Eroticism
in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery

Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages
and the Renaissance

Volume 39

General Editor

Robert E. Bjork

ARIZONA CENTER FOR MEDIEVAL
ACMRS
AND RENAISSANCE STUDIES

Eroticism
in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery

Edited by

Ian Frederick Moulton

BREPOLS

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed on acid-free paper
D/2016/0095/53
ISBN 978–2–503–56788-4
e-ISBN 978–2–503–56789-1
DOI: 10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.5.110263

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Many of the essays collected in this volume were originally presented as papers at the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference on "Erotica and the Erotic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," held in Tempe, Arizona, in February of 2012.

Thanks are due to all who contributed to making that conference a success, especially Robert Bjork, Director of ACMRS, William Gentrup, the Associate Director, Kendra TerBeek, the Outreach Coordinator, and Michele Peters, the Program Coordinator.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the anonymous readers who gave useful and insightful suggestions on each of the essays here.

And lastly thanks are due to Roy Rukkila, Todd Halvorsen, and Erin McCarthy at ACMRS, for doing such a wonderful job on the production of the volume.

Ian Frederick Moulton

Introduction: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery: Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Ian Frederick Moulton,
Arizona State University

Magic rings; seductive she-devils; satyrs bound and whipped on stage; a woman coerced to touch her priest's genitals in the confessional; a boy caught masturbating over a midwifery manual; a marriage of true minds between two men; a prince led to repentance at the sight of a naked, virginal girl prepared to give her life for his. These varied manifestations of medieval and early modern sexuality—each at the center of one of the essays in this volume—suggest the ubiquity and diversity of eroticism in the period. The erotic is the stuff of legend, but also of daily life. It is inextricable from relations of power and subordination, and it plays a fundamental role in the hierarchical social structures of the period. It is as private as masturbation, and as public as a pageant. The erotic is also very much a part of the spiritual realm, often in morally ambiguous ways. In a German romance, an erotic vision leads to spiritual renewal; in a Jewish legend, a demonic spirit seduces upright men to her bed. And this is to say nothing of actual clerics seducing and sexually abusing their parishioners in the confessional.

I have argued elsewhere that one of the distinguishing characteristics of premodern eroticism is that it circulated widely throughout the culture as a whole rather than being confined to a demarcated sphere called pornography. The seven essays collected in this volume would support this thesis. They demonstrate the role the erotic played in notions of happiness or fulfillment, in clerical life, in Jewish legend, heretical magic, and Christian marriage, in poetry, on the public stage, and in medical manuals.

Albrecht Classen's essay on "The Erotic and the Quest for Happiness" opens the volume by attempting to assess the relationship between erotic pleasure and spiritual content in the Middle Ages. Although eroticism was seldom seen as a

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: *Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery,* ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. ix–xvi.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484 /M.ASMAR-EB.5.111053

source of lasting happiness in the period, medieval texts frequently employ erotic language and imagery to express spiritual union and transcendence. Boundaries between the sexual and the sacred were not firmly fixed. Theologians like Richard of St. Victor used sexual language to describe the love of God. Conversely, Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* reconfigures sexual passion as a virtual religion.

Classen analyzes the complex interplay between spirituality and eroticism in a variety of texts. In Hartmann von Aue's verse narrative *Der arme Heinrich* (ca. 1200), the ailing prince Heinrich can only be cured by blood taken from a willing virgin's heart. A peasant girl who adores Heinrich offers herself up, thinking that her sacrifice will not only save her beloved but assure her own salvation. Waiting outside the doctor's chambers for the sacrifice to be completed, Heinrich cannot restrain himself from peeking in the door. Seeing the maiden's naked body bared for the surgeon's knife, Heinrich is struck by a spiritual epiphany. He immediately halts the procedure and resolves to submit himself to God's will. Heinrich is saved, as Classen argues, not because he attends church and goes to confession, but through his erotic vision of the virgin's body.

Following the biblical example of the *Song of Songs*, thirteenth-century female mystics, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and the Flemish poet Hadewijch, frequently resort to erotic imagery and language to describe their spiritual experiences. In the anonymous fourteenth-century text, *Christus und die minnende Seele* [Christ and the Loving Soul], Christ himself appears as an idealized wooer, serenading the loving soul like a minstrel and kissing her passionately before proposing marriage. The eroticism of such mystical writing, Classen contends, should not be understood as a simple expression of repressed or thwarted sexuality. Instead it defines and explores a spirituality firmly rooted in the human experience of erotic pleasure and desire.

Whereas Classen examines the role of erotic language in Medieval spiritual writing, Asunción Lavrin analyses the role that eroticism played in the lives of male and female clerics in early modern Spain and Mexico. Her essay amply documents the fundamental hostility towards eroticism at the core of Counter-Reformation theology. But despite a plethora of hortatory writing and preaching condemning sexual activity of all kinds, people—clergy included—continued to have sex. As Lavrin documents, sexual activity among the clergy was a persistent problem for the Inquisition. Like Classen, Lavrin stresses the uncertainty of boundaries between divine and human love, between sacred ecstasy and sinful passion.

The institutional demonization of sexual desire was accompanied by severe misogyny: friars were to avoid even looking women in the face. To avoid potentially polluting contact with half the human race, particularly pious friars would lock themselves away, passing their days venerating the Virgin Mary and contemplating the wounds of Christ—ideal ingredients for powerfully sensual fantasies of drinking milk from Mary's breasts and blood from Christ's wounds. No wonder defining

the difference between sinful lust and divine love was so difficult that authorities believed the subtlety of the distinction was beyond the comprehension of the laity.

As observers of twenty-first-century scandals surrounding clerical sexual abuse of children can attest, preaching celibacy is not necessarily an effective way to curtail sexual activity. While friars in particular were praised by the Counter-Reformation Church for their supposed super-human ability to resist erotic temptation, Inquisition records show that sexual abuse by clergy was not uncommon. Lavrin's paper ends by noting that the anti-erotic stance of the Counter-Reformation Church was not only dominant in the early modern period but remains powerful today: "Most religious groups . . . remain unreconciled to the uncensored appeal of the erotic, and . . . reject the possibility of granting complete freedom to sexual impulses."

Sharonah Fredrick's essay "Disarticulating Lilith" explores the cultural significance of the figure of Lilith, the vampiric siren of Sefardic folklore. In recent years, Lilith has at times been interpreted as a symbol of female emancipation, especially in popular culture. But given that the early modern texts dealing with Lilith were largely restricted to a male readership, Fredrick argues that she must be understood historically as a figure of masculine anxiety rather than an articulation of feminine resistance to patriarchal authority. In particular, Fredrick analyzes the role of Lilith in Jewish attempts to make moral sense of the expulsion of Sefardic communities from the Iberian peninsula in the late fifteenth century. As a mythical agent of evil who is nonetheless subservient to God, Lilith offers a model of temptation that might paradoxically lead to redemption.

Lilith was said to be Adam's first wife, expelled from Eden before the arrival of Eve because she resisted taking a submissive position to Adam in sexual intercourse. She is later imagined as being the wife of the adversarial spirit Samael or Satan. Just as Satan was permitted by God to torment Job, Lilith's role was to test righteous men by seducing them. Legend foretold that if a man could ever resist her, it would be a sign of the coming of the Messiah. Besides being an archetypal temptress, Lilith was also believed to afflict people by killing their infant children, and one can see a certain symbolic logic in her dual role. A promiscuous harlot, she is the opposite of the faithful wife; a monstrous infanticide, she is the opposite of the nurturing mother: the perfect negative female role model.

While accounts of Lilith had long circulated in mystical Jewish texts, such as the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, following the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal she takes a central position in oral folklore as well. Fredrick analyzes several of the most prominent sixteenth-century folktales involving Lilith, including the tale of her seduction of the respected scholar Josef Della Reyna and the story of "the Father's Testament." She compares these tales of Lilith to stories of supernatural feminine seduction from other traditions, including French legends of the serpent-woman Melusine and Mayan myths of Xtabay, the enchantress of the crossroads. Fredrick concludes that far from being a fantasy of female autonomy, the monstrous and unnatural counter-example of Lilith exemplifies patriarchal thought. She is both a nightmare vision of evil femininity and a powerful symbol

of the unredeemed state of the Jewish people waiting for the messianic return. Her expulsion from Eden mirrors the Jews' expulsion from Iberia.

Lilith may not be a proto-feminist heroine. But they do exist. Rosalind Kerr's "Sex and the Satyr in the Pastoral Tradition" demonstrates the ways that actress and playwright Isabella Andreini's drama *Mirtilla* (1588) puts female erotic desire at the center of the traditionally masculine fantasies of pastoral poetry. Pastoral dramas such as Tasso's *Aminta* and Beccari's *Il sacrificio* often featured a scene in which a nymph was captured by a lustful satyr and tied to a tree before being rescued by the shepherd hero. In *Mirtilla,* Andreini turns the tables and has a nymph tie down and torture a satyr. In addition, she stages a scene where, echoing Narcissus, the nymph Ardelia falls in love with her own reflection. As Ardelia articulates her desire for her own body, she not only gives voice to female desire, but she also appropriates the masculine position of looking at and praising feminine beauty. Kerr argues that the lesbian undertones in this scene serve to interrogate the construction of feminine beauty rather than catering to the voyeuristic heterosexual male desires which are traditionally dominant in pastoral poetry and drama.

Liliana Leopardi's essay on erotic magic analyzes the role of rings and precious stones in the construction of early modern masculinity. She focuses in particular on Camillo Leonardi's treatise on the magical powers of gemstones, the *Speculum Lapidum* (1502). Leonardi's text was the culmination of a long tradition of lore on the supposed magical and natural properties of gemstones. Leopardi traces the relation between traditional gem lore and the fashionable fifteenth-century Neoplatonism of scholars like Ficino, who held that gems were receptacles of celestial power and that their properties could be communicated by touch. Wearing a ring with a particular stone could thus affect the wearer's mood or offer him or her protection from various threats. As Leopardi demonstrates, eroticism was central to magical thought about gemstones. Emeralds, carbuncles, and pearls were all thought to strengthen chastity, for example.

In the *Speculum Lapidum*, Leonardi deals not only with gems but also with the occult powers of images engraved on them. Several of the images he discusses are clearly erotic, either explicitly or symbolically. In particular, Leonardi contends that rings set with gems engraved with images of naked women or of men with erections will give a man wearing the ring the power to "impose his will, to make anyone obey him and to gain the love of all." Leopardi suggests that the engraved gems described by Leonardi functioned as fetishes that served to protect the virility and the masculine dominance of men who wore them. Indeed, she speculates that the very act of wearing a ring can be interpreted as a symbol of masculine power— a vaginal ring on a phallic finger. Thus jewelry, which in our own culture tends to be gendered feminine, could serve as a powerful marker of masculinity in the early modern period.

David Orvis's essay on queer marriage explores early modern masculinity through poetry rather than jewels. Shakespeare's sonnets frequently use marital metaphors to describe the speaker's relationship not with a woman, but with the fair youth—a

young aristocrat with whom he has an intense emotional and possibly also physical relationship. Orvis argues that Shakespeare's deployment of marital conceits in the context of a passionate relationship between men cannot help but interrogate and destabilize traditional understanding of what marriage is and could be.

As Orvis demonstrates, marriage was very much an institution in transition in early modern England. While the Anglican church was taking increasing control over marriage, it remained a legal reality that a priest was not absolutely necessary for a marriage to be valid. Verbal contracts of marriage between couples, if spoken in the present tense, were considered binding and indissoluble. So were verbal contracts in the future tense if couples subsequently had sexual intercourse. Neither form of verbal contract required a clergyman (or anyone else) as witness. Such unions were not particularly respectable or proper, but they were legal all the same.

The theological justification for marriage was also somewhat unclear. The Book of Common Prayer gives three justifications for marriage: the procreation of children, the avoidance of sex outside of marriage, and the help and comfort spouses bring to each other. It does not specify, however, whether a particular marriage must fulfill one or two of these conditions or all three. And, as Orvis points out, passages in scripture that disparaged marriage as inferior to celibacy were conspicuously absent from the liturgy.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 echoes the language of the Book of Common Prayer in its evocation of a "marriage of true minds" that will "not permit impediments." And yet, this invocation of the marriage ceremony comes in a sonnet that in all likelihood describes the relations between the male speaker and the fair youth. Orvis contends that the sonnet describes a "marriage" between these two men that is clearly opposed in many ways to the Anglican Church's definition of "marriage." It is reductive to understand the "marriage of true minds" simply as an idealized friendship, because although the speaker often refers to the youth as his friend in the sonnets, he also calls him "lover," "spouse," "son," "patron," "lord," and "master." Whatever their relationship is, it is multivalent and unfixed. Referring to such a relationship as a marriage constitutes a radical challenge to the definitions of marriage provided by both Church and State in early modern England.

As many commentators have pointed out, Sonnet 116 is far too negative in its imagery and diction to be taken as a straightforward celebration of marriage of any kind. Orvis juxtaposes the destabilizing redefinition of marriage in Sonnet 116 to passages in Sonnets 36 and 96 that imagine the speaker and the youth as united in their "undivided loves." He concludes by analyzing a striking metaphor of marriage in Sonnet 94, in which the strings of a lute are said to be husbands to each other while at the same time resembling a nuclear family of father, mother, and child—an image that simultaneously suggests a dizzying variety of possible harmonious and queer relationships.

The volume concludes with Chantelle Thauvette's exploration of the role that printed midwifery manuals played in erotic education in early modern England. Though addressed to midwives, midwifery manuals and other works dealing with

reproductive health actually gave little practical information on safely delivering children. They were repositories of general information about human reproduction and sexuality, not practical guides to the business of midwifery. They also tended to be frequently reprinted and seem to have sold well, which suggests that they were read by a general audience, eager to learn about sexual issues and perhaps titillated by the volume's subject matter. Thauvette contrasts Thomas Raynalde's sixteenth-century *The Birth of Mankind* with Nicholas Culpeper's seventeenth-century *A Directory for Midwives*, demonstrating that while Raynalde anxiously attempted to forestall erotic readings of his text, Culpeper in some ways embraced them.

Raynalde's text was one of the first vernacular English books to provide information on sexuality, conception, and anatomy to a general readership. In his prefatory remarks, Raynalde is critical of writers who "set forth the secrets and privities of women" to and worries that such volumes will be read like "the tales of Robin Hood" by "every boy and knave." Though the preface goes on to threaten such readers with retribution, it is clear that there is no way that the author can prevent erotic reading of sexually detailed material designed to educate the public. Thauvette suggests that Raynalde's anxiety about lewd male readers paradoxically makes the book a "safer" text for female readers—he never imagines women reading it for titillation. In a culture that routinely imagined women to be more sexually voracious than men, this is a significant omission.

For almost a century, Raynalde's text remained the only vernacular book in England that addressed issues of reproductive health and conception. In the years immediately prior to the Restoration, however, a number of competing midwifery manuals appeared. This is the same period in the late 1650s that sees the first print publication of much bawdy manuscript poetry as well as erotic narrative pamphlets such as *The Crafty Whore* (1658). In contrast to Raynalde's *Birth of Mankind,* Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives* is generally unconcerned about whether or not readers are sexually aroused by the information in his volume. He provides an English glossary of Latin anatomical terms, for example, and coyly suggests that his descriptions of male genitalia will "do good" to his female readers. Culpeper thus admits that the audience for his volume goes far beyond practicing midwives; as Thauvette points out, it is hard to see how detailed knowledge about male reproductive anatomy is of immediate use in birthing babies. And anatomical illustrations in the text ensure that even the illiterate might profit from the information provided. Raynalde speculated that lewd boys and knaves might find his book titillating; for Culpeper's volume, there is anecdotal evidence that this was the case. One John Cannon, writing his memoirs in the late seventeenth century, recalls that when he was twelve years old, his mother caught him masturbating with Culpeper's *Midwifery* and promptly confiscated the book. In this case, at least, erotic information and pleasure went hand in hand.

Taken together, the essays collected in this volume provide a provocative interdisciplinary perspective on the place of the erotic in the periods we call the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In their diversity of subject and of methodology,

they suggest the multivalent ways in which eroticism circulated throughout the culture of premodern Europe.

The Erotic and the Quest for Happiness in the Middle Ages: What Everybody Aspires To and Hardly Anyone Truly Achieves; Medieval Eroticism and Mysticism

Albrecht Classen,
University of Arizona

Eroticism and love have been of central importance to the courtly world at least since the twelfth century, and the sexual always lurks just behind the corner or between the lines of most secular texts. Moreover, the interest in physical sensation was so intense that even members of the Church, then mystics, and countless preachers resorted to erotic and even sexual imagery to convey their religious lessons.[1] Human happiness, however, as Boethius had already expressed so powerfully in his *Consolatio philosophiae* (ca. 525), constantly aims beyond the physical satisfaction and desires spiritual fulfillment. As I will argue in this paper, then, the quest for the erotic (in its all-encompassing meaning) and, at the same time, for the salvation of the soul through a merging with the Godhead (in the mystical sense) represented some of the central issues in medieval and early modern literature, where the ideal of happiness was encapsulated by the concept of the erotic (courtly love, *unio mystica*, philosophical happiness). For brevity's sake, I define happiness only as an individual's experience of wholeness and contentment when body and mind correspond with each other and his or her spiritual needs are met, either through a philosophical learning process or through a religious and erotic epiphany. To illustrate my argument, I will analyze examples from a variety of courtly romances and mystical literature, framing both genres with a study of relevant contemporary texts concerned with the issue of love, mostly of a philosophical and religious nature.

[1] For a broad text selection, see *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 6th ed. (1994; Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008).

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery, ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 1–34.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.5.111054

Depending on one's viewpoint and field of research, one could view the Middle Ages either as deeply religious, completely determined and controlled by the Catholic Church, vehemently opposed to the erotic and sexuality, or profoundly dominated by lust and physical pleasures. According to the clerical discourse, spirituality was the highest goal, striving toward securing the well-being of one's soul, keeping the precarious and all-decisive afterlife in mind all the time, as we learn from countless sermons, treatises, religious narratives, and artwork. Indeed, the European landscape was dotted by churches, chapels, cathedrals, and monasteries, all architectural monuments reminding people of this one fundamental teaching. Most medieval art was commissioned and patronized by the Church, extending the very same lesson in visual form. Countless written texts addressing this or related topics, secular and clerical, were produced in monastic scriptoria, and this also applied to music, often reconfirming the theological underpinnings as well. History, philosophy, and the sciences were taught at cathedral schools, all deeply influenced by the overarching theological purposes behind the educational intentions. But then came the famous "Renaissance of the Twelfth Century," a complex, divisive, but ultimately transformational development, irrespective of it being a "Renaissance" or a "Reformation."[2] Secular society found its own footstep and the world of the courts launched a massive literary program, encapsulated by the concept of courtly love, increasingly embracing the value of the physical body as the springboard for spiritual happiness as well.

Suddenly, for the first time since antiquity, the relevance of the erotic as one of the most important driving forces in human life returned, at least in some circles, to the center of all attention, after a hiatus separating the fifth and six centuries from the high Middle Ages, as Peter Dinzelbacher has observed a number of times. His thesis has withstood the test of time despite some valid criticism by intellectual giants such as C. Stephen Jaeger.[3] Of course, the influence of the church did not

[2] Apart from some of the seminal and classical studies, see now Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages 1000–1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (1992; University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (1996; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also the excellent, though a little more specialized, study by C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

[3] Peter Dinzelbacher, "Gefühl und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Vorschläge zu einer emotionsgeschichtlichen Darstellung des hochmittelalterlichen Umbruchs," *Höfische Literatur, Hofgesellschaft, höfische Lebensformen um 1200: Kolloquium am Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung der Universität Bielefeld (3. bis 5. November 1983)*, ed. Gert Kaiser and Jan-Dirk Müller, Studia humaniora, 6 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1986), 213–51; see also his monograph *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250. Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte*, Kultur und Mentalität. Darmstadt: Primus, 2003); C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 184–85. He argues that courtly love

wane, but it had to contend with many other social groups, voices, and opinions.[4] The court, above all, robustly assumed a central position and strongly competed, often neck to neck, with clerical authorities for its own supremacy in ideological terms.[5] However, as the extraordinary example of Andreas Capellanus's treatise *De amore* (ca. 1180–1190) illustrates so perplexingly, until today, there was no clear answer to the question as to the meaning, relevance, and nature of love, the erotic, and the sexual, the religious and the spiritual; on the contrary, the more Capellanus seems to identify and codify this phenomenon, the less clear it becomes.[6] In that treatise, courtly ladies appear as dominant in the discourse of courtly love and even reject their male wooers quite consistently, but the laws of love issued by King Arthur and the God of Love then dismiss all their objections and stipulate the absolute dominance of extramarital love and the absolute value of the erotic. At the end, however, in book three, nothing of what Capellanus had expounded in the first two books, with all their laws, examples, rules, prescripts, values, and ideals, seems to be true anymore, and we are left with an almost bizarre, yet fascinating, piece of extraordinarily dialectical literature.

The same would apply to the Spanish treatise by Juan Ruiz, *El libro de buen amor* (ca. 1340), and later examples would only subscribe to this intellectual, literary, and religious phenomenon as well, confounding modern critics to no end. After all, and that seems to be the best approach to this large phenomenon, we are dealing with a broad-ranging discourse involving many different parties at court, in the church, and at the university—by the late Middle Ages, also representatives of the urban class.[7] Currently, as far as I can tell, the best conclusion regarding how to interpret

---

poets such as Chrétien de Troyes and Gottfried von Strassburg tried "to breathe new life into a dying ideal" (185), but his evidence would have to be read in a very different context, keeping the specific genres they used in mind.

[4] For a broad survey with detailed studies, see Albrecht Classen, "Love, Sex, and Marriage in the Middle Ages," to appear in *Handbook of Medieval Culture*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, forthcoming). See also the useful contributions to *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995). The number of relevant studies on this vast topic is, of course, legion.

[5] See the contributions to *Curialitas: Studien zu Grundfragen der höfisch-ritterlichen Kultur*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein. Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 100 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

[6] C. Stephen Jaeger, in his *Ennobling Love* (see note 3), 114, emphasizes: "It [Capellanus's treatise] shows us the panoply of sentiments and concepts that clustered around it [courtly love], including the stark, ascetic rejection of it."

[7] This topic has been addressed countless times by now, but see the contributions to *Discourse on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004). See also the excellent, though a bit inconclusive, study by John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200*,

these treatises on love, and hence on sexuality, seems to be to recognize — not to reconcile or to harmonize, however — the internal contradictions and the deliberate dialectics as the fundamental strategy to explore, develop, and practice critical aspects of human communication, since there seems hardly anything more attractive, high and low, but to discuss eroticism and sexuality.[8]

In this light, it might be the most reasonable approach to the famous correspondence between Abelard and Heloise exchanged before his death in 1142 to recognize in their letters a truly intriguing effort by two of the intellectual geniuses of their age to balance, to the best of their abilities, the fundamental opposites of flesh and spirit, fending off the one while accepting the other, rejecting the latter while subscribing, after all, to the former. To cut down this correspondence, and especially Abelard's position by identifying it as the outcome of a maniac egoist, self-aggrandizer, narcissist, and solipsist writer, as Peter Godman now suggests,[9] ignores, I dare say, the critically important tension between the world of the church and the world of the court, or, in simple terms, between body and mind. Fortunately, most scholars today agree that Heloise's letters were truly composed by Heloise herself, so we can rely on her own statements pertaining to their sexual experiences, sometimes even on holy ground, in church. Of course, all this does not make it easier in any way to determine Heloise's frustrating internal struggle over being Abelard's beloved, mistress, or his wife, a notion which she actually rejected as being unfitting for a philosopher like him. Whatever the case might be, here we have prime evidence for the supreme relevance of the topic of sexuality in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, provoking discussion, opposition, protests, and also great enthusiasm.[10]

The battleground was sex, or human lust — more poignantly, the erotic — and while the one side tried to win the war by means of adulating and glorifying it in every conceivable manner, the other side made every possible effort to subjugate, denigrate, malign, and demonize it, or, when that was not possible, to instrumentalize

---

The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[8] This is the main argument in my book *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), esp. 53–107. For an excellent introduction to Capellanus's text, see now *Andreas aulae regiae capellanus*, *De amore: Libri tres. Text nach der Ausgabe von E. Trojel*, Übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort versehen von Fritz Peter Knapp (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 591–646.

[9] Peter Godman, *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages: Abelard, Heloise, and the Archpoet*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 66–95.

[10] *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard: A Translation of Their Collected Correspondence and Related Writings*, trans. and ed. by Mary Martin McLaughlin with Bonnie Wheeler, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

it for spiritual purposes through a metaphorical strategy. But both sides certainly predicated their arguments on the quest and definition of happiness.[11] Constance Brittain Bouchard argues most convincingly that in the twelfth century "vernacular literature as well as Latin theology was built on a discourse of opposites."[12] Catherine Browne echoes this approach by observing: "The blurring of borders between master and student repeats the eroticized pedagogy of their *studium amoris*, in which . . . logic and grammar are of little importance."[13]

However, if we consider the extensive application of sexual imagery even in churches, whether we think of the countless misericords or corbels, often with explicitly pornographic allusions, intended as warnings of people's weakness and of the ease with which they could become victims of seduction, or if we keep in mind the stunning plays composed by the tenth-century Benedictine canoness Hrotsvita of Gandersheim, we also can grasp how much the discourse on sexuality permeated the world of the Church.[14] As art historians have alerted us now for a number of years, we can neither talk of medieval art as being exclusively clerical nor as being mostly secular: "Just as there is no clear dividing line between sacred and secular medieval texts, neither can such a boundary be established between objects."[15] Sex, above all, has always determined human life to a large extent, and the church made every possible effort to regulate it according to its own precepts and ideals, as James A. Brundage has taught us through his careful and close reading of the canon laws and other regulatory texts determining Western European Christianity from late antiquity to the early sixteenth century.[16]

---

[11] Albrecht Classen, "Sexuality in the Middle Ages: An Exploration of Mental History on the Basis of Literary Evidence," *Neohelicon* XXII.2 (1995): 9–51.

[12] Constance Brittain Bouchard, *"Every Valley Shall Be Exalted": The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 58.

[13] Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism*. Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 73.

[14] Christina Weising, "Vision of 'Sexuality,' 'Obscenity,' or 'Nudity'?: Differences Between Regions on the Example of Corbels," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 3 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 325–82; Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986). For the sexual themes in Hrotsvita's plays, see Albrecht Classen, "Sex on the Stage in an Early Medieval Convent: Hrotsvita of Gandersheim. A Tenth-Century Convent Playwright's Successful Struggle Against the Roman Terence," *Orbis Litterarum* 65.3 (2010): 167–200.

[15] Nancy Netzer, "Secular and Sacred Objects from the Middle Ages: Illuminating the History of Classification," in *Secular Sacre: 11th – 16th Century: Works from the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, ed. eadem (Chestnut Hill, MA: Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of art, 2006), 11–17, esp. 11.

[16] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); see also Charles J. Reid, *Power over the Body:*

Particularly at the abbey of St. Victor in Paris, a group of theologians emerged who skillfully and deftly combined the sexual with the spiritual in order to come to terms with the phenomenon of love for God, the highest goal in all of human life. As Richard of St. Victor remarks in his *On the Four Degrees of Violent Love* (ca. 1170), the process of discovering, exploring, and gaining the highest degree of love includes, at first, betrothal; secondly, marriage; thirdly, sexual union; and fourthly, childbirth. In specific terms, he emphasizes: "And so in the first degree the beloved is visited frequently, in the second she is married, in the third she couples with her beloved, and in the fourth she is pregnant."[17]

The best secular-literary expression for this aporic phenomenon, perhaps the ultimate, our rationality-defying phenomenon of all human existence, might well be the courtly romance *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg (ca. 1210). Although the narrator never clearly formulates any direct criticism of the church, he certainly attacks the church and its dogmatic, orthodox approach resorting to satire and sarcastic irony.[18] One short episode above all, however, illustrated dramatically how much the religious discourse had also become available for secular writers, who suddenly injected secular aspects into their work. In the second half of the romance, the situation for the Cornish King Mark has become intolerable, as the evidence supporting the whispered charges of adultery against his wife, Isolde, and his nephew, Tristan, have become loud and clear. While Tristan simply disappears from the scene, Isolde has to handle the compromising situation all by herself, and even her trustworthy chambermaid, Brangæne, seems to have lost all agency in that matter.[19] However, Isolde, now demonstrating her full intellectual potential, knows how to operate independently under those dangerous conditions. She voluntarily accepts undergoing an ordeal to let God confirm her "innocence." Carrying a red-hot iron in her bare hand, after having sworn an oath that she had never laid in the arms of any man except her husband Mark and those of a poor pilgrim who had carried her off the ship and then had accidentally fallen to the ground, she remains unhurt and thus can triumph over all her accusers and her jealous husband. Indeed,

Equality in the Family; Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Priscia Lehmann, *La Répression des délits sexuels dans l'Etats savoyards: châtellenies des diocèses d'Aoste, Sion et Turin, fin XIIIe–XVe siècle*, Cahiers lausannois d'histoire médiévale 39 (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 2006).

[17] *On Love: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St Victor*, ed. Hugh Feiss OSB, Victorine Texts in Translation 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 286.

[18] For a good introduction, see Christoph Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg: Tristan*, 2nd rev. ed., Klassiker-Lektüren 3 (2000; Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2001); Mark Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg,* Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[19] Friedrich Michael Dimpel, *Die Zofe im Fokus: Perspektivierung und Sympathiesteuerung durch Nebenfiguren vom Typus der Confidente ind er höfischen Epik des Mittelalters*, Philologische Studien und Quellen, 232 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2011), 289.

she had sworn an honest oath, at least on the surface, and so God graces her with this miracle.

But who was that strange pilgrim? Isolde refers to him and his lack of skills when he had brought her to the beach in an almost facetious manner: "always excepting the poor pilgrim whom, with your own eyes, you saw lying in my arms" (247–48).[20] As much as she had prepared herself most seriously and devotedly for the ordeal, displaying honesty and piety, she seems rather relaxed and unconcerned about the possibly horrible consequences of an ordeal that easily could turn out badly, if not catastrophically, for her. Isolde draws her strength and sense of security from the simple fact that she has orchestrated the entire setting in an ingenious fashion, having asked Tristan to appear in the garb of a pilgrim just at the right time when she needed a religious person to carry her off the ship (246). Hardly having reached the beach, she had told him to collapse, which allowed her to end up in his arms, seemingly a simple little accident. She even defends the "poor pilgrim," referring to his physical weakness, and this then allows her to swear this dubious oath which is both honest and not at the same time.

First, however, she exculpates the pilgrim for his feebleness, and goes so far as to insinuate that even he, as a man, would have enjoyed frolicking with her in erotic, sexual terms: "Would it be surprising if this pilgrim wanted to frolic with me?" (246). The Middle High German word is "schimpfen" (15615), which certainly carries ambivalent meaning, implying both "to joke" and "to laugh," but also "to make love" and "to enjoy sexual pleasures," as countless parallel examples in courtly romances and especially in courtly love songs (*Minnelieder*) confirm.[21] Isolde is so self-assured of her victory in this battle of the minds that she can even smile in response to her own statement, while the others interpret it as a "mark of her virtue and breeding" (246).

Whatever the circumstances of this ordeal might be, it does not matter at all for the evaluation of the lovers because God rewards Isolde, so to speak, for her good lie and thus also protects Tristan from any persecutions.[22] After all, the essential

---

[20] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. Rüdiger Krohn (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980); here I consult the English translation by A. T. Hatto, Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan: Translated Entire For The First Time: With the Surviving Fragments of the* Tristran *of Thomas* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1960; rpt. 1984).

[21] Gaby Herchert, *"Acker mir mein bestes Feld": Untersuchungen zu erotischen Liederbuchliedern des späten Mittelalters: Mit Wörterbuch und Textsammlung* (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 1996), 93, 98, 157, 184, 203, 220; Stefan Zeyen, *. . .daz tet der liebe dorn: Erotische Metaphorik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik des 12.–14. Jahrhunderts* (Essen: Item-Verlag, 1996), 119.

