry of position and disposition on both sides of the communicative act, a mutual manifestation and mutual recognition of *triuwe*, or that which is of God in our fellow (wo-)man. Meaning is made only as a result of the joint participation of audience, performer/narrator, and text in the making of *âventiure.* This "renewal" of tale-telling would transform the most secular of narrative experiences into the vessel of a privileged gnosis, an entry into the presence of the Word reserved for the weak, the young women, and the illiterate. *Devocions de cuer*—that is, *triuwe* such as Herzeloyde represents—is the layman's key to Peter's gate.

112 Cf. lines 239–42, quoted above, pp. 219–20.

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This was Wolfram's answer to "the truth question" in vernacular narrative. Notably, it has little to do with our idea of fiction but much to do with a discovery of empathy as a locus of Christian meaning and truth. It accomplishes the same substitution, in far more ambitious form, that we observed in Benoît's narrative: the truth of "being there" is superseded by the truth of "being her." In effect, Herzeloyde's words stand as an *attestatio res visae* in which the truth born of personal witness in physical presence is instead known through identification in affective experience: loving, suffering, and thereof knowing, as another did before. Gottfried von Strassburg subsequently introduced a similar substitution in more playful form in his *Tristan*.[113] After the extended and indulgently allegorical description of his celebrated love grotto, the narrator attests to the truth of the portrayal with the words, "Diz weiz ich wol, wân ich was dâ" (This I know well, for I was there) (17104). But after another thirty-five lines in which he describes his trip to the location in question it is abundantly clear that what he intends is instead a witness of the heart: "ich hân die fossiure erkant / sit minen elif jâren ie / und enkom ze Kurnewâle nie" (I've known the grotto since I was eleven years old and without ever setting foot in Cornwall) (17140–42).

What Gottfried intended this statement to mean for the construction of truth in *Tristan* cannot be pursued further here. I will explore in the last chapter how Wolfram developed the idea of witness through the heart in *Parzival*. But the contours of the experience are already delivered through Herzeloyde: the truth of narrative is found in a response in which we know one another through identification in experience, in the humanity that we share with Christ. The enabling model and mirror of this truth is Mary's experience of conception, birth, and motherhood, the joy and suffering of humanity over its part in the life of the divine on earth. With the exposition of his "new narrative" Wolfram reinscribed the original act of Christian reading, the act in which the body became the vessel of divine truth, as the model of how meaning is made in his performance space; he claimed the truth manifest in the reading of the bride as the truth of the layman's romance.

113 Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 186–87.

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Chapter 8

THE HEART, THE WOUND, AND THE WORD—SACRED AND PROFANE

The Advent of *Âventiure* and the Reconception of the Word

In one of his last essays on the formation of a poetics of fiction in early romance narrative, Walter Haug described this "liberation" from "the horizons of religious meaning" as a continuation of the revolutionary renewal of biblical exegesis that began with Rupert of Deutz.[1] It was Rupert, Haug wrote, who had established "the right" of every new exegete (and thus also every new poet) "to ask after the meaning [of scripture] independently of all previous authority."[2] In the new fictional narrative, the poet's

> work is, for him, a search for meaning, and this as an existential problem, for at stake is the claim that a poetic fiction can constitute the path to meaning and its delivery even within a world for which interpretation as God's creation according to Christian teaching no longer provides the operative authority.[3]

How this existential search for meaning could have grown out of Rupert's testimony that personal reading experience could reveal not "meaning," but *truth*; that all reading experience, approached through the authentic "foundation" of sacred *historia*, led to the truth—that is, to God—is a problem that Haug did not directly address.

The idea of a connection between the experience of narrative fiction and Rupert's reading experience served Haug as a way of accounting for Wolfram's persistent appeal to the figures and metaphors of religious inspiration to authorize his work. In particular, he was building on an essay by Friedrich Ohly of thirty years previous, which elucidated the same for the central image of Wolfram's *third* Parzival prologue, the advent of *Frou Âventiure*, "Lady Taleteller," at the opening of book 9:[4]

> "Tuot ûf." wem? wer sît ir?
> "ich wil inz herze dîn zuo dir."
> sô gert ir zengem rûme.

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1 "… die neue, vom religiösen Sinnhorizont abgelöste Literatur," Haug, "Autorität," pp. 115–27 at p. 124.

2 "… das Recht, in Freiheit von jeder Autorität die Sinnfrage zu stellen" (Haug, "Autorität," p. 126 and passim).

3 "Sein Werk ist für ihn Sinnsuche, und zwar Sinnsuche als Problem, denn es geht um die prekäre Frage, ob eine poetische Fiktion ein Weg der Sinnfindung, einschließlich ihrer Vermittlung, im Rahmen einer Welt sein kann, der gegenüber man sich nicht mehr damit begnügt, sie als Schöpfung Gottes heilsgeschichtlich zu deuten" (Haug, "Autorität," p. 124).

4 "Cor amantis," pp. 128–55.

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"waz denne, belîbe ich kûme?
mîn dringen soltu selten klagn:
ich wil dir nu von wunder sagn."
(433,1–5)

("Open up." To whom? Who are you? "I seek the way to you inside your heart." Then you're after cramped quarters! "What, you don't think I'd fit? My prodding shall give you little to complain of: I want to tell you wondrous tales.")

For both Ohly and Haug, this encounter between the narrator and his story-as-muse recast the idea of divine inspiration as invention occurring in the author's heart. Both singled out the unusual use (unique in Wolframs oeuvre) of the verb *erliuhten* in the narrator's plea for news of Parzival in reply: "nu erliuhtet mir die foure sîn" (Now illuminate his path for me) (434,2). The term referred to a spiritual *illuminatio*, but in this case it occurred through "the spirit of the story" itself.[5] For Ohly this was a gesture to God's intervention in the story as manifest in book 9 ("the story of an act of grace"), but he did not extend a claim to such truth to the act of narration itself.[6] For Haug, the allusion to spiritual inspiration claimed similar authority for narrative invention alone.

Either conclusion offers a striking display of how reluctant scholars have been to admit of a true interpenetration of the sacred and the profane in the "classics" of medieval romance, for there have been few better informed on such questions.[7] As Ohly laid out, the image of a beloved who seeks entry into (or once admitted, is locked inside) a *Herzkluse*, the "chamber" or "cell" of the heart, was by 1100 a common, even somewhat hackneyed one, whether in spiritual use as God's place in the hearts of the faithful or in secular love poetry. His interest in Wolfram's verses lay in the way they crowned a renewal that was characteristic of the twelfth century: "a fresh approach that takes the image literally and this literal understanding seriously, that restores its appeal to the imagination even as it seems to eliminate the imaginary."[8] That is, this treatment of scriptural imagery witnesses the transition from the imaginary to the experiential, the figural to the "historical." Moreover, it does so as a consequence of reinvigoration through the miracle of the Incarnation: the literalization of the metaphor in question takes place in the first half of the twelfth century just as Wolfram has recorded it, as speculation over how such a small space can possibly accommodate such an imposing guest, that is, how Mary's heart, or womb (the two were often interchanged, in Latin and in German), could have accommodated *Christus Gigas*, he who was more immense than the world itself.[9] Ohly, however, did not make the causal connection that has proven

5 Both authors take the phrase "der Geist der Erzählung" from Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*; Haug, "Autorität," p. 123; Ohly, "Cor amantis," p. 155.

6 In "dem geistigen Herzen der Dichtung, … der Geschichte eines Gnadengeschehens," "Cor amantis," pp. 148, 154.

7 Similarly: Palmer, "Herzeliebe," pp. 203–4.

8 "Cor amantis," p. 129, "Seit dem 12. Jahrhundert gibt es einen frischen Zugriff, der das Bild beim Wort nimmt, mit ihm ernst macht, ihm den Reiz des Phantasievollen zurückgibt, indem es ihn zu nehmen scheint."

9 Ohly, "Cor amantis," pp. 143–44; see also Palmer, "Herzeliebe."

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central to developments considered in these chapters: Mary was the wellspring of the twelfth century's literalization of scriptural imagery; it sprang from her generative and gnostic act. Thus, the images of her conception and bearing of Christ did not merely "influence, or incite" the complementary images in love poetry[10] but rather mediated the experience of reification itself. The mediation of this act as reading experience to twelfth-century audiences is where Rupert's contribution is properly situated. With the reopening of Parzival's story in book 9, Wolfram not only illustrates the literalization of a metaphor. He also appropriates the original authority for the realization of scriptural imagery as experience and identifies it with the heartfelt reception of narrative. What this meant for the construction of meaning and truth in courtly romance is to be further explored in this chapter.

The juncture at which Wolfram avails himself of these ideas has much in common with that between books 2 and 3: here as there, the story must introduce its absent hero, as Parzival has not appeared for the length of two intervening books on the adventures of Gawan. Where we witnessed there his original entry as born from his mother's bodily conception of a new narrative, his return in book 9 must emerge from the entry of *frou âventiure* into the respondent's heart; the "conception" of narrative depends on "his" opening to "her" loving knocking.

But Wolfram's image is not therefore one of the poet's *illuminatio*. The singular use of the verb *erliuhten*—familiar from religious literature in connection with the divine illumination of the heart[11]—is a telling point, but it occurs far on into the passage, embedded in a cascade of anxious queries like those of some amorous *adulescentula* eagerly awaiting news of her beloved, a litany of desire itself (433,8–434,10). Moreover, it is not the poet's wish to narrate that initiates this exchange but rather "Lady Taleteller," who, in the manner of a wooing lover, herself seeks entry "to *you* into *your* heart." That the person addressed is the composing poet or even the narrator is open to question. Whatever his or her identity, and despite initial scepticism over the available space (Mary, too, balked at Gabriel's announcement), the addressee's reaction evinces exactly what the exegetical elaboration of this figure assured: once the "lady" is recognized, the heart expands sufficiently to accommodate all manner of possible tales (or guests).[12] Entry here requires no great persuasion, for this heart's enclosure has already been punctured by love's dart.

This "narrator" is singularly ignorant of his own tale, and what he seeks is not so much illumination as simply presence. His heart opens as the poet intends ours to do—this is the real objective—in anticipation of encountering the hero. For when we receive *frou âventiure* we receive her hero no less; or rather, to receive this lady in love is

10 Ohly, "Cor amantis," p. 144.

11 In the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied*, lines 128,2–7, for example, God, seen as the sun, is said to enter and *entliuhten* the hearts (souls) of the faithful. Further examples of the illuminated heart in Middle High German literature are cited in Ertzdorff, "Herz," 290–91.

12 God (or love) makes the heart into an infinitely expanding enclosure, capable (as Mary's was) even of receiving him "whom no vessel can contain" (Landri of Waben, *Song of Songs*, line 2242). See Ohly, "Cor amantis," pp 135–39; esp. p. 139n22.

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to follow her hero's path, *die fuore sîn*, with all the loving anxiety modelled in the receiving heart's response. This is, then, no more a model of poetic inspiration (divine or otherwise) than the denial of letters in the second prologue can be directly equated with the *legenda*-poet's invocation of the Spirit. In the poetic construction of the *niuwe mære*, authority is invested in the "female" receptive act. The obverse is also true: this generative rebirth of narrative partakes of the same power and truth as Herzeloyde's did. Consequently, the continuing story is now born of *our* hearts, of our own burning desire to follow the path of "the beloved"—we need only hear the first person singular pronouns as plurals:

> Beidiu iur hêrre und ouch der mîn[,]
> nu erliuhtet mir die foure sîn:
> der süezen Herzeloyden barn,
> wie hât Gahmurets sun gevarn,
> sît er von Artûse reit?
> ober liep od herzeleit
> sît habe bezalt an strîte.
> habt er sich an die wîte,
> oder hât er sider sich verlegn?
> sagt mir sîn site und al sîn pflegn.
> (434,1–10)

(Both your lord and also my own, now illuminate his path for me: how has the sweet child of Herzeloyde, how has Gahmuret's son fared since he rode from Arthur's court? Tell me whether he has since won happiness or heartfelt sorrow in his battling. Does he persist in his wide wanderings, or has he rather turned to his bed? Tell me how it is with him and what he's been about.)

The generative transformation that took place once before as the experience of Herzeloyde, that is, in the body of narrative, must take place here in the hearts of the "believing" audience. The resumption of the narrative thus begins with the celebrated, seemingly blasphemous pronouncement, never sufficiently explained: "Swerz niht geloubt, der sündet. / diu âventiure uns kündet" (He sins who does not believe this. Lady Âventiure tells us) (435,1–2). This would be heavy artillery, indeed, to employ in an advance charge so far afield as an annunciation of narrative fiction. But it is none such. Wolfram is merely taking the metaphors to their experiential extreme. Should the manifestation of truth in experience itself depend on the believing participation of the *experti*, then to fail in that faith, that is, to fail in *triuwe* to the telling of the tale, would offend against the new covenant between humankind and God.

Wolfram's renewed generation of Parzival's story is thus here as before fused with the constitution of sacred truth. In exegetical tradition the idea of God's knocking on the door of the heart to gain entry, either for instruction or loving reception, was centuries old when Wolfram composed his *Parzival*.[13] Its scriptural antecedents were two: Canticles 5:2, in which the bride wakens to "the voice of [her] beloved, knocking,"

13 Ohly, "Cor amantis," pp. 150–51; on development from the thirteenth century onward, see "Knocking at Heaven's Gate," in Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 158–68.

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and Revelations 3:20, "I stand at the door and knock." Middle High German sermons and religious poetry of the thirteenth century play on the same themes in a way that suggests Wolfram captures ca. 1210 a vernacular understanding that is on the threshold of written tradition. A dialogue between God and the soul from the late thirteenth century, for example, has Christ paraphrase Canticles 5:2 with these words: "ich klopfe an daz herze dîn, / dîn friuntschaft mir daz niht verbunne, / tuo ûf, mîn hort und lâ mich în" (I knock on the door of your heart, your friendship will not begrudge me entry, open up, my darling, and let me in!).[14]

The voice that announces itself as if knocking at the door of the heart is borrowing the voice of the beloved, knocking, to which we have seen the bride rise and open over and again (cf. Canticles 5:2, 5:5). This voice speaks here through a lady who is the incarnation of narrative itself. What more clever construction could one imagine to conflate Mary's conception of the Word, the audience's reception of narrative, and the resumption of the tale at hand all in one "opening" gesture? The opening to book 9 is a call to make room in one's heart for a heartfelt participation in the continuation of the story and thus in its manifestation of *triuwe* as truth. The awaited *illuminatio*, the heart's induction into knowledge, is found in compassion with the story's protagonist; here as elsewhere this loving entry is also a wound.[15] With the penetrated heart thus evoked, the audience's experience joins with the narrator's words of conversion to the new woman: *Mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn*. To open one's heart to Lady Âventiure's urgent knocking is to participate in—or rather to renew—a fellowship of suffering hearts that was first conjured in the second prologue.

What eluded both Ohly and Haug in reading this passage was the transfer of the stage of communication to the hearts of the recipients and the consequent modelling of empathetic response as the heart of truth. Such would have accorded well with Haug's model of meaning formed in the act of narrative received, "in a shared path of loving and suffering."[16] It was not, however, a new way of making meaning peculiar to the composition of secular or romance narrative. In fact, as has become increasingly apparent in the preceding chapters, it was a new truth that comprised both our history and Christ's, that made our pain into a mirror of Christ's and held the two together in one suffering heart, Mary's. To open one's heart to this truth was to know as Mary knew, to experience as she did the descent of the Word into the all-too-cramped space of a human heart, to speak with her the words, *Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea*

14 As cited in Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 165–66. As Hamburger notes, the poem elaborates "the imagery of the Song of Songs in combination with that from Revelation 3:20 to give nuns models for an amorous colloquy with Christ." Similar passages are found earlier in the thirteenth century; see Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 112–13 and 164.

15 The ideas of the knocking on and opening the door to the heart and that of penetrating and wounding it are interchangeable; both equally identified with Christ's side wound as the door to his heart. By the first half of the thirteenth century this image complex becomes conventional: see Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 158–68, esp. 164–66.

16 "… im liebenden und leidenden Mitgehen mit dem … literarisch gestalteten Schicksal," *LDMA*, p. 178.

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commorabitur (Canticles 1:12), and enter into her mystery, one that united conception and compassion, an embrace of both loving and suffering. In such compassionating participation empathy is sanctified, for it constitutes a condition in which the heart opens, that is, bleeds, for fellow men as Christ bled when he, as Herzeloyde informs her son, "died the death of our flesh most cruelly on the cross."[17] The heartblood of compassion is our equivalent of Herzeloyde's flowing milk, our *triuwe* in return for Christ's. *Swerz niht geloubet, der sündet.*

Both the second and third prologues thus serve one message: *compassio*, this reciprocal entry into a heart-wound, could reveal history, it could generate narrative as an experience of the truth. There were conditions on this possibility, which Wolfram lays out in his prologues. Their essence is the acknowledgement of an abject, body-bound humility that enables reciprocal recognition of inner truth—the same that we saw initially articulated through the expanded role of Alexis's *spuse*, or through the interpolation of Briseida's story as a contrafact to the audience's expectations of Helen. With Herzeloyde, three different personifications of female suffering for love, the *sponsa derelicta*, Mary's *compassio*, and the worldly widow, meet and their convergence is complete; the three have become one in her testimony to a woman's renewed experience of Mary's knowing. The reiteration of the moment of heartfelt identification staged as the regeneration of Parzival's story in the opening to book 9 is a signal to the audience that an arc of meaning is on the verge of completion, the aimless drifting of *âventiure* is about to touch land again, which will occur in a renewed and decisive encounter with a woman's widowed grief, the third meeting between Parzival and Sigune. The relationship between witnessing audience, a woman's suffering, and the constitution of truth through shared tears, first demonstrated in Herzeloyde's transformation, is remixed and restaged at the opening of book 9 through a reverse arrangement: here the poetic exposition, or communication about the making of the story in the penetrated heart, precedes. The crucial moment of identification with women's suffering follows in Parzival's own encounter with the widowed bride, his entry into the compassionating heart.

In this final chapter we return to the two images of the psalter-reading woman with which we began, Sigune and Laudine, to rediscover them as widows. What the two finally have in common is that each represents the widowed bride within a carefully constructed presentation of narrative poetics as Mary's reading *en romans*—Wolfram, in fact, tells us as much by twice evoking Laudine's dilemma as the point of reference for his portrayal of Sigune, measuring either woman against an ideal of widowed fidelity. What Chrétien had communicated to his audience through Yvain's path from Laudine to the *pucele*, Wolfram incorporated into a parallel construction in *Parzival* that leads from Herzeloyde's grieving lactation to the apotheosis of grief in Sigune. In both *Parzival* and *Yvain*, proper orientation to the suffering of the widowed bride, to a woman's tears, is where audience and protagonists alike learn proper response to a story told. This process, in which the protagonist learns to read the widow, forms the narrative arc or

17 Herzeloyde's statement is echoed early in book nine by Kahenis, lines 448,10–12 (see below, pp. 335–36).

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horizontal axis between two encounters that each double an identification in suffering within the narrative with an appeal to the audience to accomplish the same; indeed, in which continuation of the tale is made contingent on such continuity of heartfelt participation (see figs. 8.1 and 8.2). The resulting four-cornered construction accomplishes a presentation of narrative poetics such as, when Chrétien first laid it out in *Yvain*, had never been attempted before. The scenes together, in either text, build up a complex of images and associations between love, suffering, and knowing; where knowing resides in the initiation into another's pain, an act of reading that penetrates the heart of the beheld and thereby wounds the heart of the beholder. The heart, the wound and the Word; *compassio* as union in the wounded heart mediated by a woman's grieving and reading or reading grief: this was the point in which the popularizing potential of the monastic transformation of reading culminated.