[22] Gottfried includes another ordeal early on, pitting Tristan against the Irish knight Morold, reflecting on the great significance of this legal procedure in medieval society. See Sarah Neumann, *Der gerichtliche Zweikampf: Gottesurteil – Wettstreit – Ehrensache*, Mittelalter-Forschungen 31 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2010), 79–81, but she does not consider the ordeal that Isolde has to undergo.

issue does not prove to be, as the narrator indicates, whether the queen can refute the charges or not, but whether she can, with God's help, defend her true love and trump the jealous courtiers. In fact, the narrator then even refers to Christ as a windblown sleeve, since he can be used in such legal matters for whatever purposes, especially as far as erotic relationships are concerned: "Thus it was made manifest and confirmed to all the world that Christ in His great virtue is pliant as a windblown sleeve. He falls into place and clings, whichever way you try Him, closely and smoothly, as He is bound to do. He is at the beck of every heart for honest deeds or fraud. Be it deadly earnest or a game, He is just as you would have Him" (248). We could call this comment blasphemous, and older scholarship in fact had strongly voiced criticism of Gottfried's *Tristan* for this very reason, especially if we think of Karl Lachmann's influential comments, rejecting this work outright for religious and moral reasons.[23]

In order to understand fully how Gottfried then proceeds to uncover the spiritual component of the love between Tristan and Isolde—that is, their dream of happiness—we must recognize how he develops the most intriguing, much-discussed episode in the famous love cave where the two protagonists suddenly receive enough sustenance from their love, making all previously earthly needs redundant. This love cave allows them both to enjoy each other's company as a marital couple, and to entertain each other with music, storytelling, and hunting. The narrator's strong interest in allegorizing the cave hides for a while the erotic paradise that his characters can enjoy, but it certainly constitutes its essential character. Although we are never explicitly told what actually happens in the cave, Gottfried's oblique comments tell us perhaps all: "But whoever is so blessed as to reach and enter that solitude will find his heart's delight there. Whatever the ear yearns to hear, whatever gratifies the eye, this wilderness is full of it. He would hate to be elsewhere" (266). As for the two lovers, we are told that they enjoyed more pleasure and erotic bliss than any other lovers before them who might have had the opportunity to enter this cave: "These two beguiled Love's hour in a way no lovers surpassed—they did just as their hearts prompted them" (267). And when Mark finally discovers the cave, which in itself constitutes a major accomplishment for this older man, who had always been excluded from the privileged domain of love, he gazes through the windows down upon the couple and is ardently inflamed by Isolde's erotic beauty: "never had she seemed to her lord so bewitching and alluring" (271). Hence, he allows the image to deceive him, but lust and love have filled his heart and body more than ever before, especially because both are denied him both here and subsequently.

However, it would be erroneous to assume that the poet simply intended to excite his audience with an erotic story in this extremely dangerous situation, with its heavy legal and political implications. On the contrary, as we know from his

[23] Tomas Tomasek, *Gottfried von Straßburg* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 238–39.

prologue above all, the account about Tristan and Isolde serves primarily as an illustration of what true nobility might mean. Only those who know how to embrace the sorrowfulness of pain would be graced with the joys of love and happiness: "This is bread to all noble hearts. With this their death lives on. We read their life, we read their death, and to us it is sweet as bread" (44). We might certainly question whether Tristan fully achieves that goal at the end because he leaves Isolde behind, seemingly gets confused about which woman he should love, and yet keeps singing love songs addressing Isolde, Mark's wife, while Isolde Whitehand listens to his songs and erroneously assumes that they refer to her.[24] The Irish princess, however, stays behind, suffering deeply, but she remains true to her love, upholding, in an amazing expression of her inner strength and devotion, the true ideals of love, which virtually represent the "religion" of her life.[25]

As much as Gottfried alluded to erotic and sexual matter, inviting his audience to accept the position of a voyeur, ultimately the romance really carries profound ethical messages that are, in a way, almost religious-spiritual in nature, if not an expression of courtly mysticism, a *contradiction in adiecto*. After all, only true lovers, irrespective of their being married or not, can be counted among those with a noble heart, while love stories that often carry a tragic message represent the bread which lovers enjoy digesting throughout time. As much as Gottfried projects numerous episodes and scenes strongly determined by sexual content, such as Blancheflor's healing of mortally wounded Rivalin in the first part through sexual contact (1199–1330), they all contribute to the quest for the sublime, which the two lovers finally achieve, though only in a fleeting moment, while they spend time together in the famous love cave.[26] Consequently, it would be justified to inquire whether the combination of sexual experience might in any sense be connectable with religious, spiritual ones.

What do the courtly poets, beginning with the *troubadour* Guillaume le Neuf and his countless peers in France, Germany, and Italy, and extending to fifteenth-century poets such as Oswald von Wolkenstein, François Villon, and John Gower, have to say with respect to the ultimate purpose of human life? In other words, what does the sexual discourse, which seems to permeate virtually every courtly text dedicated to courtly love, have to say about the human desire to transcend material

[24] Ute Nanz, *Die Isolde-Weißhand-Gestalten im Wandel des Tristanstoffs: Figurenzeichnung zwischen Vorlagenbezug und Werkkonzeption,* Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), 130–54.

[25] Albrecht Classen, "Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives," *Tristania* XXIII (2005): 39–60.

[26] As to the sublime in the Middle Ages, see now the contributions to *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2010); see esp. his own article, "Richard of St. Victor and the Medieval Sublime," 157–178, esp. 172.

existence?[27] As much as courtly poets aimed, so it seems, primarily at the fulfillment of erotic desire, we would badly misread this huge corpus of texts if we perceived it only in its material connotations. Without going into many details here, let it suffice to contend that medieval love poetry carries a range of profound meanings, some of which proves to be closely correlated with the religious and spiritual aspects of all human endeavors, while others adulate the physical, lascivious components.

Yet, whatever approach the poets might have pursued, ultimately they presented images, avenues, methods, and strategies of how to achieve happiness, either within or outside of the bonds of marriage, as we learn just too well in the *lais* by the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poet Marie de France. In her *Eliduc*, for example, sexual passion completely overpowers the male protagonist, to the extensive detriment of his wife back home. But when she recognizes his deep love for the new woman, she voluntarily withdraws from their marriage and takes the veil. By granting him and his mistress earthly happiness, she gains spiritual happiness, and she can later welcome the other woman as a fellow-sister in her convent and her husband as a brother in spirit in his own monastery.[28]

These are huge aspects, and we could easily spend many hours discussing them, but let us take a closer look at several most intriguing texts where the dialectical tension between the flesh and the mind comes through in most dramatic terms. First, I would like to consider the most charming, actually brilliant, verse narrative, Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich* (ca. 1200), then I want to turn to some mystical texts, especially by the Flemish poet Hadewijch, and the anonymous treatise *Christus und die minnende Seele* (Christ and the Loving Soul), to conclude with a discussion of the last but perhaps most famous story, that of Griselda in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1350).

Hartmann is famous for having been the first to introduce the courtly romance into Middle High German, with his "translations" of Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec* and *Yvain*. While he injected himself much more into the first romance, adding many new details and observations, the latter he translated much more closely without

[27] I have dealt with this topic already in a much larger context; see *Sex im Mittelalter: Die andere Seite einer idealisierten Vergangenheit. Literatur und Sexualität* (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Bachmann, 2011).

[28] *The Lays of Marie de France*, trans. with Intro. and Commentary by Edward J. Gallagher (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 71–85; for a comprehensive, though not always unproblematic, discussion of all of Marie's texts, see R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. 83–89. His name etymologies, in particular, are rather suspect. One of the best critical studies on "Eliduc" proves to be Marco D. Roman's article "Reclaiming the Self Through Silence: *The Riverside Counselor's Stories* and the *Lais* by Marie de France," in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho, The New Middle Ages (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave, 2000), 175–88.

significant changes (*Iwein*). Moreover, Hartmann composed a most remarkable religious verse narrative, *Gregorius*, and the above-mentioned *Arme Heinrich*, or *Poor Henry* (*Lord Henry*), not to forget his courtly love poetry.[29]

At first, the verse narrative dealing with the protagonist Heinrich does not seem to be interested in topics such as love, the erotic, or the sexual. On the contrary, the poor hero, a young prince with great virtues and a high level of popularity in his country of Swabia, becomes the victim of leprosy and is finally told by a medical doctor in Salerno that his only hope would rest in a voluntary human sacrifice: "You would have to have a virgin of clearly marriageable age willing to suffer death for your sake. . .Nothing else is required for a cure than the blood from the heart of a virgin. That would be the cure for your disease" (219). As to be expected, injecting a solid sense of realism into the literary account, such a young woman cannot be found, and it would actually be blasphemous from a religious point of view to ask a virgin for such a sacrifice, since it would be tantamount to suicide, vehemently banned in the Middle Ages as a serious sin.[30] Henry is very clear about this condition and hence simply abandons all hope, awaiting his certain death.

Let me briefly summarize the subsequent events since they are so important for the understanding of the critical moment where the erotic and the spiritual merge and bring the true healing. Henry one day reveals to the farmer and his wife what the Salerno doctor had told him, which their young daughter overhears. Soon enough she decides to be the one who would voluntarily die for her lord because, as she later explains in a most amazingly developed rhetorical presentation, this would help her to avoid falling into sin and to lead a sinful life, fraught with countless problems and worries, especially as the wife of an ordinary farmer. Even if she were to love him, suffering would be the certain result. For her, the only true bridegroom could be the Lord Himself: "A free Yeoman desires me, and I give myself to Him eagerly. Truly you should give me to Him. Then my life is well taken care of. His plow glides along smoothly; His household is filled with supplies. There neither horse nor cattle die. There crying children are not a bother. There it is never too hot or too cold. There one never grows old in years. . . It is there I want to go, fleeing the farm that rain and hail beat down on and floods wash away, though one struggle against them time and again" (225–26). As she affirms most vocally, her

[29] *The Complete Works of Hartmann von Aue*, trans. with commentary by Frank Tobin, Kim Vivian, and Richard H. Lawson (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). For a good scholarly companion, see *A Companion to the Works of Hartmann von Aue*, ed. Francis G. Gentry. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005). See also the historical-critical edition, Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich*, ed. Hermann Paul., 16th newly rev. ed. by Kurt Gärtner, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 3 (1882; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996).

[30] For a historical perspective on this topic, see Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, Vol. II: *The Curse on Self-Murder* (2000; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

own salvation would be of primary importance, irrespective of her parents' grief or sorrow. And with these and similar arguments she can finally convince father and mother, and then also Lord Henry to fulfill her wish to die for him and thus to reach Heaven early on without having to face the danger resulting from the seductions in this world, threatening the well-being of one's soul.

The parents prepare her departure as if she were going to her own wedding: "beautiful palfreys and costly clothes, the kind that she had never worn previously: ermine, velvet, and the best sable to be found" (228). The physician in Salerno does not want to believe his own eyes and ears when Lord Henry appears there with the girl, but he has to carry out the operation because she insists on it herself. In fact, she is so relaxed and determined that she can even laugh about the physician's concerns and accuse him of cowardice (229), which reminds us of Isolde's laughter before the ordeal. Both anticipate the dramatic change of events about to happen, building surprising bridges between body and mind.[31]

The most significant moment arrives, however, only slightly later when the doctor prepares himself for the deadly operation, sharpening the knife to reduce the pain that the girl would have to suffer. The erotic dimension of this scene could hardly be more intense, except for the final step, copulation. To proceed with the operation, he tells her to take off her clothing and to lie down on the table. Overly anxious to meet her true lover, the Lord, the girl rips off all her cloths upon the doctor's command, not displaying any form of shame about her nakedness. Seeing her thus, the physician almost loses his professional confidence and self-control because of her extraordinary beauty, attractiveness, and erotic appeal: "When the doctor looked at her, he swore in his heart that a more beautiful creature was rare indeed in all the world. So utterly did he feel pity for her that in his heart and mind he very nearly lost his courage because of it" (230).

Although the narrator carefully navigates through this astounding set-up, diverting our eyes away from her naked body and then right back to it by way of obliquely alluding to the doctor's emotional condition, and hence also to his sexual

[31] For further discussions of this phenomenon, see the contributions to *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 5 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010); see also Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525* (Leeds: Legenda, 2008). The surprisingly intimate relationship between the sacred and laughter has also been examined by the contributors to *"risus sacer – sacrum risibile": Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel*, ed. Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Röcke, Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik, Neue Folge, 20 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2009). For a discussion of specific scenes of laughter in Middle High German romances, see Stefan Seeber, *Poetik des Lachens: Untersuchungen zum mittelhochdeutschen Roman um 1200*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 140 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010). He does not, however, consider these two significant examples.

desires, there is little which would prevent us from reading between the lines. We do not need any particular Freudian training to recognize in the doctor's knife a phallic symbol, even though he maintains his professional demeanor to the very end. But he is not supposed to sleep with the girl, and his job consists of stabbing her to death with his knife. His urgent appeals to her not to go through with this torture and unfathomable pain had been in vain, and his expressions of fear about seeing her die had also failed to move her mind, because she was determined to give her soul, pure as it seemed to be, to God.

However, the relationship between the girl and the doctor is only of secondary importance. The central event concerns Henry's great worries about the outcome of the operation and his obvious interest in the girl, who is about to die for spiritual and medical purposes. After all, during the years that he had spent on her father's farm, he had developed a curiously intimate relationship with the girl, certainly determined by erotic undertones. As much as the narrator himself tries to cover up the growing erotic attraction, both Henry's words and deeds reveal the true nature of their mutual attraction: "He got her whatever he found for sale—a mirror, hair ribbons, belts, and rings—whatever a child might like. With such service he brought things to the point that she became so close to him that he called her his bride" (221). The narrator, obviously having become insecure about the slippery slope of his own scenario here, emphasizes the religious motivation behind it all: "it was most of all the sweet spirit given her by God that made her delight in this behavior" (221). But "bride" continues to be the centrally determinant term here, and we have to keep that in mind in order to understand Henry's great worries while waiting outside the operation room in Salerno.

The thought of never seeing her alive again deeply saddens him, and he suddenly desires to take a look at her one more time before her death. The doctor, having foreseen this problem, had solidly locked the door, yet Henry finds a curious crack in the wall that allows him to peek inside where he suddenly perceives what he was not supposed to see. The girl is not dead yet and has not yet been wounded; instead, she is lying on the table, stark naked, prepared to receive her death. Henry gazes through the hole—a most symbolic act transforming him and us into voyeurs, which finds an intriguing parallel several hundred years later when Reymund, the male protagonist in the verse romance and prose version of *Melusine* (Jean d'Arras, Couldrette [ca. 1400], Thüring von Ringoltingen [1456]),[32] peeks through a hole

[32] The phenomenon of voyeurism in the Middle Ages has been impressively studied by A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); see now Classen, *Sex im Mittelalter* (see note), 65, 103, 130, et passim. For Thüring's prose novel, see *Romane des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller, Bibliothek der frühen Neuzeit 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 9–176; for an excellent commentary, see 1012–87. The eroticized gaze is also the topic in art history; see, for instance, Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

in the door to his wife's bathroom on a Saturday, the one day when she regularly disappears from public view, only to discover that his wife is half-snake from her hips downwards.[33] But let us return to Hartmann's narrative. We need to understand, first of all, what is happening here in concrete terms. The ugly and disfigured man on the outside hoping to regain his health, and hence his previous life, back again with the help of her blood peeks into the room and perceives her beauty in all its nakedness and erotic splendor: "Her body was quite lovely. He looked at her and then at himself, and a new way of thinking took hold of him" (230).

The English translation does not seem to capture precisely enough what the actual text tells us. The poet says: "ir lîp der was vil minneclich" (1233; her body was extraordinarily lovely). In fact, Henry is deeply shocked and experiences, in essence, an epiphany, realizing the infinite difference between himself being stuck on the outside, caught in an ugly and dying body, and her, inside, naked, highly attractive, yet about to be killed for his sake. The image of her beauty, undoubtedly both spiritually and sexually, radically and rapidly transforms the protagonist who suddenly gains a perspective toward the inner dimension of his entire being: "Seeing that she was so beautiful, he said to himself, 'You are harboring a foolish thought, that you desire to live even one day in opposition to the will of Him against whom no one can do anything'" (234). In fact, only now does Henry submit himself completely under God's will; he even questions the doctor's promise that the girl's blood would rescue him from certain death.

The knight formulates explicitly what might well belong to the standard teachings of the medieval church: "Whatever God has assigned for you, let it all be done. I will not see the death of the child" (231). This change of heart and mind was possible because Henry had had the chance to gaze inside and thus to realize the inner, deeper truth of human existence, which cannot be determined only by the physical, material needs. In this regard, the girl was far ahead of him in her willingness to die for him, with the only exception that her voluntary death for his sake would have been, theologically speaking, an egregious transgression as well, casting her as a profound sinner, after all. The difference between these two people consists of their movement toward God. While she wants to leave life and enter

---

Press, 2001), esp. 91–99. Consult also Dana E. Stewart, *The Arrow of Love: Optics, Gender, and Subjectivity in Medieval Love Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2003).

[33] I have discussed this text a number of times; see, for instance, "Love and Fear of the Foreign: Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine* (1456). A Xenological Analysis," in *Foreign Encounters: Case Studies in German Literature* , ed. Mara Wade & Glenn Ehrstine. *Daphnis* 33, 1–2 (2004): 97–122. For more recent approaches, though none of them address the important sexual component, see the contributions to *Eulenspiegel trifft Melusine: Der frühneuhochdeutsche Prosaroman im Licht neuer Forschungen und Methoden: Akten der Lausanner Tagung vom 2. bis 4. Oktober 2008*, ed. Catherine Drittenbass and André Schnyder, together with Alexander Schwarz, Chloe, Beihefte zum Daphnis 42 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010).

the union with God through a voluntary death, Henry has experienced already the worst in life and desperately tries to survive. Yet, when he peers into the room and thus gains his epiphanous insight, he suddenly proves to be much closer to God than the girl can ever hope to achieve through her strategy. Not surprisingly, she vehemently protests and actually badly misbehaves, revealing her youth and immaturity, when she learns that her sacrifice will not be accepted any longer. As the narrator laconically remarks: "She broke with her usual good manners" (231).

Subsequently, as in a good religious fairy tale or legend, God, the "Cordis Speculator," intervenes and liberates both people from their suffering. Surprisingly, however, we are only told about Henry who suddenly regains his health, which then allows him to recover his former position in life, happily welcomed by his friends and relatives, since they all "recognized the mysterious workings of God on his fair body" (232). How, then, does God free her from suffering? Of course, the girl's parents are overjoyed and cry for happiness, and later Henry grants them the extensive farm and all the people on it as their own property, elevating them to the ranks of free farmers, if not estate holders. The girl, in comparison, seems to be the complete loser at first sight because her wishes were not fulfilled, and she appears to be left with nothing. The fairy-tale character of our narrative becomes noticeable at the end because Henry has to marry, and yet no one can decide which woman would be the best bride for him. In his wisdom, and probably reflecting on his own desires, Henry then declares that he would marry the farmer's daughter, whom he loves, after all: "His bride was standing nearby and he looked at her lovingly" (234). We are not told what her reaction might be, but we are informed that these two people enjoyed a happy life together, and "together they came into the possession of the eternal kingdom" (234).

Considering the numerous moments within the narrative where the erotic attraction between Henry and the unnamed girl rises to the surface, and especially keeping the voyeuristic scene in Salerno in mind, we can be certain that Hartmann predicated his story on the fundamental experiences in all human life, the sexual and the spiritual, which are intriguingly combined here because the former ultimately leads to the latter, and both combine to produce individual happiness in physical and spiritual terms. Without Henry's suffering from leprosy, he would have never encountered the girl, and without her absolute dedication to him, even though she always refers to God as her truly desired bridegroom, he would not have regained his health. Witnessing the stunning, hence also highly erotic beauty of her body, the sick knight realizes what was ultimately missing in his life. Only because he finally submits under God without any restrictions does God reward him with recovery and his reestablishment as the leader of his people, beloved by all.

Henry, in other words, develops from a suffering, miserable, hopeless person without any trust in God into a devout Christian, humble, modest, and beloved by God. This process is possible, however, not because he undergoes profound teachings, attends church, goes to confession, and the like, but because of his erotic relationship with the girl and the epiphany of her beauty. Without her help, Henry

would have despaired and died from leprosy. Her presence during those years that he spent at the farm instilled tender feelings of love in him, as expressed by his gifts for her and the label that he employed, "bride." Seeing her naked, lying helplessly on the operation table, Henry became deeply aroused, erotically, sexually, and, curiously, also spiritually.

Of course, he has her dress immediately afterwards, and then departs for home with her, but, as the narrative signals, a profound transformation has taken place in the male protagonist, which subsequently also helps him overcome the social barrier to the peasants' daughter. As utopian as this narrative appears to be in its final conclusion, envisioning the harmonious union in marriage of a noble man of highest rank with a woman from the peasant class, Hartmann has really projected an account about a spiritual experience predicated on an epiphanous vision. Elsewhere I have argued that we would understand this story correctly only if we identified the girl as Henry's sick soul, since he regains his health only once he has refused to accept her victimization and has recognized her absolute beauty, which rests inside of the body, not outside.

The union of body and mind, induced through this momentary sexual vision and facilitated through the gaze, represents one of the central religious concepts determining medieval theology, as Joachim Bumke has so beautifully elucidated in his monograph on the famous three drops of blood which remind Parzival in Wolfram von Eschenbach's eponymous romance (ca. 1205) of his wife, Cundwiramurs.[34] He is certainly right in emphasizing the new importance accredited to the soul and its working since the twelfth century, but he ignores, as we can now confirm through the analysis of Hartmann's verse novella, the equally important aspect of sexuality which serves as the critical catalyst to draw the sick protagonist into the inner sanctum of love in its erotic connotation, but which also associates him with God again.

So far I have only examined the issue from the perspective of secular literature, although in both texts we clearly observe a fascinating leaning toward spiritual aspects, which would not be surprising for medieval literature at large. Next I would like to draw from some mystical texts where we observe the opposite trend of approaching the Godhead, the partner in the mystical union, by means of linguistic and imagistic material borrowed from the secular world. Although we would be well advised, as Amy Hollywood underscores, considering mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, we should approach her work "not as a diary or even as a partial or 'veiled autobiography,' but as a theological reflection on the experience of a Christian soul."[35] Much ink has already been spilled on the theology, the imagery,

[34] Joachim Bumke, *Die Blutstropfen im Schnee: Über Wahrnehmung und Erkenntnis im "Parzival" Wolframs von Eschenbach*, Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 94 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001).

[35] Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, Studies in Spirituality and Theology 1 (Notre Dame and London: University of

the language, and especially on the mystical visions as described in her *Fliessendes Licht der Gottheit*.[36] Here, I only want to focus on the specific terminology employed by the visionary writer to describe how the union between soul and the Godhead takes place and to what extent the erotic, if not even sexual, imagery borrowed from the courtly world might have influenced Mechthild as well. Considering its basic character as an "allegorical dialogue between the soul, the senses, and God, represented as a beautiful youth" following the tradition of the *Song of Songs*,[37] we are invited to follow those exchanges closely and can thus grasp the extraordinary intimacy conveyed here. After all, the *unio mystica* was a highly personal experience, not simply reproducible, yet most present and concrete, at least in the mystic's mind and then in her written words.

As we learn from early on, the Godhead is "more lovesick for her than He ever was before when He desired more" (9).[38] The newly forming relationship is described in terms which we are wont to recognize from courtly love poetry, even though the heat of the passion gains even more emphasis here than in the secular texts, so it seems: "She says: 'Lord, You are my comfort, my desire, my flowing well, my sun, and I am Your reflection'" (9). Mechthild, similar to many other mystics, experiments with many different ways to express the deep passion that connects her with the Godhead, whom she has expressing, for instance: "You are My pillow, My lovely bed, My secret resting place, My deepest desire, My highest honor. You are joy in My Divinity, solace to My Humanity, a cooling brook to My fervor" (12). She responds in kind, equally passionate and revealing her fervent love. Indeed, love, in a myriad of meanings, proves to be the key word determining their relationship: "I delight in having to love Him who loves me, and I long to love Him until death, unrestricted and continuously, rejoice, my soul, for your life has ended through love!" (17).

Notre Dame Press, 1995), 57.

[36] For a good summary, see Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes*, Literary Criticism in Perspective (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995).

[37] Hollywood, *The Soul*, 70.

[38] Mechthild von Magdeburg, *Flowing Light of the Divinity*, trans. Christiane Mesch Galvani; ed., with an intro. by Susan Clark, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B, 72 (New York and London: Garland, 1991); for the historical-critical edition, see Mechthild von Magdeburg, *'Das fließende Licht der Gottheit': Nach der Einsiedler Handschrift in kritischem Vergleich mit der gesamten Überlieferung*, ed. Hans Neumann. Vol. 1: *Text*, ed. Gisela Vollmann-Profe, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 100 (Munich and Zurich: Artemis, 1990). Recently, Mechthild's work has been thoroughly reexamined with regard the manuscript tradition; see Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch – vom Ich zum Autor : zur Text- und Autorkonstruktion in Überlieferung und Rezeption des „Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit" Mechthilds von Magdeburg*, Bibliotheca Germanica 55 (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2010).

As in *Lord Henry*, the two mystical voices address each other as bride and bridegroom, referring to their physical beauty and the erotic attraction that binds them together: "See, My wife: see how beautiful My eyes are, how right My mouth is, how fiery My heart is, how agile My hands are . . ." (18). Of course, we easily recognize the biblical language, especially from the New Testament with its account of Christ's Passion, and then also from the Old Testament with its Song of Songs. Nevertheless, even within this religious context, the key word proves to be 'pleasure': "You shall place the pleasure of your heart nowhere but in My divine heart and at My human breast. There alone will you be comforted and kissed by My spirit" (21). No doubt, we have to read most of Mechthild's discourse in allegorical terms and must proceed very carefully in our exploration of the erotic register in her texts. Nevertheless, behind every allegory there is also something of mental history, social reality, and a reflection of the literary tradition. One beautiful example proves to be the following stanza:

> How Those Wounded by Love are Cured
> Whoever has at any time been severely wounded by true love
> Will never recover his health—
> Unless he kisses the same mouth
> Which caused his soul to become ill (II, 15, p. 40)

As much as the girl in Hartmann's novella speaks the language of courtly love translated into a spiritual discourse, so Mechthild colonizes, in a way, courtly language in order to express her mystical revelations. In order to do justice to the intensity of her experiences, she has no alternative but to resort to highly erotic images and sexual allusions, almost as if she were reflecting upon a spiritual orgasm. Here I identify "orgasm" in the sense of happiness that merges the erotic-physical with the spiritual-divine. Little wonder that allegorized Love addresses the soul over and over again and encourages her to take heart, to be as bold as possible, and to embrace love as its ultimate goal: "How Love begins and Asks and Instructs the Obtuse Soul Wanting to Bring It to Its Body, and How the Obtuse Soul Answers" (no. 23, 47).

Urging, pushing, provoking, and challenging the soul, Love finally breaks her resistance and opens the floodgate of true love, resorting to almost everyday language, yet still remaining within the domain of courtly and erotic love:

There is no Lord except He who at all times is in all of His dwellings / He resides in the peace of holy amiability.

> He whispers to His beloved in the confined solitude of the soul.
> He embraces her with the pleasure of His love.
> He greets her with His incarnate eyes,
> When they gaze on each other in truth.
> He kisses her with His divine mouth. (48–49)

Not content with these subtle allusions, the mystic has Love take even the next step and functionalize the world of sex for the mystical revelation:

> He woos her powerfully in the bed of love.
> And so she attains the highest state of well-being
> And the sorrows of love,
> As she truly becomes part of Him! (49)

Undoubtedly, much depends on the reader's / listener's imagination and ability to decode the messages contained in these powerful images. However, the clues referring to erotic embraces, kissing, and copulation are not hard to detect, especially since most medieval readers were, considering the overarching theme of courtly literature, well attuned to the sexual connotations, wherever we turn our attention. The rich corpus of love songs in the *Carmina Burana*, for instance, would confirm this observation just as much as the raucous and unabashed genre of the Old French *fabliaux*, Middle High German *mæren*, or Old Italian *novelle*.[39] Over and over again we hear in our mystical text of the desiring soul pursuing the Godhead, attempting to achieve mystical union, regularly described as the physical merging of two lovers:

> I seek You in my thoughts
> Like a bride wooing her groom.
> I suffer great illness
> For being bound to You.
> . . .
> I cannot rest, burning unextinguished
> With flaming love for You.
> I pursue You with all my might. (52)

The entire world, the physical and the spiritual, micro- and macrocosm, is united in infinite love, which embraces the erotic and the religious component. Mechthild goes so far as to identify all people qualified to follow God as erotically fulfilled lovers: "The widows, too, shall follow in splendid joy and enjoy sweet visions in the heights, where they will see how the lamb joins the maidens. Married couples

[39] Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi, *Anatomy of the Novella: The European Tale Collection from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Cervantes* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 2nd ed. (2007; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009); see also the contributions to *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* (see note 14). For the latest critical studies on the *fabliaux*, see the contributions to *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker, Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), and to *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2008).

shall look upon each other lovingly, at least as much as their noble disposition will allow them. For the more satisfaction one derives from earthly pleasures, the more heavenly bliss one must forgo" (64). Unquestionably, Mechthild would certainly, as this quote indicates, explicitly reject physical sex and the lust of the flesh, but she projects the same joys, the bliss resulting from human orgasm, to the experience when the pure and virginal soul can enter in a joyful union with the Godhead. In a subsequent passage, the mystic underscores this phenomenon in remarkably clear terms: "The loving soul is betrayed in true love, sighing after God. She is sold in holy lamentation for love of Him. She is pursued with a host of tears for her Lord, whom she longs to find. She is captured in the first awareness when God kisses her in sweet union" (76).

In virtually cascading terms, the mystic describes in constantly changing images the unfathomable passionate love between herself and the Godhead, resorting, unavoidable, as we might say, to images of courtly, erotic love of amazing intensity: "God never left me alone and brought me to such loving sweetness, such holy knowledge, and such inconceivable wonders that I had little use for earthly things" (96). Rejecting everything here on earth that might be of material nature, the soul abandons itself completely to the Godhead and merges with His heart: "Since You, Lord, are my treasure, You are also my heart, and You alone are my good" (106).

She is the bride of the Godhead and rests in Him alone, in a surprising parallel to Isolde and Tristan's experience in Gottfried's romance, although I would certainly not claim that Gottfried had been a mystic. But Mechthild enters an extensive discussion of what her love truly means and how it can be translated into allegorical terms, merging the spiritual with the bodily, thus creating a stupendously intriguing discourse on mystical love that deeply exudes eroticism and religious elevation. Even though we would look for sexual imagery in vain, the mystical projection proves to be surprisingly similar to that dimension: "There eye dances in eye, spirit flows into spirit, hand touches hand, mouth speaks to mouth, and heart greets heart" (112). In constantly changing degrees, virtually oscillating, Mechthild moves close to the courtly rhetoric of love and then distances herself again in order to regain the purely theological position.

Yet, we can certainly claim that the erotic component was of essential significance for her in order to express what this *unio mystica* actually amounted to in words, as when she reflects, at the beginning of her account, how the Godhead is longing for her soul: "He takes her into His glowing heart, just as the noble prince and the little servant-girl embrace and become one like water and wine. She is consumed by Him and takes leave of herself; when she has had enough, He is more lovesick for her than He ever was before when He desired more" (9).

Although references to the female breast within a religious context were commonly regarded as void of erotic connotations, at least until the sixteenth century, we cannot quite exclude that phenomenon in Mechhild's narrative, when she has the soul voice: "'Lady, now you must suckle us, for your breasts are still so

full that you cannot suppress it. If you no longer wished to suckle, the milk would cause you much pain. For I have truly seen your breasts so full that seven streams poured out of them, especially from the breast above my body and my soul" (16).[40] Undoubtedly, the biblical language comes through here once again, and yet the sexual element does not seem to be completely excluded, especially if we consider statements such as "You shall place the pleasure of your heart nowhere but in My divine heart and at My human breast. There alone will you be comforted and kissed by My spirit" (21), or, even more direct in its graphic description: "Come at midday to the shade of the well into the bed of love; there you shall be refreshed with Him" (23).

Even though there is no doubt that Mechthild only intended to express in her own way the mystical vision, she still resorted to the language of courtly love and sexuality:

> 'Lord, now I am a naked soul,
> And you, in Yourself, a beautifully adorned God.
> Our communion
> Is eternal life without death.'
> Then ensued a blessed quiet,
> According to both their wishes.
> He gives Himself to her and she to Him,
> And only she knows what happens to her at this moment. (25)

As mystical as this new union proves to be, as much do we hear echoes of the medieval dawn song, or alba: "When two lovers meet in secret / They must take leave of each other undivided" (26), although Mechthild's name is normally not even mentioned in critical studies on this lyrical genre.[41] Whether we perceive here another voice, or observe the emergence of another genre, which often happens in Mechthild's work (as observed, for instance, by Elizabeth A. Andersen), we can be certain that the mystic deliberately drew from the tradition of courtly and explicitly erotic discourse in order to come to terms with the revelations that we received.[42]

The Flemish beguine and mystic Hadewijch, who flourished during the early thirteenth century, confirms these observations through countless poems and many letters in which she explores the experience of love in a myriad of fashions. As far as we can tell, she must have originated from a noble background, seems to have

---

[40] Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast 1350–1750* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008).

[41] Gale Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1969). See also the classic study by Arthur T. Hatto, *Eos: An Enquiry Into the Theme of Lovers' Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry* (The Hague: Mouoton, 1965).

[42] Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Oxford, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000).

received a solid education both in Latin and the vernacular, was certainly familiar with the standard theological texts, and might also have read extensively courtly literature.[43] In her twenty-first letter, for instance, she insists, "For the Beloved is courtly and understands courtliness in love" (93).[44] In constantly changing form, degree, imagery, style, and method, the poet-mystic elaborated on the concept of love both in spiritual and physical terms, utilizing the latter to enhance the realization of the former: "This is how we court the Beloved: As long as we do not possess him, we must serve him with all the virtues. But when we are admitted to intimacy with the Beloved himself, all the things by which service was previously carried on must be excluded and banished from remembrance" (94).

Of course, the ultimate purpose always proves to be to receive the Godhead in herself, the loving soul: "So must love live in Love" (94). Nevertheless, the passionate rhetoric, the highly flowery style borrowed from courtly love discourse, certainly plays a significant role in her mystical explorations.[45] One powerful example would be her ninth letter, in which she describes in unmistakable terms how much the *unio mystica* has to be understood as a complete penetration of both partners in this revelation: "he will teach you what he is, and with what wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other" (66). Of course, Hadewijch would have rejected any assumption regarding erotic imagery in the secular, physical sense, but at the same time she certainly draws from that world and invites us clearly to create an analogy between the sexual and the mystical.

This unique imagery reappears all the time in many different kinds of texts, especially from the late Middle Ages, and if we did not know of the specific mystical context, we might easily mistake this account by the Flemish poet as a most erotic, sexually driven narrative of an extremely lascivious nature. In letter eleven, for instance, Hadewijch emphasizes, "And though all these tokens with which I met in the intimate exchange of love between him and me—for as it is the custom of friends between themselves to hide little and reveal much, what is most

[43] Hans Schottmann, "Der Natureingang in den Liedern Hadewijchs," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 93 (1971): 213–27.

[44] Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. and intro. by Mother Columba Hart, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980). See also Albrecht Classen, "Die flämische Mystikerin Hadewijch als erotische Liebesdichterin," *Studies in Spirituality* 12 (2002): 23–42.

[45] Jacqueline Kelen, *Hadewijch d'Anvers ou la voie glorieuse* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011); André Gozier, *Hadewijch d'Anvers, béguine et mystique: la pavement de saphir* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010); Anikó Daróczi, *Groet gheruchte van dien wondere: spreken, zwijgen en zingen bij Hadewijch*. Antwerpse studies over Nederlandse literatuurgeschiedenis, 14 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant* (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 2005).

experienced is the close feeling of one another, when they relish, devour, drink, and swallow up each other" (69). In fact, for here there is no doubt that "there is any man living by whom God is loved so much" (69).

This beguine and mystic simply overflows with love in all and every form, and virtually drowns in her own erotic-spiritual ecstasy and desire to merge with God and to be completely His beloved without any restraints. As we read in the sixteenth letter: "If two things are to become one, nothing may be between them except the glue wherewith they are united together. That bond of glue is Love, whereby God and the blessed soul are united in oneness. To this lofty surrender, holy Love at all times exhorts the noble, proud souls who are willing to understand it and cast away all things for the sake of Love" (80). Ultimately, for Hadewijch this means nothing less but to submit her entire life, the whole person, to love in every possible manifestation: "For in that fruition of Love there never was and never can be any other work than that one fruition in which the one almighty Deity is Love" (83). Most amazingly, we subsequently learn that for her this experience represents the total transformation of the individual who sheds all his previous external shape and joins the Godhead to form one new entity: "But when by fruition man is united to Love, he becomes God, mighty and just. And then will, work, and might have an equal part, in his justice" (84).

Undoubtedly, Hadewijch can be called a spiritualist and a theoretician bent on exploring every facet of this phenomenon of love, which she identifies as all-encompassing and all-permeating, metaphorically like a cosmic orgasm transforming the individual into a part of the Godhead by way of the deepest erotic experience. In the twentieth letter, dealing with the twelve nameless hours, she emphasizes, for instance, "The fourth nameless hour is that in which Love allures the soul and heart and makes the soul ascend out of itself and out of the nature of Love, into the nature of Love. . . . And then it experiences Love in no other way but in Love herself" (91). Although we would badly misread the mystic, anachronistically imposing a Freudian perspective on her texts, if we claimed that her effusions revealed suppressed sexuality or deep sexual desires, we nevertheless have very good reason to identify this enormously intense erotic account with its clearly spiritual direction as anchored, after all, in the fundamental human experience of the erotic.

By quoting Luke (6:38) and evoking courtly love poetry at the same time, Hadewijch identifies her love for the Godhead with the courtly lover and the mystic as the beloved, both in a secular and in a religious context: "For the Beloved is courtly and understands courtliness in love. And therefore when he acknowledges the great pains and the grievous exile that the soul he love has suffered for him, and the noble price it has paid, certainly he cannot fail to *mete out the same measure* of love and give himself completely in return" (93–94). The *unio mystica* constitutes the ultimate intimacy with the Godhead, principally the orgiastic joining of two lovers, as she underscores herself resorting to exactly this kind of rhetoric (94).

When we turn to Hadewijch's poetic stanzas, the courtly language of love surfaces even more strongly, and so also the erotic imagery, as in "Love's mode of

action" (number 5): "However sad the season and the birds, / The valiant heart that wills to suffer pain / For Love, has no need of sadness" (1–3, p. 139). Closely copying the traditional nature entrance topos, the mystic identifies the reawakening of nature in springtime as tantamount to the return of love. The pleasant nature and weather embolden the lover so much that he no longer withholds and energetically woos his lady until the sexual, that is, the mystical, union can take place:

> In his lawsuit with Love he wishes to win,
> And to become so bold against her
> That she will give herself wholly in love
> and Live wholly as Love with love." (7–10, p. 141)

As we subsequently hear, love rules the world, and whoever has an open heart, will be suffused by it:

> For Love can never
> Refuse herself to anyone;
> Rather she gives him what she is willing he possess,
> And more than she herself promised him. (21–25, p. 142)

As much as Hadewijch's thoughts and feelings are certainly directed toward the spiritual union with the Godhead, she unabashedly pursues a discourse that could hardly be more erotic, unless we switched to pornography, which also existed in the Middle Ages(think, for instance, of the conclusion of Jean de Meun's part of the *Roman de la rose* [ca. 1270–1280]). Wherever we turn, we recognize in Hadewijch's poetry a paean on love in its most powerful manifestation, orgiastic, cosmic, and complete:

> Oh, Love is ever new,
> And she revives every day!
> Those who renew themselves she causes to be born again
> To continual new acts of goodness. (25–28, p. 145)

We hear of the knightly and erotic terms "Laying Siege to Love" (no. 8), "The Knight of Love" (no. 9), the "Knight Errant" (no. 10), and even of the "School of Love" (no. 14), which reminds us both of Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (I:13) and numerous theoretical treatises on love, such as Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*.

As Walter Haug alerted us, in this context we would even be justified to trace this discursive aspect back to Dionysius the Areopagite who had been one of the first to harmonize the Platonic concept of *eros* with the Christian notion of love.[46]

[46] Walter Haug, "Gotteserfahrung und Du-Begegnung: Korrespondenzen in der Geschichte der Mystik und der Liebeslyrik," *Geistliches in weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher*

But in light of Hadewijch's letters and poems, we can certainly take one more step forward and identify behind the rhetoric of love a discourse that merges, deliberately and strategically, the sexual with the spiritual in order to come to terms with the ineffable, or aporic, experience of the *unio mystica*, the joining of the soul with the Godhead, as the fifth stanza of the fifteenth song, "Sure Reward," might express most powerfully:

> The loving soul wants Love wholly, without delay;
> It wishes at all hours to delight in sweetness,
> In opulence according to its desire.
> Reason commands it to wait until it is prepared;
> But liberty wishes to lead it instantly
> Where it will become one with the Beloved. (49–54, p. 167)

To conclude our discussion of this Flemish mystic, it is certainly worthwhile to allow Hadewijch to speak for herself, when she circumscribes in most dramatic terms the power and nature of love in her poem "Complaint and Surrender to Love" (no. 16):

> To sublime Love
> I have given away all that I am.
> Whether I lose or win, let all
> That is owed her be hers without diminution.
> What has happened now?
> I am not mine:
> She has engulfed the substance of my spirit.
> Her fine being
> Gives me the assurance
> That the pain of Love is all profit. (stanza 8, 71-80, p. 170)

We only might want to add that here Hadewijch truly formulates a universal experience in all love poetry and other narratives dealing with love, religious or secular, resulting from the lack of language to express that *coup de foudre*, the existential transformation, a catalepsy, perhaps (not in the narrow medical sense of the word).

We could easily extend our examination to many other mystics, since for many of them the erotic discourse proved to be exceedingly useful for the exploration of the *unio mystica* insofar as the language of courtly love and even that pertaining to the basic human experience of sexuality served them well to overcome the hindrance of the ineffable. In a way, mysticism has much to do with orgasm in a cosmic sense of the word, whether we think of Marguerite Porète or Julian of Norwich. Suzanne

---

Literatur des Mittelalters, ed. Christoph Huber, Burghart Wachinger, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000),195–212, esp. 200–02.

Kocher has poignantly described the difference between these two women: "Marguerite, unlike Christine [de Pizan], prefers to destabilize familiar discourse by opening it up to new possibilities of interpretation. She also uses analogies in less stable, less linear, less quotidian ways than do many of her contemporaries. Her views on union resemble closely those of Hadewijch, for instance, but couched in very different literary form."[47] Of course, this was not solely a privilege of female writers; on the contrary, many male mystics, deeply influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux, followed and adopted the same discourse for their purposes, such as the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross, who composed the amazing treatise *The Living Flame of Love*, all of them addressing, in a way that phenomenon which Roland Barthes described as the wordlessness of orgasm.[48]

However, instead of discussing their contributions, let us consider the rather unusual and still relatively unknown Middle High German text *Christus und die minnende Seele* (Christ and the Loving Soul), which has survived in eight manuscripts and one early printed book dating from the late fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. Basically, the narrative consists of a number of different sections illustrating the interaction of the Godhead and the loving soul. It does this, however, in a most astoundingly aggressive and direct fashion. A number of events take place that allow the soul to overcome its alienation from the Lord and to embrace Him as her lover: prayer, awakening, fasting, discipline, instruction, spinning, undressing, hanging, love potion, flight and chase, concealment and seeking, wounding, binding, temptation with gold, fiddle, the secret word, crown of heaven, and embrace.[49] In essence, the author and the illuminator made a concerted effort to project the mystical approximation of the soul to the beloved Lord by means of humiliation, suffering, and submission, which ultimately allows the loving soul to merge with the Godhead in the *unio mystica*.

In essence, the Lord earnestly encourages the loving soul to accept all the required types of suffering in order to ready itself for the marriage with the Godhead. Closely paralleling the rhetorical arguments raised by the young woman in Hartmann von Aue's *Lord Henry*, the Godhead points out all the different kinds of sorrows and suffering which the individual woman would have to accept here in

[47] Suzanne Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete's* Mirror of Simple Souls, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 13.

[48] John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love: Versions A and B*, trans. with introd. and commentary notes by Jane Ackerman, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 135 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995); *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1978), 149.

[49] Amy Gebauer, *'Christus und die minnende Seele': An Analysis of Circulation, Text, and Iconography*, Imagines Medii Aevi: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung 26 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2010).

this world. If she were to be married to a human man, she would have to cope with him day and night, and then also, by chance, with a child. Marital life is portrayed as a miserable existence, filled with hunger, strife, lack of sleep, fights with a drunken husband, and the danger of being beaten by him. Domestic violence here appears as an almost standard feature in marriage, coupled with all the hardships of taking care of a child (22–90).

The narrator seems to be well attuned to the ordinary misery in daily life and cunningly contrasts it with the paradisiacal features of marriage with Christ, the only true bridegroom, who offers a life completely opposite to what the soul is used to in reality: "Deß bist du von mir alles erlon" (91; you are freed of all of it by me).[50] The exchange between the two proves to be highly intimate and personal, with Christ directing the soul very explicitly to follow his advice and commands. The exchange between both becomes extremely intimate and yet also highly violent, yet these are images that underscore the true significance of the *unio mystica*, which the author tries to describe in as impressive terms as possible. Beginning with the theme of love carrying Christ's cross, the narrative includes the following major topics: the soul as Christ's bride; Christ ordering the soul to get up from her chair and to attend mass; Christ urging her to refrain from too much eating, since this might detract her from true devotion; His effort to castigate the soul; then his operation to punish her body so badly that it becomes lame and she loses her eyesight; Christ's teachings of the Ten Commandments; His ban prohibiting her to do spinning work and other kinds of money-making activities; Christ hanging her at the gallows so to ensure that she will never move away from Him; Christ giving her a love potion, with the very same purpose; Christ running after the soul to secure her for Himself; Christ hiding from her in order to incite her passion for Him; the soul shooting Christ with an arrow to capture Him for good; the soul fettering Christ to hold on to Him; the soul refusing all silver and gold, since she only wants Christ as her savior; Christ playing the lyre for the soul; Christ allowing the soul to kiss Him and to have intimate intercourse with Him; Christ whispering words into the soul's ear that are more worth than any other words in life; Christ beating the drum and dancing for the soul in order to preserve her senses; Christ crowning the soul; and the harmonious union of Christ and the soul.

As Hildegard Elisabeth Keller observes, the traditional "mystical threefold schema of *via purgativa*, *via illustrative*, and *via unitiva* is reduced to a twofold series of relationships. This makes it possible to parallel the discourses of secular and spiritual marriage."[51] It seems, however, slightly misguided here to read an implied criticism of marriage and to recognize in the mystic's voice that of a

[50] Romuald Banz, *Christus und die Minnende Seele: Zwei spätmittelhochdeutsche mystische Gedichte*, Germanistische Abhandlungen 29 (1908; Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1977).

[51] Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*, Studies in Spirituality, Supplement 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 193.

subjugated and miserable wife who experiences nothing but a gloomy domestic life.[52] The mystical discourse offered in this text is too complex to reduce it to such simplistic aspects, which are certainly included, but would have to be viewed from a much more critical perspective. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the soul expresses the profound pain which she experiences after having received the love potion (312–13), but Christ emphasizes that she should not care about people's opinions and simply accept the feeling of love as God-given. Life is not always determined by joy; instead it also consists of pain and suffering. Most importantly, however, the chapter concludes with Christ's emphasizing of the dangers resulting from a non-virtuous existence, which would only result in eternal condemnation.

Furthermore, Christ is described as an ardent lover who cannot stop himself from chasing after the soul as His most beloved. The narrator heavily relies on traditional courtly language and utilizes a *figura etymologica* by playfully operating with the word "minne" (318; courtly love). This convinces the soul to stand still and to accept Christ as her lover in body and mind: "lib und sel" (319, v. 1195). Then, however, the erotic game is resumed because Christ hides from her, provoking her to embark on a passionate search for Him, even expressing desperation because she cannot find her lover (321, v. 1230–32). Once the two lovers have found each other, she shoots a metaphorical arrow into His heart, which forces Him to comply with her wishes (325). Changing perspective, in the sixteenth chapter, Christ plays sweet melodies for the soul and thus lures her to Him. Even here we recognize a direct borrowing from the secular context since the soul compares Christ's performance with that of a minstrel who hopes to gain the lord's favors by playing as best as he can to support his own livelihood (339). Subsequently the two exchange intimate kisses (343–46), and finally they confess their love to each other, here in the words uttered by the soul: "O herr, du bist min, so bin ich din; / Die truw sol iemer stät sin" (360, vv. 2049–50; O Lord, You are mine, and so I am Yours; this loyalty shall remain for ever), which is clearly an evocation of one of the earliest Middle High German love verses.[53] Not enough with these modest allusions, some chapters later we hear that the two join in intimate union and merge their bodies to form one new being: "Alsus wirt ains us uns zwain" (360, v. 2046; Thus the two of us are turning into one). For the soul, this represents the highest joy possible, which makes her break out in a long monologue about the infinite rewards of being one with Christ (361–63).

From the beginning, the anonymous poet draws imagery from the erotic sphere, referring to the intimate meeting of soul and Christ in His bedroom. He praises her devotion and commends her for having visited him in His bed (259,

[52] Keller, *My Secret*, 199–200.

[53] "Du bist mîn, ich bin dîn," in *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, Vol. I: *Texte*. 38th, newly rev. ed. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1988), I, No. VIII (Lachmann 3.1).

v. 15), since her marriage with Him proves to be the very contrast to an ordinary marriage which He describes in drastically negative terms, involving children, poverty, and domestic violence—quite similar to the projection of what marriage really would be like as outlined by the peasant girl in Hartmann von Aue's *Arme Heinrich*. However, Christ goes one step further and characterizes the marriage with Himself as a pleasant, comfortable, and joyful existence: "Kundest aber es wol mit mir, / So gäb ich wunn und fröde dir" (263, v. 96–97; if you lived with me, I would give you joy and happiness). His own "minne" would be far superior to all worldly minne: "Also wol würd dir mit mir sin" (264, v. 101). There is no doubt, of course, that the author pursued principally religious goals, trying hard to develop meaningful images of the mystical *unio mystica*, but both the language and the imagery confirm the importance of the erotic and even the sexual to come to terms with the apophatic dimension of the mystical experience.[54] After the soul then has fallen asleep, Christ sings a song of praise on her virtuosity and piety, concluding with the remarkable verses:

> Sy smekt mich als ain hund ain wachtlen tüt,
> Und wirt enzunt als ain glüt
> Und wirt brinnen
> von ussnen und von innen
> Von rechter götlicher minnen
> Won ich kumm ir niemer us den sinnen (269, vv. 213–18)
>
> [She has a taste for me as a dog has a taste for a quail,
> And she is inflamed in a glow
> And will burn
> from outside and from within
> consumed by true divine love,
> since I am never going to disappear from her mind]

While Amy Gebauer rightly emphasizes the complexity of the literary and religious context of this mystical dialogue poem, addressing a fairly learned audience,[55] we can now add that here we face another, most dramatic example of the deliberate merging of the erotic with the spiritual, the physical with the mystical, transforming the former in order to reach the latter, another example of the mystical orgasm or spiritual happiness that we have already observed above. This implies, however—likewise underscoring the critical message contained in secular courtly literature (see the examples above) —how much both dimensions in human life

[54] For the theoretical underpinnings concerning the apophatic in mystical discourse, see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Language of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and, deeply informed by him, Bruce Milem, *The Unspoken Word: Negative Theology in Mesiter Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002)

[55] Gebauer, *'Christus und die minnende Seele*,' 252.

were intimately intertwined and depended on each other for the exploration of the true purpose of people here on earth. The least we can say would be that for medieval poets, religious and secular alike, sexuality was not only a dangerous human drive, essential for the creation of progeny, but also a tremendous force that could powerfully serve as the crucial catalyst for the transformation of the material into the spiritual.

If this reading can be supported, as I think it can, we might also be in a good condition to expand this approach to other contemporary texts that have often escaped our interpretive grasp. Without going much into detail, here I only want to outline in briefest terms what our new understanding of *Christus und die minnende Seele* might do, perhaps a bit surprisingly, for our understanding of the last tale on the tenth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1350), the famous story about the patient Griselda. Scholars have puzzled over what to make of this account of a brutal and merciless princely husband and the infinitely patient wife, Griselda, who is of peasant origin. There have been numerous attempts to grasp the deeper meaning, to comprehend why Boccaccio concludes his collection with this strange account of such a brutal husband, but it seems to me that all those feminist, gender-oriented, or philosophical readings have not yet achieved their desired goals.[56]

Before she marries Gualtieri, Griselda is led out of her father's house, stripped naked, and then clothed in noble dresses. At the end, after having tortured her for many years, for instance by having taking away even their children from her, Gualtieri claims to divorce himself from his wife in order to marry another woman. That one turns out to be his own daughter, and the strategy proves to be just another test of Griselda's patience and loyalty. Before the decisive denouement, however, she completely submits under his decision, only requesting that he allow her to take a shift to cover her naked body, yet she does not even demand that: "If you think it proper that the body in which I have borne your children should be seen by all the people, I shall go away naked. But in return for my virginity, which I brought to

[56] *Decameron*, a cura di Vittore Branca. Nuova ed. con xilografie tratte dalla prima stampa illustrata (1492) (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965); Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 116, 138, 141–46. For a most fascinating philosophical interpretation, see Kurt Flasch, *Vernunft und Vergnügen: Liebesgeschichten aus dem Decameron* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 207–68; see also the contributions to *La storia di Griselda in Europa: (atti del Convegno: Modi dell'intertestualitá: la storia di Griselda in Europa, L'Aquila, 12–14 maggio 1988)*, a cura di Raffaele Morabito (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1990). For a good summary of the complex history of Griselda research, see Judith Bronfman, "Griselda," in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson and Nadia Margolis, 2 vols. (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 1:376–82; cf. now also Thomas Klinkert, "Die italienische Griselda-Rezeption im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert," in *Die deutsche Griselda: Transformationen einer literarischen Figuration von Boccaccio bis zur Moderne*, ed. Achim Aurnhammer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 55–72.

you and cannot retrieve, I trust you will at least allow me, in addition to my dowry, to take one shift away with me" (790–91).[57]

The parallels to "Eliduc" by Marie de France and to "Der arme Heinrich" by Hartmann von Aue are striking, despite many material and circumstantial differences.[58] Of course, the focus does not rest on the erotic or even the sexual component; instead, Griselda appears as the most virtuous and chaste woman on the face of the earth, which then finally satisfies her husband who only now can fully embrace her as his true wife. Nevertheless, just as in the various mystical accounts, the sexual body is certainly alluded to, and we are made, once again, into voyeurs, gazing at Griselda's naked body in the first scene and invited to imagine it in the second one. Quite naturally, the true message conveyed, both here and in many of the other secular texts mentioned above, aims at the spiritual transformation, as we can read at the conclusion of Boccaccio's tale: "Gualtieri was acknowledged to be very wise, though the trials to which he had subjected his lady were regarded as harsh and intolerable, whilst Griselda was accounted the wisest of all" (794).

As the final storyteller and temporary king of their company, Dioneo sums up their entire effort to escape the plague and to survive by telling each other entertaining stories, arguing that "neither in word nor in deed nor in any other respect have I known either you or ourselves to be worthy of censure" (795). He does not mention the religious component, but considering Griselda's incredible triumph over her endless suffering and torment, framed by obvious sexual allusions throughout, we might not be too far off in our interpretation if we recognize here as well the fundamental effort to bring together in a typically medieval fashion the sexual with the spiritual, that is, body and mind. In this regard, we might then also conclude that Hartmann von Aue projected a religious epiphany when he gazed into the operation room and espied the beautiful, naked body of the peasant girl. Furthermore, we now might have additional support to claim that Tristan and Isolde's experience in their love cave constituted a kind of secularized *unio mystica*, or at least an experience of mystical enrapture, as Hildegard of Bingen might have inspired Gottfried to think of when he composed his romance.[59]

Considering that the company of three men and seven women in Boccaccio's *Decameron* had originally met in the church of Santa Maria Novella, and that they return to that very same location at the end to part from each other without having been infected by the bubonic plague, we may conclude that the erotic and the sexual aspects are accepted as the foundation of the material existence, while the spiritual

[57] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. with an introd. and notes by G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin, 1972).

[58] Albrecht Classen, "Happiness in the Middle Ages? Hartmann von Aue and Marie de France," *Neohelicon* XXV, 2 (1998): 247–74.

[59] Albrecht Classen, "Religious Utopia in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: Was Gottfried Influenced by Mystics such as Hildegard von Bingen?," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 68 (2011): 143–67.

framework then allows the individual to transcend the physical limitations and to reach out for God. In the mystical accounts, the drive for the Godhead is anchored, at least to some extent, in the erotic and sexual, which then provides the catalyst to experience the vision and revelation of Christ as their bridegroom.

As the title of my paper implies, we can now conclude that both secular and mystical writers in the high and late Middle Ages, surprisingly parallel to their artist contemporaries, deeply realized the importance of human sexuality and embraced it as an essential fact of life. At the same time, and certainly under the influence of Christian teaching, they made the most remarkable efforts to transcend and transform this phenomenon, as the Victorines in Paris had demonstrated in the twelfth century, into a metaphor of the highest mystical experience, as we can recognize even within the framework of many, if not most, courtly love poetry and romances. After all, the topic is rarely drastic sexuality, as pornographically as Jean de Meun closes his *Roman de la rose*; instead, we regularly gain glimpses of the human, sexualized body, but then also observe the degree to which the orgasmic, mystical, experience serves as the springboard for the exploration of the apophatic, the divine, God.

Jeffrey Hamburger identified some aspects of the mystical self-mortification and self-imposed suffering, which we have observed in the works by Mechthild of Magdeburg and in the tractate *Christus und die minnende Seele*, just two of many representatives of this genre. He writes,: "The harsh asceticism that features so prominently in female spirituality represents more than internalized misogyny; it also expresses an intensely incarnational spirituality enacted in the flesh: a form of religious expression with which we may hardly be comfortable, but which we nevertheless have to try to take seriously on its own terms."[60] My focus has not rested on self-flagellation, blood-asceticism, or the mortification of the flesh in any other form, which David Tinsley describes now in terms of parenting, revealing the deep desire to express love for the Godhead.[61] After all, the mystics were not at all content with asceticism by itself; instead, they aimed for visionary illumination, and hence for the spiritual union with the Godhead. In this regard, the erotic element, love at large, and the sexual proved to be the most powerful metaphorical instruments both in the hands of these mystical writers and of the representatives of the courts.

Comparing the secular examples chosen for our analysis with the religious ones, we might be struck by the considerable parallels, insofar as the sexual theme surreptitiously emerges as the common element, on both sides making possible the epiphanic transformation of the individual(s), granting visions, and creating a deep

[60] Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 28; here quoted from David F. Tinsley, *The Scourge and the Cross: Ascetic Mentalities of the Later Middle Ages*, Mediaevalia Groningana New Series 14 (Paris, Leuven, and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), 188.

[61] Tinsley, *The Scourge*, 193.

change within the characters. The erotic, in a way, almost seems to be the secular expression of the metaphysical, insofar as the bodily experience of sexuality in all its ramifications appears as the other side of the same coin, the unification with the Godhead. The metaphor of the orgasm, then, would be a physical intimation and imitation of the spiritual revelation. Happiness is the result both times, first materially or physically, then spiritually. As Richard Terdiman now formulates it: "Love produces enveloping flows of words. But that's not all it produces concerning language. All models break down—even language itself. Love then offers a lesson in linguistic modesty." This he connects with the experience of "the *unheimlich*—ultimately determining and determined by a loss of language."[62] The religious and the erotic experience intriguingly intertwine, overlap with each other, and yet pursue parallel passages, as these medieval examples illustrate so powerfully.

[62] Richard Terdiman, "Can We Read the Book of Love?," *PMLA* 126.1 (2011): 470–89, esp. 479.

The Erotic as Lewdness in Spanish and Mexican Religious Culture During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Asunción Lavrin,
Arizona State University

In considering the topic of "eroticism" in Spanish culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, cultural historians must consider the strong influence of religion and moral theology in the peninsula in the century that followed the victory over the Islamic kingdoms. The imposition of Roman Catholicism and its further strengthening after the Council of Trent, as well as Spain's central role in the defense of Catholicism in Europe developed along with its role as evangelizer in its dominions in the Americas and the Far East. A considerable effort of indoctrination of the defeated Muslim population was also taking place in the peninsula. These events explain the surge of mystic and moral theology during the reign of Charles V (I of Spain) and the three Phillips (II, III, and IV) in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In fact, the interest in these subjects persisted well into the eighteenth century after the dynastic change that brought the Bourbons into power.

The primacy of religion and piety in daily life was reflected in the proliferation and sustained popularity of devotional books well into the mid-seventeenth century. This popularity was kindled by a constellation of men and women who devoted their lives to religion and wrote not only on their spiritual experiences but also on how to help others to develop their own. Countering Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca or Lope de Vega were Fr. Luis de León, Teresa de Ávila, Juan de Ávila, and Luis de Granada, among others less well-known in history.[1]

[1] Angelo J. DiSalvo, "The Ascetical Meditative Literature of Renaissance Spain: An Alternative to Amadis, Elisa and Diana," *Hispania* 69:3 (September 1986), 466–75; Alison

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery, ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 35–58.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.5.111055

The large number of treatises on moral and mystical theology, explanations of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and the pursuit of a perfect Christian life written between 1500 and 1700 turned the erotic into lewdness and praised the benefits of divine love.[2] Divine love was opposed to human love, which was unfortunately tainted by many as they turned to lust. The role of lewdness as the opposite of divine love poses intriguing research questions to the cultural historian of the period because it was a driving theme in the religious education of people since early childhood and continued to be a key topic in preaching and writing.[3] In order to attain the supreme grace of God's love, religious discourse had to engage in depicting its antithesis. There was no heaven without hell, no divine love without earthly love, no purity without sin, and the devout person had the freedom of choice to reject the bad and pursue the good. This was the message routinely conveyed to early modern Catholic believers in Spain and Spanish America by those who preached every Sunday in church and confessed them at least once a year. Where could "eroticism" find a place in the rather limited universe of cardinal and theological virtues, capital sins and fundamental commandments that were the substance of moral Christian education?

As Albrecht Classen's essay in this volume demonstrates, the erotic has, in religious contexts, been associated with the ecstasies of mystics as they attain the cusp

Weber, "Religious Literature in Early Modern Spain," in *Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, ed. David Thatcher Gies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 149–58.

[2] Francisco de Osuna (d. 1540–41?) is perhaps one of the better examples of sixteenth-century writers of treatises on how to achieve a perfect Christian life. His *Abecedario Espiritual* (Burgos: Casa de Juan de Junta Florentino, 1536) was published in several volumes. Volume Four (or the Fourth Part) focused on the nature of divine love and how to achieve it. For a later example of instruction in Christian virtues and the vilification of lewdness in Mexico, see Juan Martínez de la Parra, *Luz de Verdades Católicas y Explicación de la Doctrina Christiana* (Barcelona: Rafael Figuero, 1705). Martínez de la Parra was a popular preacher in Mexico City. The sermons in this volume were preached in 1691.