This increasing focus on the widow's grief as the centrepiece of the new poetics of body and truth I outlined previously, in chapter 4.[18] By the end of the twelfth century, the literature of Mary's *compassio* had developed such that the relationship that Wolfram repeatedly exploits between witnessing audience, a woman's suffering, and the constitution of truth through shared tears is readily recognized as its derivative. The influential Passion tract known as the "Quis dabit," written before 1205 and probably of Cistercian origin, begins with the words, "Who will lend my head and eyes a stream of tears so that I might weep night and day until the Lord appears to his servant in a vision or a dream to console my soul?"[19] The tears the author seeks are Mary's. To share in Mary's tears is to know her experience, which reveals sacred history: "I beseech you," he addresses her, "pour out for me those tears which you had at his Passion, and, so that they might flow more copiously, let us exchange words with each other concerning the Passion of your son, my lord and God. Tell me, I beg, *the true sequence of events*."[20] In order to know, then, the interrogating devotee must first learn from Mary how to weep, for, as he protests, "I am a wretch with a stony heart, and I cannot weep." Mary in turn requires the devotee's tears as the condition for her speech, for him to know and to write of her experience: "Tu tamen, cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magnis doloribus ipsa perpensi" (You, however, write with tears those things which I have pondered with great pain).[21] Thus, this text, too, is generated and can only be generated out of a moment of heartfelt identification with a woman's suffering.

This is a most revealing beginning; it also demonstrates what had occurred over the previous century with regard to tears and stories told. Before the twelfth century, long-standing

18 See pp. 177–87, above.

19 Translation modified from Bestul, ed. and trans., p. 167. Medieval tradition attributed the text to Bernard of Clairvaux; the modern attribution to Oglerius of Lociedo is questionable, as noted in Büttner, *Überlieferung*, p. 31; all that is certain is that Oglerius used and expanded on the text of "Quis dabit" in his *De laudibus sanctae dei genitricis*, thus giving a *terminus ante quem* of 1205. An informative discussion is Marx, "Lamentation of Mary," pp. 137–57.

20 "Quis dabit," ed. and trans. Bestul, p. 169, emphasis added.

21 "Quis dabit," ed. and trans. Bestul, p. 168/69.

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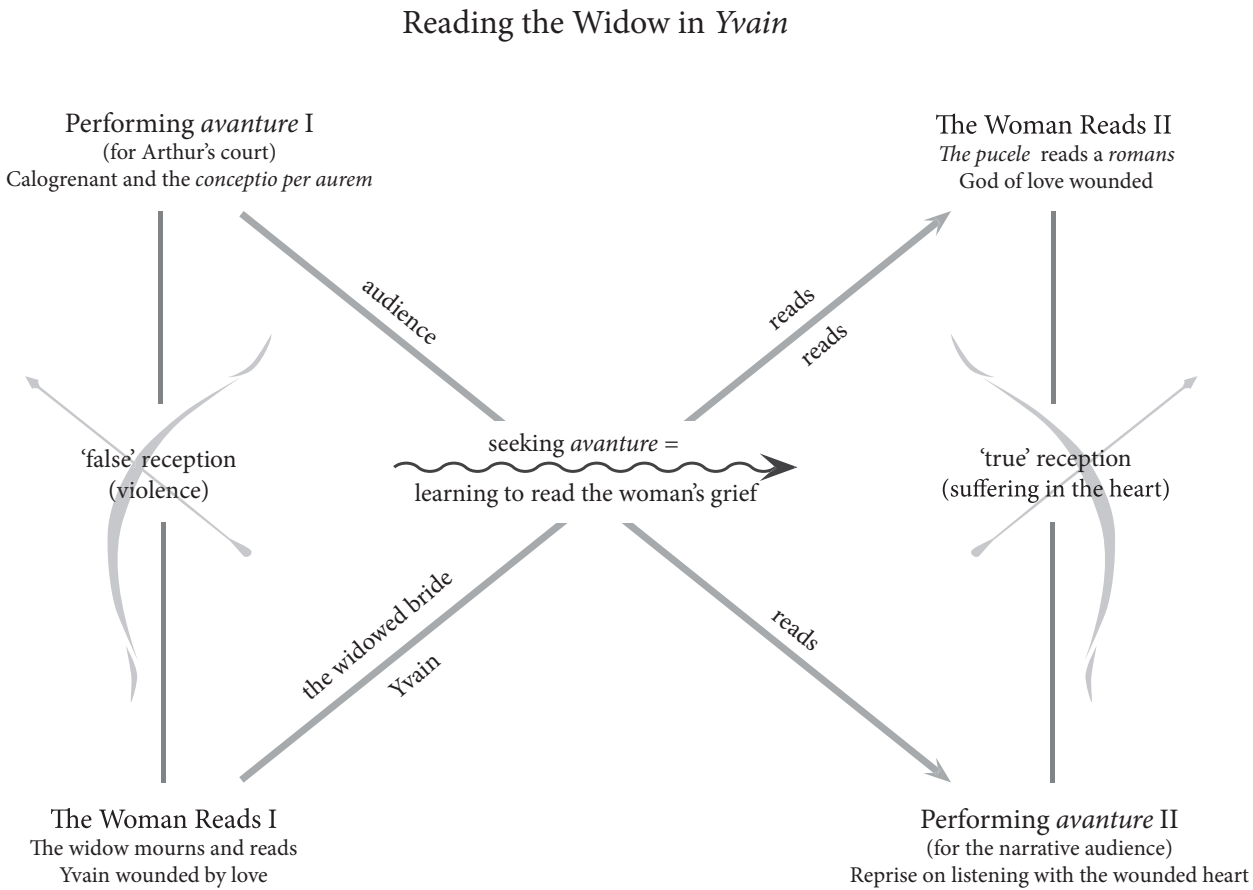


Figure 8.1. Diagram design by Barbora Hanova. © Morgan Powell.

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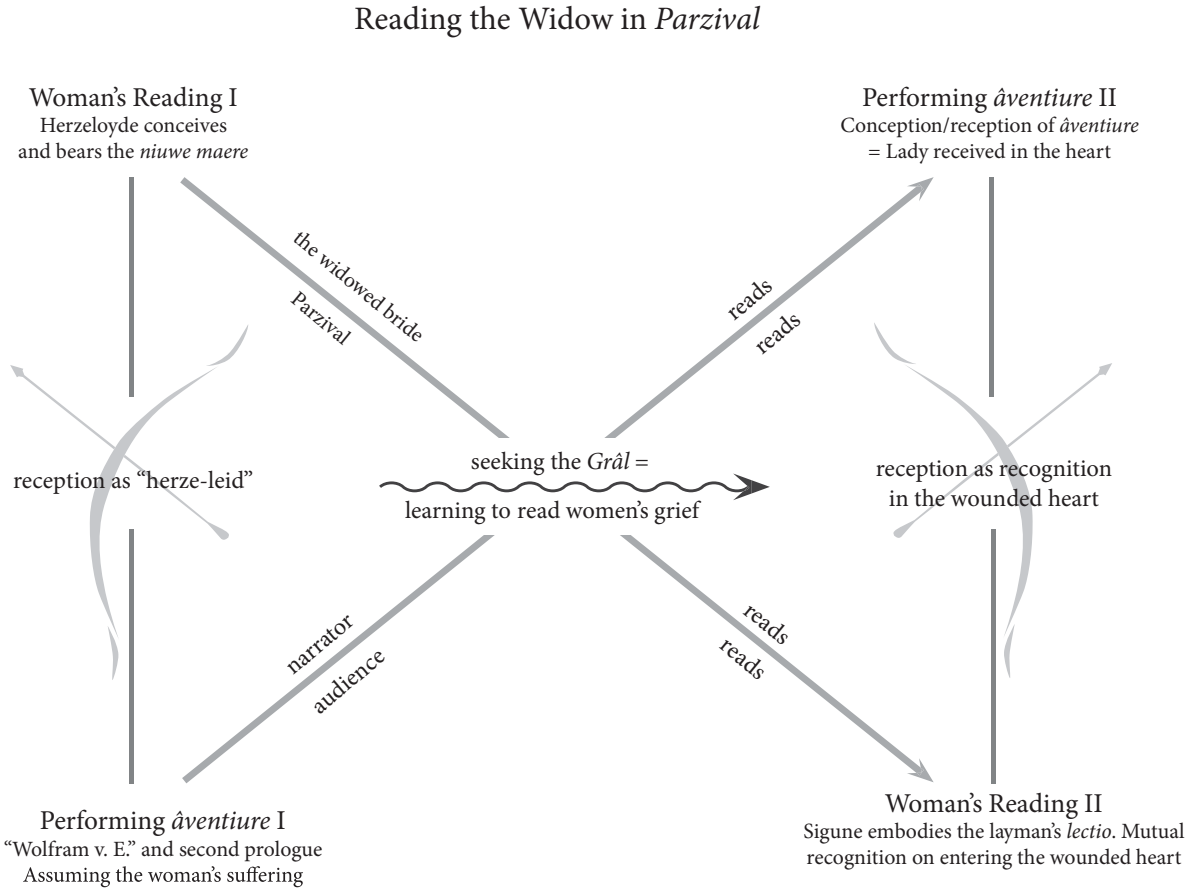


Figure 8.2. Diagram design by Barbora Hanova. © Morgan Powell.

monastic tradition had condoned tears only out of compunction for sins, secondarily out of desire for Heaven, and the tears Mary requires are neither.[22] Mary herself had not been seen to weep, but rather to stand, stoically, at the cross.[23] In the "Quis dabit" and other texts of Marian *compassio*, participation itself requires the tears of a woman's loving grief. Tears are the visible manifestation of shared inner suffering without which no telling is granted; the story is received with the wounded heart or not at all. But more than this: tears generate narrative, for what Mary revealed was neither exegesis nor interpretation but *sacra historia* itself, the story that scripture did not tell and thus was discovered by being her. It was revelation, or *erliuhten*, that occurred in the communion of wounded hearts.

To know this story, then, required the reader to become the mirror of Mary's pain, and the content of the "Quis dabit" is dedicated entirely to this purpose. To the same purpose, Mary had begun to weep, to sigh and groan and even to swoon and fall to the ground; that is, she became more and more the mirror of a secular widow's grief.[24] Even as she had begun to speak, her pain found expression in a familiar language of gesture so that it could be known, and through it, Christ's: Mary makes the Word knowable as flesh at the Passion even as she did in the Incarnation. The devotee seeks not only to know what she knew but also to learn *how* to know as she did; her tears are the metonymic signifier for this process. To the extent that the reader-devotee is able to assimilate Mary's pain to the self, Mary's story is revealed—in terms of the same pain. A symmetry of inner disposition allows the blackened body, the body in grief, to reveal sacred truth. As Mary herself says, she, now glorified and in Heaven, can no longer weep; her human interlocutor must therefore reconstitute the humanity she expressed at the cross,[25] and this, the human complement to the divine, will reveal "the true sequence of events," as it enables Mary to tell, and her audience to feel, what she felt.

The ultimate objective of this knowing was the renewed embrace of the Word, the mystery that saw Mary's experience of conception and *compassio* as one, an experience offered the audience (like the author) of the "Quis dabit" by learning to be her.[26] The promise of the same experience is what inspires Wolfram to the extraordinary

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22 McGuire, "Monks and Tears," pp. 133–51; also Weinand, *Tränen*, pp. 172–82; Adnès, "Larmes," 9:295–97.

23 See above, p. 186.

24 All these gestures occur in the "Quis dabit"; in one redaction, Mary also shakes her head and beats at her neck. See Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 99–101.

25 "Illa respondet: 'Illud quod queris conpungitiuum est et magni doloris; sed quia iam glorificata sum, flere non possum. Tu tamen cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magnis doloribus ipsa perpensi" ("Quis dabit," ed. Bestul, p. 168).

26 Both the "Quis dabit" and Odo of Morimund's sermon (discussed in chapter 4), point to this connection by attributing the strength Mary needs to sustain her suffering to an infusion from the "Most High," an overshadowing of the Spirit just as it occurred at the conception; "Quis dabit," ed. Bestul, p. 180; Odo of Morimund, "Homilia," p. 420. In keeping with the same idea, a tradition developed beginning in the twelfth century that saw Mary giving birth a second time at the cross, this time to holy church; see Neff, "Mary's Labor," 254–73. The "Quis dabit" identifies Mary's pain at the cross with the pain of childbirth that she was spared at the birth of Christ (ed. Bestul, p. 177).

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representation of Herzeloyde's transformation as a bodily coalescence of conception, grieving and birth. The heart of knowing lay in the woman's suffering heart, and through this, her human suffering in dialogue with Christ's on the cross, Mary with Christ sanctified all human suffering, initiated a reciprocal gaze and a reciprocal wound that could be reconstituted in *compassio*, a loving suffering with and for one's fellows; that is, to reconstitute this reciprocity of "hearts … stirred with compassion and pierced to the point of tears"—as Peter of Blois evoked it in passing—was itself to fulfil (though he does not say so) Peter's condition for the salutary value of tears: that they proceed from the love of Christ.[27] Decisive was not the object of attention, whether Christ's suffering as human flesh or the flesh of suffering humanity, whether tears for Arthur or tears for Christ, but rather the constitution of a true knowing from heart to heart, a negation of bodily difference through the reciprocal manifestation of inner truth. This possibility was delivered to humanity through the woman who conceived the Word as flesh and redelivered through her when she became the human mirror of Christ's Passion. Lady Âventiure's Annunciation prepares the audience for a redelivery of the same possibility through the woman who is Herzeloyde's extension into the body of narrative, Sigune.

Ist iemen dinne? (Is Anybody There?)

With her foster-mother, Herzeloyde, Sigune shares the dual distinctions of generating some of the most unforgettable images of German romance narrative and being the object of widely divergent interpretations. For the moment I will leave these latter aside in favour of offering a new interpretation of her third and final living appearance, reading it as the narrative embodiment of entry into the heart of compassion.[28]

This third scene is entirely Wolfram's invention and by far the most extensive of Sigune's four appearances. These occur (1) just before Parzival enters the knighthood, (2) after he leaves the Grail Castle, having failed in the destiny appointed him, (3) here, before he meets Trevrizent and recognizes God's grace, and finally, (4) when, after ascending to the Grail kingship, he finds Sigune dead in her cell. In Chrétien's unfinished *Conte du Graal*, Perceval makes a single encounter with a young woman, said to be his *germaine cosine* but otherwise anonymous, holding her slain beloved in her lap.[29] Wolfram distributed the content of this scene over Parzival's first two encounters with Sigune (Cu-si-ne), and then added two more.[30] The resulting sequence suggests a progression parallel to Parzival's narrative path, his unceasing action and displacement contrasted with her passivity and stasis—a stasis so complete as to seem to exist outside the passage of narrative time.[31] This is a narrative doubling we have seen before, in the expanded

27 See above, pp. 200–202.

28 Similarly, Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 196.

29 Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal*, lines 3368–628, see esp. 3538–39.

30 For extensive comparison see Mertens Fleury, *Leiden*, pp. 150–63.

31 Bumke has repeatedly drawn attention to Sigune's development as "einen Heilsweg …, der offenbar kontrapunktisch zu Parzivals Weg zum Gral konzipiert ist"; here Bumke, *Wolfram von*

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role of the abandoned bride in the *Chanson de Saint Alexis*, and it serves very much the same purpose. The layman's struggle and the woman's grieving become contrasting and complementary trajectories, hermeneutic cousins, in a seemingly endless and—if Trevrizent's wisdom is to be believed—pointless narrative quest.[32] Ultimately, the quest reveals the reversal of that wisdom. But why? Neither Parzival's adventures nor those of Gawan offer any more than a tangle of possible and often contradictory answers to this question. Wolfram's first prologue would indicate that the answer is in some sense Sigune's to give; the revelation of meaning in the knight's narrative was referred there to a reading objective identical with the woman's *zil*, in which she constitutes the diaphanous body of truth.

Lady Âventiure's "wondrous tidings" concerning Parzival reveal him merely wandering as before, somewhat aimlessly through a forest.[33] The remarkable wind-up of the story's reopening is staged, it seems, merely to bring Parzival to Sigune's doorstep, that is, to the window of her cell:

> Swerz niht geloubt, der sündet.
> diu âventiure uns kündet
> daz Parzivâl der degen balt
> kom geriten ûf einen walt,
> ine weiz ze welhen stunden;
> aldâ sîn ougen funden
> ein klôsen niwes bûwes stên.
> (435,1–7)

(He sins who does not believe this. Lady Âventiure bears us tidings that Parzival, the bold warrior, came in his riding upon a wood—I've no idea at what hour—and there his eyes fell on a cell, newly built.)

The content of Parzival's third meeting with Sigune is of no consequence for the progression of the narrative—as if to underline this point, its sole result is that Sigune puts Parzival on Cundrîe's path, which he no sooner takes up than he loses it again (442,25–30). Neither does it provide any new information on the hero's progress. No use is made of the opportunity to recount his adventures since the two last met; Parzival's reply to Sigune's questions reveals nothing beyond his double longing for his wife and the Grail (441,4–14). The scene's importance lies in the encounter itself, in the progressive and reciprocal process of recognition that it brings about between the bereaved woman and the errant knight, cousins in suffering. For the first time, each opens to the other's

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Eschenbach, pp. 87–88. Similar conclusions in Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 163, and Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 265–84.

32 As Parzival learns from Trevrizent, the Grail can be neither sought nor won, cf. lines 468,10–14.

33 The brief summary of Parzival's adventures in the interim (lines 434,11–30) is notable only for the lack of information of any consequence. The one specific event named, the restoration of Anfortas's sword in the fountain of Lac, serves to illustrate the point: the sword is never mentioned again; moreover, at the tale's conclusion, when Parzival battles Feirefiz, his sword is not the one he received from Anfortas, but the one he stole from Ither (cf. lines 744,17–18).

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heart and the nature of its grief. Wolfram manages to postpone this moment nearly to the scene's end, when, echoing the "heart's" words from the book's opening, "sît irz, frou âventiure?" (Is it you, Lady Taleteller?) (433,7), Sigune exclaims, "ir sîtz hêr Parzivâl?" (It's you, Lord Parzival?) (440,28), and then contributes her own series of questions out of heartfelt concern: "sagt an, wie stêtz iu umben grâl? / Habt ir geprüevet noch sîn art? / oder wiest bewendet iwer vart?" (Tell me, have you news of the Grail? Have you indeed learned its nature? Or what then is the reason for your wandering?) (440,29–441,2). Their interaction reiterates the encounter between Lady Âventiure and the locked heart from beginning to end. It is initiated when Parzival approaches the window, the sole opening in Sigune's sealed enclosure, and calls, "ist iemen dinne?" (Is anybody there?) The woman's voice within returns, "jâ" (437,2). The question that should follow and could from either side, *Who is it?* (*wer sît ir?* as in line 433,1), is spoken by neither, because its answer is a matter of deeper recognition, which is the objective of the entire scene.

Sigune's simple, opening *ja* announces the first meeting between the two that begins with speech rather than with her *wuofen*, or mourning wail. Her existence, as the scene reveals, has taken a decisive turn. For Parzival, too, a decisive turn is at hand. As he "knocks" here we are reminded that he seeks the Lady herself—"der junge degen unervorht / reit durch âventiur suochen" (the fearless young warrior rode in search of *âventiure*). But God has something else in mind: "sîn wolte got dô ruochen: er vant ein klosnærinne" (God then took his part: he found a holy recluse) (435,10–13). God, then, personally provides for a knocking at a different door. To communicate the result of this encounter, Wolfram awaits the conclusion of the next one, on Good Friday, with the penitent pilgrims:

hin rîtet Herzeloyde fruht.
dem riet sîn manlîchiu zuht
kiusch unt erbarmunge:
sît Herzeloyd diu junge
in het ûf gerbet triuwe,
sich huop sîns herzen riuwe.
alrêrste er dô gedâhte,
wer al die werlt volbrâhte,
an sînen schepfære,
wie gewaltec der wære.
(451,3–12)

(On rides Herzeloyde's child; so advised by his manly upbringing, his candour and his feeling heart: because the young Herzeloyde had passed her *triuwe* on to him, he came to know heartfelt suffering. Only now did his thoughts turn to Him who had brought the world into being, to his Creator, and how almighty he must be.)