[3] The opposition of human and divine love was succinctly and beautifully illustrated in the treatise *Amoris Divini et Humani Antipathia* (Paris: Chez Gillaume le Noir, 1628). Two early seventeenth-century works of wide circulation in Europe popularized the theme of the soul in search of divine love. At its publication in 1615, Vaenius dedicated his work to Eugenia Clara, the governor of Flanders and daughter of Phillip II. Although written in Latin, it had Spanish and French texts for greater popular understanding; Hermann Hugo, *Pia Desideria: Emblematis Elegiis & Affectibus SS Patrum* (Antuerpiae: Bolswert, 1624). In Spain, Pedro de Salas authored a free translation of *Pia Desideria*. See Pedro de Salas, *Affectos divinos con emblemas sagradas* (Valladolid. G. Bedoya, 1633). In 1642, the Bishop of Puebla in Mexico, Juan de Palafox, published a book, *Varón de Deseos*, which followed closely the spirit of *Pia Desideria* and explained the mystic paths. Sea, *Obras del Ilustrísimo . . . Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza.* Vol. VI (Madrid: Gabriel Ramírez, 1762). For a quick overview of the Spanish mystics writings in English, see E. Allison Peers, *The Mystics of Spain* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002); William Harmless, *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

of divine love. Because mystic enrapture is "ineffable" or inexplicable to those who do not experience it, any approximation of describing it had to resort to metaphors of human feelings even among the most spiritual and religious writers. Divine love, like human love, can affect our bodies and have somatic effects that are like crude signs of a higher experience. A sixteenth-century Spanish Augustinian moral theologian, Fr. Christobal de Fonseca (1550–1621), writing on the love of God, quoted Saint Dionysius on how divine love had the same effect on people as wine and took men out of themselves as it carried them to God. He also referred to Saint Gregory and other religious authorities who explained that the love of God caused delectation and pain, stealing all thoughts against one's own will, making one appear to be sick and pale or mentally deranged. Many saints like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, he explained, had out-of-body experiences.[4] Francis of Sales (1567–1622), who was widely read in Spain in the seventeenth century, acknowledged that divine love, like worldly love, could affect the body, transform the mind, and lead to fainting spells.[5] But could these emotions be the expression of a "pure" erotic feeling about the love of God? While we may be reading erotic nuances in mystic writers, the subject remains open to debate. Writers on mysticism and mystic writers themselves argued in favor of expressions of love that could be ambiguously erotic in a sense of triggering more desire for God. On the other hand, most writers of moral theology and devotional literature never expressed God's love in those terms, and because they were in charge of writing the treatises to indoctrinate Christians from childhood on, their teachings had a greater influence on the population than the writings of mystics describing flights of divine love.

All religious writers—mystics as well as moral theologians—agreed that human and divine love could not be considered comparable. Divine love conferred the gift of God himself upon those who experienced it. Human love was of a lesser caliber: it could be intense or fleeting, it could thrive or die, but it did not bring us closer to God. The same fine line that divided profane from divine love separated the type of human love approved by the church from lewdness and lasciviousness. That line was so fine that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moral theologians argued that most people needed to be constantly educated in noting the difference and learning the boundaries between divine love, human love blessed by the church, and mere concupiscence. In this task, moral theologians and writers of religious advice were complemented by dozens of hagiographic works and chronicles of religious order, in addition to the oral instruction received via weekly sermons

[4] Fr. Christobal de Fonseca, *Primera y Segunda Parte del Tratado del Amor de Dios* (Barcelona: Noel Baresson, 1594), 42–45; Fr. Antonio Panes, *Escala Mística y Estímulo de Amor Divino* (Valencia: Isabel Juan Vilagrafa, 1675).

[5] San Francisco de Sales, *Práctica del Amor de Dios*. Trans. by Lic. Francisco Cuvillas (Zaragoza: Diego Dormer, 1673), 234–36.

and the circulation of books for the spiritual education of the faithful.[6] And yet, despite the efforts of moral theologians, Spain and its colonies were far from being a morally pure society. Hundreds of cases of sexual transgression were processed by religious and civil courts, in addition to the Inquisition.[7] As they saw it, moral theologians had their work cut for them. Early modern Spanish society—the peninsula and its oversea possessions—was in need of intensive training in individual and social, ethical, and spiritual norms because the temptations of this world never relented.[8]

The aim of devotional writers was to make the reader aware of the circumstances of sensuality and the rewards of the pure love for God. For that purpose, they had to engage in the analysis of behavior lacking in spiritual purity and conducive to failings and imperfections among humans. The strong attraction of the flesh was explained as pulling away from the love of God and was responsible for sin. Moralists had to address not just secular men and women, but church members as well. The latter were humans and, as such, liable to be ensnared in the traps of the world. And fall they did. The Inquisition deployed its inquiry and punishing mechanisms to judge members of the Church whose weakness made them more like secular mortals than men of the cloth. In doing so, this regulatory body revealed how the desires of the flesh could overcome church members. In this essay, I will survey how moral theologians analyzed and defined what they called lewdness, which stands for behavior under the spell of the erotic; the advice given to laymen and to members of the church; and the reality of fallen men of the cloth. For the first two topics, I rely largely on Spanish writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because they were the intellectual sources of moral theology. For the last

[6] See, for example, Fr. Lorenzo de Zamora, *Monarquía Mística de la Iglesia* (Alcalá: Justo Sánchez Crespo, 1603); Fr. Pedro de Amoraga, *Instrucción del Pecador* (Madrid: Casa de Pedro Madrigal, 1602); Fr. Francisco Echarri, *Directorio Moral*, 6th edn. (Vich/Gerona: PedroMorera/Narciso Oliva, Impr., 1755); Fr. Antonio Arbiol, *Estragos de la Luxuria y sus remedios* (Barcelona: Pablo Camins, 1736).

[7] Stephen H. Haliczer, "Sexuality and Repression in Counter-Reformation Spain," in *Sex and Love in Golden Age Spain*, ed. Alain Saint-Saens (New Orleans: University Press of the South, Inc. 1996), 81–93; Stephen H. Haliczer, *Sexuality in the Confessional. A Sacrament Profaned* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Henry Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 205–8; María Elena Sánchez Ortega, *La Mujer y la Sexualidad en el Antiguo Régimen* (Madrid: Akal, 1992); Beatriz Ferrus Antón, *Heredar la palabra: cuerpo y escritura de mujeres* (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2007); Federico Garza Carvajal, *Butterflies will Burn. Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Georges Baudot and Maria Águeda Méndez, *Amores prohibidos. La palabra condenada en el México de los Virreyes* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1997). On the Inquisition and sexuality in general in Spain, see Bartolomé Bennassar, *Inquisición española: poder político y control social* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1981), 270–320.

[8] José L. Sánchez-Lora, *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1988).

topic, I focus on colonial Mexico to show the transit of a religious culture and social transgressions across the Atlantic, especially among members of the mendicant orders.[9]

Lust and Lasciviousness as Seen by the Moral Theologians

Lust is one of the capital sins and lewdness is what leads to it. Lust is produced by a series of signals outside the individual that trigger expected physiological and intellectual responses. Such signals may be read as "erotic" in contemporary parlance, but in seventeenth-century Spain they were understood as plain lasciviousness. Nomenclature notwithstanding, they led to the same conclusion. One moral theology treatise defined lust as a "disordered venereal act."[10] However, "act" in this definition falls short of the more complex meaning we find as the concept is further developed. The actions lust could lead to included rape, sodomy, or adultery. But behind such physical expressions of lust fulfilled, there were mental mechanisms. Lust or lewdness was more than an activity of the body; it was an activity of the mind as well.[11] That is why thoughts needed to be known to confessors and why moral theologians dealt with them in as much depth as personal behavior.

Franciscan Francisco de Osuna, (1492?–1540/1?) was the quintessential writer on *recogimiento* or spiritual interiority in early sixteenth-century Spain. His enquiry into lust was foundational in sixteenth-century Spain precisely because of his tempered approach to a topic that obsessed post-Tridentine authors. Writing about "carnal temptations" in his *Tercer abecedario espiritual* (written ca. 1527), he tells the reader that there are temptations from within and from without us.[12] Being flesh,

[9] The sins of clergymen in the peninsula have already received extensive attention. See Haliczer (cited above) and his large number of bibliographical references.

[10] Pedro Galindo, *Primera Parte del directorio de penitentes y práctica de una buena y prudente confesión* (Madrid: Doña Juana de Chávez, Librera del Rey, 1682), Capítulo Sexto, 171. (Hereafter referred to as *Directorio de penitentes*.)

[11] Galindo, *Directorio de penitentes,* 171. "También se advierta. . . no sólo se veda el acto exterior. . .sino también el interior, como es el deseo, el propósito, el consentimiento en su delectación con la vista, tacto, oído y otros que arriba por más extenso se declaran." [It is also advised. . .that not only is the outward action forbidden, but the inner as well, such as desire, purpose, consent in delectation with the sight, touch and hearing and others more extensively cited above.] He also thought that autoeroticism, "sin with oneself" followed by pollution, should be confessed. "Virtuous maidens who practiced it [autoeroticism] lost their spiritual virginity" (175). See also *Parte Segunda del Directorio de Penitentes* (Madrid, 1680). Galindo also wrote a book on chastity and virginity, *Excelencias de la castidad y la virginidad* (Madrid: Matheo de Espinosa y Arteaga, 1681).

[12] Francisco de Osuna, *Tercer Abecedario Espiritual* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005). His thoughts on the nature of carnal temptations are in Treaty Twenty, Chapter 5, 526 –50 of this edition.

humans naturally experience the pressure of their "bestial" parts. This process is strictly physiological. Humans also possess a trinity of abilities: understanding, will, and memory, that allow them to learn, remember, and exercise their moral and spiritual autonomy. The senses and the spirit are in constant struggle, but our higher abilities, understanding and will, and the grace of God, allows us to fight them back. God knows about our infirmities but expects us to conquer them. Quoting Saint Gregory, Osuna wrote that carnal temptations were, in fact, messengers of God, to encourage us to seek Him. Therefore, people should not be surprised to be "tempted." For him, sin occurred when men willingly gave in to natural temptations or the pleasures of the flesh and abandoned God. He who lives by the law of the flesh and he who lives by the law of the spirit are two different people. What may condemn us is our own free will to accept the law of the flesh. He concludes, significantly, that rather than being afraid of temptations, we should know them and be willing to fight them off.:"If God permits you to be tempted by lust it is not to make you lose your cleanliness but to have your chastity doubled as a prize."[13]

Osuna's moderate approach to the dangers of erotic appeal went into decline in Spain, while the more rigorist interpretation of the erotic flowered in the hands of theologians and religious writers, especially after the Council of Trent. The discourse on the erotic nature of temptations leading to sexual acts is found in the explanation of the meaning of the sixth commandment, with some additional comments on the ninth. Fr. Luis de Granada (1504 –1588), the most popular religious writer of the sixteenth century, reviewed the relationship between body and spirit in his *Guide for Sinners* (*Guía de Pecadores*), which was published in 1557 and subsequently translated into all the main European languages of the time. He identified a "superior" part in men: the soul, where understanding and will reside. Below was the body, that in its appetites and passions was in constant rebellion against the spirit. Good Christians ought to remember that "an hour of delectation" can ruin a life and lose God's grace.[14] His readers were assumed to be men and he identified women as the source of lewdness, a debilitating force that could never be satiated and that sickened body and mind.[15] Men given to carnal vices were also gluttons and drunkards. The women with whom they mingled never had enough jewels, rings, dresses, or perfumes, which were their objects of delight and corruption and their means of ensnaring men. Given its popularity, the openly misogynistic message of Granada's text encouraged the association of lasciviousness with women, a feature hardly mitigated by the piety of his message that purported to help his readers find remedies against their weaknesses.[16]

---

[13] Osuna, *Tercer Abecedario*, 542.

[14] Luis de Granada, *Guía de Pecadores*, Tomo Primero (Madrid: Oficina de Manuel Fernández, 1733), 325, 450.

[15] Lorenzo de Zamora also assumes that the source of all moral and religious degeneration in men is the love of women. See *Monarquía Mística*, 517–97.

[16] Granada, *Guía de Pecadores*, Tomo Primero, libro Segundo, p. 405–15.

Another key figure in late sixteenth-century theology was the Dominican Melchor Cano (1509–60), who waged a theological war against Granada to suppress some of his spiritual views, as they were becoming were popular among common people despite their potential heresy.[17] However, Cano shared with Granada and other moral theologians the idea that it was imperative to combat the erotic through Christian pedagogy. Cano translated an Italian treatise, *Tratado de la Victoria de si Mismo* (*Treatise of the Victory Over Oneself*) to explain the importance of self-control and explain the struggle against lewdness in terms that were rapidly becoming the accepted canonical discourse in Spain. The luxury of soft beds and thin linen, the precious and perfumed clothes, the peals of laughter and the sweet words of love compliments were prologues to fornication and filth. Those sensual attractions that we would identify as "erotic" were kindling wood for the fire of passion.[18] Like Granada, Cano portrayed the battle against concupiscence recalling the terms of delectation that penetrated them through the senses. Unlike other authors, he addressed women and widows in his writing, broadening the radius of those who would benefit from his advice.

Granada, Cano, and others who followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were of the opinion that the control of the erotic rested on the individual, not on society. Each person was responsible for his (or her) behavior and response to sensuality, using the three elements defining personhood: understanding, memory, and will. The body was the locus of physiological reactions and the mind was the source of control. If the body reacted in a Pavlovian fashion to the sensations from outside, observant Christians had the power to fight their own impulses and desires.[19] Therein lay the need to have a very strong will and a well-focused purpose in our lives. The center of that focus was God, of course.

Moral theologians developed a very detailed map of erotica under the cover of the definition of sin. Their texts are a combination of anatomic-physiological analysis followed by ethical advice and crowned by the ultimate warning about the final truth of salvation or condemnation. The analysis of erotic sin in terms of the body was quite detailed. The physiological response to "erotica-lust" was clear: there were movements in the flesh. If the flesh responded, the erotic appeal of lust

[17] Jordan Aumann. OP. Louis of Granada: "The Layman's Theologian," http://www.domcentral.org/study/aumann/granada.htm.

[18] Melchor Cano, *Tratado de la Victoria de Sí Mismo* [1551] (Madrid: Imprenta de D. Antonio Muñoz del Valle, 1763).This was a translation from an unidentified theologian but Cano received all the kudos. On lewdness, see Chapter IV, 22–39. This work was first printed in Toledo in 1551 and preceded the Council of Trent, but because Cano participated in the council of Trent his views were reaffirmed.

[19] Galindo, *Directorio*, 210. He admitted that movements of the flesh were very difficult to control by the spirit. For the upright Christian, the key was to learn how to reject them, difficulties notwithstanding.

had worked.[20] Religious doctrine relied a great deal on the physical expression of consent to the erotic: pollution, that is, the physiological flux preceding coitus or following the emotional excitement produced by an erotic object and signifying pleasure. The physical reaction to an erotic source resulted from its acceptance by the mind as it engaged in "morose delectation."[21] Morose delectation consisted of engaging in "wicked memories" or thoughts of pleasure. The degree of erotic appeal was always measured by the effect it produced not only in the flesh but in the mind of the recipient.[22] Without the acquiescence of the recipient, the erotic appeal could not function. The willing "cogitation" on or willful engagement in the pleasure led to "interpretive consent" insofar as the individual interpreted the signs of erotic appeal and used his own will to engage in the sensual thought. The failure to hold back a thought of pleasure was followed by the deliberate and conscious will to engage in it. Once the gates were open, it was very likely that the person would indulge in carnal pleasure, losing his capacity to reason and becoming tied to its source.[23] The consequences of yielding to concupiscence were dire. Fr. Christobal de Fonseca, echoing Granada's misogynist message, also resorted to the Psalms and Saint Paul to write about the blindness that lasciviousness brings to men: "Wine and women steal men's hearts and leave him as a tree trunk, without body and soul."[24] Moral blindness was the result of the degradation of the body that accompanied venereal acts. "The loss of the thin blood during venereal acts is so detrimental to the brain that its abuse can render a man foolish."[25] Carnal delectation shortened life expectancy, weakening the body and making it "effeminate."[26] Such statements reflect the survival of early Christian ideas about sexuality, reinforced by the opinion of medieval theologians. The threat of losing virility by abusing sex was deemed strong enough to be taken seriously by many men, but the moralist pushed the line and made concupiscence the source of the loss of intellectual and

[20] Galindo, *Directorio*, 188–215; Cano, *Victoria*, 26. "You will know the effect [of carnal delectation] by the alteration and firing of the flesh."

[21] The advice of religious moralists did not change much throughout time. Orthodoxy in religious teaching proscribed any deviation from rules established in the sixteenth century because they were presumed to be founded solidly on the best theologians of Christianity. For the eighteenth century, see, for example, Francisco Echarri, *Directorio Moral*.

[22] Galindo, *Directorio*, 203. Galindo confessed that as a matter *muy interior*—that is, deep into the head of the subject—this was very difficult to understand, even more so among vulgar people. Obviously, he found lower class people more inclined to the appeal of the erotic, less refined in their taste, and less apt to exercise self-control.

[23] Cano, *Victoria*, 26–29; Galindo, *Directorio*, 207–13.

[24] Fonseca, *Tratado del Amor de Dios*, 288v.

[25] Fonseca, *Tratado del Amor de Dios*, 289. He reminded the reader that both Solomon and David had lost their rare wisdom when they mixed with women.

[26] Galindo, *Excelencias de la Castidad*, 34v.

moral abilities.[27] Such ideas were popularized in sixteenth-century Spain by a host of writers for whom the feminization of men could result from lack of self-control in the vices of the flesh.[28] By the end of the seventeenth century some moralists considered lewdness a disease and compared it to a plague. Fr. Antonio Arbiol (1651–1726) took this extreme position and exempted no one from being affected by the "infernal epidemic." He described the role of confessors as that of medical doctors in charge of administering the most efficacious means to cure such grave disease, and he advised them not to be timorous in the prescription of strong medicine because those who refused to take it deserved to be sent to hell.[29] The willing reception of the erotic in the flesh and in the mind was the required prologue for the intervention of the moral theologian and the advice (medicine) he was bound to dispense.

The theologians as well as the preachers assumed that once the sources, means, and consequences of seduction were known, penitents would avoid it, following the wishes of the Church and God. [30] Moral theologians such as Christobal de Fonseca, Diego de San Cristobal, and Francis of Sales aimed at strengthening the will of the sinner with knowledge that would give him the resolve to change his behavior and resist temptation.[31] That is why the definition of erotic had to be accompanied by the prescription of the anti-erotic. The anti-erotic was the advice given to avoid being seduced by the erotic appeal of concupiscence and its objective was its defeat. Obviously, the erotic assaulted people through their senses, the windows to the world. Sight was the most obvious and dangerous sense, given the variety of incentives and perceptions. Sight conveyed tempting beauty in the form of the human body, nude or dressed to appeal (in, for example, a low neckline that revealed the

[27] For a survey of the ancient notion that uncontrolled sex could be harmful for the body and debilitate men, robbing them from their virility, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), *passim*; Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For sixteenth-century commentaries on erotic approaches in married sex, which are applicable to all forms of sexual desire, see pp. 174–85.

[28] Jacqueline Ferreras, *Diálogos Humanísticos del siglo 16 en lengua castellana* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2008), 195–207; Mar Martínez Góngora, *El hombre atemperado. Autocontrol, disciplina y masculinidad en textos españoles de la temprana modernidad* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). Martinez Góngora cites popular authors such as Bishop Antonio de Guevara and Pedro de Luján, both followers of Erasmus in Spain and proponents of the need to control sexual appetites. Pedro de Luján's *Coloquios Matrimoniales* saw eleven editions between 1580 and 1589.

[29] Arbiol, *Estragos de la Lujuria*. Prologue to the Reader.

[30] For an example of a sermon against lewdness, see Fr. Joseph de Carabantes, *Remedio de Pecadores* (Madrid: Andrés García de la Iglesia, 1678), 256–87.

[31] Sales, *Práctica del Amor de Dios*, 3–7. Quoting Saint Augustine and Saint Bernard, Sales assumed that the will governs sensual appetite. However, passions were constantly agitating the will and the intellect, like men in a mutiny.

décolletage). Sight allowed us to receive suggestive gestures and bodily messages from others that aroused bad thoughts and inflamed the flesh. The eyes could also be employed in alluring abstract activities, such as reading books of prose or poetry that could be potentially disturbing, and appealing to dishonest thoughts.[32] Because blame fell on the provoker as well as on the receptors, women appear as potent agents of seduction and are faulted for their ability to bring about impudence (*impudicicia*).[33] Moralists were mostly addressing men, and they assumed that men acted on their own desires. While women were agents of seduction, men could not exonerate themselves from their own actions. Arbiol recognized the "sex appeal" of some persons of both genders, whose bodies, movements, and apparel "breathe accursed lewdness."[34]

Touch was another obviously powerful venue of erotic awareness. Kissing and touching were charged elements in personal exchanges, but they were allowed among married couples. As long as there was no subsequent arousal of the flesh, the couple was on safe ground. Thus, a touch of hands without any other intention was admissible. However, the borders were transgressed if such tactile exchange was applied to the "shameful parts" or the breasts of women. Those were "impudent" acts because they disposed the participants to venereal acts.[35] By explicitly stating the touch of female parts, the advice is directed at men. These writers vaguely suggest the possibility of women acting on a man's body but such behavior was not typical of an ideally honest woman. In men, the erotic power of touch would inevitably lead to irrepressible delectation of the mind if not to the carnal act itself. The exemption given to married couples extended, with limitations, to affianced couples. Moralists Galindo and Echarri analyzed the quality of kisses to make a clear delineation among the many forms of kissing, always taking to consideration the final purpose of the action.[36] With married and betrothed couples, the boundary of the erotic was very fluid, depending on the ultimate intentions of the exchange and whether the effects of the erotic appeal produced physical results (i.e., pollution). Confessors were aware of the existence of erotic dreams, even in the most innocent of persons. However, any pollution or physical expression of delight caused a dream caused no sin because when one sleeps there is no use of reason or intent.

Taste and smell were largely considered together. Eating and drinking excessively was conducive to the relaxation of the body and indulgence in carnal

[32] Antonio Rubial García and Doris Bieñko de Peralta, "Los cinco sentidos en la experiencia mística femenina novohispana," in *Cuerpo y Religión en el México Barroco*, coord. Antonio Rubial García and Doris Bieñko de Peralta (México: Secretaria de Educación Superior, 2011), 145–182.

[33] Fr. Francisco Echarri, *Directorio Moral*, 363 and 364–67, on impudence (*impudicicia).* The purpose of citing eighteenth-century works is to corroborate the continuum of the moral pedagogy.

[34] Arbiol, *Estragos de la Lujuria*, 2. In his work, he addressed men and women alike.

[35] Echarri, *Directorio Moral*, 327, 365; Galindo, *Directorio*, 190.

[36] Echarri, *Directorio Moral*, 366; Galindo, *Directorio*, 197–215.

acts. However, there was no unanimous opinion on the degree of eroticism provoked by eating or drinking *per se*, as they were legitimate needs of the body. A few considered perfumes — and the sense of smell — means of enhancing pleasure and a potential erotic source. Hearing could deliver a good measure of eroticism as the words of a lover or admirer were venues of excitement. There was concern with other aural sources such as music, songs and poetry, saucy stories, and the lewd words in comedies and theatrical performances. Fonseca focused on specific feminine forms of appeal, such as the lasciviousness evoked by the sound of the taffeta used in luxurious women's gowns as the body moved. This hypersensitive note about sound indicates the intensity of the analysis of seduction in some moral theologians. Fonseca also added the "appeal" of curled hair and bodily adornments like pearl necklaces. All those titillating expressions of sensuality were the expressions of "effeminate and lascivious nature."[37] He reminded the reader that the appealing attractiveness of women's hair was the reason for the order for women to have their heads covered in church. Although not "bad" in their character, some women could simply embody the potential of lewdness as part of the nature of their bodies and clothes.[38]

An escape hatch was provided by the moralists (at least Galindo) given their knowledge of human nature. Occasionally, and without premeditation, one could have dishonest affections or thoughts. Those were forgivable, especially in married couples, affianced couples, and widows and widowers. Would it be possible to exempt oneself from the erotic by praying to God and not consenting willingly to its appeal and consequences? Opinions differed, but many authors took the hardest route, following Thomas Aquinas. Since we are advised of what morose delectation is, and what the traps of erotic venues are, there could be no valid reasons for exceptions. So, those who felt lascivious movements and could not or would not repress them fell into the trap of the erotic and sinned. For the religious mind, the erotic was a complex system of actions and thoughts in which intentions and results had to be assessed in a casuistic manner to determine the degree of culpability and sin. In fact, there were so many nuances owing to personal behavior in the moral message that one can only regard the principles of moral theology as a rough theoretical guideline requiring constant interplay with the complex reality of human behavior.

[37] Fonseca [1620], *Tratado*, 317–19.

[38] Fonseca, *Tratado*,[1620] See 277–301 and especially 280–93. He used *Ecclesiastes*, 7.26 to remind his readers of the corporeal and erotic attractions of bad women and to discuss the perils of the love of women.

Advice for Men of the Cloth

The Church had its own flock to guard. Its members were full-blooded men and women whose virtuous behavior was expected to inspire the laity. Unfortunately, they were not exempt from the weakness of their own flesh, and acknowledging that hard fact, religious writers advised them how to rebuff the temptations of the world from the earliest days of Christianity. For men of the cloth, the struggle against the appeals of the flesh was centered on their duty to preserve chastity. After the cloistering of religious women was achieved in the sixteenth century, men were bound to be more vulnerable than women because their mission was carried among the lay population in the secular world. The pedagogical literature that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Fr. Diego Murillo's *Escala Espiritual* (1598) and Fr. Valeriano de Espinosa's *Guía de Religiosos* (1623), dealt with the problems of those who had vowed to chastity.[39] Espinosa explained chastity as a voluntary decision "to keep flesh and soul from all the delectations of the flesh, sensual and venereal."[40] He based his arguments on the words of the Fathers of the Church, including Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, and later, Thomas Aquinas. Assuming that the body could generate activities that would corrupt the soul and impede one's progress toward God, secular and religious men shared the problems of their own flesh, but the consequences were graver for men officially consecrated to chastity. Men of the cloth, as Espinosa saw them, had to engage in a constant war against their own bodies. The "enemy" was deep inside, in a remote interior that was difficult to explain. To reinforce his discourse on the strength of the erotic temptations, they were specifically feminized. "She" slept with us, (gendered feminine in Spanish) and was a sweet as the lips of a whore (Proverbs 5:3). "She" possessed erotic traps such as perfumes and make up, and had the ability constantly to renew itself. Conversation between men and women was like pumping air on fire; words were like balls of fires.[41] Quoting Saint Ephren, Espinosa wrote, "Sin feigns a thousand illusions and lascivious images; it multiplies with loving coy words, and sweet and delectable thoughts."[42] To defend himself against such traps, the friar must chastise and restrain his body. Physical control became the medicine against the appeal of the multiple heads of the erotic.[43] To reach control over their bodies, friars were advised to seek solitude, avoid women,

[39] Fr. Valeriano de Espinosa, *Guía de Religiosos* (Valladolid: Gerónimo Morillo, 1623); Fr. Diego Murillo, *Escala espiritual para la perfección evangélica* [1598], Tomo Segundo (Barcelona: Gustavo Gil, Editor, 1907).

[40] Espinosa, *Guía*, 108ff.

[41] On chastity, see Espinosa, *Guía*, 202–24. To a man of the cloth, the touch posed a greater danger than mere sight. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the erotic appeal of touch was mostly conveyed in unguarded situations, such as when the friar faced a woman alone.

[42] Espinosa, *Guía*, 214–15.

[43] Espinosa, *Guía,* 281–297; Murillo, *Escala*, 142–54.

and engage in constant work to deprive temptations of their fuel. Luis de Granada, explaining John Callimachus's writings on chastity for men of the cloth, suggested that many demons pursued men to make them fall. The key to maintaining chastity was not only the control of one's thoughts but also a constant battle against the body. Granada did not linger on specific forms of temptation, but he gave advice on how to maintain a battle against the flesh with prayer and a regulated life.[44]

To achieve an ideal detachment from the world, instruction began early in the friars' life. Instructions for novices of all the religious orders warned them about the dangers against their modesty and the peril embodied in women. Citing church fathers such as Saint Gregory and Saint Augustine, the new brothers received advice on avoiding looking at women, remembering the dire consequences of food and wine, and being extremely careful about touching their own bodies.[45] The regulation of body movements, as prescribed by the rules of religious orders, trained the novice on how to guard the senses from going astray and betraying him. Composure expressed the discipline of the body under the command of the will. Metaphorically, novices should close the doors of their souls, their physical senses, and leave not a single opening that could taint their virtue.[46] To prove the viability of theoretical advice, biographers stressed the virtues of men who had struggled with the flesh and won the battle. For example, the biographer of a now-forgotten Augustinian friar, Fr. Alonso de Orozco, preacher to Charles V and Phillip II, recounted how this model man succeeded in maintaining his physical virginity through his eighties. Whenever he talked to a woman, he averted his eyes and fixed his gaze elsewhere; he did not go beyond the walls of his monastery unless absolutely necessary; he venerated the Virgin Mary with great devotion, disciplined his body, and meditated continuously on the passion of Christ. As the biographer argued, how could anyone see Christ's body so covered by blood and think of the

[44] *Obras del V.P.M Fr. Luis de Granada*, Libro Quarto, Tomo VI (Madrid: Don Pedro Marín/Real Compañía de Impresores y Libreros del Reyno, 1788), 382–95. Granada translated Climacus's *Scala* around 1565. However, there was a Spanish version published in Valencia in 1513. The *Scala* is reputed to be the first book printed in Mexico City (1537) for the use of Dominican novices. See Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XVI* (Mexico: Librería de Andrade y Morales, 1886), XIV–XV.

[45] Fr. Francisco de San Buenaventura, *Instrucción para novicios de la Religión Bethlemitica* (Mexico: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1734), 98–102, 168–71.

[46] *Instrucción y doctrina de novicios con la cual se han de criar los nuevos religiosos en esta Santa Provincia de San Joseph, de los Descalzos de la Regular Observancia de Menores* (Madrid: Oficina de Antoni Marin, 1739). This and other rules printed earlier for members of the Franciscan orders largely followed those first laid out by Saint Bonaventure. For Mexico, see *Cartilla y Doctrina Espiritual para la Crianza, y Educación de los Novicios que tomaren el Hábito en la Orden de nuestro Padre San Francisco* (Mexico: Herederos de la Viuda de Miguel Rivera, 1721). This and other, later editions were based on earlier works originating in Spain.

delights of the flesh?[47] Models spilled to the New World. Dominican Pascual de la Anunciación, who moved from Spain to Mexico City in 1564 was said to have preserved the "angelical virtue of virginity," a condition he confessed to some persons of authority in the order, who in turn testified to it after his death. To maintain his virginity he avoided familiarity and conversation with women and disciplined his body with fasts and flagellations. His "virginal body" was interred with the utmost care, and to add prestige to this event, the writer claims that witnesses saw rays of light, such as those emanating of the paintings of saints, shining off the body of the friar during the internment. Not surprisingly, several years later, his body was found as fresh as the day it was buried.[48] To be sure, the palm of virginity was not claimed for all men of the cloth, possibly for good reason, but simply resisting the call of the flesh and the seduction of women was part of a good friar's test of manhood.[49]

Among men of the cloth, the defeat of the sensual and the erotic was the path to the love of God and Christ, which was devoid of sensuality.[50] While the vocabulary of divine love provided many expressions that mimicked those of human love, it was understood that the experiences of saintly men were not "erotic" in a worldly manner. For moral theologians, the love of God purified the sense of touch in the experience of mystic embraces and kisses experienced by visionaries. Common emblematic and saintly encounters of the bodies of human and divine beings, including the touching of Christ's wounds, the drinking of the blood oozing from that wound, or the reception of the milk of Mary's breasts through divine lactation experienced by several male saints, were devoid of any lewdness.[51] Fonseca, for example, engaged in a detailed description of the corporeal beauty of Mary following canons of physical appeal. However, accepting the premises of other moral theologians and biblical scriptures, Fonseca stated that the beauty of the body reflected the beauty of the soul, and in the case of Mary, her pure beauty

[47] Fr. Francisco de Avilés, *Vida del venerable padre Fr. Alonso de Orozco, religioso del orden de nuestro padre San Augustin* [1719] (Madrid: Juan Sanz, n.d.), 72–73. Orozco was born in 1500 and professed in 1520.

[48] Franco, *Historia*, 149–150.