We open our hearts to Lady Taleteller; Parzival opens his to the sufferings of Sigune, of his fellow men, and of Christ on Good Friday—this latter being recalled by the pilgrim Kahenis in an echo of Herzeloyde's words: "wâ wart ie hôher triwe schîn, / dan die got durch uns begienc, / den man durch uns anz kriuze hienc?" (Where was greater *triuwe* ever revealed than in that which God endured for us when he was nailed to the cross

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for our sakes?) (448,10–12). The wheel has come full circle: Parzival's "baptism" in the *triuwe* of milk and tears, the narrator's wounded heart, and the audience's participation in the tale are all joined in the heart of the suffering woman—and thereby also to Christ.

Sigune's enclosure is the final station of her existence and the one in which it will reach fulfilment. How we are to see it makes up in large part the content of the scene, including a lengthy preamble of some three strophes before the conversation can be fully engaged. This is devoted to *telling us* what Parzival finds as opposed to what he thinks he sees: *aldâ sîn ougen funden ein klôsen* (And there his eyes fell on a cell) (435,6–7). What "his eyes find" is not what they see:

> er vant ein klôsnærinne,
> diu durch die gotes minne
> ir magetuom unt ir freude gap.
> wîplîcher sorgen urhap
> ûz ir herzen blüete alniuwe.
> unt doch durch alte triuwe.
> Schîânatulander
> und Sigûnen vand er.
> (435,13–20)

(He found a holy recluse who for the love of God had offered up her virginity and her happiness. That fountain of all women's sorrow bled ever fresh from her heart and yet by reason of an old wound. Schianatulander and Sigune were those he found.)

These verses form a carefully constructed chiasm that describes the central paradox of Sigune's existence. In all outward appearance, this woman is a virgin recluse who has devoted her body and her life exclusively to Christ. Neither we nor Parzival initially know any more of the occupant's identity than this. But the apparently factual statement, *er vant ein klôsnærinne*, undergoes a reversal when we learn that this virgin is not enclosed with her heavenly bridegroom, or not with him alone: *Schîânatulander und Sigûnen vand er*. This incongruity is underlined by the occupant's isolation from human settlement and ecclesial support, brought to a point when the narrator insists: "Sigûne doschesse / horte selten messe: / ir leben was doch ein venje gar" (Duchess Sigune all but never heard mass; still, her life was one long prayer on bended knee) (425,23–25). And the continuing description, which lingers over the pallor of Sigune's faded beauty, her renunciation of "all worldly joy," her hairshirt and grey habit and the psalter in her hands, leaves no doubt as to her station in life. Regardless of the paradox then, this is in truth a holy life, but its very holiness is inseparable from the central statement that bridges the gap between Parzival's visual impressions and what is inside the cell, between outward appearance and inner truth: "That fountain of all women's sorrow bled ever fresh from her heart, *and yet by reason of an old wound*."[34] These words contain the entire meaning

34 My translation restores what I take as the more immediate sense of the image. Line 435,17 contains a pun, as both *blüete* and *bluote* (the reading offered in MSS D and G) can mean either 'bled' or 'blossomed' (Lexer, *Handwörterbuch*, 315, 317; and Beneke, Müller, Zarncke, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 1: 215, 219). But while the idea of sorrow "blossoming" ever new, which is that adopted

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of the encounter, the enclosed truth that it opens to Parzival's knocking. The process of recognition the scene describes is Parzival's entry, and ours with him, into communion with this wound. The same process replays the familiar question, the *Quae est ista?*, as a knock-knock riddle, an entry from exterior to interior, such that it becomes a narrative iteration of the locus of truth as it was announced in the first prologue: woman as the blackened body that reveals inner truth.

But what is the *alte triuwe* that I have translated as the "old wound"? The opposition between old and new is one—like that between the two different identities of the woman Parzival "finds," the *klosnærinne* and his cousin Sigune—between women's suffering in worldly love and another "wound" that is not contingent, not temporally limited, continuous with Sigune's suffering as it is continuous through time. It is the opposition between *sacra historia* and the *mære*, between *gotes minne* and Sigune's *minne*. *Alte triuwe* evokes Christ's *triuwe* on the cross but even more Mary's *triuwe* as the woman who suffered the same heart-wound for and with him. Sigune's love reveals that love, the new reveals the old; love of others renews our love of Christ. This is essentially the same message as that communicated through Alexis's bride, whose unfailing fidelity finally merits a heavenly embrace in which she is (re-)united with her husband and with Christ at the same time. It is above all Herzeloyde's message, the import of the *lactans dolorosa* for the *niuwe mære*.

Still, while the audience is now informed of the identity of the occupants of the cell, Parzival is not: "dennoch was im hart unkuont / wer si wære od möhte sîn" (Still he had no idea who she was or even might be) (437,22–23). For him recognition will come only after the conversation is well under way, at the end of the sixth of eight strophes (240 verses) that comprise the full encounter; that is, only after the *klosnærinne* has initiated him into the mystery of her existence as she understands it. The point of departure is her ring, which thus becomes the quintessence of all that she represents. Enquiring after its justification, Parzival goes so far as to suggest she is a fraud: "For whose sake, then, do you wear that ring," he scoffs (*in schimpfe*), "ich hôrt ie sagen mære, / klôsnærinne und klôsnære / die solten mîden âmûrschaft" (If I've heard right, holy men and women aren't supposed to be lovey-dovey) (439,13–15).[35] The audience feels this reproach as

as a rule in modern translations, is not at all foreign to the imagery of the heart's wounding in love and mystical imagery of Christ's wounds, this only underlines its essential character as bleeding. The related rendering of *alte triuwe* as "old wound" I will discuss shortly.

35 Parzival's confusion is shared—but in reverse—by modern critics. Nellmann remarks in his commentary on these lines that, as a recluse, Sigune should have been formally inducted into this life with a church ceremony; Green, *Women Readers*, p. 148, feels Parzival must be ignorant of the role played by a nuptial ring in the same ceremony, which the bride of Christ (nun or recluse) then wore as a sign of her profession. Neither custom had, however, been widely established by 1200; they appear instead to have formed part of the church's attempt to reign in and regulate the female eremitic and monastic life in the course of the thirteenth century; see *VCM*, 2:89 and 224–25, esp. n377. Aelred of Rievaulx makes no mention of either custom in his rule for recluses of ca. 1160, and Hildegard's nuns created a scandal in the eyes of another abbess, Texwindis, in part because of their habit of dressing as brides and wearing rings. Sigune's understanding of her ring, on the other hand, perfectly anticipates the sentiments that were to find representation in the ring of profession.

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Sigune must: like acid on a wound. Sigune responds, however, with the solemnity of a sworn witness in her own defence, "swenne ich nu valsch gelerne, / sô hebt mirn ûf, sît ir dâ bî. / ruochts got, ich pin vor valsche vrî" (Should I ever learn false ways you may well denounce it, should you be present. As God is my witness, of falsehood I am free) (439,18–20). Her ensuing account of herself forms the "heart" of the encounter.[36] "This betrothal band" she says, she wears "for a man whose love I have never known in the human act, but whom the counsel of my virginal heart teaches me to love."[37] For this man (still a riddle to Parzival) her love is unending, for he fought and died for her sake; she retains her virginity, but before God he is no less her husband. "Of true marriage this ring shall be my witness before God; this, the lock of my true devotion, and the heart's stream that flows from my eyes."[38]

I have selected and paraphrased Sigune's words so as to underline the echoes they contain of the life of a bride of Christ. Wolfram has ingeniously reconstructed the riddle between narrator and audience, the *Quae est ista*, such that the protagonist is in the dark about an identity in this case known to the audience. Parzival's confusion serves to allow the audience to approach the same question on a different level. The crucial identity question concerns not the woman's name but the truth of her existence, the central and obstinate insistence on continuity between human and divine love, between the grief of the bereaved *Minnedame* and the devotion of the bride of Christ—the meaning of her ring. For Parzival, "finding" the identities that lie within the enclosure will bring this revelation: the bride of Christ *is also* his cousin, Sigune. For the audience, the grieving existence of the woman it knows as Sigune becomes continuous with devotion to Christ, this devotion is revealed in and through that "historical" body, tears shed for Schianatulander are tears of *triuwe* to God.

That Sigune's ring so immediately attracts Parzival's attention is due to its luminosity. As we are told, this seal of "rehter minne rât" (the counsel of true love) "darts its rays like fiery sparks" from the darkness of her cell. "The noble ruby set in base brass with *al die âventiure sîn*," the ring that, in the first prologue, identifies *rehten wîbes muot* with the corrected ideal of poetic representation, has found an equivalent here in *historia*, as a product of narrated experience that we can know and feel. That the ruby is replaced by a garnet in Sigune's ring is only in keeping with Wolfram's insistent displacement of symbolic identification: we are not to seek factual equivalence, but rather inward identity in ever-changing external manifestations. As the centre of luminous beauty in an otherwise utterly disconsolate existence, Sigune's ring completes a statement of paradox that inwardly identifies her *triuwe* with the commitment the ring would appear to belie, the integrity, or *triuwe* of the bride of Christ. Sigune embodies this integrity in a literal sense; she lives it as apprehensible reality. The identity discovered by the audience is

36 Likewise Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, pp. 87–88.

37 "… disen mähelschaz / trag ich durch einen lieben man, / des minne ich nie an mich gewan / mit menneschlîcher tæte: / magtuomlîchs herzen ræte / mir gein im râtent minne" (439,22–27).

38 "der rehten ê diz vingerlîn / für got sol mîn geleite sîn. / daz ist ob mîner triwe ein slôz, / vonme herzen mîner ougen vlôz" (440,13–16).

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one that identifies Sigune's grief, a woman's grief over her earthly beloved, with the grief of every Christian *sponsa* over Christ's death on the cross. She is his widow no less than Mary was, because she effects the incarnation of the same truth.

The clearest parallels are thus the apparently most unseemly, because they embody spiritual experience: the *inclusa* was seen as truly "interred," *consepulta* with Christ, dead to the world and thus enclosed in a living tomb. As the narrator says, "der helt lac dinne begraben tôt: / ir leben leit ûf dem sarke nôt" (the warrior lay within dead and buried; her life was but suffering over his tomb) (435,21–22), and, "si minnete sînen tôten lîp" (she served in love his dead body) (436,3). The inward truth of this morbid obsession is once again other than it seems. Sigune experiences her existence not, or not only, as one of eternal grief, still less of penance, but rather as one of union with her beloved. With the following words she allows Parzival the long-delayed moment of recognition, and identity is revealed simultaneously with the idea that is the centre of her existence: "Ich pin hinne selbe ander" (Here within I am two together), she concludes her defence of the ring, "Schîânatulander / ist daz eine, dez ander ich" (Schianatulander is the one and I the other) (440,17–19). The two verses together suggest one place that comprises two beings, an identification of two in one, or two persons in one heart: "*Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*" (My beloved is mine and I am his) (Canticles 2:16). Here, too, tears lead to *unio*.

Sigune's factual enclosure recalls the celebrated verses on the beloved enclosed in the heart, long mistaken as the epitome of *Minnesang*, that have come to us within a collection of love letters from the monastic literary centre of Tegernsee:

> Dû bist mîn, ich bin dîn
> des solt dû gewis sîn
> dû bist beslozzen
> in mînem herzen:
> verloren ist daz slüzzelîn:
> dû moust ouch immêr darinne sîn.[39]
>
> (You are mine, I am yours, of this you should be sure. You are locked within my heart; lost thereto the key: there within you ever must remain.)

The female voice of these verses emerged from the monastic experience of the Song of Songs; they, too, are a translation of the reading life of the bride.[40] The words *du bist mîn unt ich bin dîn* occurred no less readily in sermons on the beloved's knocking and entry from Canticles 5:2.[41] Sigune's "necrophilia," as some have called it, reifies this

39 *Minnesangs Frühling*, 1.1.8, p. 21. For an inquiry into the entire "love-letter" collection with an edition and translation of the texts, see Kühnel, *Dû bist mîn*; the famous verses are discussed there on pp. 27–34.

40 As argued in detail by Ohly (and others previously), "Du bist mein," see esp. pp. 375–78, 391.

41 Ohly, "Du bist mein," p. 383, cites two sermons on Canticles 5:2 (one of them on Mary) that each contain a passage in which the bride's "cohabitation" in the heart is described as follows: "[er] ruowet da mit ir unt si mit ime. … So sprichet denne diu sele o lieber herre du bist min und ich bin din" (He lies therein with her and she with him. … Thus the soul proclaims, 'O dear Lord, you are mine and I am yours.) See also Edwards, "Winileodos," pp. 195–96.

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metaphoric complex, both the enclosure of the heart and knocking for entry, but such that its promise of blissful union is accomplished only through suffering and grief. Her cell is to be understood as a *Herzkluse*, but to enter here is to enter a wound and to be likewise wounded, to be enclosed with another in a communion of suffering, a *compassio* of a most body-bound sort.[42] Through obstinate insistence on the destiny that is singularly her own, Sigune reveals the meaning of the universal, the truth contained in suffering with the suffering Christ. But such meaning is revealed only to those who "knock on her heart," a gesture that in fact corresponds to the opening of their own to empathy. This is the truth contained in the ring, in Sigune's wounded heart, and in her *Herzkluse*, the truth of the true woman.

The reciprocity that is then established between the heart of the suffering bride, Sigune, and her audience, Parzival, is one that restores a bridge between earthly and divine love as it does between the life of the body and divine truth; it recapitulates, then, Mary's gnostic act through the process of narrative, which is also a process of suffering. Sigune re-embodies Herzeloyde's *wâriu mære*, but where Herzeloyde's experience mirrors the simultaneity of birth and death, joy and suffering, contained in Mary's uniquely prophetic apprehension of the Word, Sigune's exhibits the apotheosis of purely human grief into a oneness with devotion to God even as it empties the imagery of love lyric into a union in suffering with the suffering Christ. And all of this is obliquely evoked as the obligation of the "believing" audience when Lady Âventiure seeks to penetrate their hearts.

Reading the Widow

It is Sigune's function in the narrative to manifest a mystery, that is, how our history, in and of itself, can remanifest the truth of *sacra historia*. Accordingly, Wolfram does not refer Sigune's mourning explicitly to devotion to the dead Christ. No words escape her lips equivalent to Herzeloyde's when she cites Mary's breastfeeding as the *triuwe* or the heart's bleeding that reciprocates Christ's on the cross. Where he does refer Sigune's suffering devotion to a model or exemplar beyond his own text it is instead one from the world of *âventiure*, and the model appears to be the negative counter-example of her literary forebear, Laudine, the widow who marries the man who slew her husband in the romance of *Yvain/Iwein*. Precise understanding of this gesture is the key to the relationship between Wolfram's poetic superstructure and its foundations in Chrétien's *Yvain*.[43]

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42 Similar conflation of sacred and profane, of *Minnesang* and religious imagery, characterized the further development of this image complex in the female monastic tradition; see Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 151–58.

43 A comparison with Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* (concluded by ca. 1200), while rewarding, cannot be attempted here. There are parallels between Chrétien's text and Wolfram's that directly concern my argument but are not found in Hartmann's. These reinforce the conclusion, already acknowledged in the scholarship, that Wolfram knew and used both texts. Where the parallels directly concern the communication with the German audience over the nature of the narrative project in relation to its forebears, this admittedly raises questions that require further attention.

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Its significance reaches beyond even the realm of romance poetics to the fundamental questions of reading and knowing that have shaped this book, to the function and identity of the woman as mirror in the long twelfth century. Wolfram's audience was well aware that the question, "who is the truest widow," was no simple matter of poetic rivalry, that it evoked a figure that held a central position in the very production of meaning within the western Christian church.[44] The question Sigune raises (and the audience is to answer) is once again that of the relationship between "woman … and reading in the literary history of the West."[45]

As I laid out earlier, Mary's grieving allowed a response to and recognition of Christ's suffering that acknowledged the weakness of the body; the widowed bride responded not by reaching beyond herself, but by discovering the truth of her oneness with the bodily Christ. Standing with Mary at the cross and weeping her tears, the new widow did not so much plead for forgiveness as she simply sank into the heart of her grief; her suffering could bypass penance to emerge from her own compassion and loss.[46] Her response was one of steadfast fidelity and selfless love (Wolfram's *triuwe*) that enabled her to know and to bear Christ's pain. In this embrace, the twelfth century discovered a new understanding of the widow. Not in an approximate or merely metaphorical sense but in the reality of human experience, Mary's experience at the cross expressed that of grieving widows in the world, and vice versa. This conjunction between love sacred and secular thus became both the accessible point of entry into and a generative pole of the continuity Mary creates between *sacra historia* and our experience. This is the conjunction that we find so puzzlingly distilled into the existence of Herzeloyde, Sigune and Laudine, and what is at stake in Wolfram's claim to the truest portrayal of a widow's grief.

It is only one of the oddities of this apparently polemical gesture, which occurs not only in the third scene but also in the preceding (in which Parzival finds Sigune perched with her baleful burden in a linden tree), that it is aimed not at the remarrying widow directly (who receives no explicit mention) but instead at her confidant and lady-in-waiting, Lunete. Likewise unclear is precisely what motivates the narrator's indignation. In the first instance, we are told that "Sigune had heard no such advice as Lunete gave" (cf. 253,10–11). The narrator then castigates Lunete's *dame* indirectly by stating that Sigune desired no other man as replacement (*ergetzen*) of her loss, "als wîp die man bî wanke siht" (as with women of fickle will) (253,16). Again we hear an echo of the presentation of women's *triuwe* and inner truth, this time from the second prologue.[47] The contrast with Chrétien's widow, whom Chrétien names only once (if at all) as Laudine, would seem clear in that she gives up her mourning to remarry, while Sigune perseveres

44 See Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 224 and passim, who describes his project as tracing "wie die Figur der Witwe ins Zentrum der christlich-occidentalen Sinnproduktion geraten ist."

45 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 47–48.

46 See above, pp. 179–80.

47 Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 265–84, overlooks this point, despite making an argument constructed entirely around inter- and intratextual references. See also note 56, below.

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in her *triuwe in extremis*.[48] The *Quae est ista*, the audience's search for meaning in a female identity, has been expanded to an intertextual frame of reference, with Sigune—the widow unto death—as the new female ideal.

Doubt arises, however, if we recall that the *wîp* whom Wolfram found untrue (*an wanke sach*, 114,11) stands in contrast to Herzeloyde, herself a remarried widow—circumstances of which Parzival will shortly be informed by Trevrizent (494,15–30). On being widowed a second time (from Gahmuret), Herzeloyde chooses Sigune's path, with consequences that can only cast a favourable light on the reasoning that motivates Laudine's decision.[49] Within the narrative, moreover, the idea that Wolfram might seriously advocate that widows continue in fidelity unto death is resoundingly countered by Orgeluse's story, the entire object of which appears to be that she overcome her embittered grief not as Sigune does but through remarriage to Gawan.

A third oddity is that, while Herzeloyde and Laudine are truly secular widows—the latter can be taken as the near epitome of the expression of a woman's grief in this period; in three successive descriptions of her, Chrétien delivers the entire catalogue of gestures this entailed[50]—Sigune is in reality no widow, but rather a grieving, virgin beloved. Mary herself, however, was not a widow in factual understanding; she became one, no less, through her own realization of scriptural imagery as history, *sponsa* was *mater* not in the succession of personal biography but as roles filled in relation to one male entity. Sigune's existence manifests Mary's realization of scriptural imagery as a process that defines her own narrative trajectory, a process to which we will later return in more detail. As one aspect of this existence, Sigune insists simultaneously on the roles of the virgin, the abandoned bride, and the widow—and appears to fulfil them all. In this, once again, she is very like Alexis's bride, whose persevering fidelity alone constitutes a holy trajectory that culminates in virginal widowhood as a position from which she surprisingly ascends to the heavenly embrace of the saint and the *sponsus*. Sigune remanifests this destiny in and as *âventiure*. True to the ironic cast of his gestures to Chrétien's romance, Wolfram claims that Sigune is the better widow because she is not one in the factual sense but rather only through inner truth.

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48 Wolfram's gesture, naming only Lunete, is in fact consistent with the texts of both Chrétien and Hartmann, which name Laudine either not at all (seven of ten manuscripts of *Yvain*) or extremely seldom (the other three manuscripts use the name once, at line 2153, while in Hartmann's text she is named only twice, at lines 2421 and 2758). As a rule Chrétien refers to Yvain's bride only as *la dame*, in marked contrast to the frequent use of Lunete's name and in keeping with the anonymity of the bridal reader we have repeatedly observed. I use the name Laudine solely for clarity's sake. See the note in *Yvain*, ed. Hult, at line 2153.

49 Herzeloyde's initial widowing is perhaps as close to Sigune's as a married woman's can be, while nonetheless recalling Laudine's responsibility in magnified form: Castis, her first husband, dies before the marriage is consummated but nevertheless leaves his two kingdoms in her care. Both are then lost after she flees to Soltâne (lines 494,15–30).

50 Laudine wails, swoons and falls to the ground, tears at her hair and clothes, wrings her hands, weeps, scratches or beats her face and breast, clutches at her throat, and is described as delirious. See *Yvain*, lines 1152–59, 1204–5, 1300–1301, 1415–17, 1471–91.

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Accordingly, the argument is made *ex negativo*, by discrediting the alternative, outward qualification of inward excellence. The renewed allusion to Laudine in the third encounter all but entirely retracts the idea that the "best" widow should never remarry. We are first informed once again that "Today's Lady Lunetes likewise arrive all too hastily on the scene wherever a woman's fidelity is at stake" (cf. 436,8–10); and then, here, of all places, we are reminded that Sigune is not a widow: *If Sigune had become his wife, Lunete would not have dared …* (cf. lines 436,4–5). But what reason would we then have to reprehend a hypothetically hasty Lunete for her advice in Sigune's factual case? Rather than clarify, the narrator only multiplies the confusion. His deliberations conclude with the statement that a man whose wife maintains her fidelity *while he lives* has been granted the greatest gift; should he die, *she is free to do as she pleases*—although her reward for faithful widowhood will be greater (her crowning "wreath") "than if she joins the pleasure of the dance" (cf. lines 436,11–22).

These concluding remarks are not, or not only, the narrator's own but rather a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 7:39–40.[51] This passage and the preceding verses (1 Corinthians 7:32–38, in particular verse 34) formed, together with the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23; Luke 8:5–15), the scriptural authority for the several heavenly rewards of the married, the widowed and the virgins.[52] As seen above, the transformation of the role of the widow in the twelfth century went hand in hand with a shift in the understanding of this hierarchy of bodily roles, such that inner *intentio*, rather than socio-sexual station, became the decisive determiner of merit.[53] Wolfram is playing a shell game, and the shells involved are the three sexual lives of women, which should contain their respective thirty-, sixty- and hundred-fold rewards in Heaven. The models for each state are provided, in this case, not by saints' lives or from scripture, but rather from the pantheon of *avanture*. The final remark on the crowning wreath appears to defer to the conventional system of model behaviour and its reward.

Sigune, however, would qualify for none of the conventional roles: for all her carnal devotion *uni viro* to a deceased knight servitor, she is factually a virgin and was not so much as betrothed to Schianatulander, so that she is neither widow nor wife. Conversely, while she insists on nothing if not her fidelity to her beloved and "spouse," her intact virginity does not constitute that fidelity, but rather her deepest regret.[54] On the other hand, her place as the earthly embodiment of *triuwe* is never in doubt, as we were reminded at the opening of the second encounter: "al irdisch triwe was ein wint, wan die man an

51 "A woman is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth: but if her husband die, she is at liberty. Let her marry to whom she will: only in the Lord. But more blessed shall she be, if she so remain, according to my counsel. And I think that I also have the spirit of God." Groos, "Sigune," 641–42, also commented on this connection.

52 Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 46–147; the resulting image idea can be seen in the picture of the "tree" of the three orders that is the object of discussion in part 8 of the *Speculum virginum* (cf. Jussen, *Witwe*, figs. 3–6).

53 See pp. 178–79, above.

54 As Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 109, observed, "Die Klausnerin ist nun Witwe (438,9), Jungfrau und Vermählte zugleich (435,13–15; 440,7ff.)."

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ir lîbe sach" (all earthly *triuwe* was as nothing next to the affliction visible in her person) (249,24–25). What this shell contains is clear, regardless of its outward appearance, and therein lies the point: such model categories and the corresponding social mores, "the condition and behaviour of the body," have no real bearing here.[55] Hence the narrator's corrective epilogue to his digression, as if calling himself to order: "wes mizze ich freude gein der nôt / als Sigûn *ir triwe* gebôt? / daz möhte ich gerne lâzen" (But who am I to count out rewards in the face of the affliction Sigune endured for her devotion? That's better left alone!) (436,23–25).

The consequences of this multiple refraction are several. First, there is no criticism properly to be levelled at Laudine, for it is the inner truth (on which in her case we are left in the dark) that is decisive, the essence of Sigune's ring. Only Lunete is clearly in the wrong, but her position is nowhere in evidence—unless it is to be inferred among the audience.[56] Once again, the argument on women's fidelity points finally, inevitably, to the eyes of her beholders—reception of the *mære*. The indictment of Lunete serves to direct the audience to beware a misjudgement not infrequently encountered among modern critics: that Sigune's fidelity should be called into question as overly extravagant, self-indulgent or better overcome (such were among Lunete's arguments to Laudine); indeed, that it should require any justification other than the one she claims herself: inner truth. Beyond this, it is in her virtual widowhood, especially, that Sigune stands in opposition to the *wîp an wanke* and the woman whose exterior beauty (or virtue) hides a counterfeit heart, who are both evoked, in the second and first prologue, respectively, in opposition to an ideal of truth in narrative art. The narrator's endorsements thus serve to recall and renew Herzeloyde's position in the romance's exposition. If Sigune surpasses "all earthly *triuwe*," then it is—as the preceding line states—because she is the child of Herzeloyde's sister: "si was doch sîner muomen kint" (249,2). In Wolfram's ongoing exposition of romance poetics she assumes Herzeloyde place.

Finally, then, exemplary exteriors and their presumed rewards are disenfranchised in favour of something that defies external imitation. *Sigûnen triwe* is the extreme protraction of grief over the dead beloved into a state of permanent loving contemplation and unending embrace, that is, into a Marian devotion to the crucified Christ. The narrator's first indignant swipe at Lunete responds to Parzival's suggestion that the body be buried; the second follows the words, "si minnete sînen tôten lîp" (446,3). These remarks defend an all but monumental expression of a woman's grief at the same time as they suggest the same bears directly on the relationship of this tale to one told before. With the feigned sideswipes at Laudine that set up his "widow," appearances notwithstanding, as the epitome of *wîbes triuwe*, Wolfram indicates that "she"—his narrative as her body—at the same time surpasses previous embodiment of truth in romance narrative. But what claim had Chrétien made before him?

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55 "Der Zustand und Haltung des Körpers," Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 147.

56 Draesner's idea (*Wege*, pp. 271–73) that Parzival, by advising in the second encounter that Sigune (in effect) bury her sorrow, is placed in the position of Lunete, is ingenious, but Wolfram undercuts it immediately when he makes the point of comparison reside not in such a release from grief but rather in *ergetzen*, or compensation for the loss. For the third encounter as well, Draesner argues that Lunete's position is implicitly placed among the audience.

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Yvain and the "tres bele crestïenne"

We last revisited Chrétien's *Yvain* by reason of parallels exhibited between the description of the *pucele* reading in the garden and the descent of the Word to claim its bride. Landri of Waben's understanding of Canticles 4:9, *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea sponsa, vulnerasti cor meum uno oculorum tuorum et in uno crine colli tui* (You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck), is remarkable for its recording *en romans* of an understanding of this passage such that the bride inspires and even prompts the descent of the loving god through her "reading" act—to paraphrase the terms in which Chrétien hypothetically extolled the sheer irresistibility of his young lady's reading. Compassion, as Landri (among others) saw it, the desire better to know our pain, moved God to reciprocate the bride's reading gaze, her attempt "to comprehend what no place can hold," and nonetheless take human form in the tiny space of her womb. That is, as Chrétien put it, "to serve her he [became] a man, issuing from his divinity and striking the love-wound in his own body."

Pucele avanture, as we might call her, in this scene effects the descent of the Word *en romans* by wounding the heart of her audience with her reading. The scriptural image at stake was presumably unmistakable to a twelfth-century audience, and it implied a reverse wounding that enabled *compassio*, the reciprocal recognition of suffering that was constituted in the reciprocal gaze, the moment that Odo of Morimund paused over as the "stupendous axis of vision" that changed the world forever.[57] A doubling in the wound of love is likewise built into Chrétien's four-cornered construction: the wounding of the god of love at the sight of a woman's reading is the reprise of Yvain's wounding over the sight of Laudine's reading grief; the wounding of incarnation should find here its parallel in a wounding of compassion—once again as received by the audience of the suffering woman (fig. 8.1). But the parallel between the two scenes only serves to underline their incommensurability. Chrétien's romance of love conceived for the woman widowed by the lover's violence is constructed as the result of an illicit, indeed, an invisible gaze; reciprocal vision is precluded, even as loving compassion is displaced by predatory lust. The task of the romance, then, is somehow to correct the distortion, to teach its audience and Yvain alike—both loving voyeurs—how to read the woman suffering for love. This, it turns out, is none other than instruction in how properly to read tales told, tales such as the *pucele* or the narrator relate, tales, most crucially, such as the one Yvain was told at Arthur's court: *avantures*.

The four-cornered configuration we found in *Parzival* requires two generative moments, one narrated and the other staged as narration, to allow the romance to unfold (fig. 8.2). In *Yvain* these first two corners are Yvain's wounding for love of Laudine and, preceding this, a narrator's exposition presented though the disjoint staging of *avanture* as eyewitness report (*ce que je vi*, 174) at Arthur's court (fig. 8.1). The latter event, Calogrenant's tale, has been perhaps more often discussed as a portrayal of the generation and staging of romance narrative than any other scene in the canon. Arthur is absent, lingering too long in bed with his queen (who is not named). Her later

57 See above, pp. 180–81, 183–84. On the relative obscurity to a medieval audience of the possible reference to Cupid and Psyche, see above p. 256 note 67.

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and somewhat surreptitious entry interrupts Calogrenant's tale, which, upon altercation with Key, he threatens not to continue—unless his lady, the queen, should insist. Wolfram's narrator twice renewed this gesture, directed to the women in his audience. For our purposes, two observations are key: first, the narrative is resumed only under the auspices of the listening lady, and Calogrenant now (why not before?) requires of his audience that they listen with their hearts.[58] As Chrétien's narrator has already reminded us, to belong to Arthur's court was—or should have been (should be?)—to belong to an order of the heart in which stories (*nouveles*) are told, most especially of love,

> of its torments and of the suffering and the great good that are the part of disciples of its order, who, in those days, were great both in number and quality. But today few remain true to love. … Today, indeed, love is little more than a fiction [*tournee a fable*], because those who have in fact felt nothing of it say they love, but they lie. They make of love a pack of fables and fairly tales [*fable et menchonge*] who expound on it with no right to do so.[59]

Calogrenant's exordium thus joins the narrator's own; he sets about (re-)establishing this truth, one contingent upon lived experience received in the loving heart.[60] As he elaborates before his newly constituted audience (with the lady in its midst), truth is made not in the ears, but in the heart, "Car parole oïe est perdue / S'ele n'est de cuer entendue" (For that word is lost that is not heard with the heart) (151–52). This brings up the second key point. There follows what may be regarded as the actual prologue to Chrétien's romance, delivered instead by the knight telling his tale of personal shame. What it describes we have seen several times before, a *conceptio per aurem*, here *en romans*:

> As oreilles vient le parole,
> Aussi comme li vens qui vole,
> Mais n'i arreste ne demore,
> Ains s'en part en mout petit d'ore,
> Se li cuers n'est si estilliés
> C'a prendre soit appareilliés;
> Que chil le puet en son venir
> Prendre et enclorre et retenir.
> Les oreilles sont voie et dois
> Ou par ent y entre la vois;
> Et li cuers prent dedans le ventre
> Le vois que par l'oreille y entre.
> (157–68)

58 "Such a demand from him was [at this point] quite unnecessary," Hunt, "Rhetorical Background," 14.

59 "Des angousses et des dolours / Et des grant biens qu'ont souvant / Li desiple de son couvant, / Qui lors estoit riches et boens; / Mais or y a molt poi des siens, / … / Or est Amours tournee a fable / Pour chou que chil qui riens n'en sentent / Dient qu'il ayment, mes il mentent; / Et chil fable et menchongne en font / Qui s'en vantent et droit n'i ont" (12–27).

60 Alois Wolf points out the connection between the two passages, but relates them to the idea of truth in narration rather than to a true heartfelt reception—a misinterpretation that, not surprisingly, all but ignores Calogrenant's extensive appeal (lines 150–70) for this latter: Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter," pp. 191–209 at 200–201.

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> (The word comes to the ears like the whirling wind but does not linger there or remain, but is gone in a whiff if the heart is not properly disposed and prepared to grasp it, so that it seizes the word as it arrives, locks it in and retains it there. The ears are the pathway and the conduit through which the voice enters; and the heart encloses the voice in the belly, which enters through the ears.)

Such a wind whistled in the ears of Rupert of Deutz to tell him that "a woman conceived God in her soul, Christ in her body." It blew again through the garden enclosed in which Landri's reading bride awaited the Spirit. In the *Eructavit*, the *voiz cui li cuers toche* was identified explicitly as God's word that was to enter Marie's heart even as it "entered [Mary's] precious body through the voice of the angel."[61]

To date, comment on Calogrenant's invocation of the *conceptio per aurem* has largely contented itself with the observation that it constitutes a "typical prologue topos" in allusion to Matthew 13:14–15.[62] This is misleading: the passage relates to a tradition, certainly, that arises from these biblical verses, but the tradition is enormous and properly implies the entire parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23 and Luke 8:5–15). This is the biblical *locus classicus* for a fertile reception, by way of eyes and ears ("beati oculi quia vident et aures vestrae quia audiunt" [Matthew 13:16]), of the Word of God.[63] A topos, indeed: we have encountered it repeatedly in connection with the eleventh verse of Psalm 44 and Mary's conception of Christ. The biblical passage is part of a complex of imagery used to evoke Mary's reading as a model for the audio-visual reception of performance. And this is clearly where Calogrenant/Chrétien intends our own ears to turn: his is no mere evocation of the need to listen carefully or even empathetically but instead also a description in anatomical terms of the way the Word is conceived in the heart and the pathway it takes to get there. As Bernard was led to insist, it was not enough that Mary merely hear Gabriel's greeting, that she be filled with grace *in mentem*; there was a further penetration necessary that took place with the words, "the Most High will overshadow you," and so on, in which "etiam ventrem perfundere debet" (her very womb was to be flooded), where *venter* takes on the meaning that is in play wherever the *conceptio per aurem* is evoked.[64] We have seen that this entry was also a wound, which Bernard and others saw as one with the heart-wound both Christ and Mary experienced at the cross. The author of the *Eructavit* completes the triangle by referring to the voice and the Word of God as the point and shaft, respectively, of an arrow shot to convert "the king's enemies," but also as the arrow of love that Bernard had written of, striking a wound both "suave and sweet" that pierces (as Calogrenant also specifies) "li cuer del vantre / Que nus ne set quant il i antre" (the heart of the belly / such that no one knows when it enters there) (*Eructavit*, lines 727–28). This is "the wound of which no one complains,"

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61 Cf. lines 119–21, cited above, p. 213.

62 Cf. Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter," p. 200 (who does not identify the biblical passage); similarly: Hult, ed., *Yvain*, n.3; Hunt, "Rhetorical Background," 13n76; and Woledge, *Commentaire*, 1:64. More incisive is Ribard, "Calogrenant," p. 425 and passim.

63 See also Luke 8:15, where those who receive the word "on the good ground are they who, in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it and bring forth fruit in patience."

64 *LVM*, 4.3, p. 50.

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consisting of love and faith, and which anyone should count himself lucky (as Bernard would) to have felt.[65] This jump from receiving and seizing in the heart to the idea of suffering a wounded heart is not completed in Calogrenant's prologue. If reception of his tale were properly accomplished, the hearts of his listeners would be pierced just as Mary's womb was, and Chrétien's audience is advised to experience the text from within the wounded heart that is thereby evoked. Calogrenant's audience, however, receives this wound quite differently, which is both why the discourse on the wound is postponed and part of the explanation for why this prologue is projected into the narrative rather than delivered by the narrator. Further reflection on the point awaits development through the narrative and finally restatement by the narrating poet at the completion of the four-cornered exposition, once we have learned, with Yvain, to read the widow.

Because this prologue is embedded in the narrative, two observations apply: the constitution of audience for Chrétien's text does not occur, unless it is taken as figured in Calogrenant's. Second, the scene offers Chrétien the opportunity to stage the proper constitution of audience as well as the model of reception of *avanture.* These normative gestures then go awry: as we are twice reminded in the course of *Yvain*, the queen has eloped into an *avanture* of illicit love of her own; one, moreover, required to satisfy a historical woman-as-audience, "ma dame de Champaigne": Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*.[66] This absence intrudes on the narrative we are about to hear in that it disrupts the proper functioning of Arthur's court. In effect, the action of the one tale is collapsed into the other, such that both tales—this one of the fountain of Broceliande and the other involving its absent audience—are observed by the sole audience evoked beyond the texts, Marie de Champagne. The result is a highly suggestive triangle: the princess of poetry *en romans*, Marie, witnesses the staging of a tale (*Yvain*) in which the queen, as audience, wanders into her own tale (*Charrette*); or Marie requires a tale (as the queen does of Calogrenant) of illicit love that, in effect, results in the absence of the woman-as-audience (the queen) from *Yvain*. The main narrative of *Yvain* is the result of another audience member's, Yvain's, attempt to step into and thus re-enact a tale he has heard. At the same time, ca. 1180, once again, another text, the *Eructavit*, was written claiming the same historical audience, in this case by way of staging the arch-communication, David's or the Spirit's to the heavenly bride, to which Calogrenant's model of reception—Chrétien's staged communication of *avanture*—ultimately refers. In either case, whether scriptural model or *avanture*, the woman's ear is required inside and outside the text in order for the *parole* to be properly received. This condition is secure only in the *romans* of Psalm 44, the model on which Chrétien's puzzle-piece variations are based.[67] In these

65 Cf. *Eructavit*, lines 723–36.

66 Cf. *Yvain*, 3702–7 and 3914–23. In a third reference, lines 4734–39, the queen is reported to have been restored to the court only three days before. See also above, pp. 215 and 257n68.

67 These observations need not depend on historical circumstances and are not intended to claim, for example, historical patronage of *Yvain* by Marie de Champagne. Most significant is the way Chrétien has woven the two texts together so as to encourage reflection between them on the construction of audience and of *avanture* and its reception.

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latter, we in one case observe an audience who submits to Ooliba's failing and in the other an audience—Yvain—who learns to read the New Eve.

To return to Calogrenant's normative staging of an *avanture*: this is renewed at the express request of a queen of *romans*, whose request is accepted on the condition that the speaker's *parole* be received as Mary received the Word, through her ear to be enclosed in the heart-womb, the generative centre of truth in the body. Conditional upon the fulfilment of these requirements, and echoing the narrator's words on tales of true love, Calogrenant makes his own claim to truth in storytelling depend on his story's "true" reception:

> Et qui or me vaurra entendre,
> Cuer et oreilles me doit rendre,
> Car ne veul pas servir de songe,
> Ne de fable, ne de menchonge,
> Dont maint autre vous ont servi,
> Ains conterai che que je vi.
> (171–74)[68]

(Anyone, then, who would understand me must lend me both ears and heart, for I do not wish to serve you dreams, or fairy tales, or lies such as so many others have done. I will tell you instead what I saw myself.)