[49] *Instrucción y doctrina de novicios sacada de la de Buenaventura. . .para la Provincia de San Diego de México* (Puebla: Diego Fernández de León, 1685). To preserve chastity, it was best to run away from women, the sources of potential corruption. However, the inner strength of the friar and his willingness to "fight" his own body and its desires were essential to succeed. Here the instructor balanced the "cowardly" action of escaping and running away with the more "heroic" struggle with the flesh.

[50] Fonseca, *Tratado*, 40–42. As an Augustinian, Fonseca followed Augustine very closely, quoting the latter when he stated that if one loved earth one was earth and if one loved God, "I dare say one was God."

[51] The "lactation" of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in its several versions implicates the exposure of Mary's breast to the saint. It has a wide iconographic history. See http://www.art-breastfeeding.com/rel2/bern.htm. Equally revealing is the iconography of Madonnas suckling baby Jesus.

killed—so to speak—all impure thoughts.[52] But divine love was not an easy topic for most laymen, and theologians spilled much ink in explaining its nature. Bernard of Clairvaux succeeded in explaining the symbolism of the Song of Songs as a spiritual endeavor, a line of interpretation from which the church did not depart and that has been the source of much controversy since.[53] He wrote in Latin for clergymen, but translating this alluring part of the Bible into the vernacular could lead to misinterpretation among the populace. It is worth remembering that the explanation and translation of the Song of Songs by John of the Cross and Fr. Luis de León caused much stir in sixteenth-century Spain because this work was too close to the fine line separating the erotic from the divine love of Christ and was not assumed to be understandable by the common man.

The Challenge of Lewdness in Colonial Mexico

The conquest and settlement of Mexico (New Spain) extended the territory of Roman Catholicism to territories many times the size of Spain. The catechization of these new lands fell to the mendicant orders by papal decision. Along with the tenets of Christianity came the restrictions of moral theologians applicable to Spanish settlers, converted indigenous populations, and more importantly to the evangelizers themselves. The leaders of evangelization, such as New Spain's first Bishop, Fr. Juan de Zumárraga (1468–1548) and the first generation of Christian preachers had a high stake in the promotion of "model" friars dedicated to activities that they regarded as reflecting the apostolic endeavors of the founders of Christianity. Obviously aware of the trenchant debate over celibacy in the "dissident" areas of Europe, those religious men who self-consciously chose to live emblematic lives in the first decades after the conquest regarded their own celibacy and sexual chastity as one of their most important assets.[54] Yet the New World

[52] Fonseca, *Tratado,* [1620], 414–15.

[53] Fr. Antonio Arbiol, *Mística fundamental de Christo Señor Nuestro, explicada por el glorioso y beato padre San Juan de la Cruz* (Barcelona: Joseph Altés, 1748), 315–16. This work was first published in 1723, shortly before the death of Fr. Antonio, and proves the persistent influence of sixteenth-century mystic thought. The marriage of the soul and Christ was explained in very human terms by San Juan de la Cruz, as he interpreted the Song of Songs as a Christian metaphor. However, the marriage was "full of purity" even though God and Jesus could behave as jealous husbands. Any offense to God was compared to spiritual adultery.

[54] On celibacy, see Stefan Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church: The Beginning of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000). Heid sustains that celibacy can be traced back to the first apostles of Christianity. See also Alfons Maria Cardinal Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Aaron Raverty, "Are we Monks or Are We Men? The Monastic Masculine Gender Model According to the Rule of Benedict," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14:3

offered many challenges to saintly lives. Settlement in a vast land and a fluid and racially diverse society became a challenge for the maintenance of spiritual and social norms more deeply rooted in Spain. Lust was a generalized moral failure among male settlers surrounded by a large number of indigenous women available to their uncontrolled desires. A mixed-race population was soon to emerge under the noses of the ministers of the church.

The friars tending to conversion were initially more interested in the catechesis of the indigenous than in supervising the male secular population. In turn, members of the mendicant orders became affected by laxer internal controls, and the problem of "solicitation" of sexual favors became a concern of ecclesiastical authorities. Solicitation was an important topic for moral theologians because it revealed the failure of the expected ethical and spiritual fiber of male ecclesiastics facing the power of lust and sensuality. Solicitation was most often a product of the close contact between penitent and confessor. Confession was a pillar of the Roman Catholic sacraments and the obligation to confess at least once a year technically exposed all lay confessants to errant men of the cloth. In 1622, Pope Gregory XV's ruling on solicitation set the universal law for the seventeenth century. It defined solicitation as any request of sexual nature at the moment and place of confession and admonished confessants to denounce solicitants to the Inquisition.[55] Its meaning was amplified if the solicitant followed up on his intentions after confession. Tactile activities, as well as words provoking "lust" or inciting the penitent to engage in dishonest thoughts and actions, were all mortal sins because they corroborated the intentionality of the sin by the confessor.

Faced with less than exemplary members in its own ranks, the church's literature of moral edification, mostly written in Spain, gained purchase in the New World. When the orders began to record their own history of New World evangelization for posterity, the chroniclers constructed models of male virginity and chastity in their "menologies" or collective biographies of inspirational men of the orders, in which male chastity became paramount and far more important than celibacy itself since the latter did not necessarily imply the former. The virginity of the most exemplary members of the mendicant orders was an example of their victory over themselves and the "erotic" or lewd appeals of the world. The official concern with male virginity was also a point to impress the native population. Virginity

(Fall 2006), 269–91; Dawn M Hadley, *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman,1998); Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Celibacy in the Western World," *Church History* 41:2 (June 1972), 149–67; Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 227–32; Patricia Cullum and Catherine J. Lewis, eds., *Holiness and masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004); Jacqueline Murray, ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York: Garland, 1999).

[55] Fr. Miguel de San Antonio, *Resumen de la Theologia Moral* (Madrid: Imprenta de Ángel Pascual Rubio, 1719), 535–42. Solicitation was not an act involving women only; it also included men and children of both sexes. See also Haliczer, *Sexuality in the Confessional*, 42–62.

raised a lot of admiration among the indigenous, for whom abstention from sex was not a desirable qualification in any man. The biographies of "holy" men and the "menologies" aimed at teaching by example. Fortitude against the weakness of the flesh was not portrayed as a virtue of a few friars, but as an achievement of many of them. Numbers mattered and enhanced the collective view of the orders. Religious chroniclers like the Dominicans Agustín Dávila Padilla and Alonso Franco eulogized virginity as the essence of male achievement against the flesh. Male virginity was a treasure so rich it belonged to heaven, and it was to be achieved with the help of God.[56] Franco stated that he lacked the wisdom, writing ability, eloquence, and sanctity of the great doctors of the church to write about virginity, but the cause merited his boldness and he decided to tell all such cases that came to his attention. He wished to extol the "angelical treasure" of those who possessed it to persuade others who were constantly assailed by temptations. By witnessing cases of virginity and writing about them, he hoped to embarrass those who were young but behaved like old men sunken in dirty vices and dishonesty. Franco was writing near the second half of the seventeenth century amidst an atmosphere of civil and ecclesiastical distrust of the role of the mendicant orders. The chroniclers cast a longing gaze at the past, depicting the mid- to late sixteenth century as the "golden" days of evangelization and present their own contemporaries as men of many virtues meriting respect and reverence. Yet in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Inquisition was bombarded by cases of soliciting friars and clergy for whom the terms virginity and chastity had lost their spiritual purchase. Those men were a source of embarrassment for their orders and the church. Very much on the defensive, Franco became the champion for the recognition of virtues and chaste behavior that, if beyond the grasp of some members of the regular orders, he claimed were still part of the mendicant tradition and especially his order.

The strength of some friars' virginity was measured by the circumstances and amount of time they had spent in the world before professing. The confessor of Dominican Fr. Pedro Galarza declared that in terms of chastity and "virginal purity," he had committed only a few venial sins. This was admirable because before he entered the order at age twenty-two, Galarza had been a student, and he had traveled considerably after taking the vows. Men who, like Galarza, had

[56] Franco, *Historia*, 151–52. See also 166. *Menologio Seraphico de las vidas, ejercicios y muerte de los que con virtudes religiosas ilustraron a la Provincia del Santo Evangelio de México*, 30, 68, 121, in Fr. Augustín de Vetancurt, *Menologio Franciscano*. In their struggle to preserve their virginity, men should not be too vocal or too proud. Some of the friars who evangelized Mexico were said to have kept their virginity in secrecy only to reveal it to their confessors at the end of their lives. Male virginity would be hidden as a pearl in its shell while a woman's virginity was always public and upfront. Historians dealing with advocacy for virginity suggest that the victory over the flesh did not imply impotence but rather manifested the grace of God. See Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), chap. 4, 5, and 7.

been exposed to the trials of their own flesh and had "succeeded" in conquering them, were more commendable than others who had professed in their early life and lacked such testing experiences.[57] Franciscan Fr. Juan de Cerpa's virginity, commented Franciscan chronicler Juan de la Rea, was admirable in a man who was tall and robust and had lived as a layman before professing. Corpulent men or men with strong bodies were thought to be more susceptible to the weaknesses of the flesh.[58] A few oddities stand out. Following the advice of avoiding women to the letter, Dominican lay brother Fr. Pedro de Balmaceda was said never to have looked at a woman's face, following the teachings of sixteenth-century moral theologians. He lived mostly inside the convent, and if, when he ventured to the church in his role of sacristan, women came to talk to him, he closed his eyes "knowing that temptation enters the soul through the senses."[59] Of Franciscan Fr. Martín de la Coruña, chronicler Jerónimo de Mendieta, writing in the late sixteenth century, stated that "many years before his death Our Lord removed from him the movements of sensuality."[60] This could have been a discreet hint that he became impotent and did not suffer the stings of the flesh that others had to control through penitence.

Writing in the late seventeenth century on the *Dieguinos*, a discalced Franciscan branch, Fr. Baltasar de Medina selected the story of Fr. Juan Bautista, who was born in Asturias under the name of Gómez de Mesta. His inclination to virginity was described as an early predisposition, put to the test by the living temptation of a young woman who had herself intended to follow the religious life but abandoned it. When she attempted to seduce him in the open fields, he knelt and prayed to God to protect her and him. The *topos* of the seductive and errant woman is presented here as taking place in Spain, suggesting the universality of female seduction. Having traveled to Mexico City, Fr. Juan professed in 1600 and was remembered for having worked for and protected a widow and his daughters without any physical interest in them. Such rare distinction seemed to have attracted women, who pursued this exemplary friar. After his profession, he had to reject yet another attempt at seduction by the young daughter of a merchant who was in the process of becoming a nun herself. In this, as in the previous encounters, the "confused" temptresses eventually saw the light and returned to religion. Throughout his life, Fr. Juan also helped others who had problems with their troubled sexuality. Virginity was manifested in the friar's early life as an intuitive and natural disposition, but it had to be defended against the assaults of female agents intent on destroying it.

[57] Franco, *Historia*, 322, 325. Having committed only a few venial sins, he possessed the "angelical virtue" of chastity and retained the simplicity of a child.

[58] La Rea, *Crónica de la Órden*, 309–10.

[59] Franco, *Historia*, 354. See also 176, 226, and 326.

[60] Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, 2:159.

The man stood as a castle of purity engaged in a battle to preserve his virginity as a soldier acting in in his own defense.[61]

How did all the pedagogical intentions of moral theologians and pious chroniclers translate into real life? The Inquisition, installed in Mexico City in 1571, tested the efficacy of the moral advice and the validity of the models painted in religious chronicles. By recording the cases of men of the cloth who failed to observe their vows of celibacy and the ideal of sexual chastity, Inquisitorial records reveal the less edifying examples of friars and clergymen who lost the battle against their own flesh and solicited women in the confessionals, even raping some of them or living in concubinage.[62] The trial records also contain information on how the religious judges applied punishment for the cases discussed by moral theologians and embodied in deviant friars. When Inquisition judges looked at a transgressor, they must have shared the statement of moral theologian Diego de San Cristoval [Estella], who said that the only sin Christ never incurred or forgave was the sin of the flesh.[63]

The Inquisition records reveal men of the cloth exercising their virility as lay men: using seductive words and touching the bodies of female confessants, writing love letters, and even worse, forcing women to have sex with them or persuading them to do so voluntarily. The indictment against solicitation in the confessional was based on the desecration of the sacrament of penitence, administered through confession, as well as the transgression of the vow of chastity if a sex act was committed.[64] As men well versed in moral theology, Inquisitorial judges were not lenient in their opinion of the transgressors. After meticulous investigations, the ecclesiastical cases against men of the cloth were based on terms that are familiarly close to those discussed by the theoreticians. However, a significant difference in their statements was that the women targeted by the solicitants usually appeared as "victims" of lecherous confessors, not the sources of erotic temptation. The Inquisitors were not "kind" toward women; they were as misogynist as most men in their period. Women's morals were thoroughly investigated before their word could be accepted as a source of investigation. Any female denouncer confirmed or assumed to be of lax moral standing in the community had little chance of having her accusation taken seriously.[65] However, if her moral reputation was

[61] Baltasar Medina, *Chronica de la Santa Provincia de San Diego de Mexico de Religiosos Descalzos de NSPS Francisco en la Nueva España* (Mexico: Juan de Ribera, 1682), 104–107.

[62] There are some cases of pedophilia and sodomy recorded but in this brief survey, I will confine myself to heterosexual activities, which surpass other sins of the flesh in numbers.

[63] San Christoval [Estella], *El Tratado de la vanidad del mundo*, 298.

[64] Fr. Miguel de San Antonio, *Resumen de la Theologia Moral* (Madrid: Imprenta de Ángel Pascual Rubio, 1719).

[65] For example, a 1637 case of solicitation denounced by a young man who witnessed it while waiting to be confessed received no attention and was only reviewed (and possibly shelved) in 1669, thirty-two years later. The solicited woman had a reputation of having questionable

strong, the judgment of the errant man of the cloth could not be forfeited. Thus, while the records lack information about the erotic appeal of women to the friars, they corroborate that the sources of lewdness were the men themselves, who used seductive words, spoken and written, lewd tactile approaches to their victims or, at worst, engaged in demeaning carnal acts.[66] Sometimes the wording of the judges is rather direct and brutal when addressing the facts. Errant friars were accused by ecclesiastic attorneys of being "vultures" and foxes among their flock, seeking revolting pleasures and leaving their penitents deep in the mud of their sins rather than cleansing them. The intentionality of the man weighed on the judgment and relied on the well-known premises of moral theology. As such, they focused on morose delectation and pollution as evidence of erotic arousal. When nuns were put on trial, which was very rare, they did not escape the compulsion to declare the response of their flesh to the appeal of erotic lewdness. In a 1681, case a nun had to confess that the verbal harassment of one confessor had led her to "pollution," the undeniable expression of morose delectation.[67] This important shift in the assignment of fault between the theoreticians of morality—who blamed women as seducers—and the ecclesiastics sitting in judgment for the Inquisition—who punished men for their transgressions—suggests that their focus was on the condemnation of the men in order to make a teaching example of their mistakes.

The most explicit case of sex in the conventual premises was the 1598 case of Chaplain Juan Plata and Sor Agustina de Santa Clara of the Dominican convent of Santa Catarina de Sena in Puebla.[68] This case was conflated with the accusation of *alumbradismo*—enlightenment through direct contact with

morals. See Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico) (hereafter AGN), *Inquisición* 384, fol. 314 (1637).

[66] There are hundreds of such cases in the Mexican Inquisition's archives that run between 1571 and 1810. I have discussed some of those dealing with nuns in Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 209–43; Jorge René González Marmolejo, *Sexo y Confesión. La iglesia y la penitencia en los siglos XVIII y XIX en la Nueva España* (Mexico: Conaculta/Plaza y Valdés, Editores, 2002); John Chuchiak, "The Sins of the Fathers: Franciscan Missionaries, Parish Priests and the Sexual Conquest of the Yucatec Maya, 1545–1785," *Ethnohistory: Journal of the American Society for Ethnohistory* 54:1 (Winter 2007): 71–129; Asunción Lavrin, "La sexualidad y las normas de la moral sexual," in *Historia de la Vida Cotidiana en México*, coord. Antonio García Rubial, ed. Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 5 vols. (México: El Colegio de México/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 2:489–517; Jaime García Mendoza, "Casos de curas solicitantes denunciados ante el Santo Oficio de Tasco (1580–1630)," in *Inquisición Novohispana*,eds. Noemí Quesada et al, (México: UNAM, 2000), 25–44. For other examples before 1700, see AGN, *Inquisición* 295 (several cases for the years 1614–15); vol. 244 (1597); vol. 435, exp. 30 (1609); vol. 485, exp. 28 (1656), exp. 29 (1658); vol. 520, exp. 42, fol. 59v–61r or v. In this paper, I use cases dealing with mendicant friars only.

[67] AGN, *Inquisición* 552 (1680).

[68] AGN, *Inquisición* 186 (1598). For a synthesis of this inquisitorial investigation and transcriptions of some of its documents, see Álvaro Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados, Vol. III, Los*

God—a trend considered heretical in late-sixteenth-century Spain. Father Juan softened his potential "victims" by telling them that he and others believed they were specially favored by God. Covered by the pretense of spirituality, Juan and Agustina simply broke religious inhibitions about chastity and gave free rein to their sexual desires. As the chaplain of the convent, Plata had relatively easy access to the nuns. After a circuitous courtship in which both parties slowly recognized their mutual attraction, they had sex twice on the roof of her convent. The text of this case reads like a masterpiece of voyeurism. The Inquisition demanded a full confession from the man, with plenty of details as to what happened, when, and how, and, it displayed what I consider prurient interest in details. However, one must remember that moral theologians also wrote with precise detail on the processes of erotic seduction, and details were essential in such casuistic processes. Plata and Agustina were interrogated separately. The couple declared various acts of mutual sexual incitement during confession, leading to touching of their respective genitals and concomitant pollution. In order to save himself from the expected spiritual and physical punishment, the clergyman twisted the theory of voluntary consent elaborated by moral theologians and pretended that there were two levels of acquiescence. Materially, he claimed, the bodies consented, but spiritually they had not consented. He further claimed that the nun had devised this theological escape hatch. Some of the inquisitors did not buy this interpretation. However, she was removed from her convent and subjected to an inquiry that lacked the exacting detail of the friar's, perhaps in deference to her sex. In the end, she was held as culpable as the man and was transferred to a convent in Mexico City, without her bridal veil and devoid of voice in the convent. He was secluded for ten years in a hospital near the capital city.[69] While this was not the only case of erotic engagement between friars and nuns, it gave the inquisitorial authorities the opportunity to enforce their moral and spiritual codes on church members of both sexes.

Cases of sexual involvement of male clerics with secular women were far more numerous than with nuns, but most lack the explicitness of the case of Plata and Agustina. However, they provide details of the confessors' erotic activities, corroborating their ingenuity to achieve arousal and interest among their objects of desire. The catalogue of enticing situations and techniques displayed by these men of God suggests a significant degree of masculine sexual harassment. Franciscan Fr. Joseph de Oliva inquired of one of his female penitents if she experienced pollution and explained what it was, arguing in his defense that she should know how to confess herself. He requested another to show him how to kiss a man and attempted

alumbrados de Hispanoamérica (1570–1605) (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1986), 791–910.

[69] As a bride of Christ, she had committed spiritual adultery. Cases of actual lovemaking between men of the cloth and nuns were exceptionally rare in New Spain. Agustina de Santa Clara died in Mexico City in 1603. Juan Plata served for ten years in the hospital of Huastepec before asking, in 1610, for permission to be relieved of his prison to return to Spain.

to steal kisses from yet another female confessant.[70] The erotic appeal of words suggested by some moral theologians was the tool used by this deviant confessor. The spectrum of activities in the act of confession must take into consideration the fact that closed confessionals evolved slowly through sixteenth century in Europe. Even in grilled confessionals it was possible to use verbal harassment. Using the evidence of inquisitorial cases it is obvious that there were open confessions in many rural area or remote towns. Confessor and penitent were close together, and the woman could have been kneeling in front of the confessor. This allowed certain liberties, such as that taken by Fr. Alonso Formicedo, who was accused of obliging an indigenous woman to touch his virile membrum over the habit. He had asked the confessant if she wished him to give her a baby.[71] Situations such as this went beyond the "erotic" to that of open sexual harassment. Equally beyond the boundaries of the simply erotic were the actions Fr. Pedro de Aro, who after soliciting a woman in the confessional and being rejected, went to her house in the afternoon, entered her bedroom, and tried to rape her. The woman's slave helped to push the man out of the bedroom and the house.[72] Less fortunate was an Indian servant in distant New Mexico, who was raped by Fr. Joseph Trujillo, her confessor, during a visit to her master's private chapel.[73]

A thorough survey of the diversity of erotic (i.e., lewd) and lascivious behavior of church members in colonial Mexico is beyond the scope of this paper, which has focused rather on the cultural-religious definition of eroticism and its interpretation as lewdness. However, this brief survey indicates that men of the cloth confronting their own sexuality were not that different from secular men. One key and ironic difference, however, was the fact that confessors had women cornered and under their control, while secular men could not socially or personally approach women as freely as a confessor despite the fact that they had made no vows of chastity.

Moral theologians attempted to counter the natural appeal of the sexes with a strict set of rules of moral condemnation. They wished to deflect the appeal of sensuality, whether discreet or blunt, and replace it with the more ethereal and desirable love of God. That was their job, so to speak, but their task was a difficult one. Neither secular men and women nor men of the church could escape completely of the challenges of their own bodies. Doubtless there were good, upright men in both the secular and the religious world. Even so, the overpowering religious culture the Roman Catholic Church built up through centuries of moral advice had a deep influence in the construction of a negative concept of the erotic in early modern Spain and its dominions overseas. The strength of prescriptive religious models like those discussed by moral theologians relied on the willingness of state institutions

[70] AGN, *Inquisición* 527, exp. 3 (1690).
[71] AGN, *Inquisición* 244, fols 33r or v?.–53v (1599).
[72] AGN, *Inquisición* 435, exp. 30 (1609).
[73] AGN, *Inquisición* 458, fol. 286 (1658).

to adopt and enforce them, and early modern Spanish legislation was greatly influenced by the tenets of religious values such as those proposed by moral theologians. From childhood to adulthood, men and women were subject to moral education imparted by clerics and a cultural atmosphere that accepted the theologians' validity of what was good, godly, bad, erotic, and sinful.[74] The support given by civil legislation to religious concepts of sexual self-control and social control encountered a growing number of challenges, especially in the New World, so far from the centers of Christian theological discussion and populated by such challenging and diverse cultures. The presence of the Inquisition in the Viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain could hardly contain, let alone control, the variety of sins of the flesh flourishing in the vastness of the land. However, the tenets of moral theology helped to hold together the doctrinal position of the church, at least in theory. Moral theology continued to be relevant as a pedagogical tool and a venue to strengthen the position of the church on the body and sex during the Catholic Reformation period. Understanding the appeal of the erotic and explaining it, these texts unveil the path of reasoning of traditional attitudes about the need to curb natural appetites and spiritualize the meaning of love. Their answers remained unchanged and largely unchallenged for centuries to come. Even though we live in a secularized society of unbound sexuality, most religious groups—not just Catholic Christians—remain unreconciled to the uncensored appeal of the erotic and strive to offer answers that, unlike those of early modern period, do not divorce the spirit completely from the flesh but reject the possibility of granting complete freedom to sexual impulses.

[74] *Libro de Doctrina Christiana. Juntamente con otro tratado de Doctrina Moral exterior que enseña a la Buena crianza que deben tener los mozos. . .* (Toledo: Casa de Miguel Ferrer, 1564); *Suma de Doctrina Christiana compuesta por el bachiller Alonso Martínez de Laguna* (Salamanca: Casa de Juan Cánova, 1555).

Disarticulating Lilith: Notions of God's Evil in Jewish Folklore

Sharonah Fredrick,
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Lilith as Eden's Snake

Lilith, the vampire-like siren of Sephardic folklore, was not a proto-feminist archetype. All of the texts that spoke of her were strictly forbidden to women and also concealed from most men, except those belonging to fellowships of the *Kabbalah*. It is true that in the twentieth century, Lilith was often viewed as a symbol of female emancipation, even if, as Ellen Frankel has correctly noted, the legend had its origins as "a misogynist rationale for male supremacy."[1] But Lilith's primary importance does not arise from her gender. Her significance is linked to her role as an arbiter of God's justice on earth.[2] She is the snake in the Garden of Eden, in a moral sense. She frightens and seduces, and even if she is cursed, she, like the snake, is placed in our world by God.

Her role in Sephardic folklore is indicative of a dilemma that plagued the Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Portuguese worlds following their respective expulsions. Why had God punished His chosen people, the Jews? Was Lilith an agent in a divine plan for redemption, a plan that included the punishment of *Gerush Sefarad* ("the exile from Spain/Portugal")? Did the disaster of the Iberian Exile conceal a better destiny?

[1] Ellen Frankel, *The Jewish Spirit: A Celebration in Stories and Art* (New York: Stewart, Tabor and Chang, 1997), 15.

[2] Lilith is notably absent from Judeo-Portuguese Peninsular literature; it is generally in the post-Expulsion period when her figure begins to crop up in the shared Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) folklore of the Diaspora.

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery, ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 59–82.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.5.111056

Lilith is an agent of evil who was subservient to God, a role she shared with her male consort Samael. As a representation of necessary iniquity—the evil that God has placed in the universe so that mankind may choose the good—Lilith became, for the male authors of the *Talmud* and the *Zohar*, a masculine imagining of the forbidden, a fantasy of unconsecrated intercourse. In the early modern period, which coincides with the Jews' expulsion from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), Lilith was designated as the scandalous non-maternal counterpart to Eve, humanity's "mother." In that dubious role, Lilith had borne children, but not human ones. Hers were the harmful spirits known as *mazikim*, literally "damage inflictors" in Hebrew.[3]

Kabbalistic Judaism's many lesser demons, the above-mentioned *mazikim*, constituted an explanation for difficult events. Appropriately enough, the Lilith legend enjoyed its widest diffusion when Sephardic history entered its decline: beginning with the pogroms in Castile and Cataluña in 1391 and climaxing with the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula. News of the Inquisition's activities in Spain and the New World was followed by despair and confusion throughout the Sephardic Diaspora, until the demise of the Holy Office in the early nineteenth century. It was Lilith's presence that provided some sort of teleological reasoning for these events.[4]

The increased persecution of crypto-Jews in the Spain of Felipe II and the public burnings of "relapsed" Jews in Mexico City (1596) and in Lima, Peru (1639) created panic in the Sephardic world and demanded explanations of God's plan. Though marginal, the Lilith stories offered a teleology that included even the dread "auto-da-fe" within God's parameters. Certain sixteenth-century Cabbalists, including Hayyim Vitale, Abraham Galante, and Josef Karo, had viewed the Inquisition as a prerequisite for the Advent of the Messiah. Even non-Kabbalistic Jewish writers of the early modern period, such as Samuel Usque, reasoned that the Expulsion from Spain might be the first step towards returning the exiles to Zion.[5] Lilith was the second step, at which all men stumbled.

Lilith's story is comprised of three main components: 1) her expulsion from the Garden of Eden for resisting the submissive position Adam assigned her during intercourse; 2) her designation as Samael/Satan's wife; and 3) her seduction of the

[3] Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith, The First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1992), 33, describes the *mazikim* as "pests", as opposed to an entirely different group of spirits, the *khabalim* ("destroyers").

[4] Spain never formally ended the Inquisition in the Americas. Its demise was a lengthy process: the Liberators Jose de San Martin and Simon Bolivar finally abolished it formally during the Latin American Wars of Independence, (1812-1824).

[5] Usque's 1553 *Consolacam* devotes a great deal of attention to Isaiah 62:1-9, in which Jerusalem is compared to a virgin awaiting her bridegroom. In the *zeitgeist* of the Sephardic exiles, the Jewish people had become the groom and now Jerusalem, not Spain and Portugal, was the beloved bride.

male descendants of Adam and Eve.[6] Only when Lilith found a man capable of resisting her seduction would God send the Messiah and return the exiles to Zion. That hypothetical moment would redeem humanity and end the suffering of the Jewish people. That same moment would also end Lilith's axiological function as temptress of would-be Messiah bringers. Consequently, if human beings possessed agency—Jewish insistence on free will being undeniable—then they could have a hand in bringing, or thwarting, the Messianic Age. But when even the most righteous sage succumbed to Lilith, the Messianic Age would be long in coming.

Origins of the Lilith Myth

The Jewish Lilith myth evolved from the older winged pair of Babylonian demons: Lilit and Lilitu, whose mission was strangling children. Akkadian texts also spoke of Lilitu, the female member of the pair, appearing as a nocturnal seductress.[7] Regarding the Old Testament, Lilith is mentioned only once, and it is not in relation to Adam, Eden, or baby-strangling. In *Isaiah* 34:14 she is named as one of the "desert beasts" who prowl the ruins of Jerusalem, the future destruction of which is envisioned by the prophet: "And the martens shall meet with the jackals, and one goat shall call to his fellow; only the screech owl (Lilith) shall rest there, and find for her a place of repose."[8]

In early modern vernacular translations of the Old Testament (including the King James Version), the word *Lilith* is translated as "screech-owl." The name "Lilith" per se does not appear in English, nor did it appear in Spanish, Portuguese, or French Bibles. It is possible that this is an attempt to obscure the Lilith personage, a way to avoid equating the Lilith character with the owl. Modern Hebrew uses the generic term *yanshuf* for "owl,"[9] although *Lilith* as a word may once have referred explicitly to the screeching variety.

During the Talmudic period, descriptions of the she-demon were embellished with references to her sexuality. The rabbis wrote of Lilith as a fully-recognizable, air-gliding female demon with "a woman's face, long hair, and wings" in *Talmud: Niddah,* 24b. Another Talmudic text, *Talmud: Pesach* 112b, finds a correlation

[6] Hurwitz remarks, in *Lilith, the First Eve,*142: "But for the most part, Lilith is not concerned with killing men. She would rather seduce them, in order to conceive children by them. . .." In other words, she is always attempting to recreate her own Eden.

[7] Hurwitz, in *Lilith, the First Eve*, 1999, 52, gives a detailed background of Lilith's pagan antecedents, which encompass Sumerian, Babylonian and Akkadian sources prior to her incorporation into Jewish folklore.

[8] All Biblical quotes in English are taken from David H. Stern's *The Jewish Bible* (Netherlands: Importantia, 2006)

[9] Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary* (Ramat Gan: Masada Publishing House, 1981), 937.

between Lilith and another post-biblical she-demon: Agrath. Agrath-Lilith is the daughter of Mahalath, a malevolent female spirit whose name derives from the Hebrew lexical root, MEM-KHET-LAMED, for sickness and disease. In contrast, it is the root for forgiveness, pointing to the ambiguity of these fictional characters.[10] Talmudic quotes do in fact define Lilith as a distinctly nocturnal presence, concurring with the earlier "screech-owl" reference.

Like Isaiah's screech-owl, Lilith portends doom, but her doom is laced with seduction. Unlike Satan in New Testament sources, who rebels against God, Lilith does not rebel against God, but rather against Adam. For this reason, God accepts Lilith's sexual insubordination in the Cosmos, assuring her a prominent role in the fortunes of humanity. And while she is not the only malevolent spirit, Lilith indeed "occupies a central place among the demonic images of Judaism because she is by far the most distinctive figure among this religion's numerous evil spirits."[11]

Judeo-Spanish mystics implanted the Lilith myth within a gap between Genesis I and Genesis II. At the end of Genesis I: 27, an unnamed woman is co-created with Adam by God on the sixth day of Creation: ". . . male and female God created them. . . ." Inexplicably, the unnamed woman has disappeared by the middle of Genesis 2:22, where Adam's rib is fashioned into the more obedient (if we discount her penchant for conversing with snakes) Eve. That unnamed, disappeared woman becomes, a posteriori, Lilith. Although divorced from Adam, Lilith achieves parity with him through semantics. Adam and Eve's children are named for their father (*Bnei Adam,* the "sons of Adam"), whereas Lilith's and Samael's children bear the title of their mother: *Bnei Lilit* (in Hebrew: "sons of Lilith"). In the incarnation of Na'amah, one of her supernatural manifestations, Lilith could mother half-human, half-demon offspring. I will review this provocative motif, which fused human and diabolical motifs, below in my analysis of the folktale *The Father's Testament.*[12]

A mystical Jewish mystical text of unknown authorship that surfaced in the eighth century, the *Aleph-Bet of Ben Sirah*, presented Lilith choosing banishment to the Red Sea rather than returning to Eden to play the submissive wife.[13] The *Aleph-Bet* contains Lilith's vows to kill a hundred of her demon children every day while leaving human children unharmed, on the condition that they bear amulets inscribed with her name.[14] We will return to this point later on; but it stands as evidence that Lilith is more self-sacrificing than malevolent. Her unruly nature in

[10] Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary*, 1272-3.