Calogrenant in effect claims his story is commensurate with "true" stories told by those who have experienced true love, for either derives from experience in opposition to vain fantasies; such tales require reception by "true" hearts capable of receiving the same experience. The combined message of the two passages (the narrator's and Calogrenant's) results in the position taken by the narrator in his later excursus on the wound of love, where he disparages of his audience's capacity for heartfelt, "wounded" reception of the story because they themselves "no longer truly love."[69] That is, "today's" lovers have become today's listeners, and true love is true listening, or the ability to receive the word with the heart (see fig. 8.1). Truth, then, is constituted in response, in the act of listening with the loving (= wounded) heart. At this later juncture, however, Chrétien has only just evoked the same act of reception by restaging Calogrenant's delivery of *avanture* as the prelecting of a *romans* in an enclosed garden, where some knight's tale (*ne sai de qui*) has become a text delivered by an exquisitely desirable maiden, and this act provokes the godhead to descend into human form to embrace his

68 The last two verses are missing in two major manuscripts, including the copy by Guiot, on which the CFMA text is based (see the note following). The lines are, however, perfectly in tune with the overall argument.

69 Here the copy of Guiot (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 794), used in the CFMA edition (ed. Mario Roques), may preserve the text closest to Chrétien's: "mes tost deïst, tel i eüst, / que je parlasse de songe, / que la genz n'est mes amoronge / ne n'ainment mes, si con il suelent" (5386–89). As Woledge, *Commentaire*, 2:98, notes, *amoronge* is a *hapax legomenon*, and thus clearly the *lectio difficilior*. But the more compelling argument in its favour is that it is used to echo Calogrenant's rhyme on *songe/mançonge* (Roques, ed., lines 171–72), which in turn echoes the narrator's remarks in the prologue (lines 26–27). With the rhyme *songe/amoronge* the place of the passage in the exposition of truth and narrative is lexically fulfilled.

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bride—or *would*, *if he had seen her* (cf. line 5373). We do see her, as Yvain does and her mother and father do, who "greatly rejoice to behold and listen to her," *de li veoir et oïr* (lines 5367–68). That is, the response of the god of love re-enacts the moment that is the origin of the reception of tales evoked in Calogrenant's prologue on receiving the word with the heart. We, however, are not the god of love, whether from the literature of antiquity or Christian scripture; our place is with the maiden and her reading. Love properly conceived is a wound reciprocal to that (once) sustained by the god of love over the reading of a maiden, and the proof of worthiness required of the audience is to *aimer loiaument*; that is, to bear this secondary wound, a wound of *compassio*, to the end of the tale (cf. 5381–87).[70] The hypothetical conception effected through the god of love is to be truly completed in our listening hearts. *Vulnerasti cor meum soror mea, sponsa*, with one word of your mouth, with one verse of your *romans*. Yvain's own *avanture*, a reiteration of the one told by his cousin—the "microcosm of a romance,"[71] related "non de s'onnor, mais de sa honte" (not for his honour, but for his own shame) (60)—is a story that teaches how to receive the story of another's suffering.

When we reach the second generative moment of Chrétien's romance, Yvain's wounding in love for the grieving widow, things are even more amiss than at Arthur's court, and the reason derives from misguided reception of the tale recounted there: Yvain does not take Calogrenant's words "to heart." His cousin's intention was clearly not that his shame should be avenged (he has waited six years to tell of it—175), nor that any should undertake the "fool's adventure" that he recounts, nor that it ever be told again (cf. 575–78). Yvain's response, which instead insists his cousin is a fool for having sought no restoration of (family) honour (580–83), continues a never-ending cycle of violence and vengeance—"G'irai vostre honte vengier" (I will go and avenge your shame) (587)—which is the nature of the fountain of Broceliande (in German "Briziljan," where Sigune will endlessly deplore the violence of Orilus). The initial cycle of the romance up to Yvain's wedding of the widow represents false, or not "heartfelt" reception of a tale and a wound—one that cannot sustain compassionating participation without rising in the wish to correct or avenge the wrongs displayed, that is, to perpetrate further violence. The Passion narrative, one might recall, begins with Christ's admonition to Peter to put away his sword.

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70 Our text, and Foerster's critical edition (with standardized spelling), read: "De cheste plaie vous deïsse / Tant quë huimés fin ne preïsse, / Se li escouter vous plëust" (I would tell you more of this wound, such that I would never reach the end, if it pleased you to listen to it) (5385–87). The CFMA edition, following Guiot, reads: de ces plaies molt vos deïsse / tant qu'a une fin en venisse / se l'estoire bien vos pleüst" (I would tell you much of this wound, until I reached the end of it, if the story were to your liking) (Roques, ed., lines 5383–85). Woledge, 2:96–98, examines the differences between Guiot's text and Foerster's in some detail to conclude that the two texts, despite the differences, yield the same meaning. In either case, it is clear that the audience lacks willingness to suffer the wound, and this suffering is prolonged through narration. As indicated in the preceding note, however, Guiot's text displays the greater sensitivity to the overall argument in relation to the earlier exposition.

71 Ribard, "Calogrenant," p. 428.

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With some panache, Chrétien/Calogrenant turns this idea of reception as intervention-in-a-story against those who insisted on truth as tangible fact. The most pointed reference to the relationship between fiction and truth is intertextual, and comes with Calogrenant's concluding words:

> Ainsi alay, ainsi reving,
> Au revenir pour fol me ting.
> Si vous ai conté comme fox
> Çou c'onques mais conter ne vox.
> (575–78)

(Thus I went forth, and thus I returned, and returning held myself a fool. And as a fool I have told you what I wish never to tell again.)

As is well known, these lines take up a derisory rejection of the fabulous quality of romance and place it in the mouth of one who himself protests to be eyewitness to the truth of what he tells—within a patently fantastical narrative. In his *Roman de Rou*, Wace, a contemporary writing as a vernacular historian for Henry II, had taken his distance from the marvellous dimensions of Arthurian tales by claiming to have gone to see the fountain of Berenton in the forest of Broceliande for himself (here we should recall Gottfried's words on his visit to Cornwall):

> La alai jo merveilles querre,
> vi la forest e vi la terre,
> merveilles quis, mais nes trovai,
> Fol m'en revinc, fol i alai;
> fol i alai, fol m'en revinc,
> folie quis, por fol me tinc.[72]

(I went there seeking marvels, I saw the forest and the country, marvels I sought but none did I find, a fool I returned, as a fool I set forth; a fool I set forth, and a fool I returned, foolishness I sought and held myself a fool.)

It is highly likely that Chrétien's narrative turns so entirely around the adventure of the fountain because it is conceived as a direct response to the question of how the encounter with the marvellous—not in life, but through stories told—can deliver experience that contains the truth that Wace so foolishly sought with his foolish "eyewitness" expedition.[73] The retort to such pedantry is delivered by Calogrenant in the brilliant exchange

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72 Wace, *Roman de Rou*, lines 6393–98; see also Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter"; and Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 179–80. The dates generally accepted for the section of the *Roman de Rou* in question are 1170 to 1183, thus only shortly before the *Chevalier au Lion*; on this question see Woledge, *Commentaire*, 1:85–86.

73 Wolf, who points out the neglected significance of the allusion to Wace, nevertheless misinterprets it. Calogrenant's self-avowed foolishness attests to the grievous *reality* of the peril and shame that befell him; I cannot see how it can be taken as undercutting the "truth" that he earlier claimed for his tale; cf. Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter," pp. 200–201 and passim. This truth, that of eyewitness experience, is affirmed step for step (within the overall fictional frame) through Yvain's adventures.

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with the wild man, when he defines the knight errant—that is, his own existence—as the narrated object of an *avanture* with the words, "I am—*as you can see*—a knight, one who seeks what I cannot find."[74] Or is it "what cannot be found"?[75] Truth can be seen, heard, and felt in *avanture*, but not such that one can reach out and grab it nor even such that it is "found" in the tale itself.

No less foolish than Wace's response, we can surmise in retrospect, having heard the story, was Yvain's own expedition in search of Calogrenant's adventure. Such wisdom is not the privilege of the audience at the outset, however; on the contrary, we are taken in the same trap and assume that Yvain's exploits are those he is rightfully to fulfil in conception of his own heroic tale of *avanture*. Thus Yvain's narrative proceeds from a point that finds its inverted complement in the later staging of the maiden's romance performance and the narrator's address to the audience. Reception in the wounded heart is the objective in either case; in Yvain's case we see what occurs when this reception is not fulfilled. His arrival in the secluded garden in which the *pucele*'s reading seduces the god of love signals completion of an arc of meaning in the same way (and with very similar meaning) as does the arrival of *Frou Âventiure* at the beginning of book 9 in *Parzival*.

The misguided reception of what he sees and hears (and invariably wishes to reach out and grab) becomes the explosive seed and motor of Yvain's narrative when, in voyeuristic fascination with the grievous consequences of his intervening violence, the husband's slayer falls in lust with the bride and actually succeeds in replacing him in the conjugal bed. Yvain is a far cry here from the response contained in Wolfram's credo, proclaimed in heartfelt suffering for the suffering widow, Herzeloyde. But we, as audience, are on the same path as is initiated there—to a reception of the Word in the heart—and find ourselves at very much the same juncture of narrative (see figs. 8.1 and 8.2).

Not surprisingly, it is this introduction of the widow—the second corner in *Yvain* and the first in *Parzival*—that displays most emphatically what the latter romance owes to the former. Either narrative is exceptional for two things (at least): the story to be told begins only after a lengthy proemium, really an independent narrative complete in itself, which serves to deliver its heroine into widowhood, such that the emerging tale is born—in *Parzival* literally—from this portrayal of female suffering. That is, narrative experience takes place first as the introduction to and performance of a woman's' grief and then as a renewed trajectory entirely determined by (one might say, under the sign of) the same, as the search for an adequate and reciprocal *response*. In *Yvain* this search overtly drives the protagonist's narrative path as the reformation of male desire; in *Parzival* it is instead a kind of genetic inheritance unknown to the hero but no less essential and all the more inevitable. Wolfram removed the personally contingent dimension of this search to make it instead a human destiny, or humanity's destiny.

What is most extraordinary about the introduction of the heroine in Chrétien's *Yvain* is also what is most obvious: her incomparable beauty is perceived and described only through the extremity of her grief and as disfigured by her grief; for Yvain, the two are

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74 "Je sui, çou vois, uns chevaliers / Qui quier che que trouver ne puis" (356–57).

75 Ribard, "Calogrenant," p. 432, likewise suggests the line is better understood in the latter sense.

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inseparable, even as his love is inseparable from her distress. This beauty receives qualification worthy of Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei*; given the circumstances, however, it is more reminiscent of the heavenly queen in her earthly pain. As the invisible Yvain watches the frantic search for her husband's assassin,

> Vint une des plus bele dames
> C'onques veïst riens terrestre.
> De si tres bele crestïenne
> Ne fu onques plait ne parole;
> Mais de duel faire estoit si fole
> C'a poi qu'ele ne s'ochioit.
> (1146–51)

(There arrived one of the most beautiful ladies who have ever walked this earth. Of a more beautiful Christian woman word has never been heard, but she was so consumed with her grieving that she might well have taken her own life.)

The opposition between "Christian beauty" and the excess of grief is apparent—but not reported as irresolvable (in Herzeloyde's display of her grief it is, in effect, spontaneously resolved). While Yvain suffers for seeing where he dares not be recognized, for Laudine it is the inability to see the author of her wound that is most unbearable—for the sake of vengeance, not for recognition. God himself takes a scolding from her for this injustice; a fact which initially underlines the extremity of her own position and its need of correction (lines 1212–16). The fascination exerted upon Yvain is nevertheless immediate—but there is as yet no talk of love. As the text says later, "Love took him at the window"[76]—that is, in the position that renders unmistakable both his seeing unseen and the intensity of his desire to step into a scene from which he is irrevocably excluded: "Then she swooned and tore at all that was on her person and came within her grasp. My Lord Yvain, regardless of the consequences, could only barely restrain himself from rushing out to hold her hands."[77] What Chrétien so carefully constructs as the catapult from which this narrative is launched is an almost intolerable suspension between the desire for inclusion in, and factual exclusion from, a woman's suffering; experienced, so the fabulously constructed narrative would have it, on one side as a negated body (Yvain's invisibility, or inability to show himself), and on the other as negated vision (Laudine's inability to see him). The rest of the romance takes place as the struggle to establish a reciprocal gaze in which each recognizes the other's wound. This, as we have seen, can also be stated differently, as the desire for inclusion in woman's truth. It was no less the realization of the diaphanous body, the body whose blackness—unlike Laudine's in this scene—could serve to reveal rather than to obscure the beauty of the bride.

The same construction thus witnesses a collision of the sacred and the profane in which Yvain figures as the cause of their incompatibility and Laudine as the site of their *potential* convergence. Despite the crass profanity of Yvain's position, however, all sense of

76 "En chest voloir l'a Amour mis, / qui a la fenestre l'a pris" (1427–28).

77 "Lors se pasmë et se dessire / Trestout quanques a mains li vient. / A mout grant paine se detient / Mesire Yvains, a quoi que tort, / Que les mains tenir ne li cort" (1300–1304).

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contingent impropriety is passed over in silence, for the audience alone to ponder. Lunete expresses neither indignation nor even surprise at her captive's vampiric voyeurism; on the contrary, his suggestion that he "would gladly see the procession and the body" is met with her immediate indication of the fateful window.[78] The funerary procession, by contrast—which Chrétien describes previously and which proceeds as if continuously in the background of these transactions—is lent all possible marks of Christian solemnity: a company of nuns precede, bearing the consecrated water, the cross, and candles; behind them come "li texte"—doubtless the Gospel books—and the censers born by priests "who dispense the holy absolution that is the concern of every frail soul (*chetive âme*)" (cf. lines 1166–72). The manuscript on which our text is based provides its own window onto this scene, a large single miniature inserted not where the procession is first described but instead above and directly opposite Lunete's instructions to Yvain on how he is to behave as its viewer (lines 1314–37, fig. 8.3).[79] These instructions are remarkable in themselves. Once again, they contain no reference to Yvain's position as a *chetive âme* in need of his own absolution; they read instead as if advice to a bumpkin about to attend his first performance of tragic theatre. Her remarks are in part a response, it is true, to Yvain's demonstrated difficulty to control his impulses (lines 1303–4), but what can Lunete mean, at this point, when she evokes the "grant biens" (great good) that can result from his visual participation in the funerary procession if only he will stay seated; and the "enormous profit" that will be his if he refrains from "scandalous outbursts" (*dire outrage*)?[80] "For he who lets himself get carried away," she explains, "or even sets about some bold action when it is neither the time nor the place, he I would rather term vulgar than honourable."[81] The specific, perilous, and painful peculiarity of Yvain's position vis-à-vis Laudine is here whitewashed in favour of general instruction in how properly to conduct oneself as the compassionating audience of a performance, of events that no measure of chivalric bravado can set aright. In this much Yvain succeeds, although not without great difficulty. It is his first attempt to "read" as a woman.[82]

78 "Verroie volontiers la hors / La prochession et le cors" (1273–74).

79 As seen opposite, the miniature is itself a sophisticated "window" view: the procession is portrayed as inside the church while framed by an exterior view of the same. Yvain is nowhere visible; we see what he sees. The text's description of the procession occurs on fol. 71^{r}.

80 Cf. lines 1314–22.

81 "Car qui se derroie et sourmaine, / Et d'outrage faire se paine, / Quant il n'en a ne tans ne lieu, / Je l'appel plus mauvais que preu" (1323–26). The lines occur only in Guiot's copy (MS H) and Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1433 (MS P), the two manuscripts also generally held to be the most reliable. Other redactors possibly found them awkwardly inappropriate. Foerster originally excluded them in his "Große Ausgabe," only to restore them later in the "Petite Edition." See also Woledge, 1:107.

82 A somewhat comical effect is achieved when Yvain, immediately before being wounded by love, is suddenly preoccupied once again with Keu's renewed mockery, should he not "grab" some proof (*tesmoing et garant*) of the truth of his exploits, a trophy to bring home (cf. lines 1345–57). This relapse into male reading anticipates Yvain's later absorption in tournament games, over which he will simply forget his all-important promise to Laudine.

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Figure 8.3. The funeral of Esclados, end of the thirteenth century. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1433, fol. 72v. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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His position at the window, on which the text repeatedly insists, is in fact superfluous—being invisible, he has no need to conceal himself behind a wall—and serves properly as a "visual" analogy to the position of the audience before a performance. Like them, Yvain must learn to sustain suffering felt in the heart—suffering for love of another who takes the real blows—as the only way to enjoy even an illicit proximity to the object of his desire. All this in preparation for the decisive, third "scene," in which he finally observes Laudine alone. As further necessary introduction to this scene, we first learn the result of Yvain's lesson in compassionating participation: an incomparably wounded heart that will, finally, subsume his entire identity and reduce him to only the barest semblance of a man—for failure to *aimer loiaument*, a failure of reciprocal recognition in suffering.

This wound, significantly, is not struck by the male god of love who will be evoked in the garden at *Pesme Avanture* but rather by a consistently female personification who works, ostensibly, in service of Laudine's revenge, "which she exacts more severely than ever [Laudine] could have done."[83] Yvain is wounded not as the *sponsa* is but rather indirectly, through the wound to the suffering woman. Like Mary's (as Odo tells it), his wound is struck "through the eyes to the heart" and lasts far longer than any administered by lance or sword (1372–74). There follows the complement to the later remarks on its "cure,"

> Cols d'espee garist e saine
> Mout tost, des que mires y paine;
> Et la plaie d'Amours empire
> Quant ele est plus pres de son mire."
> (1375–78)

(Sword wounds can be cured and heal quite quickly, once a surgeon attends to them, but the wound of love only worsens when its surgeon is near.)

Afflicted with a wound for which the only "healing" is its protraction, the victim has no choice but to learn to sustain its pain—which becomes the object of Yvain's next lesson, and which the narrator later announces as the burden of his own audience.

It is this next scene, in which Yvain no longer observes the public grief of the ruling lady but rather her private devotion, "reading her psalms in a psalter illuminated in letters of gold" (cf. lines 1418–19), that clarifies exactly how he is wounded: on the one hand by her grieving reading, on the other by—among other points—her eyes, her hair, and her neck, *in uno oculorum tuorum et in uno crine colli tui* (Canticles 4:9). This is likewise the scene that makes Laudine's significance clear, in which she briefly becomes the diaphanous body and the lightening rod for the descent of the Word into our experience, into *avanture*. First the grieving reading:

83 "Venjanche en a prise gregnor / Qu'ele en prendre ne l'en peüst" (1368–69). Hult's translation does not preserve the female gendering of love, apparently assuming it is merely grammatical. That did not prevent the poet from speaking of a male god in the later scene.

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Et Mesire Yvains est encor
A le fenestre ou il l'esgarde;
Et quant il plus s'en donne garde,
Plus l'aime et plus li abelist.
Che qu'ele pleure et qu'ele list
Vausist qu'ele laissié eüst,
Et qu'a le parler li pleüst.
En chest voloir l'a Amour mis,
Qui a la fenestre l'a pris.
(1420–28)

(And my Lord Yvain is once again at the window where he beholds her, and the more he beholds her, the more he loves her and the more he is delighted, that she weeps and that she reads, these he wishes she would leave off and that it would please her to speak to him. Love put him in this state, who fell upon him at the window.)

The five verses (1422–26) that are framed here by a pair each before and after, stating and restating the position at the window, defy linear interpretation. The reason is an *apokoinu*, a construction in which one syntactical element serves to form two consecutive statements. That element is the central verse, *Che qu'ele pleure et qu'ele list*.