[11] Hurwitz, *Lilith, the First Eve,* 31.

[12] *Zohar* I, 19b

[13] The *Aleph-Bet* has several extant versions, and while there is general agreement that it originated in the Eastern (Babylonian and/or Persian) Jewish communities during the Middle Ages, dates of its possible authorship vary widely, depending upon the scholar. Louis Ginzburg thought it dated to the tenth century; other theories see its origin in Southern France, and certain segments of it may have been written in Italy; it is a composite work.

[14] Hurwitz, *Lilith, The First Eve*, 120.

Ben Sirah seems to stem from the book's conception of all things female rather than something uniquely attributable to her. In *Ben-Sirah* 42:9–14 we read: "Daughters are trouble, let there be no window, do not expose her to any male and let her take not counsel among women." (Frymer-Kensky 2002, 180-1) So Lilith, it appears, is typical of her genre.

The Eastern Lilith texts would have been well-known to Jewish scholars in Omayyad Andalucía, who maintained active contact, via the *Responsa*, with the Babylonian rabbinical academies in Pumbeditza and Nehardea. But by the tenth century, Berber invasions had pushed Andalusian Jewish communities northward. This is the background to the foremost collection of the Lilith legends: Rabbi Moises De Leon's *Zohar,* or "Splendor" in Hebrew. Moises De Leon himself (1250–1305) claimed to have received the *Zohar* from an earlier Aramaic source, the Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. (This idea was discounted definitively by Gershom Scholem in the 1960s on the basis of linguistic analysis of the *Zohar.*)[15]

The *Zohar* fills in the interstices in the Old Testament, such as the previously mentioned gap between *Genesis* I and II. Although she is not the *Zohar*'s main character, Lilith's shadow predominates in the text. De Leon portrays a medieval femme fatale, couched in Mediterranean terminology and drawing on the earlier Babylonian folklore, but Sefarad surpassed anything found in the Babylonian Talmud or *The Alphabet of Ben Sirah*.

Lilith in the *Zohar* was seductive and aggressive, but always with divine license: "She stands at the entrance to roads and paths, in order to seduce men. She seizes the fool who approaches her, kisses him and fills him with a wine whose dregs contain snake venom. . ..Those fools, who come to her and drink this wine, commit fornication with her. And what does she do then? She leaves the fool alone, sleeping in his bed, and ascends to Heaven. There, she gives a bad report of him. Then she obtains permission to descend again."[16]

From the point of view of narrative function, Lilith is similar to Satan in the Book of Job. She tests virtue, and when it is found lacking, she hands in the report to God. God then promptly sends her back to the human world to pursue her activities and her men. Satan, the Accuser, also tests virtue. In Job I: 11-12, he mocks God's depiction of Job as an upright man, and challenges God to make life a bit harder for him: "But stretch only forth thy hand and touch all that he hath, and see whether he will not renounce thee to thy face." God assents and allows Satan to visit tribulations upon Job, on the condition that he spares the man himself from annihilation: "Then said the Lord unto the Accuser: Behold, all that is his is in

[15] Scholem and virtually every 20th century academic who has studied the text has affirmed the heavy prevalence of Spanish and even Latin grammar operating on the Aramaic syntax: why would Shimon Bar Yohai have spoken Spanish-tinged Aramaic if the Spanish language per-se did not yet exist when Bar Yohai was alive in the Holy Land?

[16] *Zohar* III, 19a

thy power; only against himself shalt thou not stretch forth thy hand. The Accuser went thereupon away from the presence of the Lord."

Satan tests virtue through tribulations; Lilith does so through temptation. God grants carte blanche with certain conditions to Satan in canonical Judaism. In non-canonical, Kabbalistic Judaism, Lilith derives her power from the same source. Perhaps that is why Jewish mysticism married them together in a spiritual and textual sense.

Samael/Satan, Lilith's eventual husband, was present in Judeo-Spanish folklore even prior to the *Zohar*, as Scholem has observed.[17] Although wayward, he functions within God's parameters, as does Lilith. Samael was frequently identified with the Angel of Death or Satan, a terrible visitor, but one who comes knocking only when God determines it. Lilith, together with Samael, is designated to rule over a sort of Jewish Antipodes, a mock-mirror universe where the *Bnei Lilit* live a life that resembles that of their human cousins, the *Bnei Adam,* but is more magical. This "other realm" of Lilith and Samael is referred to by the *Zohar* using the Aramaic term *Sitra Ahra*.[18]

In the *Sitra Ahra*, women were not always the helpmates exemplified by the biblical Eve. Some were out and out whores. References to Lilith as a beautiful harlot abound in the *Zohar*: *Zohar* 1:14b, 2:111a, 3:76b.[19] As the female ruler of the forces of chaos, Lilith represents uncontrolled female sex. She is an embodiment of *Yetser hara*, in Hebrew: "the evil inclination." The evil inclination does not defy God. Theologically, it is a prerequisite for defining the counterpoint of the Good, and it has no non-Godly origin, as Judaism's God is all-encompassing.[20]

Sephardic mystical thought viewed each of the Divine Emanations, the *sefirot*, as possessing a dark underside, which Lilith and Samael exemplify. The unsettling pair served as a sort of shock-absorber to blunt questions that would raise doubt as to God's goodness, since He had created Lilith and Samael no less than Adam and Eve. Samael and Lilith, seen as "evil" by common folk, are in reality the servants of God. Like many obedient employees, they are entrusted by their boss with the ugliest tasks. Samael terminates life at God's behest. Lilith seduces, and exposes the weaknesses of the ostensibly pious, all at the Creator's whim.

---

[17] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism: Mysticism and the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 175: Scholem remarks that Moises de Burgos and his mentors Isaac and Jacob Ha Cohen of Soria already mentioned Samael in earlier literature; centuries before the *Zohar,* Samael's character is well-established.

[18] Hurwitz refers to the *Sitra Ahra* as being the sum total of impure emanations (*sefirot*) of God (147); we should note that, though impure, the dark side is nonetheless an integral part of the Godhead.

[19] See: Margot Pritzker, Ed., *The Zohar, Complete Edition* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

[20] According to Maimonides, the evil inclination is not inherent in human beings; it is consciously chosen. While Maimonides was in no way a Cabbalist, his observation fit in, a posteriori, with the Lilith tales.

Scapegoating Lilith

Religiously based, non-academic study of the *Kabbalah* is cultivated primarily by the Hasidic communities in New York, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Jerusalem. The Hasidic anecdote of the "evil surgeon" illustrates the Lilith conundrum perfectly, centering on an invisible Good that transcends visible Evil. In the story, man with no knowledge of science enters a hospital and sees a surgeon operating on a patient. Horrified, the man screams. He believes the surgeon is killing the patient. When someone explains to him that what *appears* to be evil—plunging the scalpel into an open wound—is the only way to save the patient's life, the man relaxes. What he thought he saw, empirically, did not contain the whole truth.[21]

This is also the message of the Lilith stories. What appears to our (human) limited vision as hurtful—evil—is in reality for our benefit. This interpretation of reality predominated in mystical circles in the post-Expulsion period, and reshaped Lilith's role. Without the Inquisition, the Cabbalists reasoned, the Jews would have remained in Sefarad, the exiles would never return to Jerusalem (as foretold in Isaiah 56:8), and the biblical prerequisites for the coming of the Messiah would remain unfulfilled. If Lilith did not exist, the reasoning continued, there would be no way of discovering whoever was truly fit to hasten the Messiah. All religions have indulged in this sort of post-factum teleological justification, particularly during periods of crisis.

The Old Testament ends with Cyrus's proclamation to the exiled Jews in Babylon. In 2 Chronicles 36: 23, the Emperor urges those who wished to return to Jerusalem to do so: ". . .All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." Nonetheless, the majority of the Jews did not return to Judah; Babylon had become their home. But with Sefarad lost, and the Diaspora looking tenuous, perhaps the Jews would feel differently. If they could prepare a rabbi to withstand Lilith's sexuality, God would send the Anointed One and torments would cease.

Therefore, Lilith does not signify Hell in the Christian sense. She is an agent of a greater design that only the righteous can perceive. She is the hypocrite's downfall. Lilith, as Queen of the *Sitra Ahra*, must test the moral fiber of Adam's descendants. Abrahamic religions develop the rigor of their prophets through "testing periods" and ordeals: Moses in the wilderness, Jesus on the cross, Mohammed fighting the pagans of the Arabian Desert. To be deemed upstanding and "just"—*tsadik*—the Jewish man had to follow the 613 precepts contained in the *Shulkhan Arukh*.[22] This

[21] The story was heard by the author in a prayer-service led by Lubavitsche Rebbe Schneerson in New York in 1978.

[22] The *Shulkhan Arukh* which in Hebrew signifies "set table" is also of Sephardic origin, was codified in 1565 in Tzfat by one of the most prominent of Sephardic mystics, Josef Karo. He

was, in essence, a daily test of character. Predictably, Lilith caused even the most upright *tsadik* to violate Karo's code, particularly as regards adultery.

It is impossible to separate Lilith from sex, insofar as her expulsion from Eden arose from her demanding the dominant posture during intercourse with Adam. With the onset of the Sephardic Exile in 1492, it becomes equally impossible to separate Lilith's sexuality from the imperative of upholding Judaism's statutes. Disasters were attributed by the Cabbalists to having strayed from the sacred precepts. Human agency in the form of prescribed religious observance thus became a magical element in detonating or averting disasters.

Lilith as the Anti-Mother

In this same manner, attribution of infant death to Lilith took its alibi from some flaw in Jewish behavior. The death of a child has always been the most horrid dilemma for the monotheist, who must see all things as coming from God. But why does God punish one who has not yet sinned, namely, the child? Premature death would have been a well-known facet of life prior to 1492 and after it as well. But how could one justify the death of an innocent being theologically? In the event of such a tragedy, it was easier to lambast Lilith's mania for human children as the primary cause than it was to question God's dictates, the most perverse of which were obediently enacted by Lilith.[23]

Prior to, during, and after childbirth, protective charms against the she-demon proliferated, and many may still be seen in North African Jewish communities. Use of these amulets against Lilith reached its height following the Iberian expulsions. This is no accident, for as Ausubel noted when referring to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Sephardic Diaspora: "Superstition, excessive piety and delirious cabbalistic dreams proved excellent modes of escape from the unhappy reality of Jewish life."[24] In North Africa, where Spanish Jewish exiles began to resettle following the 1391 pogroms, amulets such as the five-fingered hand of Fatima, (the *hamsa*)[25], large blue stones, and mirrors in the form of black-lined eyes were used by both Muslims and Jews in hopes of averting Lilith's(or any other

claimed to have received it directly from an angel whom God sent on behalf of the Jewish people. Karo's thinking is typical of the Messianic wave that swept the first generations of Sephardic exiles. Human agency, in this case observance of the sacred precepts, the *mitzvoth*, was believed to influence history: should all Jews follow the *mitzvoth*, the Messiah would arrive.

[23] Hurwitz notes that in several early Greek and Aramaic texts, such as the *Testament of Solomon*, Lilith is placed in the role of child-strangler, but that "she does not do this on her own initiative but because she was created solely for this purpose" in *Lilith, the First Eve,* 118. Again, this points to Lilith as the servant of God, of He who created her.

[24] Nathan Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), 176.

[25] Hurwitz, *Lilith, the First Eve,* 150.

lesser demon's) "evil eye." If the amulets were not properly displayed, Lilith, it was rumored, would snatch the sleeping child.

However, if the parents displayed the names of the three names of the angels who had tried to return Lilith from her hiding place in the Red Sea, she would be powerless to harm the newborn (Schrire 1966, 118-120). Post-Expulsion folklore mentioned Lilith's merciful side, since it was she herself who had given the formula for the amulet: "But at heart she is not cruel. For out of compassion for her sister creatures, she has betrayed her own power. 'If you insert the names of the three angels, Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof, in an amulet and tie this charm around your children's neck,' she has whispered to the mothers of these innocent babies, 'I promise not to harm even one hair on their heads.' And she has never failed to keep her word."[26] As noted previously, The *Aleph-Bet of Ben Sirah* had stipulated that Lilith had provided the formula for the amulets, the *kmeyot*, to be used against her.

These *kmeyot* (the word is Aramaic) are ubiquitous during the most vulnerable period in the newborn's life: the eight days preceding the circumcision (for a boy) or the naming ceremony (for a girl). Red strings are tied around infants' wrists, in the hope that the imitation of blood will persuade Lilith not to shed the blood of the baby. Translucent blue beads and red *hamsa* ornaments hang over the baby's crib so that Lilith's magic will be deflected. Red boasts the already-cited identification with blood, the essence of life, while blue is an emblematic, universal symbol of the color of heaven. Pointedly, heaven is where Lilith, Queen of the *Sitra Ahra*, cannot ascend. Therefore, use of heaven's color on the cradle of the human child renders him or her invulnerable to the she-demon. Metaphorically, blue shields these portals where Lilith's presence is in transit between our world and her own. This is imitative magic in pure form.

The paradigm of Lilith as child-killer enabled the grieving parent to pin his or her rage on what was a coherent rationale. According to this mental construction, their child had died because they had not enacted the required precautions against the night-witch, precautions which Lilith herself had generously revealed. While nothing mitigated the tragedy of the baby's loss, this alibi at least transformed the child's death into a purposeful narrative. The persistence of the Lilith customs attested to the need for a coherent explanation of Evil, one that would avoid overtly blaming God, while simultaneously promising that human agency could counteract, via the amulets, God's mysterious and often cruel decrees.

[26] Frankel, *The Jewish Spirit*, 22.

Lilith's Functions in Early Modern Folklore

By the sixteenth century, Lilith's image had seeped into Jewish folklore, spreading outward with the Sephardic Diaspora. Spain's rabbinic academies had been destroyed, but due to the loss of those academies, certain elements previously limited to the recondite text — such as Lilith — entered the wider sphere of Jewish tradition. Beyond the prescribed spaces of institutional learning, the oral tradition of Lilith flourished. In fact, her folklore surmounted the chaos of the Expulsions precisely *because* it was unofficial. After all, folktales were their own self-perpetuating authority. "Although oral tales have often been regarded as the stepchildren of rabbinic authority, they have been lovingly embraced by the people, retold and singularly embellished by each community in the far-flung Jewish Diaspora"[27]. In addition, the written tradition that developed in the Sephardic Diaspora was less bound to rabbinical censorship than it had been in Sefarad. In the case of the Lilith stories, this is crucial, because some of them, including the *Father's Testament*, may actually have originated from earlier written sources, as did Lilith herself.

We know that as Queen of the *Sitra Ahra*, Lilith can never successfully mother a fully human child, a fact that would have resonated powerfully with anyone listening to the Lilith stories. For a Jewish woman of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sterility was to be feared. Jewish physical and religious continuity was precarious in the post-Expulsion period, and the scattered refugee communities doubtless felt more vulnerable than when Sefarad had been their territorial and cultural center. Not to have biological children in the post-Expulsion period was assumed to be a disaster for the physical perpetuation of the Jewish community. This is why, paradoxically, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Sephardic Jewish folklore, Lilith's status as "anti-mother" and "anti-wife" enabled her to play a utilitarian role in Messianic Redemption.

Lilith was God's instrument for judging the opportune moment of the Coming. By the mid-sixteenth century, Sephardic Jewish mystics based in the Galilean city of Tzfat began to turn their energies away from remembering the lost Sephardic Golden Age and towards hastening the Messianic Era. But before that could occur, God placed Lilith in their way. She was the litmus test of resisting the *yetser ha-ra, "the evil inclination."* Surrounded by the petitions of would-be Messiah-bringers, Lilith had to winnow the candidates down until she discovered the stellar one who can withstand her charms. It is an ironic commentary on male virtue that, according to the Lilith legends, the Messiah has not yet arrived.

Oral tradition, taking its cue from earlier texts, presented Lilith as the dutiful wife of the Angel of Death, Satan/Samael. But in the new stories of the Sephardic Exile, Lilith was also a would-be happy housewife, if God and all the Messiah-obsessed rabbis would only let her be. It may be Lilith's status as Adam's divorcée

[27] Frankel, *The Jewish Spirit, 9.*

that explains why the Lilith stories proliferated in the post-Expulsion period. Once "divorced" from Iberian soil, it became possible to empathize with other "divorcées," even ones as questionable as Lilith. De Leon surely did not intend for Lilith to become a symbol of empathy with the Jewish people when he authored the *Zohar* two centuries before the Expulsion, but the circumstances of the Sephardic exile modified Lilith's character in oral transmission.

Lilith and Rabbi Josef Della Reyna: A non-marriage of opposites

Folklorist Nathan Ausubel has given us a detailed retelling of the sixteenth-century legend pertaining to Lilith and the scholar Josef Della Reyna.[28] This is one of the most important of the "messianic" Lilith stories. The tale was still extant in Sephardic Greek and Italian communities in the mid-twentieth century, and it was particularly popular among the Spanish and Italian Jews of the *Old Yishuv* in Jerusalem one generation earlier. Historically, Della Reyna had been part of a group of cabbalistic rabbis based in Tzfat. That group, Ausubel reminds us, eschewed rationalism in their search for spiritual meaning, and "wove their web of morbid enchantment around Jewish daily thinking and feeling."[29] Josef Della Reyna lived within that "morbid enchantment," devoting himself obsessively to hastening the advent of the Messiah. Messianic obsession would be, fictionally and allegorically speaking, Della Reyna's downfall.

The story appeared in print in 1519 in Jerusalem, in a Hebrew manuscript called *Igeret Sod HaGeulah* (News of the Secret of the Redemption), and it may have been viewed in its own time as a genuine news item. It later underwent a florid literary re-working by Salomon Novarro (b.1606), a Jewish convert to Christianity in Italy who augmented the Lilith role and made her a paramour of Della Reyna. Centuries later, Gershom Scholem found the story circulating orally among the Sephardic community during the British Mandate. He transcribed the spoken story in 1933, a classic example of the back and forth movement of oral and written traditions.[30] Scholem's version appeared to adhere to the outlines of the 1519 text without Novarro's additions. Ausubel recounts Scholem in a more animated and less "folkloric" fashion, while leaving details of the 1519 story intact.

Ausubel presents us with a she-demon who has managed to establish a stable home life with her second spouse, Satan. After her dire experience with Adam, married life with the Angel of Death must have been a relief. The Lilith of this story no longer flies through the air to kidnap human babies, and she is well-settled

[28] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 206-15.
[29] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 176.
[30] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 124-30.

into her home in the *Sitra Ahra*, leagues beneath the deepest ocean. But despite Lilith's acquiescence to her destiny in the Other Realm, her peace of mind and hearth are continually disturbed by Rabbi Joseph Della Reyna's attempts to summon the Messiah before God's appointed time. Such an event would nullify Lilith's and Satan's legitimacy, since no evil, or free choice between good and evil, will be necessary in the Messianic Age.[31]

After purifying his body and mind, Della Reyna is almost ready for the sacred task. Worried that their existence is in peril, Lilith goads Satan into action: "He then took counsel with his wife Lilith *who upbraided him for doing nothing* when their very existence was threatened."[32] [Italics mine] At Lilith's behest, Satan begs God to hinder the rabbi's plan. While insisting that the Other World pair refrain from action as long as Della Reyna adhered to his moral code, God concedes on a key issue: "'however,' added God, 'should Joseph Della Reyna stray from righteousness by even the thickness of a hair, *I will give you the power* to bring his plan to naught."[33] [Italics mine]

As in the previously cited quotes from Job, where Satan receives authorization from God to destroy Job's well-being (I, 11-12) and the *Zohar* (III, 19a), where God empowers Lilith descend to earth and tempt another would-be hero after she has finished seducing a previous one, God allows the otherworldly couple to work their will on His creatures. In this story, God could have protected Della Reyna if He chose to do so; narratively, He does not.

As for Lilith, her character reflects her task in the structure of the folktale.[34] She is an archetype resembling the conjoined characters of Virtue and Vice in a medieval morality play. Here, she must determine whether Della Reyna's high degree of religious faith is commensurate with his code of sexual conduct. Lilith is the barometer which God utilizes to determine the sincerity of intention, the *kavanah*.[35] Now she must ascertain that Della Reyna can withstand the one temptation

[31] The *Zohar* remarks that Lilith will die on Judgment Day (55a), a fact which illustrates her desperation in the narrative, (assuming that this idea was tacitly understood by the story-tellers and their audiences).

[32] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore,*212.

[33] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore,* 213.

[34] The structural analysis of folktales and the "tasks" of the characters are detailed in the writings of Tzvetan Todorov and of course, in the father of Structural Anthropology, Claude Levi Strauss, in his *Mythologies*.

[35] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *The Faith of Maimonides* (Tel Aviv: Naidat Press, 1989), 74: Maimonides defined *kavanah* as being paramount "whether or not Man understands God's plan." However, his arch-critic, (and arch-mystic) Hasdai Crescas believed that *kavanah* was secondary to Divine determinism. The Lilith stories, while quoting neither Crescas nor Maimonides, strike a balance between the two: God has a plan, but is willing to negotiate with Lilith and Satan so as to better determine the intentions of His creation.

that has not yet stood in his way: Lilith herself. She embodies the castigating intent of the Almighty, and human free will is invariably weaker than she is.

Lilith and Satan are allowed by God to lead Della Reyna astray, so that they may verify whether he is truly as righteous as he purports to be.[36] In the meantime, Della Reyna already enjoys the support of Lilith's angelic foes in heaven, such as the arch-angel Metatron: "He [Metatron] warned him [Della Reyna] especially to guard himself against the weakness of pity towards evil after he had made captive Satan and Lilith."[37] Della Reyna even receives Metatron's gift, a plate inscribed with the Hebrew *Tetragrammaton,* the Name of God, composed of 72 letters. This is the trigger that makes Lilith spring into action, since the *Tetragrammaton* was thought to have such force that merely pronouncing it would summon the Messiah. Kabbalistic thought adds a caveat: the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton must never be attempted by one whose intention, whose *kavanah*, was questionable. Lilith's "professional duty" was to verify Della Reyna's *kavanah,* and his worthiness to pronounce the Name.

Contrary to our expectations, and to previous literary representations of her, the Lilith of this story does not employ sex in a conventional sense. She is, after all, a good wife, faithful to Satan. Instead, she tries a subterfuge. Rather than awakening the rabbi's venal instincts, she persuades her demon husband to play upon Della Reyna's sense of compassion. To that end, she stages a dramatic scene in which she and Satan are ostensibly starving to death. Humbly, the couple begs a few crumbs from Della Reyna. "All this time Satan and Lilith were moaning in heartbreaking voices, 'Help us! Give us something to eat! We're dying of hunger.'"[38]

Della Reyna initially resists the underworld pair. He recognizes their true nature when they appear in the guise of two black dogs, and he promptly binds them with magical amulets. But as opposed to the amulets whose power Lilith has granted to human mothers, Della Reyna's *kmeyot* prove ineffective. She may show sympathy to other females by revealing how to ward off her own destruction, but no similar mercy will be shown to Della Reyna, who is blasphemously attempting to force the Almighty's schedule for Redemption.

While enchained by the amulets, Lilith reverts to her human form, but with "wings and fiery eyes."[39] A recognizable, (if witch-like) woman, she exudes sexuality even while not being overtly sexual with Della Reyna. But instead of seducing the rabbi, she requests fragrant spices from him for herself and Satan. Although the rabbi had denied Lilith food and drink, surely he could not be so cruel as to deny

[36] In the *Book of Job* Satan entreats God to send Job hardship for the same reason: to test his righteousness.

[37] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 214.

[38] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore,* 215.

[39] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 214

her a mere fragrance. Her reasoning is accurate, and she beseeches him: "'At least give us a smell of your spices or we perish.'"[40]

The sound of Lilith's human-like female voice is too much for Josef Della Reyna.[41] He succumbs and offers her and Satan the chance to inhale some herbs.[42] Redemption is lost at this moment. As foreseen, all Hell breaks loose, quite literally: "Immediately, tongues of searing flames shot forth from their nostrils. . .Then the voice of the Almighty sounded, 'Pay heed, o Joseph Della Reyna! No human has the power to end the Exile! I alone, God, will hasten the Redemption of the Jewish people when the right time comes.'"[43]

The rabbi is disgraced before God and shamed by Lilith, thereby constituting an admonition for all who heard the story. Morally, Della Reyna falters in his ability to choose between the Good Instinct and the Evil Instinct, the latter embodied by Lilith. By showing mercy to the she-demon, he reneges on his promise to God, whom Lilith serves. And because Judaism teaches that the adult individual is responsible for his or her actions, Lilith cannot be accused of corrupting Della Reyna. She merely exposes his unpreparedness for the objective that he has chosen, like a crystal that reflects clouded human motives. In the same way that Satan "tested" Job's righteousness in the Old Testament, Lilith tested the moral stature of God's (male) creation in Jewish folklore. If Creation failed, it was hardly Lilith's, or Satan's, fault.

Lilith's representation of Evil, linked to male inability to resist her, gave the worshipper an object towards which he or she could direct or deflect his anger at God for delaying the Messiah. "Lilith as deflector" sidestepped the question that monotheism downplays: if there is only one God, and God's ways are just, why does He allow evil to exist in the world? Is the Divine gift of free choice always a satisfactory answer for so much human suffering, when God must know beforehand that evil people will obviously not choose Good?[44]

---

[40] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 215.

[41] The equation of female voice and diabolical temptation was particularly common during the Early Modern Period in both England and Spain; Butler notes that "female musicians were frequently accused of inciting lust, and compared with courtesans and the Homeric sirens in their threat to male self-control." Katherine Butler, "By Instruments her Powers Appear: Music and Authority in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 357. Historically, Talmudic Judaism denied women the right to chant from the *Torah* in male company on the same grounds.

[42] The inhalation of spices is a recognizable reference for the Jewish audience: it refers to the *Havdalah* ceremony which closes the Sabbath on Saturday night. Spices are used to wish the worshippers a good and sweet week. By inhaling the spices, Lilith acts as an "anti-Shekhinah" and burlesques the Sabbath, the day when she has no power.

[43] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 215.

[44] The English poet Archibald MacLeish summed up this dilemma in his play about Job's sufferings, where we read: "If God is God He is not good; If God is Good He is not God. . .. . ."

Whatever the answer, Lilith's omniscient "boss," God Almighty, demands obedience, and she enacts the Creator's terrible will. In this manner, Lilith redirects (and deflects towards herself) the worshipper's unease with some of God's dictates. Philosophically, she occupies the role of the excoriated middle woman between the Creator and His creation. Rather than confronting the manager, it was, and is, far easier to complain about His appointees. In a world in which God's immanence was taken to be present in all things, Lilith could receive all the unease and despair of the worshipper, while God's motives remained unquestioned.

The She-Demon Forsaken: Lilith in "The Father's Testament"

"She [Lilith] retorted, 'We are both equal, for we are both issued from dust. . .therefore I will not be submissive to you. . .they [the three angels] ordered her to return at once to Adam, but she refused."[45]

As we have seen, insubordination to male commands meant that Lilith would never mother a child with a human husband. Yet there were hints of another possibility, as noted previously in this essay. In the role of another she-demon named Na'amah, Lilith could have semi-human children, though this aspect of her personality had not surfaced much in the Lilith folklore, because it was perhaps too horrifying to contemplate.[46] But in the folklore of the Expulsion, there is a notable exception to this tendency. It can be found in Matilda Koen Serrano's bilingual (Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish) collection of Sephardic legends, *Lejendas*. Although Lilith does, in "The Father's Testament," give birth to and care for a half-human baby, that story, like all the others, carries with it the warning against choosing the iniquity that Lilith exemplifies. The price of her child's humanity, his "better half" so to speak, will be Lilith's self-denial as a maternal figure. The impossibility of seeing Lilith as a fully normal maternal figure may be what impels the narrative to show Lilith handing the child over to his human family, while she returns to her Other World. Evil herself, she chooses Good.

Tamara Alexander, of Ben-Gurion University's Department of Hebrew Literature and Folklore, asserts that the framework story is of medieval Sephardic origin, predating the Expulsion. If that is so, then in this case, an older trope was adapted to the more chaotic circumstances of the Early Modern Period, during

---

Lilith occupies that middle ground between God and the Goodness whose Purpose is far from clear to human beings; she avoids us thinking too deeply about why it is that God created Evil.

[45] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 592-4.

[46] Popular tradition in "Spanish Sahara" Jewish communities in Melilla and Ceuta speaks of red hair, left-handedness, and green eyes as constituting characteristics of some of Lilith's half-demon descendants. Green eyes are also frequently attributed to Samael, so perhaps he too has infiltrated the human race.

what Ausubel correctly called Sephardic Judaism's superstitious "Dark Ages."[47] In 1949, the Israeli Institute for Folklore and Ethnology published, in Hebrew, "*Ma'aseh shel Yerushalmi*" (The Deeds of a Jerusalemite), a very popular folktale in the Jerusalem Sephardic community, and the one which is the basis for Koen-Serrano's version. It combines the witchcraft that Ausubel cites from the Jewish early modern period, with the medieval warning that "going to sea" will bring ruin.[48] The latter would have been a common admonition in stories from the Middle Ages, when sea-travel was more limited than during the Age of Exploration (also the Period of Expulsion).

Italian Jewish playwright Judah Leone Ben Isaac Sommo's sixteenth-century farce, *Zahut Bedihutah de Kidushin* ("Identifying the Mockery of Marriage"), may have provided an additional framework for the oral story which was first transcribed in 1949 (and was later transcribed by M. Koen Serrano in 1999). In Sommo's Hebrew theater piece, a son disobeys his dying father and goes to sea, as will occur again in our story. His disobedience leads to multiple romantic complications; but all is happily resolved, and Lilith is nowhere present in Sommo's text.

However, as is clear from the origins of the story of Della Reyna and Lilith, it was not unusual for oral tradition to borrow what it wanted from literature, and vice-versa. Sephardic Jews who settled in the Italian city-states following the Expulsion could easily have inserted a popular motif from Sommo's Renaissance play within a matrix of an older story, which was itself adapted to post-Exile uncertainty and fears.

In "The Father's Testament," Lilith assumes multiple guises. She is the daughter of Ashmeday, himself traditionally a demon of chaos but here a loving Other World patriarch. She is the mother of an *almost* human child, and finally, she is the faithful and ultimately betrayed wife of a volatile mortal. That last role is a possible variant of the *Zohar* and *Ben Sirah*'s archetype of Lilith as the divorced and expelled wife of Adam. Not so coincidentally, the term for divorce in Hebrew, *girushin*, shares its three root letters gimmel-resh-shin[49] with the term for Expulsion, *gerush*, as in the Expulsion from Spain: *Gerush Sefarad*. Lilith, "*ha-gerusha*" (the divorced woman) also signifies "the exiled woman," key terms that conflate their definitions in the she-demon narrative.

[47] Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 176.

[48] The *Ruby Serpent*, a Middle Eastern Jewish tale of the medieval period, also contains the father's command to the son to never embark on a ship, and there as well, the son violates his father's wishes, although to good effect: shipwrecked after a storm, the magical serpent leads him to his lady-love, none other than King Solomon's daughter. In both stories however, the sea is equated with the pathway to romance, sometimes doomed and sometimes felicitous. In our story the shipwreck leads to the demons' world; in the *Ruby Serpent*, to royalty and a happy end. The story is recounted in: Frankel, *The Jewish Spirit*, 114.

[49] Alcalay, *A Complete Hebrew English Dictionary*, 388-389.

As the impossible supernatural wife, Lilith shares her fate with many figures of folklore. She is a paradigm scattered throughout cultures the world over, a sort of Jungian archetype of the unconscious.[50] French medieval literature told of Melusine, the serpent woman forced to flee her knightly lover once he uncovered her reptilian nature; Mayan traditions from post-Conquest Yucatan told of the doomed union between the mortal man and the seductive Xtabay, enchantress of the crossroads who lures suitors into a forgetful sleep or eternal death.[51] At a much later date, in nineteenth-century Danish literature, Hans Christian Anderson reutilized the theme of an impossible human/supernatural union to great effect in "The Little Mermaid." Throughout these tales, the commonality shared by the human male/supernatural woman pairings is sterility. Neither Melusine, nor the Xtabay, nor the Little Mermaid bears a child.[52] In these unions, there can be no biological continuity. These female "monster" stories instantiate, *a priori*, Roland Barthes's principle of the "chimerical body" as he elaborated upon it in *S/Z*: a merging of incompatible entities, deemed "monstrous" by society because it produces no offspring. [53]

Unexpectedly in this Sephardic story from Jerusalem's *Old Yishuv* community, Lilith breaches the boundaries of Barthes's "monstrous" and crosses into it, where humans and demons embrace. [54] She gives birth to a "blended" child, albeit one she will ultimately pass over to the human side. By virtue of her temporary motherhood with her second human husband (Adam having been the first); Lilith tenuously unifies our world and the *Sitra Ahra*. In the act of delivering her half-human child to the fully human side, where he becomes a learned man and raises a family, Lilith manages to inject some of the alien Other Realm into our own. By entreating them (the humans) to treat her child well, Lilith merges human and Other bloodlines: "I want you to take my child. Find him someone to marry, and give him all good things."[55]

---

[50] Sigmund Hurwitz to a greater degree, and Scholem to a lesser one, stress the role of Lilith in the (Freudian) Jewish subconscious, related to primal fears of castration and death.

[51] Antonio Mediz Bolio's 1944 version of the Xtabay in *La tierra del faisan y del venado* [*Land of the Pheasant and the Deer*] (Mexico: Botas Publicaciones) is the definitive transcribed version of this Mayan femme fatale.

[52] The Xtabay theme contains a merciful variation; Mayan folklore also portrays her as the protectress of orphans.

[53] Barthes (1974), in *S/Z* analyzed the "impossible" body of the transvestite male, in the personage of the courtesan S/Zambinella. His use of the term "monstrous" referred to society's vision of any union outside the heterosexual norm; it did not refer to any supernatural horror or mock any physical defect.

[54] The term *Old Yishuv,* "old settlement," refers to the Sephardic Jews who lived in Jerusalem prior to the founding of the State of Israel, and who identified more with Judeo-Spanish culture than with New *Yishuv* Hebrew culture.

[55] Koen-Serrano, *Legendas: Kuentos Morales de la Tradicion Judeo-Espanyola*, (Jerusalem: Nur Akafot Publishers, 1999), 245.

Adequately enough for all things connected to Lilith, the *Father's Testament* commences with a transgression. A young man on the coast of the Holy Land defies a vow made to his father never to cross the sea; he embarks on a voyage and is shipwrecked in that Kabbalistic predecessor of the Antipodes, the *Sitra Ahra*. Contrary to Counter-Reformation depictions of Hell, (or the Antipodes), the demonic denizens of the *Sitra Ahra* are described in this story as adhering to a code of honor. They even guarantee an education to their children in accordance with Jewish religious precepts: "Ashmeday said: 'I have a child. I want this human being to teach him a bit of Torah. Then we will see what happens.'" (ibid, 239) Thanks to the demon's good faith, the wayward human is employed in the *Sitra Ahra* as a tutor for Ashmeday's son.

Tragically it is Lilith, here called euphemistically "Ashmeday's daughter," who becomes the object of the shipwrecked man's desire. She in turn reciprocates eagerly, as though she has been impatiently waiting. There is more than a hint of desperation in her plea: "Look my love; I am a she-demon, but I know the ways of a woman, I can give birth to a child, I can do anything." (ibid, 241) In the narrative, the "chimerical body," to borrow Barthes's phrase, is breached, but at terrible cost to Lilith, whose intentions are more sincere than her lover's.

Ashmeday's daughter, the Lilith prototype who like her human husband remains unnamed throughout the tale, is quite anxious to have a human child. Notwithstanding her father's protestations that human men are never to be trusted, Lilith marries the alien newcomer, though she knows that he is already married to a human bride. Eventually, Lilith bears him a child named Solomon. (Since King Solomon is believed to have had power over the demons in Jewish folklore through the use of a magical ring, the name can hardly be arbitrary).

Blinded by love, Lilith allows her husband a journey to his human world in order to assuage his profound homesickness. Selflessly, she releases her Adam temporarily back to his former Eve: "I will let you go to your human wife for a year. Go and see her, and then come back to me."[56] Needless to add, once he escapes the demons' world, the fellow decides to remain with his first "Eve," and Lilith is abandoned in the *Sitra Ahra*.

Heart-broken at being spurned, Lilith goes in search of her mortal spouse. She takes young Solomon in tow and ascends from the Deep Sea Other Realm to our human sphere. With the aid of some upstanding demons who are disgusted by human infidelity, Lilith discovers her perfidious lover. For the crimes to be properly judged—the man's adultery on one hand, and Lilith's revenge on the other—public testimony of the man's deceitfulness within the Jewish community, the *kehilah,* must be presented. Lilith complies with the legal conditions: "The she-demon

[56] Koen Serrano, *Legendas*, 241.

came; she came into his house, and said to him, 'I want all the people of the town to come forth. I want to speak with them. I want to tell them everything.'"[57]

Now well reestablished in the human world, the man wishes to rid himself, quickly, of the embarrassing she-demon through a generous alimony: "I will hand you back our wedding certificate. You know that I am rich. My father has left me a fortune, amassed during his life. . .I'll give you the money, and you must go."[58] Shaken, Lilith realizes that her hope of a human family has been dashed. It seems that despite the *Zohar*'s descriptions of Lilith as the beautiful harlot (*Zohar* 1:14b), in this story, she is offended at being treated as such.

Appearing to accept the deal, Lilith asks her husband one boon only: a final farewell kiss. The man yields to his demon-wife one last time, and the narrative turns on a fatal mix of sex and death. Lilith drowns or suffocates him in the kiss, whereupon the bigamous lover drops down dead.[59] "And while he was kissing her, she turned and drowned/strangled[60] him and left him there dead."

Her revenge is concluded. Lilith does not extract any collective punishment from her ex-husband's kin. On the contrary, she bequeaths her child to them, and then sadly returns to the *Sitra Ahra.* Within the logic of the narrative, her "crime of passion," that last deadly kiss, is entirely understandable, if not indirectly justified. The most sympathetic characters in this tale are the demons, and so it is logical that the villagers agree to raise the half-demon child.

As previously stated, with the exception of Ashmeday and the boy Solomon, neither of the romantic protagonists is named, but it seems self-evident that Ashmeday's daughter is Lilith. [61] Who else could it be? Who else dwells in the "Other Realm" and has a tendency to seduce, and be seduced by, mortal men? It is probable that the Lilith legend was so well known by the post-Expulsion period that names were superfluous, because the archetypes were recognizable. This anonymity may itself be a nod to Lilith's insinuated role in *Genesis*, as reread through

[57] Koen-Serrano, *Legendas*, 245.

[58] Koen-Serrano, *Legendas*, 245.

[59] By the 14th century polygamy had ended among Sephardic Jews; while it existed on a very limited scale in some of the Jewish communities of Yemen, the lover in this Sephardic story is definitely viewed as a false bigamist.

[60] Koen-Serrano, *Legendas,* 245. The word in Judeo-Espanyol used by Koen-Serrano is "aogo" which in Spanish would be "ahogo" (the 'h' always being silent), meaning "drowned." However, as no one is under water at this point, it would be logical to assume that strangulation is implied, and this is indeed given as the term in the Hebrew translation, "khankah."

[61] That the two named protagonists are Solomon and Ashmeday cannot be coincidence. Judeo-Spanish folklore tells of Ashmeday the demon granting a boon to King Solomon: a magical worm that can bore through stone, and helps Solomon build the Temple in Jerusalem. The story can be seen to insinuate an "otherworldly" origin to King Solomon, and the impact of these two names would not have been lost on Sephardic Jews of the 16th-17th centuries.

the lens of the *Zohar*: Lilith is that first "unnamed" woman created with Adam on the sixth day of Creation.

Nonetheless, since the demon Ashmeday is explicitly "named" in his paternal function, and Ashmeday is often Lilith's husband/lover, it is equally possible that the she-demon in the story may in fact be Lilith's *daughter*. Throughout the *Targum Jonathan*, an Aramaic commentary and translation of the Bible from the third century, Ashmeday is interchangeable with Satan/Samael, Lilith's Other World consort. Following this line of reasoning, Lilith would be the unnamed and unmentioned wife of Ashmeday. By default, this would make Lilith the implied *mother* of the unhappy female protagonist.

In that case, Lilith's incapacity to raise a human family is generationally transmitted. Demonic sterility is a hereditary disease. Ominously, not only Lilith was condemned to never raise a fully human child. Even her demon-daughter was consigned to the same unjust fate. In the framework of this supernatural tragedy, the figures of Lilith (and her daughter) prove how unworthy human beings are to enter the Messianic Age. Not only do men submit to Lilith's and her daughter's sexual charms, but afterwards, those same men refuse to fully assume the consequences of their actions. Human beings were proven to be sexually and emotionally abusive, untrustworthy, and false. Put simply, they did not yet deserve the Messiah. In accordance with the teleology that dominated the monotheistic vision of history, humanity in general, and the Jews in particular, must be "tested" many more centuries until they were worthy of redemption. Until then, the Jews, and the rest of humanity, must suffer and wait.

Lilith in the post-Enlightenment imagination

Lilith is conspicuously absent from the flowering of Sephardic literature of the eighteenth century, a renaissance begun by Istanbul's Rabbi Culli's publication of *Meam Loez* in 1730. Her invisibility on the written Enlightenment-era page is not surprising, since Lilith is not part of the acceptable canon in Jewish tradition. The *Meam Loez* is a biblical commentary which, in the tradition of Samuel Usque's earlier biblical commentary, adheres to text. It is not concerned with the mystical (or imaginary) spaces between the letters, as is the Kabbalah.[62]

On the other hand, the increasing incorporation of Jews into all spheres of social and political life in Europe and the Mediterranean meant that Lilith began to grace non-Jewish texts. Robert Browning published his poem *Adam, Lilith and Eve* in 1883, demonstrating a firm grasp of Lilith's *Zohar*-based story; in Browning's

[62] The allusion here is to the 12th century Spanish Jewish mystic Jose Chicotilla, famous for having referred to the Torah as "black fire" (the letters) on "white fire" (the parchment). Cabalistic mystics, obviously, preferred the white fire, as it was only there that they could dare to insert, or perceive, the Lilith legend in Genesis' account.

famous phrase, "the Paradise-door proved locked" for Lilith. Her first major apparition of the twentieth century was in the Armenian poet Avetic Isahakyan's poem *Lilith* in 1921. Written while Isakyahan was in Italy, the poem reflects the typical femme fatale of Romantic poetry, made more threatening thanks to her God-given talents, and the God-given backing she enjoys for all her exploits.

In the mid- and late-twentieth century, textual study of Lilith had begun to shift from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe. Fascination with Lilith's eroticism spilled over from the popular to the academic world, in a reverse motion from what had characterized the extension of the Lilith figure, from hermetic texts to folklore, during the early modern period. German Jewish scholars Gershom Scholem and, later, Sigmund Hurwitz devoted sizable portions of their analysis of the Kabbalah to the Lilith figure. Hurwitz focused on the more cannibalistic aspects of the child-eating anti-maternal figure. (Hurwitz, 221-224), while Scholem's work presents Lilith as the Dark Mother. She is the underside of God's maternal presence, the *Shekhinah*.

The *Shekhinah* or "presence" in Hebrew is a feminized version of the three-letter Hebrew root shin-kaf-nun, "shakhen," to be present, to be immanent in the world. The *Shekhinah* was the feminine aspect of God, but, like Lilith, never independent of God Himself. She is the divine maternal emanation. As with her counterpart Lilith, the *Shekhinah* had found her way into Sephardic tradition via the Babylonian Talmud. (*Mishnah Bereshit*: 7: a and 17: a) According to the vision of the Sephardic mystics who settled in Tzfat post-1492, the *Shekhinah* descended to the sphere of human beings, the Bnei *Adam*, once every seventh day on the eve of the Jewish day of rest, the *Shabbat*. Like Lilith, she too goes into Exile, although the *Shekhinah* chooses the exile of her own free will, whereas Lilith is spurned.[63]

Salomon Alfasi enshrined the *Shekhinah* in his sixteenth-century Sabbath acrostic prayer, *Licha Dodi*. In it, Alfasi calls the *Shekhinah* by the term "my beloved" (*dodi*) a term interchangeable in early modern Hebrew with "bride." He then describes how he (the male worshipper) and she (the *Shekhinah*) will be husband and wife on the Sabbath. *Licha Dodi / Likrat Calah / Pnei Shabbat / Nikablah,* the poem's refrain, translates as "Come, my beloved / you will be as the wedding's bride / and together we shall receive the Sabbath Day." This is the Jewish alchemical divine wedding.

According to Sephardic folklore, Lilith, Queen of the Other Realm, was immobilized on the Sabbath Day by the *Shekhinah*, the Sabbath Queen. On Shabbat, the anti-mother was overcome by the supreme motherly aspect of the Almighty. Lilith, therefore, represented the days without redemption, the exile without end

[63] A Midrashic tale, from *Lamentations Raba* 1:6, states that the Shekhinah followed the children of Israel into Exile following the Babylonian invasion of Judah, and specifically after Nebuchadnezzar kidnapped the Israelite children.

during the week, whereas the *Shekhinah*, Lilith's antithesis, offered a glimpse of the Messianic Age.

In Jewish thought, the *Shekhinah*, who is an emanation of the divine, remains impersonalized, since personalizing the divine would be tantamount to idolatry. Lilith, on the other hand, is profane and highly personal. We, the "folk," live with her six days a week. We know her "lore" and spend more time with her than we do with the *Shekhinah*. Once we begin to understand the pain of her symbolic exile from Eden through the example of the Expulsions from Sefarad, we can begin to pity Lilith's unenviable fate. In the modern literary sense, we can do something unimaginable in the religious sense: we can "identify" with Lilith.

Conclusion

Literarily speaking, Lilith is an unfinished trope. Despite her longing to become the mother of the human race, God has consigned her to the Other Sphere. From that unhappy vantage point, Lilith uncovers the failings of all men, from the most vile to the most righteous. Ethically, this is the reason that the Other Sphere is always impinging on our human existence: we must define ourselves against it, in order to do good. Lilith thus represented the Expulsion, not only from Sefarad, but from Paradise. She is the negative model, the one that we must shy away from. And she must be there, or else free will, the most important condition that God has given to man, is meaningless.

Lilith is placed (by God) in our world in the same manner that the serpent is placed (by God) in Eden. Jewish tradition does not see a diabolical presence in the serpent. God ordained the snake to tempt Eve, who in turn tempted Adam. Adam and Eve had the power to refuse, but they succumbed, and their punishment was expulsion. Decontextualized, the Eden story provided an axiological justification for human wanderings and pain. Lilith's stories explained why this suffering continued.

Judaism does not believe in evil or good beyond the sphere of God's intent. Therefore, the Expulsion could not be attributed to Satan's or Lilith's own volition. Somehow, reasoned the mystics, these disasters must conceal a divine intent. That intent would be redemption. Consequently Lilith became, willy-nilly, a collaborator in the divine plan. Designated by God as the eternal temptress, she, like Satan in the Book of Job, would define Man's worthiness for the Day of Judgment and the Messianic Age.

Lilith is Eve's antithesis for all eternity. Still, far from being a Kabbalistic suffragette, the messy, fascinating, and complex Lilith construction illustrates an anti-behavioral code for the Jewish woman of the late medieval Sephardic world. Her character does not champion women. On the contrary, it exemplifies patriarchal thought. Through Lilith we learn that a strong woman is unmarriageable (at least for *human* males) and that she impedes Redemption as well. Samael is no substitute

for a human bridegroom, because there could be no (human) Jewish community, practically speaking, in the *Sitra Ahra*.

Lilith thus becomes the shadow example. She is what we must avoid so as not to prolong the hell of expulsion. Otherwise, we risk being expelled forever from Eden, Sefarad, or wherever, just as Lilith was expelled from Eden. In this way, Lilith supplied an alibi for the existence of torments that she herself had not caused. This is the axiological point at which Lilith diverges radically from Christianized conceptions of evil. Unlike the New Testament devil, she remains firmly within the divine plan. Her malice is directed toward Adam, and Adam's annoying descendants. In contrast, Lilith remains unquestionably a loyal servant of God.

Bibliography

Aberbach, David. *Turning Points in Jewish Intellectual History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

Alcalay, Reuben. *The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary*. Ramat Gan: Masada Publishing House, 1981.

Ausubel, Nathan. *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folksongs of the Jewish People*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1975.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1974.

Briggs, Katherine. *An Encyclopedia of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures*. NY: Pantheon Books, 1976.

Butler, Katherine. "By Instruments Her Powers Appear: Music and Authority in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 65 (2012): 353-384.

Des Autels, Peggy and Walker, Margaret, Eds. *Moral Psychology, Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

Frankel, Ellen. *The Jewish Spirit: A Celebration in Stories and Art*. New York: Stewart, Tabor and Chang, 1997.

Frazer, Sir James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. 1922. Reprint, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Frymer-Kensky, Tivka. *Reading Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*. New York: Schocken Books, 2002.

Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

Ginzberg, Louis. *Legends of the Jews: Bible Times and Characters*. Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007.

Hurwitz, Siegmund. *Lilith, the First Eve. Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine*. Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1999.

Koen-Serrano, Matilda. *Legendas: Kuentos Morales de la Tradicion Judeo-Espanyola*. ("Legends: Moral Tales of the Judeo-Spanish Tradition") Jerusalem: Nur Akafot Publishers, 1999.

Leibowitz, Yeshayahu. *The Faith of Maimonides*. Tel Aviv: Naidat Press, 1989.

Maler, Bertil. *A Biblia na Consolacam de Samuel Usque* (1553). Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell International, 1974.

Patterson, David. *Greatest Jewish Stories*: *Biblical, Talmudic, Midrashic, Kabbalistic, Folk, Hasidic, Modern*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 2001.

Pritzker, Margot. *The Zohar, Complete Edition*. Stanford University Press, 2009.

Scholem, Gershom.

———. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism: Mysticism and Kabbalah.* 1966. Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1996.

———. "Le-Ma'aseh Yosef Della Reyna" in *Zion*, 5, (1933): 124-130.

———, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961.

Schrire, T. *Hebrew Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966.

Stern, David H. Translator. *The Jewish Bible*. Netherlands: Importantia Publications, 2006.

Zlotnick, Y.L. Publishers, Eds.: *Ma'ase shel Yerushalmi*. Jerusalem: HaMakhon HaEretz-Yisraeli L'Folklore V' Etnologia, 1949.

Zlotowitz, Schorr, Malinowitz, Dicker, and Kasnett, Eds. *Schottenstein English Edition Talmud Bavli*. New York: Art Scroll/Mesurah Publishers, 2005.

Sex and the Satyr in the Pastoral Tradition: Isabella Andreini's *La Mirtilla* as Pro-Feminist Erotica

Rosalind Kerr,
University of Alberta

Isabella Andreini's pastoral, *La Mirtilla*, published in 1588 when she was twenty-six and already a famous prima donna, enjoyed a long and successful print run.[1] Touted as the first pastoral written by a woman, it impressed theatre scholar Angelo Ingegneri who mentioned *La Mirtilla* in his *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* along with other notable examples he felt had contributed to the flowering of this captivating third dramatic genre as it progressed from Tasso's sublime *Aminta* (1573) towards Guarini's exemplary *Il Pastor Fido* (1590).[2] Scholars have taken a new interest in it, and both a modern Italian edition by Maria Luisa Doglio (1995) and an English translation by Julie D. Campbell (2002) have brought it back into focus as an example of a female treatment of the genre. Doglio's praise for Andreini's acute depiction of an autonomous feminine intellect fully cognizant of the Tassian theme of the suffering that passionate love

[1] *La Mirtilla*, (Verona: Discepolo, 1588, 1599); (Ferrara: Baldini, and Venice: Bonibello 1590); (Bergamo: Comin Ventura, 1594); (Venice: Bonibello, 1598); Verona: Delle Donne e Varignano, 1599); (Venice: Spineda, 1602); (Milan: Bordone e Locarni, 1605); (Venice: Imberti, 1616). Also translated into French as *Myrtille bergerie* (Paris, 1602).

[2] Angelo Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche*, in *Lo spettacolo dall'Umanesimo al Manierismo*, ed. Ferruccio Marotti (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), 272.

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: *Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery,* ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 83–98.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484 /M.ASMAR-EB.5.111057

brings[3] is echoed by Campbell's observation that she provides "an element long missing from the traditional canonical studies of this subgenre of drama: the voice of the Renaissance female dramatist writing in response to the texts of her male contemporaries."[4] This chapter will address these claims by looking at the ways in which Andreini's imitation of Tasso's *Aminta* with intertextual references to other classical and contemporary male models can be read as a pro-feminist intervention that engages directly with the sexual politics of the genre to express a female perspective that embraces a frank eroticism. I am using the term pro-feminism to avoid historical inaccuracy, but I argue for the strength of Andreini's expression of support for her gender and their sexual identities.[5]

Recent studies, notably Lisa Sampson's *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy* (2006) and Virginia Cox's *The Prodigious Muse* (2011) have greatly enriched our knowledge of the contributions made by other women writers to the pastoral genre and put in question whether or not Andreini's *La Mirtilla* was the first to be published.[6] But if Andreini was not alone, or perhaps even the first woman to write a pastoral, she still stands out as the first and only female performer to do so.[7] I argue that being a professional actress and a scholar gave her special skills with which to

[3] Maria Luisa Doglio, introduction to *La Mirtilla,* by Isabella Andreini (Lucca: Fazzi, 1995), 9.

[4] Julie D. Campbell, introduction to *La Mirtilla*, by Isabella Andreini (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2002), xvii.

[5] Pro-feminism is a term used to indicate a support for feminism (i.e., a belief in gender equality and the need to address issues of violence against women) without the implication that the supporter is a member of a feminist movement. Andreini represented herself as being able to move between male and female subject positions, rather than speaking only from a female sexual identity and can better be labeled pro- rather than proto-feminist for this reason. Virginia Cox also chooses to use the term pro-feminist to apply to Andreini's rewriting of the nymph-satyr relationship. See *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 112.

[6] Virginia Cox, who names Maddalena Campiglia's *Flori* as having been published in the same year as *La Mirtilla*, provides a list of the seven surviving pastoral plays by women that appeared in the 1580s and early 1590s. Of the seven, Barbara Torelli's *Partenia*, written in 1586, survived only in manuscript. After Andreini's and Campiglia's, there are two from the 1590s: one anonymous, located in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, and the other, Valeria Miani's *Amorosa speranza,* written in 1598 and published in 1604. The anonymous *Tragicomedia pastorale* in the Marciana has been possibly identified as having been written by Leonora Bernardi, a gentlewoman from Lucca. The final two works, Isabetta Coreglia's *Dori* and *Erindo il fido* (1650), fall into a later time period. See *The Prodigious Muse*, 92–93. For additional examples, including ones that are lost, see Lisa Sampson, *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy*: *The Making of a New Genre* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006), 103.

[7] Sampson concedes that *La Mirtilla* stands as "first and only known one [pastoral drama] by a female actor"; see *Pastoral Drama,* 119.

respond to this male-dominated theatrical genre.[8] While it is important to note how other female writers address similar gender issues for points of comparison, my main focus will be on how Andreini's *La Mirtilla* operates as a direct response to *Aminta* with reference to her authorial voice as playwright, her presence as the nymph-poet Filli, and her dramaturgical choices for staging scenes for maximum performative effects that disrupt the traditional model requiring female submission to male desire. My brief introduction to the establishment of the satyr's role in the pastoral tradition will set up the conventions that Andreini will contest in *Aminta*.

It is important to establish where Tasso's *Aminta* fits into the pastoral tradition in order to understand the ways in which Andreini challenges its central plot device, the pursuit of a nymph by some combination of a shepherd, satyr, or god intent on depriving her of her chastity, as Meredith Ray notes in "La Castità Conquistata: The Function of the Satyr in Pastoral Drama."[9] Ray revisits the central role played by the satyr when the genre first re-emerged in the early cinquecento showing how his presence represented an extreme of sexual aggression that had to be tempered to ensure the ultimate happy union of the lovelorn nymphs and shepherds wandering in Arcadia. Noting an apparent lack of attention among scholars of the pastoral to the question of the misogyny and problematic attitudes towards women in the continuing, even if less central, appearance of the lustful satyr figure, she traces his representation in Giraldi's *Egle* (1545), Beccari's *Il sacrificio* (1554), Tasso's *Aminta* (1573), and Guarini's *Il pastor fido* (1590) in order to foreground Andreini's contrasting treatment in *La Mirtilla*.[10] If the notion of female chastity as a cultural and social ideal had become entrenched in Renaissance thought, it also provided the fuel for the expressions of male rage against the barriers it allowed females to

[8] It is well known that the professional actresses brought a new sophistication to the *commedia dell'arte* stage by performing the *innamorata* roles requiring them to comport themselves like court ladies and speak in elevated Petrarchan conceits. It is also likely that they came to be associated in court society with the performance of the nymphs' roles. A member of the first generation of great actresses, Vincenza Armani became famous in court circles for her great eloquence in portraying both male and female roles and was credited by Adriano Valerini in her funeral oration (1569) as having been the first to introduce improvised pastoral performances to the stage. It has also been suggested that Andreini's famous actress rival, Vittoria Piissimi, may also have written a pastoral entitled *Fillide,* but this has been disputed. See Sampson, *Pastoral Drama,* 119n81.

[9] Meredith Kennedy Ray, "La Castità Conquistata: The Function of the Satyr in Pastoral Drama," *Romance Languages Annual* 9 (1998): 312–21. I will be commenting on some of her main arguments in the following paragraphs.

[10] Ray notes that only Jane Tylus's treatment of the chaste nymph's submission to the shepherd in order to escape being raped by the satyr (using the early pastoral *Grotolo* as an example) directly addresses the sexual politics at work in symbolically bringing the independent woodland worshipper of Diana under control of the new patriarchal household. See "Colonizing Peasants: the Rape of the Sabines and Renaissance Pastoral," *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 23 (1992): 113–38.

put up against sexual violation. The pastoral genre brought into focus the conflicted societal attitudes towards female independence codified in the nymphs' worship of Diana, the goddess of chastity. Ray posits that the pastoral provided a way to reflect on societal anxieties over issues of female sexual and social autonomy through the "structural mechanism of the satyr, whose endurance in pastoral drama as a symbol of sexual and misogynist threat is facilitated by his comic efficacy."[11]

While Giraldi's *Egle* revived the satyr play for the early modern Ferrarese court, Beccari's *Il sacrificio* is usually considered to be the first real model in the pastoral drama tradition with its intermingling of a solitary satyr and a group of shepherds and nymphs. Because it provides a source for both Tasso's and Andreini's very different treatment of the satyr, it is valuable to outline what happens in some detail. Although there is only one satyr present, he is a vital plot device, as Beccari remarks in his argument, explaining that his intervention is necessary to solve the tangled love relationships of the shepherds and nymphs.[12] However the comic pleasure associated with it arises from his "hyper-aggressive sexual desire" and spills over into an "eroticized sadism" when he voices his intentions to force his victims and make them suffer.[13] Representing the force of unrestrained natural sexual impulses, he buffers the more polite behavior of the shepherds, who are held back by social conventions.

Beccari's satyr's trap is of special interest because it provides the scenic model for future pastorals where the nymph finds herself caught by the satyr and at the mercy of the shepherd who rescues her. It also contains another possible scenario of the nymph who falls into the trap, but manages to escape by outwitting the satyr. The nymph Melidia provides this model when she is captured by mistake and then manages to talk her way out by insisting that if he dishonors her, her brother will kill her. Appealing to his extra-human skills in making such an intricate trap, she gets the satyr to untie her and even manages to leave him caught in his own web. Balancing this unsuccessful first attempt, the satyr's second effort turns much uglier when Stellinia falls into the trap. The first extended scene between them ends in her tricking him by having him cover his eyes with one of her veils while she disrobes for him, but results in him trapping her again when she comes back for her clothes. As his rage mounts, so do the violent insults that he directs towards the whole female sex: "Fede in donna? / Non mai più credere che si ritrovi" (Honesty in woman? / I no longer believe that it exists) (5.2). His final threat, "Nuda ti vuo' spogliar, poi tutta nuda / Ti vuo' piagar e farti tutta sangue" (I want to strip you nude, then all naked / I want to hurt you and make you all bloody) (5.2), strips away

[11] Ray, "La Castità Conquistata," 313.

[12] "I quali diversi amori ultimatemente pervengono al desiato fine con intramissione d'un satiro, che con piacevoli inganni cerca godere di queste ninfe e con inganni parimente vien da loro schernito." See "l'argomento," *Il sacrificio*: *favola pastorale*, by Agostino Beccari (Turin: Edizione Res, 1999), 8.

[13] Ray, "La Castità Conquistata," 315.

all pretense and leaves her humiliated and exposed. When Turico, the shepherd she had spurned, saves her at the last minute, she can only submit to him in gratitude, begging him to help her put her clothes back on.[14]

Tasso's *Aminta*, first performed at the Ferrarese court in 1573, continues with Beccari's device of the satyr attempting to entrap the nymph, although it reduces his appearance to one key monologue and a narration of his attempted rape. With a single plotline dedicated to the pursuit of the chaste nymph Silvia by the love-stricken Aminta, the satyr's intervention remains a crucial lesson in suffering she needs to learn in order to awaken her desire. In fact, the shepherd poet Tirsi, who is Tasso in disguise, shares with his confidante, the nymph Daphne, in making up the plan to send Aminta to take advantage of Silvia as she bathes in the fountain of Diana, only to find that the Satyr has gotten there first. Tasso's Satyr embraces his hirsute, hyper-manly attributes in the same comic vein as early versions, but he now combines his anger at the ungrateful nymph Silvia's refusal of his love tokens with an even greater rage at his mistreatment by the court because of his poverty and lack of refinement. As a woodland creature, he plans to use his natural talents "for violence and rapine" to attack her, swearing not to leave her "ch'io pria non tinga / l'armi mie per vendetta nel suo sangue" (until my arms are dyed / and reddened by her blood for vengeance sake) (2.1.96–7).[15] His actual encounter with her, brought alive by Tirsi's voyeuristic narration, delivers the details of her torture with a certain sadomasochistic delight. Naked and tied to a tree by her own hair with a thousand knots, and "'l suo bel cinto, / che del sen virginal fu pria custode, / di quello stupor era ministro, ed ambe / le mani al duro tronco le stringea" (The lovely bands / which guarded once her virgin breast from view, / became an agent of the rape, for both her / hands were fastened by it to the cruel trunk) (3.1. 56–59). Saved in the nick of time by Aminta, Tirsi cannot resist commenting on how Aminta, too, enjoyed the sight of her trembling naked limbs before helping to untie her.

The legendary first performance supposedly took place on Belvedere island on July 1573, with Tasso himself directing *commedia dell'arte* actors from the already famous *Gelosi* troupe and featuring their diva Vittoria Piissimi in the role of Sylvia.[16] The island featured a palace with beautiful gardens and woods surrounding it and would have provided the perfect setting to reflect on courtly life. Because there is no evidence to prove that such a performance took place, it is impossible to do more than speculate on what kind of impact it might have had on its courtly audience.[17]

---

[14] Looking at Turico's refusal to ravish her from the side of providing an example of male restraint, his actions in releasing her possibly foreshadow Aminta's refusal to take advantage of Sylvia when he saves her in similar circumstances.

[15] Torquato Tasso, *Aminta,* ed. and trans. Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones (New York: Italica Press, 2000).