This is the heart of the matter, for us as well as for Yvain. Laudine is an all but mandatory inclusion in any discussion of women's grieving in romance narrative; as we saw in chapter 1, she has become no less obligatory to the discussion of women's literacy. But the two are never discussed as Chrétien emphatically represented them: together, as inseparable and complementary. The reason for this is simple: Laudine is the sole example to be found of a courtly lady who chants her psalms while also fulfilling the prescriptive gestures of a widow's grief.[84] Was it this sense of incongruity that led Chrétien's German adaptor, Hartmann von Aue, to omit all reference to Laudine's psalter prayer? Wolfram, for his part, would appear to have understood perfectly and conceived his portrayal of Herzeloyde's grief analogously: each woman's grieving is defamiliarized through an element that suggests an interpenetration of sacred and profane and is to be read as a reference to the woman who sacralized human grief, Mary.

To read the crucial and central verse such that the syntax is entirely successful it is necessary to substitute a comma for the full stop after *abelist*. Laudine's tears and her prayer can or indeed must be taken as both what increasingly pleases Yvain and what he wishes would stop.[85] The resultant state, "which love put him in at the window," is

84 Characteristically, a recent contribution judges Laudine's portrayal to be composed "all but exclusively of conventional literary topoi from the widow's *planctus*," but makes no mention whatever of her psalter-reading: Breulmann, *Weibliches Agieren*, pp. 194–95. Comparative studies of the grieving women of courtly narrative are found in Küsters, "Klagefiguren," and Peil, *Gebärde*; neither, however, comments on Laudine's psalter prayer. Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 113–15, is one of the few to have so much as paused over the striking incongruity of the scene.

85 In the first case the sense would be, "The more he beholds her, the more he loves her and the more it pleases him to see her weep and read; *nevertheless*, he wishes she would leave these and that it would please her to speak to him." In the second: "The more he beholds her, the more he loves

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admittedly peculiar: he is most possessed by that which also precludes all contact with his beloved; similarly, love's wound most craves that which makes it suffer: in either case, reading and weeping, prayer and tears.

The more she does this, "the more he loves her and the more he is delighted": the collision of profane desire and a sacred attention to the dead continues; Laudine's psalter appears in part as if a sacral remnant of the funerary procession that accompanied her previous lament, accentuating the continuing incongruity of Yvain's desire. To these incongruities I will return shortly. But the grieving widow's psalter is no less the counterpart of the *pucele*'s romance, its reading responsible for an equivalent wound of love: Yvain's ill-conceived participation in the suffering of the widow reaches its own resolution (which offers no resolution in his relationship to Laudine!) at the castle of *Pesme avanture*, where he again witnesses a woman's reading performance, this time purely profane, but with a power to wound that is capable of re-enacting Mary's original reading act—or at least affecting another god in the same way. It is in fact Laudine's tearful reading that bears the appropriate resemblance to the dart cast by the Christian bride, while Yvain's response to the wound he receives beholding Laudine is what romance convention would dictate for the later scene. His response to *pucele avanture*, on the other hand, constitutes redress of his earlier transgression: rather than seeking possession of the reading woman, he ends up freeing the 300 weeping ladies held in slave labour (see lines 5769–79). The prelude to this latter act is a scene in which hearts meet in mutual recognition and explicitly reciprocal vision—"Il les voit et eles le voient / Si s'enbronchent toutes et pleurent" (He sees them and they see him, and they all bow their heads and weep) (5202–3)—and in God's name: "Dix, s'il plaist," Yvain hails the ladies, "Chel doel, qui ne sait dont vous naist, / Vous ost des cuers et tourt a joie!" (May God, if he please, lift from your hearts this sorrow, of which I know not how it befell you, and turn it to joy!) (5243–45). The echo returns from within the enclosure (*un prael clos*—line 5187), "Dix vous en oye, / Que vous en avés apelé!" (May God hear you, as you have called upon him!) (5246–47). Once Yvain has encountered the *pucele* and accomplished the *Pesme Avanture* and they are thus rescued, the ladies manifest a joy such as "I doubt they would have shown over him who created all the world, had he descended from Heaven to earth."[86] The hypothetical descent of God-as-love marks not only the maiden's reading but also Yvain's arrival as a reader of Mary's reading, one able to know and embrace her tears. This is the same point, at the same corner of the poetic exposition, at which Parzival has arrived when he knocks on the door to Sigune's wounded heart and "finds" her true identity.

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her and the more *she* pleases him. Her reading and her weeping he wishes she would leave, and that it would please her to speak to him." Separated into two distinct statements, neither is entirely satisfactory without an interpolated element (given above in italics). Neither Woledge, *Commentaire*, nor the editors (Roques, Hult) offer any comment on these lines.

86 "Ne je ne cuit qu'eles feïssent / Tel joie com eles le font / De celui qui fist tout le mont, / S'il fust du chiel venus en terre" (5776–79).

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In response to the spectacle of "the Lady's" grieving reading,[87] Yvain delivers a monologue in fascinated admiration that continues Chrétien's study in *compassio* ill-conceived even as it ostensibly enumerates the hallmarks of her beauty. These are (as alluded to above) her hair, "surpassing fine gold, such is its luster," which, Yvain says, "m'esprennent et auguisent" (inflame[s] and prick[s] me like needles) (1468) as she tears at it; her eyes, the most beautiful he has ever seen, despite their ever-flowing tears, which "me dessïent" (rob me of my senses) (1472); her face, the beauty of which is disfigured by her scratching, thus causing him "grant destreche" (great constriction) (1477); and, finally, her neck (or bosom, the word is *gorge*), which, as she clutches at it, "me par a acouré" (nearly tears out my heart) (1482). On this last he elaborates: "Ne nus cristaus, ne nule glache / N'est si bele ne si polie / Que se gorge est, ne si onnie" (No crystal nor any mirror is so beautiful or so bright as is her bosom, nor so defiled) (1486–88).[88]

Chrétien delights in this climax of discord between the lustful gaze and the suffering widow, which is the echo of his original description of this "most beautiful Christian woman who ever walked the earth" (cf. Yvain's reprise of this superlative description, lines 1496–510) and, in some sense, its resolution. The woman's wound is open in this scene, her suffering unobscured by desire for vengeance or defiance of God. The image of her bosom as a sullied mirror is the telltale signal of the body diaphanous; through the disfigurement of her grief, or rather because of it, the key scriptural image shimmers as if below the surface. With her psalter prayer Laudine represents the widow's grief as the potential convergence of human and divine, suffering and the kiss of heartfelt recognition. What Yvain experiences is beauty inverted, the joy of the flesh transmuted into the image of suffering for its loss, the body as mirror of its own infirmity: the nature of the widowed, or black bride. In one possible interpretation his suffering is that of the *sponsus* who suffers in reciprocation of her suffering, wounded at the sight of her eye, her hair and her neck. At the same time, it remains that of the erotic voyeur, marvelling over purely exterior beauty. The correspondence between the image of Canticles 4:9 and the body parts that so physically afflict Yvain is only partial and in itself not compelling. It becomes so, once again, through the jarring peculiarity of the situation: erotic love conceived as physical pain over a woman's grieving pain. We had reason to pause over such wilfully obscured allusion to sacred models with reference to Herzeloyde and Wolfram's text generally. Despite all incongruity, Yvain suffers with the widowed bride as Landri's bride suffered with Christ, she who "endures by *co-passion* whatever [Christ] suffered in the flesh. She is one spirit with him, all the injuries are common to each." But neither sees the other's wound. Love here does indeed proceed from pain that is reciprocal and interdependent, but it is neither shared nor mutually acknowledged; the gaze cannot be returned.

87 See note 48, above.

88 Guiot's copy omits all reference to Laudine's neck or bosom (*gorge*), which results in a less satisfactory text and suggests that the special and extended emphasis the *gorge* receives was felt as incongruous—possibly exactly what Chrétien intended.

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The woman's psalter-reading was our point of departure, we saw that it could stand for an incapacity for letters and the learned path to God as well as for an ideal of lay devotion and a layman's gnosis. In Laudine's hands, the psalter mitigates the portrayal of grief, for it joins her with the image of the woman as expectant, potential vessel of the Word and "our" access to God. Such reading frequently involved tears, as illustrated when Malcolm of Scotland, Margaret's husband, leafed through the lavishly ornamented book he had given her and, in admiration of her devout reading, kept "even the nocturnal hours … with a sighing heart and abundant tears.[89] But these were tears of contrition, not tears of grief, tears of desire for Heaven, not for a lost beloved. The moment of incongruity insisted upon here is entirely characteristic of Chrétien's art; such moments serve to provoke the audience to seek further meaning. In this case, the *sponsa derelicta* has joined the grieving widow-in-the-world, tears of prayer have joined those of suffering for love—precisely the shift that received its sacred authority in the invention of Mary's weeping grief at the cross. The ideas evoked thus comprise the power of women's prayer and the special privilege of their tears—what Abelard evoked as *infirmiora sexus praerogativa*—as well as Mary's weeping at the Passion and her reading at the Annunciation. The reading of the *sponsa derelicta*, Mary's reading, and the worldly widow's grief are all briefly superimposed in the meaning potential of this moment that launches the reformation of male desire—or, as for Malcolm and others cited earlier, Yvain's instruction in how to read as a woman.

This is the moment that corresponds to Wolfram's *lactans dolorosa* as the generation of a narrative and an experience of truth. Wolfram's adaptation of Chrétien's exposition shows us a path from the image of Herzeloyde and its reception in the narrator's heart (in the transition from the preliminary narrative to the *niuwe mære*) to the audience's reception of Lady Âventiure and Parzival's recognition of the *commortua* and *consepulta*, the woman who dies and is buried with her beloved, as his cousin. As we witness Yvain's path, the grief of the *sponsa derelicta* (she who weeps and reads in search of the new kiss) leads to the kiss of the Annunciation, while we are led from Laudine's psalter prayer to the *pucele*'s prelecting of a *romans* and Yvain is led from the gaze of possession to one of reciprocal recognition, from a desire to seize and act upon what he "sees" (unseen), to a suffering participation in others' suffering. The result is a continuity accomplished between loving, suffering and knowing that applies in our reading of and participation in this *romans* just as it applies as the objective of Yvain's reading the grieving woman, as it is expressed in Sigune's *Herzkluse*, and, finally (or rather originally), as it applies to the *sponsa*, whose generative reading act is made to shimmer through the diaphanous body of either poet's narrative art. The extremity of women's grief potentially opens in either poem onto an epiphany of empathy that is then the objective of the narrative experience. The widow serves as a point of convergence of reading and *historia* sacred and secular, of our history and Christ's, sustained in her suffering heart.

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89 *Vita S. Margaritae*, 2:330C; see pp. 34–35, above.

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Sigune's Reading

"My widow is better than that one," Wolfram tells us, and the one-upmanship was more than idle boasting. In both Laudine's grieving reading and Herzeloyde's grieving lactation, sacred and profane join in a forced coalescence that corresponds to a contemplative suspension of narrative time, opening a kind of vertical window onto sacred meaning. With Sigune, however, Wolfram made this moment of conjunction into her very function in the narrative. Each scene finds her in a new position of iconic stasis, first in the cleft of a rock-face, next perched improbably in a linden tree, and finally in a cell that is built over a stream. Each of these reveals how she realizes Mary's reading, making scriptural images into lived experience.

A great deal has been made in the scholarship of Sigune's possible relationship to Mary, whether iconographic or moral, and decades ago Arthur Groos drew (renewed) attention to her relationship to the dove and turtledove as the bestiary symbols of mourning and undying widowed fidelity, which served equally as symbols of Mary, the widow, and devotion to the Passion.[90] The key, however, is neither bestiary lore nor images of Mary's suffering in visual art but rather the behaviour of the dove as it was informed by the dove imagery of the Song of Songs. Sigune's final residence, the cell curiously poised over a stream (lines 435,7–9), provides the clearest reference to the biblical text, doubling the image of the dove's eyes "above streams of waters" and its abode "beside the brimming streams" (Canticles 5:12). The passage was traditionally explicated as revealing the bride's reading of scripture, for just as "the dove's eyes" sought the shadows of approaching enemies (raptors) in the water, so the Christian sought refuge in meditation on scripture.[91] Sigune finds refuge from the raptors of her world—Orilus and his kind—on the one hand in religious devotion (psalter prayer), and on the other in a withdrawal that is simultaneously a total immersion in the fate of her slain beloved. Her first "nesting place," *vor eines velses orte* (below a spur of rock) (138,12),[92] already expresses this last idea through an image that fused the widowed fidelity of the dove with devotion to Christ's Passion.

This first position is that of the dove in Canticles 2:14, *columba mea in foraminibus petrae in caverna maceriae* (my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall), which both Rupert and Bernard in their Song commentaries identified (respectively) as Mary's or the bride's contemplation of Christ's wounds, "for she turns all her devotion to the wounds of Christ, abiding there in constant contemplation."[93] From the early twelfth century onward (if not before), Canticles 2:14 situated the bride of Canticles in devotion to the Passion; moreover, this led to the understanding of the preceding image, *Vox turturis audita est* (The voice of the turtledove has been heard)

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90 "Sigune," 631–46. An account of Sigune's possible relationship to Mary, useful for its analysis despite dubious conclusions, is found in Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 97–108.

91 For example, *CCC*, 5, pp. 122–23; other examples cited in Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 81–83.

92 Trans. Hatto.

93 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica*, 61:7, p. 152.

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(Canticles 2:11), as the endless grieving felt in the same *compassio*.[94] Before he sees Sigune as the dove of Canticles 2:14, Parzival first hears her *wuofen* (mourning wail) (cf. lines 138,11–14) as the turtledove of Canticles 2:11; the same occurs again to initiate the second meeting at the linden tree (lines 249,11–12). Sigune is not Mary, but she is the *columba* or *turtur* just as Mary was in that her life realizes the truth of the scriptural images of the mourning bird, their common denominator, as experience.

Sigune's perch in the linden tree is her most singularly memorable position and that which is most obviously birdlike. However, it is also the most problematic, as comment in the scholarship has shown.[95] This image in particular at once provokes and defeats all attempts at reduction, both sacred and profane, which makes it for my argument the most instructive of the three. Groos insisted on Sigune's position in the tree as a "metaphorical identification" with the "turtledove on the dry branch,"[96] which entered commentary on Canticles 2:14 with Bernard of Clairvaux, who cited it as the widowed bride's conversion solely to heavenly things. As others have duly noted, Sigune's branch is decidedly green, a fact for which the notion has either been rejected or, alternatively, seen as a cautionary exemplum with the dove positively clinging to her earthly existence (a green branch) as Sigune does to the deceased.[97] But, repeatedly and above all, association with the dove and the turtledove, with or without the dry branch, has been rejected for lack of unambiguous mention in the text—such as Wolfram provides for Belakane, whose "happiness settled on the dry branch even as turtledoves still do" (cf. lines 57,9–14).[98] This—a transparent reference to *bîspel* and *bilde geben*—is, with regard to Sigune, precisely what we must not expect.

Sigune's leafy perch can be most directly understood, first, as an intensification of the identification between her, the dove, and devotion to the Passion as introduced in her first station, in which Parzival "finds the dead prince lying in the virgin's lap" (cf. lines 138,22–23). The second scene continues the embrace from the first but constitutes its elevation

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94 Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 230–31; and Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 77–81. In German, the dove's mourning call could be rendered as *wuofen* (examples in Messelken, p. 87). How close the understanding of this behaviour comes to Wolfram's Sigune is readily apparent in the extremely popular "Branch B" of the Latin *Physiologus*—of which the first vernacular translations (though in Old French) began to appear in the twelfth century: "Es gibt einen Vogel, der heißt Turteltaube. Von diesem steht geschrieben: 'Die Turteltaube läßt sich hören in unserem Lande' (Canticles 2:12). Der Physiologus sagt von der Turteltaube, daß sie ihren Mann sehr liebt, daß sie enthaltsam mit ihm lebt und nur ihm die Treue halt. Wenn es also passiert, daß ihr Mann vom Habicht oder vom Vogelsteller gefangen wird, verbindet sie sich mit keinem anderen Mann, sondern verlangt immer nach dem einen und sehnt sich jeden Moment nach ihm, und in dieser Erinnerung und diesem Verlangen verharrt sie bis zum Tod" (as quoted and trans. in Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 219). Groos discusses the *Physiologus* in relation to Sigune at length ("Sigune," pp. 639–45, this passage on p. 639).

95 For a critical overview, see Backes, *Stellenkommentar*, pp. 161–66.

96 Gross, "Sigune," 633.

97 The last position is taken by Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 134–35; similarly Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp 100–101. To be sure, Groos, "Sigune," 638, addressed the "green" branch, and his solution remains to my thinking perceptive, if not wholly satisfactory.

98 Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," p. 100; Nellman, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 589–90 (249,14); and Backes, *Stellenkommentar*, p. 166. Wenzel, "Herzeloyde und Sigune," pp. 229–30, remains sympathetic to Groos's conclusions.

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and thus a movement heavenwards; it is entirely in keeping with the dove's search for isolation and seclusion "on the summits of mountains or in the tops of trees."[99] The dove's devotion to its crucified beloved, moreover, was often visualized, both verbally and materially, as its nesting in the centre of the cross as a tree. In this "nest in the tree," as Hugh of Fouilloy put it, the dove (soul) seeks Christ as a faithful widow in unceasing remembrance of his suffering: "Redit saepius ad arborem, frequentat nidum, videt effusionem sanguinis, indicium videlicet mortis; dum haec attendit gemit" (Often she returns to the tree, remains close to the nest, looks on the flowing blood, the reminder of his death. And as she looks on this she mourns).[100] Sigune's nesting place would thus reify the metaphor of cross as tree in its relevance to devotion to the Passion. But as suggestive as such a description is of Sigune, Wolfram renders its *exemplary* value seemingly useless: Sigune mourns not the absent Christ but her (very physically) present earthly beloved; she does not merely seek a treetop refuge but also persists in embracing her dead (and now embalmed) beloved there. As we have seen, Sigune's literal "imitation" of the image denies its allegorical referent as well as its edifying value. And herein lies the rub: invariably, the assumption has been that Sigune either mirrors these images of the dove and is therefore to be read in terms of the bestiary exemplum—a living *bîspel*—or she cannot be read for exemplary value and therefore the dove, turtledove, and the pertinent images from Canticles cannot be used to inform our understanding of her place in the narrative.[101]. *This winged* bîspel *flutters too fast for simple folk*: what we need here is a different way of reading, which is what Wolfram's (and Chrétien's) widows represent and teach.

Sigune's embrace opens an avenue for meaning derived from the secular experience of grief, which has given rise to a third position. As Ute Schwab shows, Sigune's seemingly endless embrace of her dead beloved, whether it be regarded as sublime, grotesque, or merely impossible, would have suggested the *Schoßhaltung*—a ritual form of *Totendienst* in which the newly deceased was held in the lap of a close relative—more readily than Mary's embrace of the dead Christ (as yet iconographically unknown). On this point there will be more to say shortly. In Sigune's case the gesture would not only be obsessively extended (over a year), but would also occur in utter isolation, thus negating its ritual function, which in itself—she is neither wife nor relative—it would not be Sigune's place to perform.[102] Whether she thus becomes a cautionary example of

99 "… qui semper in jugis montium, vel in verticibus arborum morantur." This phrase was a standard element of commentary on Canticles 2:11–12, as seen in the *Glossa ordinaria*, PL 113:1141 (cited in Groos, "Sigune," p. 624), and Bernard's *Sermones super cantica*, 59.7, p. 139.

100 Hugh of Fouilloy, *Aviarium*, 29, pp. 146–50. See also Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 237–40; related remarks in Groos, "Sigune," 635–37, and Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 105–6. An excellent study of the symbolism of the Tree of the Cross, also in relation to romance texts, is Greenhill, "Cosmological Tree," 323–71.

101 Groos, too, sought to demonstrate "strong and apparently deliberate echoes of the turtledove tradition … which Wolfram employs in delineating Sigune's exemplary character," or "to articulate the exemplary nature of Sigune's chaste fidelity" ("Sigune," 635, 641). Jacobson, "Cundrie and Sigune," 1–11, sees Sigune as an exemplary penitent, although for a sin that is not her own but rather a human universal.

102 Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 107. For Schwab, the extremity and incongruity in Sigune's fulfilment of *Totendienst*, or ritual mourning, contributes to an appraisal of her as a solely cautionary figure, intended to evoke revulsion and disgust; see also pp. 132, 135.

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immoderation or not, to explain the embrace in this way only begs the question, once again, of the perch in the tree.[103]

If Sigune is not exemplary, then neither is she a penitent; she suffers not primarily for guilt, but simply for love. Similarly, if Sigune "follows" the dove, then she does so by immersing herself in the images of its suffering fidelity; its "nesting places" serve as her residences, points of immersion that constitute intersections between the sacred and the wilfully personal historicity of her existence. The same images that inform her first station, the dove's mourning call and its place in the clefts of rocks, served—as seen in the *Rheinisches Marienlob* of the early thirteenth century, a text that addresses its female monastic audience as "pure doves"—to identify Mary as the dove of Canticles; that is, Mary was the dove *because* she "sighs and weeps in the crevices of the rock" or *because* she "has always been found in the holes of the five wounds," in other words, because she fulfilled prophetic images as *historia*, as the monastic audience was to do in their *lectio* of the same text.[104] To go one step further, in Aelred of Rievaulx's rule for women who had chosen Sigune's third nesting place, the enclosed cell, the same three-way identification between the dove in the wounds, Mary, and the female religious gives place to a vivid call to the bride of Christ to enter sacred *historia* by stepping up to the cross next to Mary and John to experience the same images in her own life:

> Hasten, linger not, eat the honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk (Cant. 5:1). The blood is changed into wine to gladden you, the water into milk to nourish you. From the rock streams have flowed for you (Ps. 77:16), wounds have been made in his limbs, holes in the wall of his body, in which, like a dove, you may hide (Cant. 2:14) while you kiss them one by one. Your lips, stained with blood, will become like a scarlet ribbon and your word sweet (Cant. 4:3).[105]

Such texts as these are where we should seek the confluence of image, experience and affective devotion that informs, whether directly or indirectly, Wolfram's portrayal of Sigune. They are a far cry from the moralizing exempla of bestiary literature and derive from a different understanding of image and *historia* altogether; their aim is not the emulation of specific virtues or behaviour (whether sacred or secular), but rather the immersion in an experience of shared pain. If Sigune is a dove, the bride, or Mary, then only because she reads the scriptural images as Mary did. Similarly, Sigune does not recapitulate Mary's experience at the cross, she does not suffer along with her wounded, scourged, dying beloved; Schianatulander is no Christ-figure any more than Parzival is. She instead re-experiences the images of scripture as her own experience; her experience is a renewal of Mary's reading of those same images, their embodiment as life, as her own suffering. That is, quite simply, her experience is Herzeloyde's experience: *o amici, hoc ego experta sum*, or *dez weiz ich wâriu mære*.

This is then also where we discover the decisive explanation for Sigune's perch in the tree. Sigune is the narrative reiteration of Heryeloyde's *lactans dolorosa*:[106] where

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103 On this point, accordingly, Schwab is silent.

104 Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 80, 86–89.

105 *Rule*, pp. 90–91.

106 Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 278–79.

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the one image shows us the nursing mother and evokes the embrace of the dead beloved, the other shows us the embrace of the dead beloved such that it accomplishes the meaning of the lactating mother: image becomes incarnate experience. Herzeloyde, Sigune, and Mary are one in a singular experience: the intensity of grief experienced as a loving embrace or the intensity of love experienced as a grieving embrace. This was the central mystery of Rupert's Mary, the significance of the "bundle of myrrh" that is the beloved resting "between my breasts," the simultaneity of maternal joy and widowed grief, of conception and compassion, Mary's explanation of "how I knew these things." The one experience contains the other even in the very truth that all three communicate: the incarnation of the image as experience. Sigune's perch in the tree thus implies Mary's position in a more familiar image, the Tree of Jesse, the tree that itself becomes image through her incarnation of the prophetic word.[107] Twelfth and thirteenth-century examples still reveal this older visual idea, with Mary holding her child at the centre of a tree;[108] in the *Speculum virginum* we saw this idea of the *virga Iesse* as it was used to visualize the virgins' completion of Mary's reading. Wolfram uses it in Sigune's case to communicate the same: what Mary knew in the conception and bearing of Christ, what Herzeloyde knew through her bearing of Parzival, Sigune knows and makes known through *compassio* with a dead beloved—and we know, as Parzival comes to know, by entering her suffering heart.

In this, and only in this, does Sigune's experience offer access to sacred truth, for her and for us: as her experience of the Word. But that is exactly the point of Wolfram's poetics of *triuwe*. Meaning is made only through a shared experience of the inner truth, not through *bilde geben* or *bilde nemen*, not through *bîspel* or mirrors or allegorical representation. Meaning was found in *triuwe* to women's truth, in the reciprocity of wounded hearts.

There is intriguing evidence of the rarest sort, material testimony to the reception of the Yvain/Iwein story from around 1220, to indicate that the audience of the German adaptation of Chrétien's romance two generations later retained an acute awareness of the widow's significance as only just stated. In a cycle of *al secco* paintings that runs across three walls of a room of the castle of Rodenegg in South Tyrolia, eleven separate scenes present the story up to the point of Iwein's first appearance before Laudine.

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107 This association merits further treatment, which cannot be undertaken here. The "tree" in question was interchangeably the Tree of the Cross, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Paradise, as is suggested in the French Grail romance tradition in a scene in which Perceval encounters an angelic child in a tree—and which may have inspired Wolfram's scene. Sigune's linden tree, which has often been taken as a reference to the love idylls of the Minnesang, performs similarly to the linden tree under which Tristan and Isolde are caught by Mark: as a symbol that refracts the sacred through the profane and itself raises the question of their interpenetration as of the relation between love human and divine. On the cosmological tree and the scene from the Perceval continuations, see Greenhill, "Cosmological Tree," 323–71; on Wolfram's possible use of the continuations, Curschmann, "Erzähler," 15; and on the significance of the linden tree, Groos, "Sigune," 638; Wenzel, "Herzeloyde und Sigune," pp. 229–30; and Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," pp. 7–17.

108 Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, plates vi, vii, x. In an illustrated manuscript of ca. 1220, the same visual idea made an early appearance in a German vernacular work as the frontispiece to Priester Wernher's "Three Songs of the Virgin" (Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellonska MS germ. oct. 109, fol. 1^{v}).

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The sequence has been described by others and the point that I wish to make amply noted: front and centre in the composition, opposite the doorway which forms the only entrance, is a scene that never occurs in the text: Laudine grieves over the dead body of her husband, holding him in her lap (figs. 8.4 and 8.6).[109] The text grants us a view only of Laudine grieving over the body on its bier, but even should the Rodenegg scene be a more expressive variation on that narrative moment, it is markedly out of place. Three scenes make up this shorter middle wall (figs. 8.4–8.5): immediately to the right, Iwein storms the sanctuary, pursuing his victim to the very gates of his castle; to the left, still fully armed, he receives the ring from Lunete that will allow him to see Laudine—and looks not forward to the funeral on the following wall, but rather back at the grieving woman whose presence there so radically interrupts his own charge from outside to inside, as it will so radically alter his own life.[110] One scene, then, is offered for contemplation as if its content comprised the whole. Laudine's arresting presence in this visual narrative bears an uncanny similarity to Sigune's existence somehow inside and outside, subordinate to and yet beyond narrative time; just as either does to the sculptures of Mary as pietà that would emerge a century later.

As mentioned earlier, Hartmann's text, on which the Rodenegg paintings must be based, does not include Laudine's psalter prayer, but neither does it relate this "Deposition" or "Lamentation" pose, to cite the iconographic types that have been evoked as possible models for the artist's work.[111] The same types have frequently been cited as models for Sigune's "Lamentation" over Schianatulander.[112] Finally, we might have cited a Lamentation scene as a chronologically admissible inspiration for Herzeloyde's (imaginary) fulfilment of the same embrace. But none of these associations is finally compelling. The pose in which the deceased is taken onto the lap of a mourning relative needed, and possibly had, no properly established sacred model, whether visual or verbal, in these early decades of the thirteenth century; the ritual gesture of the *Schoßhaltung* was instead well known in secular literature, most prominently displayed by men on the battlefield.[113] On the other hand, this gesture was, as far as we can tell, not part of the repertoire of female mourning; in this regard Wolfram's Sigune constitutes—possibly—the earliest example on record.[114] But such considerations somewhat lose sight of the forest for the trees. What so strikingly links these three portrayals of a woman's grief over her dead beloved is their iconic isolation, the way

109 Curschmann, *Wandel*, p. 17; also Bonnet, *Rodenegg*.

110 As described by Curschmann, *Wandel*, p. 17. The scenes are badly damaged; I am most grateful to Anne-Marie Bonnet for permission to use her reconstructions in executing my own (cf. Bonnet, *Rodenegg*, plates 12, 14, 16).

111 Curschmann, *Wandel*, pp. 17–18; Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, p. 55.

112 Wenzel, "Herzeloyde und Sigune," pp. 226–27.

113 As argued extensively, with many examples, by Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 77–99.

114 Schwab's evidence belies her own conclusion on this point: In reply to Peil, who first recognized Sigune's exceptional position (Peil, *Gebärde*, pp. 133–34), she compiles a catalogue of examples, but none of those preceding Sigune in fact shows a woman performing this ritual act (Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 98).

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each interrupts the rushing flow of (male) narrative to command a "viewer's" attention, the way each then also attains a significance that extends far beyond its moment in time—in Sigune's case, the very pose is protracted into the surreal, continuing well over a year later in her perch in the linden tree. Should it not be here, in the intensification and monumentalization of a woman's grief, that we should seek both the impetus behind this new addition to the repertoire *and* the affinity with Mary's lament over Christ? "Through its very absurdity," as Schwab writes, "reaching beyond human possibility and thus prohibiting imitation *ad litteram*, the action points, or rather forces the viewer into the sphere of *compassio*, where his *triuwe* is to be proven."[115]

This, I think, is the key. Whether or not the Rodenegg artist consciously adapted Marian iconography to his Iwein cycle, the isolation and monumentalization of Laudine's embrace captures the visual origin of Yvain's/Iwein's wounding in love and isolates it for individual, extra-narrational contemplation, which elicits entry into Laudine's wounded heart even as it seeks to wound the viewer's: we are to know and share her tears and in this we join Mary's experience. This is, after all, the image that Yvain—and we, the audience of the *romans*, with him—must learn to "read." If the artist resorts to the interpolation of an improbable or even physically impossible gesture (Ascalon, or Chrétien's Esclados, must surely still be armed), then it is in order to communicate an intensity of love and suffering as a moment suspended in time; the embrace is the visual rendition of the mourning widow's determination not to allow the inevitable separation from the beloved body. It is the widow's appeal to her onlookers for compassion with her pain. The same embrace enters the textual tradition of Mary's lament over Christ with the *Quis dabit*.[116] "In gremio meo te mortuum teneo," (I hold you dead in my bosom), Mary says, when Christ has finally been taken from the cross.[117] Both Sigune and Mary initially refuse to relinquish their beloved for burial; failing in this, they seek to die and be buried with him.

There is indeed nothing imitable nor intended as such in these extreme portrayals of a woman's grief. The "widow" takes and holds her position as the central, generative image in each case—Mary's, Herzeloyde's (continued in Sigune) and Laudine's—because she makes reciprocal suffering all but a moral imperative; she serves to *require* this response. Wolfram gives us the verbal rendition of this imperative, isolating the same image as chosen by the artist at Rodenegg:

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115 "Es ist beiden Szenen [Sigune's embrace and Mary's as pietà] … wohl gemeinsam der abseitig-ausserwirkliche und eben dadurch emblematisch-wirkungsvolle Charakter. …Durch das Absurde, das ad litteram nicht nachzuahmen ist, weist, ja drängt dieses Handeln, das Menschenmögliche überbietend, den Beschauer in die Sphäre der Compassio, worin sich seine '*triuwe*' beweisen mag," Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 107–8.

116 If not before: I have not been able to investigate this specific point myself. Moreover, it is not clear when the gesture enters the textual tradition of the "Quis dabit," as, once again, this gesture is not in the version transmitted by Oglerius. It was included, at the latest, in the first half of the thirteenth century, and the formula was then taken up in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. See Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 100–103.

117 "Quis dabit," ed. and trans. Bestul, pp. 180–81.

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Figure 8.4. West wall of the Iwein cycle, Schloss Rodenegg, South Tyrolia, ca. 1220. © Schloss Rodenegg, reproduced with permission of Rafael Emmenegger and Graf Oswald von Wolkenstein.

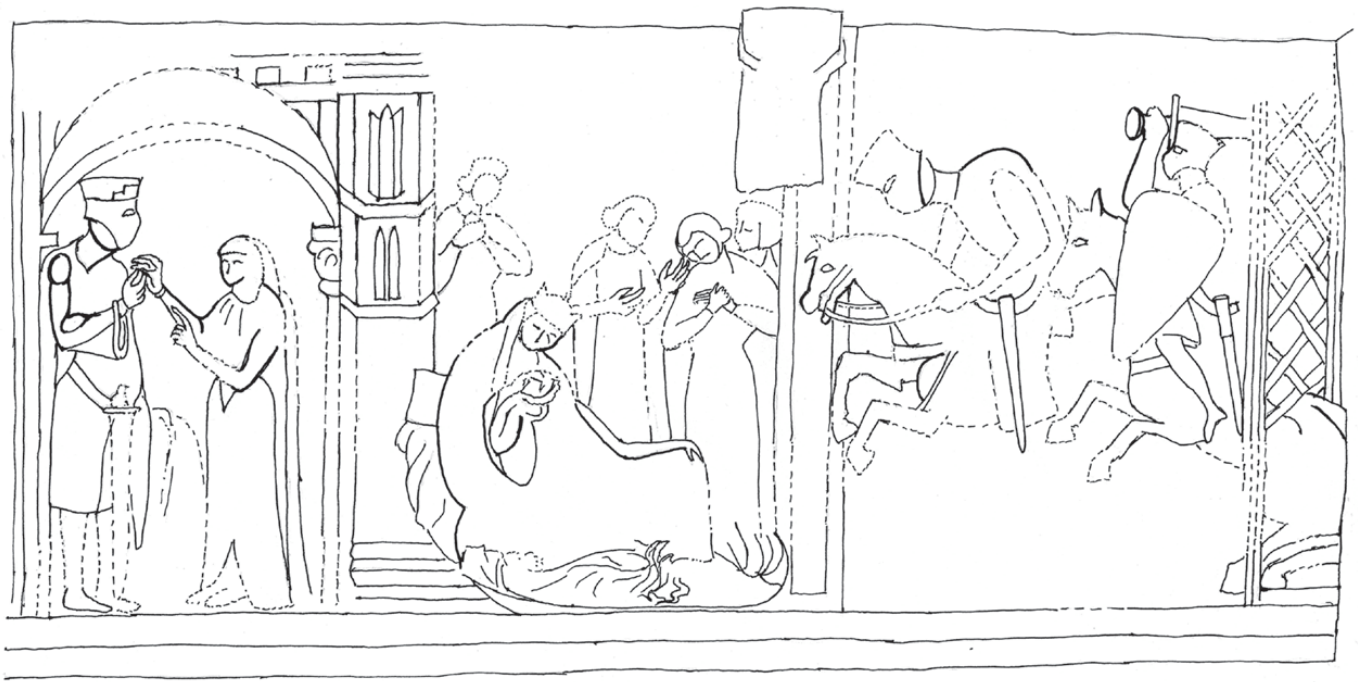


Figure 8.5. Contour reconstruction, west wall of the Rodenegg Iwein cycle. © Morgan Powell.

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Figure 8.6. West wall of the Iwein cycle (detail), Schloss Rodenegg, South Tyrolia, ca. 1220. © Schloss Rodenegg, reproduced with permission of Rafael Emmenegger and Graf Oswald von Wolkenstein.

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ein gebalsemt ritter tôt
lent ir zwischenn armen.
swenz niht wolt erbarmen,
der si sô sitzen sæhe,
untriwen ich im jæhe.
(249,16–20)

(A dead knight embalmed lay between her arms. Should anyone see her sitting thus and feel no compassion, I would charge him with *untriuwe*.)

Untriwe: for Wolfram, this is no less than the sin of disbelief. Evoked thus before Sigune's third entrance one might as easily say, "Such a one is unworthy to hear this tale," or *Swerz niht geloubet, der sündet.* This call to compassion encompasses onlookers inside and outside the text, audience, narrator and protagonist, and had previously found all but identical expression in the tradition of Mary's lamentation:

Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
matrem Christi si videret
in tanto supplicio?
Quis non posset contristari,
piam matrem comtemplari
dolentem cum filio?[118]

(Where is the man who, seeing the mother of Christ in such distress, would not weep? Who could possibly remain unmoved, contemplating the pious mother as she suffers with her son?)

In the "Quis dabit," the injunction extends even to angels who "sorrowed with [Mary] … if they were able to sorrow," for "what angel … would not weep here, even contrary to nature, where contrary to nature, the author of nature, the immortal God, lies dead as a man?"[119] Hartmann von Aue devised his own echo of such extremity in his portrayal of the lamentation of Enite (Enide): there it is nature itself, the surrounding forest and hypothetical beasts who must in absence of all other onlookers echo her pain and *helfen weinen* (help her weep); while the call for compassion from all present—very close to Wolfram's—occurs in the preceding scene, in which Erec is in the same position as Parzival and the devotee of Mary's *compassio*, observing the *compassio* of Cadoc's beloved.[120]

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118 "Stabat mater dolorosa," stophe 3, as cited in Kraß, *Stabat mater*, p. 294.

119 Bestul, ed. and trans., p. 181.

120 "si hâte auch gwunnen / von jâmer solhe swaere / daz doch niemen waere / alsô vestes herzen, / haete er ir smerzen / zuo den zîten gesehen, / sît ich der wârheit sol jehen, / si enmüeste im erbarmen" (*Erec*, 5327–34).

For Enite's lament, see *Erec*, lines 5746–54, 5860–68, 6081–83. See also, Kraß, "Mitleidfähigkeit," 294–97.

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These scenes require exactly what their authors' injunctions claim: reciprocity, a recognition of other as self such that the heart opens—or rather is "stirred with compassion and pierced to the point of tears," as Peter of Blois described the conjunction of tears for Arthur and for Christ. This was no call to action or to *imitatio Christi*, to acts of charity or *misericordia* (to say nothing of vengeance); neither is the truth it seeks constituted as a model of moral progress contained in the narrative itself.[121] It was a call instead to feel as woman feels, to enter her helplessness, weakness, and her desire and embrace them as one's own; a call thus to reconstitute the mirroring gaze of wounded hearts in which humanity, as woman and through woman, had last known its saviour on earth. Such was the new conception of truth in narrative—both as we read it in Wolfram and as he and his contemporaries had seen and heard it in Chrétien.

121 While Yvain—as outlined above—makes such progress, this is itself a model of the reception of suffering; its truth is constituted not through action, but through mutual recognition.

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CONCLUSION

THE READING AND grieving widow had become, by 1200, the face of the woman in the mirror of the reading revolution that transformed Western understanding of the place of man before God. She stands at the end of a succession of mediary translations that consistently serve one and the same experience of identification achieved between audience and bride, and that we have been able to trace from the beginning to the end of the long twelfth century. Rupert's new Marian reading of the Song of Songs itself derives from the possibly original locus of this identification as it was embedded in the much older liturgy for the feast of Mary's Assumption. His project, however, translated the same into a hermeneutic event accessible to "immature" and "female" souls, through which they could "read" the scriptural images as Mary had. From there it was translated into an alternative, audio-visual *lectio* for women in the monastic life in the *Speculum virginum* or, in Hildegard's audio-visual gnosis, into the model of a new authority for a woman's unmediated apprehension of divine teaching. The woman's reading position enters the conception of vernacular textuality as the locus of a reorientation of identification in narrative in the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* as staged in the St Albans Psalter. In the rendering of scripture *en romans*, this position fused with a new conception of the poetic performance space itself, from there to enter narrative representation, where figures of secular *historia* could double and prefigure the audience's own transformation as envisioned in the delivery of the text. Finally, then, it rejoins and cross-fertilizes, it seems, the expanding treatment of Mary's narrative, most especially in her suffering at the cross, to deliver a new poetics of truth in the reception of romance narrative. In this process of translation for new audiences and the corresponding sites of delivery, Latin becomes vernacular, *lectio* becomes oral performance, scriptural images acquire bodies in narrative or visual art, the experience of the liturgy is transferred to instruction and poetic entertainment. Through all these changes however, the experience that is aimed for remains the same one with the same claim to gnosis and truth and the same authorizing privilege as a "female" and "illiterate" access to the Word.

What we have most basically discovered in pursuing this woman in the mediary mirror is that there was an alternative way of reading being articulated in the twelfth century that has as yet barely been detected in the pages of modern scholarship: an alternative poetics of body and truth, an alternative to the oppositions between letter and spirit, kernel and chaff, masking exterior and inner truth—all the familiar dichotomies that subtended exegetical reading and allegoresis. The alternative resides in the possibility that the body and bodily experience themselves can reveal truth to the extent that they approach the abject humility of God-in-human-flesh. The body here reveals in and through its materiality and historicity, in its particularity as in its pain: it shuns exemplarity even as the "true woman" shuns praise and all external display, all semblance of manifest, external excellence. Thus, the body as object-to-be-read negates its

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own quality as sign to empty itself of the presumption inherent in all re-semblance. Here the body can only become more itself, sink into its own immanence to the point that it attains the inverse perfection evinced by Christ on the cross. Where external perfection is inherently suspect, truth in the other is grasped only as the sense of loss and bereavement of the suffering body; that is, through empathy achieved, identification with the other in the fullness of his or her humanity. It is finally by knowing Parzival or Yvain as ourselves, their struggles as ours, that we know something of Christ through their respective narrative fates and not by knowing or decoding Parzival or Yvain as Christ. The woman in the narrative mirror taught her audience how to do just this. She does not teach imitation but rather herself seeks identification with Mary's experience as the steadfast, suffering beloved and mother, even as she requires the same from protagonists and audience. Mary as the protagonist of the *Stabat mater*, the steadfast woman as mirror of Christ's human pain, was the position from which the human soul learned to read as woman.

The search for and articulation of this new reading is not hidden from view nor is the field in which it was articulated one that can be easily overlooked: it occurs through the *lectio* of the Song of Songs. Here we discover somewhat differently the significance of this biblical book, even the reason for its extraordinary and pervasive predominance in twelfth-century letters and thought, meditation, and devotion. The Song of Songs was the site of the creation of a new reading experience; the text itself, in contemporary understanding, created or generated this experience, one in which the search for oneness with the Word was a process of identification with body and bride as self, in which the images of human sensual and sexual experience become not objects of renunciation but rather points of immersion through which to experience the humanity of the flesh in its communion with the humanity of the bridegroom. To read the Song was to immerse oneself in the dialogue of humanity and divinity as each sought to know the other, a song of separation and union in which knowing was a communion experienced as suffering and love, the body in pain and joy; the song of two voices seeking perfect reciprocity in love and in pain, a moment of perfect, reciprocal knowing, figured finally as enclosure in one heart. Meaning and truth were to be found in moments of continuity with this experience, moments in which the body knew itself as the chiastic complement of Christ's place in the stable at Bethlehem, sucking from Mary's breast, or hanging from the cross.

With the discovery of the moment at the centre of a claim to vernacular literary truth we have also identified the place of romance narrative within the hermeneutics of the sacred. It is worth reviewing in conclusion what this means for our understanding of the mediary landscape that generated this new literary form.

First, what we have called courtly romance served the communication of Christian truth and was driven by parallel developments in Christian devotion. It embraced a project defined by this message, which also contributes to its understanding as a distinct reading experience, a genre. To announce a text as *avanture* or *âventiure* implied it operated within the new body poetics and its larger model of knowing and truth.

The development of new vernacular narrative is complicit with the history of exegesis, but not such that the latter serves as a model for the former or offers methods

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through which to encode or decode meaning. Rather, their common ground lies in the understanding of narrative as the recreation and renewed projection of a reading experience and above all in the conception of reading as an encounter with sacred history as presence. We need to consider whether and to what extent *en romans treire* and *ze diute sagen*, the process of inscription in the vernaculars, can be understood as the imaginative projection of scriptural images as *historia*; that is, as the projection of a reading process whereby the "meaning" found, an identification of self in sacred history, is placed in a new narrative context that enables a renewed identification through shared experience.

Where *lectio* seeks truth as an experience of presence, exegesis likewise becomes "an exercise of recognition of self in history,"[1] a search for an experience of identification so strong that it could substitute for the reader's own factual absence at the events. In this it at once subscribed to the historian's idea of truth as guaranteed by the eyewitness and substituted for the same an experience achieved through reading empathy. This convergence of exegesis and history, of reading to "be her" and reading to "be there," of empathy and presence, describes the space in which the new poetics of narrative emerged. It did not operate in opposition to historical truth any more than it sought autonomy from sacred truth. The new body poetics and the idea of reading empathy were fully interdependent. They had their adherents and their detractors; the latter were no doubt most numerous among the likes of Thomasin; that is, among the more traditional clerics and *magistri* who saw themselves as potentially or factually displaced by this new mediation of knowledge. There is no basis in contemporary sources for an opposition between historical truth and a new narrative "fiction" other than this reactionary position, which thereby seeks peremptory disqualification of the latter as simply lies. As long as we discuss romance narrative in terms of an opposition between fiction and history, our attempts to grasp what is at stake are inevitably deflected back into the very opposition that served this disqualification. The operative polarity is instead one between the truth of cognition, whose vehicles are *exempla* (*bîspel*) and other applications of allegoresis, and the truth of experience, which is the claim made for "new" *mære* and *avanture*.

There did exist, finally, among the authors and audiences of the new narrative, a keenly developed awareness of its place in epistemology and poetics, as well as a discourse—a conceptual and terminological toolbox—that served to articulate the same. True to the nature of its justification and the audiences it (at least ostensibly) served, this discourse and its terminology were not those of the schools, which the Middle Ages had inherited from antiquity and have to this day been at the centre of our own inquiry. Their very authority derived from the predicated necessity of a knowing without schooled learning; the appeal to the same may at times have served to justify "extra-curricular" explorations, the possibility to operate outside the boundaries of learned tradition, and at others have been truly motivated by a concern to meet the needs of otherwise excluded groups.

Here we encounter an explanation not only for the intellectual complexity and literary quality of the first generation of romance narrative but also for its—still lamentably

1 *JP*, p. 469.

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neglected—existence in an almost symbiotic relationship to scripture *en romans*, texts whose declared purpose is to deliver the art of exegesis or religious instruction as recast in the vernacular. The authors of romance narrative were themselves no more *illitterati* than the most prolific of twelfth-century biblical commentators, Rupert of Deutz, was truly an unschooled monk. We should think of them instead as among the most intellectually adventurous minds of their time, in the company of Peter Abelard or Hugh of St Victor—and with no lesser commitment to their religious beliefs. This might seem no surprise, except that—within our previous idea of romance as a fictional world unto itself, one even outside the bounds of the communication of Christian truth—there was no more a school or other intellectual milieu from which to envision these authors' emergence than there existed an intellectual foundation for their purported idea of truth in fiction. Nor could much explanation be found for the persistent nonchalance with which contemporary witnesses and manuscript collections alike treated what the scholars of our own time considered such a radical divide, even antipathy, between texts of religious instruction and romances glorifying a chimera, a fictional truth.

What began, then, as an inquiry into supposed female vernacular readers and patrons ends up demonstrating how to understand new vernacular scripture—whether Arthurian or antique narrative, or exegesis and religious instruction—as varying facets of one experience, an experience that reveals truth in the body, in reading empathy as united with the truth of history. The key lies in recognizing that affective identity with the sufferings of Christ was felt to bring one into the presence of the crucial events of sacred history, and vice versa: to have been present at these events would be to know the truth and the Word as Mary and the apostles did, to know the Man-God by sharing his experience. All of this applies, however, because of the body that God took from Mary. The woman as bride and audience is our way of knowing these experiences; she makes them "our own" because she knew them as body, in her body, one time for all before us. This is why the mystery lady in the audience is always potentially Mary herself, why the successful constitution of meaning depends on moments of identity achieved between bride and protagonist, bride and audience. In such moments *historia sacra* becomes not only true but also "real" in an experiential sense, and secular history becomes not merely factual, but also "true" in the full Christian sense. The truth becomes a manifest dimension of human experience here, now, and among "us."

What, now, should we make of the idea of female readers of new vernacular literature? The illustration tradition of Richard of Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amours*—which provided a visual epigraph at the outset of this study—includes, in a different manuscript from the late thirteenth century, a very rare attempt to visualize the reception of romance narrative (fig. 9.1). Here, if anywhere, in a text so self-consciously staged as a written appeal to the author's ladylove, we ought finally to find the elusive female reader of vernacular literature. The illustration instead shows a man seated in a private chamber with an open book on his knees. Neither is his gaze directed at the pages nor are these directed to his face—they are turned instead as if offered to the viewer. The man's gaze is preoccupied with something far more immediate: armed figures in full battle dress (so close that the outstretched hand of the foremost among them all but touches the book) appear to address him, "For when one hears a *romans* read, one

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Figure 9.1. *Bestiaire d'amours*, late thirteenth century, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 308, fol. 86d v. © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

perceives the adventures just as if one could see them in the present."[2] It is not clear that what happens here corresponds to our idea of reading at all. If the text is to be believed, the illustration instead demonstrates that romance texts operate even as pictures did for Ooliba, creating the illusion of presence of the persons and events they portray.

What occurs when the objective is instead a more generalized representation of the reception of the text in the mind or (as Richard would far prefer) in the heart, we have already seen: a lady stands between the doors of the eye and the ear to "her" memory (fig. 0.1). This model of female reception of Richard's example of vernacular scripture is a vernacularization of the audio-visual address to the bride. It may or may not involve the literate perusal of texts; its central concern is rather a conception in the womb of memory. For a truly telling visual representation of the female reception of new vernacular narrative, and one chronologically closest to the fact, we are best referred instead to the grieving widow of the Rodenegg Iwein cycle. This Lady, placed in iconic stasis front and centre, is no less—and perhaps still more—the mirror of audience/viewer participation than she is a figure from the story itself.

2 *Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 5; as quoted above, p. 1, note 2.

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Appendix

THE PROLOGUE TO WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH'S *PARZIVAL*[1]

A translation of Wolfram's prologue is always also an interpretation. The prologue operates primarily through metaphors, images that are calculated to evoke a realm of associations familiar to the audience. To supply this common denominator in translation is to interpret the whole. But not to do so would be to leave the text an unintelligible and clumsy approximation of the literal meaning of its metaphors. Thus, I have rendered *bîspel* (line 1,15) as "fable" because we have no equivalent, and I understand Wolfram's primary message to his audience to refer to the incommensurability of allegorical teaching and the layman's experience. The "blind man's dream" (line 1,21) is rendered as a vision, not only because dreams were treated as visionary seeings in the Middle Ages but also because the focus is on the idea of a communicable knowledge of the divine. *Antlützes roum* (line 1,22), always troublesome, I have rendered as a "shimmer" of the "true visage" i.e. God's), and "trüebe lîhte schîn" as "darkling-light image," because with these terms Wolfram's mirror evokes Paul's *speculum* (1 Corinthians 13.12), the all but universal image in the High Middle Ages for human incapacity to know God "face to face."

1

Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
gesmæhet unde gezieret
ist, swâ sich parrieret
unverzaget mannes muot,
als agelstern varwe tuot.
der mac dennoch wesen geil:
wand an im sint beidiu teil,
des himels und der helle.
der unstæte geselle
hât die swarzen varwe gar,
und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
sô habet sich an die blanken
der mit stæten gedanken.
diz vliegende bîspel
ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
sine mugens niht erdenken:
wand ez kan vor in wenken
rehte alsam ein schellec hase.

When doubt lives close by the heart,
the soul is surely imperilled.
Wherever the steadfast, manly disposition
makes room for company, it is both debased
and glorified,
as in the colouring of the magpie.
Such a one can still meet with a happy end,
for in him both Heaven
and Hell have a part.
The wholly inconstant fellow
is black all over
and will come to a dark end,
while he whose intentions do not waver,
holds fast to the light.
This fluttering fable
flies too fast for simple folk.
They're unable to think it through,
for it can cut and dash before them
just like a startled hare.

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1 Text taken (with minor adaptation) from Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival. Studienausgabe*, 2nd ed., following the 6th ed. by Karl Lachmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

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zin anderhalp ame glase
gelîchet,[2] *und des blinden troum.*
die gebent antlützes roum,
doch mac mit staete niht gesîn,
dirre trüebe lîhte schîn:
er machet kurze fröude alwâr.
wer roufet mich dâ nie kein hâr
gewuohs, inne an mîner hant?
der hât vil nâhe griffe erkant.
sprich ich gein den vorhten ouch,
daz glîchet mîner witze doch.

2 *wil ich triwe vinden*
aldâ si kan verswinden,
als viur in dem brunnen
unt daz tou von der sunnen?
ouch erkante ich nie sô wîsen man,
ern möhte gerne künde hân,
welher stiure disiu mære gernt
und waz si guoter lêre wernt.
dar an si nimmer des verzagent,
beidiu si vliehent unde jagent,

si entwîchent unde kêrent,

si lasternt unde êrent.
swer mit disen schanzen allen kan,

an dem hât witze wol getân,
der sich niht versitzet noch vergêt

und sich anders wol verstêt.
valsch geselleclîcher muot
ist zem hellefiure guot,
und ist hôher werdekeit ein hagel.
sîn triwe hât sô kurzen zagel,
daz si den dritten biz niht galt,
fuor si mit bremen in den walt.
Dise manger slahte underbint
jedoch niht gar von manne sint.

It's like tin on the backside of glass
or the visions of a blind man:
they offer a shimmer of the true visage,
but such dim and darkling light
never lasts long;
it gives brief comfort indeed.
Who would try to get hold of me by hair
that's never grown, on the palm of my hand?
He'd need a sure grip, indeed!
And if I cry "ouch!" for fear's sake alone,
even so may my wits be judged.
Shall I seek true fellowship
where it's as like to vanish
as fire in a fountain
or dew under the sun?
And I've yet to meet a man so very
learned that he didn't himself need to ask
how to approach *this* story
and what good teaching it delivers.
It's no slouch on that score!
It'll show you its heels and then come charging,
it will leave you the field and then take it back again,
doling out both shame and honour.
He who can hold the saddle through these ups and downs,
he has the gift of wit indeed:
one who neither sits out the fight or takes to flight
and other-wise knows where he stands.
The false fellow's friendship
deserves the fire of Hell
and batters noble bearing like a hailstorm.
His loyalty has such as short tail
that it couldn't beat off the third bite
if flies chased it into the woods.
But all these deliberations
pertain by no means only to men.

2 As argued in Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog," 66–67, Lachmann's conjecture, *geleichet*, is no longer necessary, so that I have restored the reading in all manuscripts but D.

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für diu wîp stôze ich disiu zil:[3]
swelhiu mîn râten merken wil,
diu sol wizzen war si kêre
ir prîs und ir êre,
und wem si dâ nâch sî bereit
minne und ir werdekeit,
3 *sô daz si niht geriuwe*
ir kiusche und ir triuwe.
vor gote ich guoten wîben bite,
daz in rehtiu mâze volge mite.

scham ist ein slôz ob allen siten:
ich endarf in niht mêr heiles biten.
diu valsche erwirbet valschen prîs
wie staete ist ein dünnez îs,
daz ougestheize sunnen hât?
ir lop vil balde alsus zergât.
manec wîbes schœne an lobe ist breit:
ist dâ daz herze conterfeit,
die lob ich als ich solde
daz safer ime golde.
ich enhân daz niht für lîhtiu dinc,
swer in den kranken messinc
verwurket edeln rubîn
und al die âventiure sîn
(dem glîche ich rehten wîbes muot)

For the women I promise this reward:
she who pays heed to my counsel
will know well where
to entrust her honour and her good name,
likewise on whom she should thereafter
bestow her love and her precious person,
such that her chaste virtue
and her true devotion be not abused.
Before God I pray that all good women
might keep proper discretion as their constant companion.
Modesty holds the key to all other virtues;
I can wish their souls no greater help.
The false woman wins false praise.[4]
What constancy is there in a thin sheet of ice
exposed to the hot August sun?
Her reputation will fade just as fast.
Many a woman's beauty is praised far and wide,
but if her heart is counterfeit,
then I praise her as I should [as Isolde]:
a glass bauble set in gold.
But I hold it to be no small feat,
when someone works into base brass
a noble ruby
with all the *âventiure* it contains;
the true woman's disposition.

3 Something is lost regardless of which punctuation mark is used here, although I find Nellmann's colon an improvement over Lachmann's period. The line artfully carries the relevance of the aforegoing *underbint* into the prologue's second half, and simultaneously announces something very different. The resulting *apokoinu* is a rhetorical figure of the woman's significance to the argument, and to the poetic project.

4 The entire women's prologue exhibits the dual meanings of *prîs* and its complement, *lop*. *Prîs* is both the opinion of others (clearest here and in line 3,24) and an attribute of the subject itself (line 2,28), both "praise" and "honour" or "worth." It is characteristic of Middle High German usage that the overlap between these two is not yet objectified as "reputation." *Lop* is the action through which others manifest *prîs* and the latter accumulates to the subject. *Prîs* and *lop* thus imply moral obligations in both beholder and beheld. Through this idea the remarks on moral disposition continuously collapse the distinction between the truth (here: *rehter wîbes muot*) and its appraisal, the narrative and its reception.

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diu ir wîpheit rehte tuot,
dane sol ich varwe prüeven niht,
noch ir herzen dach, daz man siht.

Where a woman to woman is true,
you won't find me examining her complexion
or the mere cover of her heart, that which meets the eye.

ist si inrehalp der brust bewart,
so ist werder prîs dâ niht verschart.

If she be steadfast within her breast,
there no noble name will come to shame.

Solt ich nu wîp unde man
ze rehte prüeven als ich kan,
dâ füere ein langez mære mite.
nu hoert dirre âventiure site.
diu lât iuch wizzen beide
von liebe und von leide:
4 *fröud und angest vert tâ bî.*
nu lât mîn eines wesen drî,
der ieslîcher sunder phlege
daz mîner künste widerwege:
dar zuo gehörte wilder funt,
op si iu gerne tæten kunt
daz ich iu eine künden wil.
si heten arbeite vil.
ein mære wil i'u niuwen,
daz seit von grôzen triuwen,
wîplîchez wîbes reht,
und mannes manheit alsô sleht,
diu sich gein herte nie gebouc.

Were I to go on and tell you all I can
on the judgment of woman and man,
it would make a tiresome tale.
now hear what sort of story this one is.
it will give you a part in either,
in love and in sorrow.
joy and fear go along for the ride.
If there were three men here in my place
and each of them with skill enough
to equal my own:
they'd still need a wild imagination,
to try and tell you all
that I alone intend to do.
They'd have trouble enough.
I intend to renew a tale,
that tells of great devotion,
of true woman's womanhood
and man's manhood no less upright,
that never faltered under trial.

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The index is designed to provide access to the concepts, persons, or things that play a substantial role in the argument and to exhibit by means of subentries their inter-relationship within and implications for the same. No attempt has been made to list items that fall below this order of importance, as more detailed search capacity is available at no cost through the electronic version.

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