[16] Isabella Andreini was only eleven at the time and was not yet a member of the *Gelosi.*

[17] In her excellent study, Maria Galli Stampino omits the legendary accounts of the 1573 performance since the documentation is lacking and concentrates on micro-reconstructions of

However, the mannerist text itself reveals ways in which Tasso is holding up a mirror to the Ferrarese court, including allusions to real persons, places, and events. Tasso as noted is present in the guise of the cynical poet-shepherd, Tirsi.[18]

The immense popularity of *Aminta* in both courtly circles and on *commedia dell'arte* stages attests to its abilities to engage both court and public in its subject matter. Aside from the aristocratic players in the courts, the commedia dell'arte troupes also performed pastorals for both court and city audiences as part of their repertoire. Following in the footsteps of earlier divas, Isabella Andreini became well known for playing in pastorals, and frequently took the male role of Aminta, as this verse dedicated to her by one of her most ardent admirers, the poet Gherardo Borgogni, describes it: "Ora Aminta si mostra et ora Clori / or sembra Amore con la faccia ardente / fra comici, fra ninfe e fra pastori" (Playing now Aminta and now Clori / now appearing as Love with a burning glance / among the actors, nymphs and shepherds). Even more convincing evidence is found in another of his verses, which begins, "Filli leggiadra e bella," more specifically connecting her playing Aminta with her stage name of Filli, the nymph role she was most identified with: "Né qui si vide Aminta / ch'avea nel volto allor Filli dipinta" (Nor did we see Aminta ever again / speaking through Filli).[19]

---

two stagings of *Aminta* that are documented: notably, the 1574 performance at Pesaro during carnival that Guidobaldo II della Rovere had commissioned, and the 1628 performance at Parma as part of a Farnese-Medici wedding celebration. See *Staging the Pastoral: Tasso's Aminta and the Emergence of Modern Western Theater*. Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2005.

[18] While Tirsi plays a major role in the drama, hence creating a strong authorial presence referencing Tasso throughout, the relationship between the other court figures described by Daphne to Sylvia in Act 1.1 captures the paradoxical intersections between art and "real life." Other court figures include the wise shepherd Elpino, who is the Ducal secretary, Giambattista Nicolucci (Pigna); the young Batto, who is Battista Guarini; and the nymph Licori, who enchants with her eyes, is the noblewoman singer, Lucrezia Bendidio, had been the object of Tasso's youthful love. See Alain Godard, "La Premiére Représentation de L'Aminta: La Cour de Ferrare et son Double," *Ville et Campagne dans la Litterature Italienne de la Renaissance,* II: *Le Courtisan Travesti,* Centre di Recherche sur la Renaissance Italienne (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1984), 226n156.

[19] The second reference to Isabella (Filli) playing Aminta is difficult to capture in translation since it suggests that Filli actually embodied Aminta, superimposing her presence on him. The full verse of Borgogni's tribute is cited here: "Al tuo partir cadeo / Il gran teatro, e la famosa scena. / Già d'alta gioia piena, / Per grave duol si feo / Men lieta e men serena. / Né qui si vide Aminta, / Ch'avea nel volto allor Filli dipinta" (When you left / the great theatre collapsed, / and the stage, / which used to be full of joy, / turned less happy and less peaceful / for the great sorrow. / Nor did we see Aminta ever again / speaking through Filli). See "Corona di stanze alla Signora Isabella Andreini comica eccellente," in Gherardo Borgogni, *Rime di diversi illustri poeti de' nostri tempi* (Venice: La Minima Compagnia, 1599), stanzas 11, 134, 145. Quoted in Ferdinando Taviani, "Bella d'Asia: Torquato Tasso gli attore e l'immortalità," *Paragone/ Letteratura* 35 (1984): 7.

Andreini, then, was very familiar with *Aminta* and its treatment of gender roles and sexual violence.[20] When she came to write *Mirtilla* as a tribute to *Aminta*, she was able to put her improvisational skills to good use, both in the composition and staging of dramatic scenes with eloquent speech and song and in the introduction of the rougher comic elements taken from the *commedia dell'arte* repertoire.[21] Aware of her need to establish her credentials as more than those of an actress, she makes a point of mentioning her humble beginnings and hence greater need of her patron's support in her dedicatory letter to the Marchesa del Vasto.[22] However, such protestations may have been formulaic, since we know that Andreini was already getting published in various poetry anthologies and was intent on carving out a role for herself as a poet-performer. She mentions that the Marchesa is familiar with and appreciative of her work, a comment that may indicate that she had seen versions of the play already as well as suggesting that Andreini had a personal relationship with her.[23] It is also possible that some of her own pastoral compositions in both monologue and dialogue form were already in circulation and likely being performed in court settings in whole or part.[24]

If Tasso's strong authorial presence as the poet-creator in *Aminta* is underlined in act one when Tirsi makes his appearance, Andreini's identification of herself as

[20] Julie D. Campbell notes how Andreini splinters the traditional experiences of the damsel in distress found in Tasso among her female characters and in doing so creates "an intertextual counterpoint to Tasso's characterization of Silvia." See "The *Querelle* over Silvia: *La Mirtilla* and *Aminta* in Dialogue," in Julie D. Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 63.

[21] It is important to note that actresses who performed on the public stage in comedies were not considered respectable women. While praising the genre Ingegneri remarked that in "admettendo le vergini in palco e le donne oneste, quello che alle comedie non lice, danno luoco a nobili affetti, non disdicevoli alle tragedie istesse" (in permitting young maidens and honest women who are forbidden in comedy, they give a voice to noble sentiments, not to be scorned in tragedy itself). See *Della poesia rappresentativa* in Marotti, *Lo spettacolo,* 276.

[22] Isabella Andreini, *La Mirtilla,* ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Lucca: Fazzi, 1995), 33–34; *La Mirtilla*, trans. Julie D. Campbell (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2002), 1–2. Further citations of these works are given in the text.

[23] The extent of the relationship between Isabella and Lavinia della Rovere is unknown, although the fact that the Marchesa was a friend of Tasso's may play into Isabella's dedication of the first edition to her. While Giovan Battista Andreini names Lavinia della Rovere as one of the noble patrons who took one of Isabella's daughters into court service, there are no supporting documents. See Giovan Battista Andreini, *La ferza,* in *La Commedia dell'Arte e la Società* Barocca: La professione del teatro, eds. Ferruccio Marotti and Giovanna Romei (Rome: Bulzoni, 1991), 508.

[24] In her first volume of *Rime,* there are nine eclogues, likely written over several years. Several of them contain indicators that they were to be performed, and in some, there are scenarios that speak to situations in *La Mirtilla*. See *Rime* (Milan: Girolamo Bordone and Pietromartire Locarni, 1601), 226–292.

the author is directly signaled by her appearance as Venus in the prologue, before she makes her main entrance as the nymph Filli.[25] In Tasso's prologue, Amore comes down to earth, disguised as a lowly shepherd, so that even his mother Venus is unable to recognize him. As he tells us, he wants to escape from her prying eyes and controlling ways so that he can do whatever he wants. In *Mirtilla,* Andreini's prologue picks up where Tasso leaves off by having Venus find her wayward son and bring him to heel. Accusing him of being the blind fury responsible for causing the tragic destruction and death of so many famous lovers, she puts him on notice. While Andreini's prologue nods to a return of the hymeneal rule of Venus, the fact that she likely appeared attired as the goddess herself would have left a strong impression on audiences of the power of her female beauty and creativity at work behind the scenes.

Tasso's plotline, as set out by Amore, follows the typical pattern of punishing the nymph Silvia by making "far cupa e immedicabile ferita / nel duro sen de la più cruda ninfa / che mai seguisse il coro di Diana" (a wound that's deep, that can't be healed, / deep in the breast of that most cruel nymph / who ever followed in Diana's train) (1.53–55), so that she will yield to the shepherd Aminta. Andreini copies the trope of having Amore punish chastity, but her plotline is no longer the straightforward pursuit of the recalcitrant nymph. Instead, Amore intends to target two chaste characters from separate plots: one, the nymph Ardelia whose punishment will be to fall in love with herself, and the other, the shepherd Tirsi for his preference for the hunt. The opening scene where the shepherd Uranio recites his tale of falling in love delineates for us the same Arcadian paradise that Tasso's golden age chorus celebrates and sets up the longing for the possession of the beloved, in this case the nymph Ardelia, who is the image of idealized female beauty. However, instead of following the expected plotline, where all efforts are directed at uniting Uranio with Ardelia, Andreini's imitation of Tasso disrupts the focus on fulfilling male desire and instead offers an intervention that brings female erotic desire into play. Here, I will focus on three important features of *Mirtilla* which showcase Andreini's special contribution to the genre: first, the key presence of Filli and her rival Mirtilla; second, Filli's encounter with the satyr; and, third, Ardelia's portrayal of the nymph discovering her reflection.

Since Filli is the character who represents Andreini herself as the poet-performer, our introduction to her in act one, right after Uranio's scene, is crucial to

[25] The evidence that she also played Venus comes from a poem by Pantaleo Murassana, a Savonese friend of Chiabrera, who saw her perform and wrote about it in his dialect, referring to her as "Venere altera e doçe pastorella," which would mean she played both Venus and the nymph Filli. Quoted in Franco Vazzoler, "Le pastorali dei comici dell'arte: *La Mirtilla* di Isabella Andreini," in *Sviluppi della drammaturgia pastorale nell'Europa del Cinque-Seicento*, eds. Maria Chiabò and Federigo Doglio (Viterbo: Centro Studi sul Teatro Medioevale e Rinascimentale, 1992), 284.

establishing her as the chief protagonist.[26] Her poignant lament reveals her special insights into what the other characters are experiencing:

> e misera e perduta
> per gli ermi boschi e pei solinghi campi,
> indarno Uranio chiamo e mentre chieggio
> al ciel s'ei mi sarà spietato sempre,
> dai cavi sassi accresce il mio tormento
> Eco, ch'al mio parlare risponde sempre.
> [. . .]
> e vivendo in tal morte, ecco le stelle
> veggio sparire ad una ad una, e sola
> restar nel cielo l'amorosa stella;
> la qual, mentre da me tardi si parte,
> umilmente prego ch'al mio male
> qualche termine ponga, se non ch'io
> diverrò di me stessa acerba Parca. (1.2.565–570; 575–581)
>
> (Miserable and lost / in the lonely forests and desolate fields, / I call to Uranio in vain. When I demand of / heaven if it will always be so unmerciful to me, / Echo, who always responds to my speech/from the rocky hollows, increases my torment. / [. . .] / And living in such death, I see the stars / vanish one by one, until only / the amorous star remains in the sky. / While it belatedly departs from me, / I humbly pray that is puts some end / to my misfortune; otherwise, I / will become a bitter Parca to myself.)

As a nymph who has suffered rejection and knows the pull towards death, she prepares herself to behave with kindness when she finds herself in the company of Igilio, the shepherd who loves her. Her direct address to the audience about having to stop to think before she talks to him sets up their scene together as one that models the art of rejection with exquisite sensibility. Filli's hints that everything could be remedied if certain characters learned their lessons suggest that Andreini speaks through her of future plot developments, much as Tasso does through Tirsi. Beyond Tasso giving his character Tirsi his voice, Andreini is not only identified with the character Filli, but actually plays her on stage, so that audiences are always aware that the character is also the actress-poet herself. This constant reminder that Andreini as Filli is always mediating the dramatic fiction is reinforced by the

[26] For Doglio, Andreini's creation of Filli and her ability to express the torments of love puts her into the tradition of lyrical female poets such as Veronica Gambara, Gaspara Stampa, and Veronica Franco, who possess "un riconosciuto spazio di autonomia intellettuale " (a recognized space of intellectual autonomy) combined with "un senso che implica però una profonda comprensione, quasi una fraterna solidarietà per chi soffre" (a sense that also carries with it a profound comprehension, almost a fraternal solidarity with those who suffer). Introduction, 9.

presence of another famous diva and stage rival, Vittoria Piissimi, for whom the role of Mirtilla was written. The great tribute that Andreini pays to Piissimi by calling the play *Mirtilla* underlines her showcasing of the virtuosity of both herself and other female theatre artists. While Tasso brings a new subtlety to the pastoral form through the sympathetic narration of the emotional effects that the awakening of passion has on his characters, Andreini extends the practice further not only through narrative but also through more staged interactions. As Tasso also calls attention to the art involved in theatrical composition as part of his interrogation of the intersections of nature and art, Andreini extends his interrogation to include an emphasis on the art involved in performing the text to show the creative process as it is happening.[27] Both of these highly self-conscious artists conceal and reveal their creative genius through their manipulation of the theatrical apparatus in the mannerist style.

In act two, Mirtilla makes her appearance and confesses her burning desire for Uranio with tears and sighs that waken Ardelia, who has fallen asleep nearby. This sets up the scene with Uranio where Mirtilla will plead for his love, and he will scorn her for Ardelia, who in turn will scorn him. The brilliance of the fast-moving, witty repartee would be delivered as if it were being improvised to showcase the talents of the performers, especially Piissimi's as Mirtilla who, left alone on stage, caps off the act with the final lament of her frustration at being caught in such a hopeless love triangle: "Deh perché sequi, Uranio, chi ti fugge? / deh perché fuggi, Uranio, chi ti seque? / perché ami tu chi t'odia? / perché odii tu chi t'ama? / deh perché prezzi tu, misero amante, / una donna crudel che ti disprezza?" (Oh, why do you pursue, Uranio, the one who flees you? / Oh, why do you flee, Uranio, the one who pursues you? / Why do you love the one who hates you? / Why do you hate the one who loves you? / Oh, why do you prize, miserable lover, / a cruel lady who scorns you?) (2.3. 1168–1173).

Ultimately, as rivals for the love of Uranio, Filli and Mirtilla appear together in act 3, in a singing contest that is based on Virgil's third eclogue but with the protagonists changed from male to female.[28] There are similarities to Guarini's contest between Corsica and Amarillis in *Il pastor fido,* but rather than it ending badly with Corsica's plot to kill Amarillis, here Mirtilla and Filli are judged by the old shepherd Opico to see who deserves to win Uranio. This display of their rivalry

[27] The effects of Andreini's multiple indexing of herself to her character as poet and performer gives her a certain control over the way that the hierarchy of theatrical sign systems can be read to produce interplays of meanings. For theatrical sign systems, see Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 15–19.

[28] Anne MacNeil offers an important in-depth reading of Andreini's singing contest, highlighting her improvisational skills in reframing the eclogue for her own purposes and in "intertwining Virgil's pastoral metaphors with directions for musical performance." See *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 39.

in love captured in a contest of their rivalry in art underlines Andreini's conscious paralleling of the two to celebrate female virtuosity and ends with Opico declaring them to be equals and ordering them to make friends.[29] A sample of a few of the verses captures the skill they must display to keep topping each other in accordance with the rhyme:

> MIRTILLA. Amo Uranio crudele e non me'n pento.
>
> che la beltà, ch' a tutti gli occhi piace,
> mi fa lieta gioir d'ogni tormento.
>
> FILLI. La neve al sole si dilegua, e 'l foco
> strugge la cera, e a me lo sdegno e l'ira
> d'Uranio il cor consuma a poco a poco.
>
> MIRTILLA. Giovan l'erbe agli agnelli, a l'api I fiori:
> a me sol giova contemplar d'Uranio.
> nel vago viso I bei vivi colori. (3.5.1769–1777)
>
> (MIRTILLA. I love cruel Uranio and do not regret it, / for his beauty, which pleases all eyes, / makes me happy to rejoice in every torment! FILLI. The snow melts in the sun, and the fire / melts the wax, and, as for me, the disdain and anger / of Uranio consume my heart little by little. MIRTILLA. The sheep benefit from grass, as do the bees from flowers, / but the only thing that benefits me is to contemplate / the beautiful face and vivid coloring of Uranio!)

Just as her Filli and Mirtilla interrupt the usual flow of desire in a male-authored pastoral, Andreini also intervenes in her treatment of the satyr and his threat of unbridled male violence. Her Satiro resembles Tasso's in that when revealing himself in his monologue, he utters similar menacing threats, swearing that he will ambush Filli for her cruelty in rejecting his advances: "E s'ella al mio voler non sarà presta, / le faro mille oltraggi / Né sua bellezza voglio che le giovi, / Né gli altri gridi o'l domandar mercede!" (and, if she won't surrender to my will, / I'll do her a thousand outrages! / Neither her beauty nor her loud cries / or her request for mercy will help her) (3.1.1285–1288). However, when Filli falls into his trap, a very different

[29] Their legendary rivalry was fabricated as part of their diva mystique. It has been noted that their separate first appearances in acts 1 and 2, respectively, both recognized their individual stature and mirrored their appearances in *Aminta*, where Andreini is not likely to have played Silvia because Piissimi had claimed that role, leaving Andreini to play Aminta. Another example of their fabled rivalry occurred a year later when they were both invited to perform at the Medici Wedding between Ferdinando de' Medici and Cristina di Lorena in 1589 and were given separate nights to perform their favorite pieces.

scenario is presented to Tirsi's narration of Silvia's brutal treatment and humiliation. Andreini's scene borrows more from Beccari's *Il sacrificio*, described above. It may also have been influenced by Guarini's *Il pastor fido,* since it had been in circulation from 1585 as well as sharing some common elements with other female-authored pastorals of the time.[30] However, only *Mirtilla* and *Amorosa speranza* by Valeria Miani go to such extremes in their physical humiliation of the satyr.[31] Filli, played by Andreini, who despite her married status was nonetheless famous for her semi-naked mad performances, engages the satyr in a scene of intense physical contact with strong sadomasochistic overtones. As a beautiful young actress, her wide coterie of male admirers who normally expressed their feelings for her in socially sanctioned ways were free to lust after her when she was playing a role on stage.[32] It is possible that her performance contains a warning to certain of her admirers to be cautious about approaching her with unwelcome sexual advances, but at the same time, watching her discipline the satyr for his excessive lust must have generated a high level of erotic excitement for her spectators.

After he lays out the standard script, "voglio / legarti a quella dura quercia, / ove con strazio finirai tua vita." (I will tie you naked to that hard oak, / where with torture you will end your life) (3.2.1325), she begins her reverse seduction, by facing his monstrous appearance straight on and looking right into his " begl'occhi" (beautiful eyes). The effect of having Filli swear by "le tue robuste braccia / e per la

[30] The satyr incident in *pastor fido* involves Corsica's using trickery and physical force against the satyr but is more about her escaping than confronting him. Leaving her golden wig behind is highly theatrical and comical but overall not as thematically central as it is in *Mirtilla.* Virginia Cox describes the decorous handling of the satyr scene by three female authors, Campiglia, Torelli and Bernardi, as falling more closely in line with the male-authored pattern with less mention of the satyr's sexual intent. See *The Prodigious Muse,* 113–115.

[31] Miani's treatment involves two scenes. In the first, the nymph Tirenia tricks the old satyr Elliodoro into retrieving an arrow for her, leaving him tied up by his feet to a tree. In the second, when he comes after her, her shepherd lover rescues her, ties the satyr up again, and leaves him to be tortured by Tirenia. She not only plucks his beard as Filli does, but actually cuts it all off, in addition to breaking off one of his horns. See *The Prodigious Muse,* 112.

[32] One such admirer, Gherardo Borgogni, was already in his sixties when he became acquainted with Isabella in the late 1580s and is described thusly: "fu anzi qualcosuccia di più che un semplice lodatore e ammiratore dell'attrice famosa: fu, a parer mio, un innamorato vero, uno spasimante tipici, incoraggiato forse non senza un tantino di civetteria ben concepibile in donna di teatro, ma corriposto solo—presumibilmente—quanto alla stessa singolar donna lo consentivano l'onestà e il coniugale suo stato" (was someone suspiciously more than a simple admirer and fan of the famous actress: in my opinion, he was a true lover, a typical suitor, perhaps encouraged a little bit by the coquetry conceivable in an actress, but reciprocated only—presumably as much as the same remarkable woman's honesty and marital status would permit). See Vittorio Amedeo Arullani, *Di Gherardo Borgogni: Letterato Albese e delle relazione di lui con alcuni poeti suoi contemporanei: Tommaso Stigliani, Isabella Andreini, and Torquato Tasso* (Alba: Libreria Sansoldi, 1910), 12.

vaga tua cornuta fronte" (his robust arms / and by your charming horned brow) (3.2. 1334–5) draws him to her and makes him susceptible to her protestations of love. In modeling such a fearless response, Filli gradually disarms him and makes him into the one who is being wooed with the promise of a kiss. Once he has become the submissive in a kind of bondage-domination script, a new, cruel side of Filli emerges. She begins by getting him to let her tie him up, "ch'io ti leghi/le braccia, perché tu da la dolcezza / che sentirai baciandomi / tanto min mi stringessi" (so that you, from the sweetness / that you experience kissing me, / won't embrace me so tightly) (3.2.1382 –1384), and as he agrees, winds the cords around his arms, all the time, talking him through her love for him, even thanking the tree — a reference to Tasso's branch that helped in Silvia's rape — for keeping "l'anima mi legata in sì bel nodo" (fast the one who keeps / my soul tied in so beautiful a knot) (3.1. 1396).

And when he complains that she has pulled the cords too tight, she keeps to her role as dominatrix: "Datti pace / e sofri per un poco: / perché quanto più stretto / ti lego, tanto più sicuramente / ti bacierò dipoi." (Calm down, and suffer for a moment: because the more tightly, I tie you, the more safely/ I will then kiss you) (3.2.1398–1401). As the satyr begs her for it, she holds him off again by pretending that her modesty is at stake. Getting more and more physical with the Satyr, first by pulling his beard when she gets him to bend down on the grounds that he is too tall to kiss, and next by twisting his neck and pinching his nipples, she brings the satyr to beg her to stop hurting him. To keep the illusion going that at any point he could break free and turn on her, she pretends to cry. Next, they both start speaking in asides to the audience, further heightening our awareness that we are watching a scene in which the traditional roles of predator and victim have been reversed. With everything ending up focused on the actual kissing of his "quella cara e dolce bocca" (dear and sweet mouth) (3.2. 1475) she gives him his final punishment by offering him a bitter herb to eat to sweeten his breath.

Her final speech to him as he stands tied up and utterly helpless speaks on behalf of all women in a bitter condemnation of all would-be rapist satyrs:

> O malaccorto
> Or hai pur finalmente conoscuito
> Ch'io mi beffo di te, qual donna mai,
> benché diforme e vile, si compiaque
> d'amar sì mostruoso, orrido aspetto?
> Or vedi ch'io colsi, resta pure
> schernito, come merti, ch'io ti lascio.
> Così volesse il cile che fosti preda
> d'orsi rabbiosi e d'affamati lupi;
> perché innanzi mai più non mi venisse
> codesta tua sì brutta e a me tanto
> noiosa odiatissima sembianza. (3.2. 1488–96)

> (O foolish one, / now you finally understand / that I have been mocking you! What woman, / even if deformed and vile, could take pleasure in loving so monstrous and horrid a countenance? / Now you see that I have caught you! Remain here, / mocked, as you deserve to be, while I leave you. / Would to heaven that you were prey / of rabid bears and hungry wolves / so that I would never again encounter / your ugly face, which to me is the most annoying and odious.)

Instead of the male-authored outcome where the roughed-up naked nymph is saved at the last minute by the intervention of the shepherd, Andreini leaves Filli in charge and Satiro at her mercy:

> Filli, Filli, ove vai? Fermatii, ascolta,
> slegami almeno, acciò ch'io non diventi
> de l'altre come te spietate ninfe
> scherzo, favola e gioco.
> Ohimè, che non può fare
> femina risoluta d'ingannare? (3.2. 1498–1504)

> (Filli, Filli, where are you going? Stop, listen, / at least untie me so that I do not become / a joke, a tale, and a game / for other pitiless nymphs like you! / Oh me, what can't a woman do / when she is resolved to deceive?)

The other major intervention that Andreini makes occurs in the scenes where the nymph Ardelia falls in love with her own image. Reworking the narcissus myth from a female perspective, Andreini turns Ardelia's reluctance to accept Uranio's advances into an inquiry into female beauty as a male construction. There are obvious echoes of Tasso's treatment of Silvia's gazing at her reflection in the water that Daphne and Tirsi discuss when they are trying to determine whether or not she is as innocent as she seems. To capture the experience, Daphne narrates watching Silvia interact with her image as she adorned herself with flowers and checked out the effects. However, in Tasso's version, at the moment when she "gazes adoringly" at her own beauty, she also catches sight of Daphne watching her: "e vergognando / rizzossi tosto, e i fior lasciò cadere. / In tanto io più redea del suo rossore, / ella più s'arrossia del riso mio" (all ashamed, she quickly stood and let the flowers fall. / And all the while, the more her blush amused, the more she reddened at my laughing smile) (2.2. 56–59). Relayed through these unspoken shared glances between the nymphs, to which Tirsi is now privy, Silvia's knowledge of her desirability becomes the proof that she has also learned to dissemble and take advantage of the effect she has on her admirers. Such an interpretation of female beauty as a cruel weapon that should be yielded up to satisfy male desire is summed up by Daphne herself as reason enough to put her in Aminta's path by sending him to the fountain where Silvia bathes. For Tirsi it is proof enough that she is ready to be put in Aminta's way, and for Daphne, who considers that women exist for male pleasure, it is reason

enough to encourage him to rape her if necessary, as she confides to Tirsi: "Or non sai tu com'è fatta la donna? / Fugge, e fuggendo vuol che altri la giunga; / niega, e negando vuol che'altri si toglia;" (Now don't you know how woman is designed? / She flees and fleeing wants to soon be caught: / says no and saying wants to give herself;) (2.2.89–91).

In *Mirtilla,* Andreini reprises the scene with Ardelia who first appears beside a spring, looking at the flowers and thinking about "tessere ai crini miei vaga ghirlanda" (weaving a pretty garland for my hair) (2.1. 795). Only a prelude to a much longer scene in act four, where Ardelia is revealed gazing at herself as Silvia was, but in this case Andreini chooses to have Ardelia share her experiences directly with the audience for even greater theatrical impact. Thus, our voyeurism, rather than being reflected through Daphne and later Tirsi, is unmediated as we watch and listen to Ardelia create for us a double image, first of herself and then of the goddess she glimpses when she bends down to drink from the spring:

> Ma che veggio? che miro
> nel liquido cristallo?
> Leggiadra ninfa anzi leggiadra dea,
> salvi la tua beltà mai sempre il cielo,
> donde cred'io che scendi; i' mi t'inchino (4.4. 2509–2513)
>
> (But what do I see? At what do I look / in the liquid crystal? / Charming nymph, indeed charming goddess, / may heaven, from whence I believe that you have descended, / always preserve your beauty! / I bow down to you.)

But then as she nods and tries to speak to her, and hears only silence from the mute image, their inability to communicate awakens such longing in Ardelia that she becomes overwhelmed with a burning desire to possess the heavenly image who sets her on fire. As her fateful passion begins to burn her up and her efforts to reach her goddess prove fruitless, she begins to grasp the hopelessness of her situation and acknowledge that the image that is causing her to burst into flames is really her own reflection. As her desire to make love to herself escalates, she finds herself suffering from insatiable lust:

> troppo a quest'occhi piaccion gli occhi miei,
> e 'l proprio viso e 'l proprio seno e troppo,
> ah finalmente a me medesma piaccio:
> e s'io vo' fa vendetta
> di chi m'offende, incrudeli conviemmi
> contra me sola; oh sventurato amore!
> [. . .]
> ahimè, ahimè, che per maggior mia doglia
> mentre piango il mio male, il pianto istesso
> è del mio mal ministro,

poiché turbando l'acqua
mi toglie di goder di me medesma. (4.4. 2576–2590)

(To much these eyes please my eyes, / this face, this breast, too much; / in the end, I love myself! / So if I want to have revenge, / on the one who offends me, I must use cruelty / against myself; oh, unlucky love! / Alas, alas! [I see] that for my great suffering, / while I cry over my misfortune, the weeping itself /is the cause of my distress - / because disturbing the water / deprives me of the pleasure of myself!)

If there is a certain comic pathos and self-mockery built in to Ardelia's love for her own beauty, what Doglio referred to as her "lesbian passion, "[33] this scene also stands out as a pro-feminist interrogation of female beauty as more than a lure for male desire. Andreini's Ardelia is so far gone in her autoeroticism that she continues to remain out of Uranio's reach until the end of the play when he wins her by reminding her of the fleeting nature of her beauty. While she has may have learned the limits of her narcissism, her submission to him only comes through a new sexual understanding of herself.

In act five, when all the lovers have been taught their lessons and abandoned their blind attractions, they come before Venus to celebrate her rule, all paired up in sanctioned unions which suggest that Andreini is advocating an end to the sexual freedom that Tasso expounds in *Aminta*.[34] Inevitably her emphasis on marriage as the requisite bond for experiencing sexual pleasure removes us further from Tasso's golden age with its free expression of male sexual desire. However, given that Andreini has shaped the pastoral form to endow Filli and Mirtilla and Ardelia with strong voices to express their own desires and to confront male sexual violence, *Mirtilla* can also be read as a witty exposé of pastoral sexual politics. Moreover, one of the lessons that her pastoral teaches, through the words of the wise shepherd Coridone, is that reciprocal conjugal love is the greatest pleasure that humans can know. Franker in her celebration of sexual passion than other female pastoral writers, Andreini's *La Mirtilla* addresses the male-authored pastoral tradition from her unique position as a pro-feminist poet and a performer and fills an important niche in the canon.

[33] Doglio, introduction, 14.

[34] Vazzoler argues that for Andreini and the *commedia dell'arte* performers, marriage unions were a luxury that most of the actors could not afford and hence may have been considered to have a utopic dimension. See Vazzoler, "Le pastorali," 298.

Erotic Magic: Rings, Engraved Precious Gems and Masculine Anxiety[1]

Liliana Leopardi
Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Medieval and Renaissance literature abounds with tropes of magic rings and true love, as well as with crude sexual jokes, such as those of Shakespeare, in which the finger stands for the phallus and the ring for a woman's vagina.[2] Diderot's eighteenth century novel, *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* or *The Indiscreet Toys,* drew on just such a longstanding tradition when he imagined the king of Congo in possession of a magic ring, which, when pointed at a woman, would make her confess her vaginal secrets.[3] Binding spells of love magic, too, featured a ring: such spells often called for urination through a virgin's wedding ring, a powerful apothropaic spell based on sympathetic magic. Once again, the ring symbolized a woman's vagina and the golden arc of urine the male semen, as in Lorenzo Lotto's painting of *Venus and*

[1] A debt of heartfelt gratitude is owed to the Rose Tozer and Paula Rucinski, M.L.S., G.G., respectively Senior Librarian and Library Manager, of the Richard T. Liddicoat Gemological Library and Information Center at the Gemological Institute of America, Carlsbad, CA. Without their precious assistance and infinite patience, this research would have not been possible.

[2] In the middle English chivalric romance *King Horn*, Rymenhild, the king's daughter, offers her beloved, Horn, a ring to help him in the battles he will engage in to prove his love for her; see *King Horn: A Middle English Romance*, ed. Joseph Hall (London: Henry Frowde, M.A. publisher to the University of Oxford, 1901). In Ludovico Ariosto's Italian epic poem, *L'Orlando Furioso*, the pagan princess Angelica uses a magic ring to become invisible and escape from the love mad Orlando; see *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Guido Waldman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Shakespeare's references are almost too numerous to list here, but *The Merchant of Venice* ends with Gratiano cheekily stating, "While I live, I will fear no other thing / So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring." See *The Merchant of Venice*, http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/merchant.5.1.html (last accessed on 8.5.14).

[3] Denis Diderot, *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (Paris: Pierrot Ragout, 1749).

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: *Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery,* ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 99–130.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484 /M.ASMAR-EB.5.111058

Cupid (c. 1520), today at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rings, in fact, featured prominently in the context of magic, particularly erotic magic, not only in literature and art, but also in the scientific genre of lithotherapy manuals.

Camillo Leonardi's 1502 treatise on the magical powers of precious and semi-precious gems, the *Speculum Lapidum* (Fig. 1), indeed insists that such stones be worn on rings. Leonardi's treatise was not considered fiction but rather a scientific treatise on astral magic whose main function was medical. As such, the work is concerned, among other things, with the sexual sphere and its proper function: chastity, lust, desire, and most importantly, sexual potency. That the latter was a rather pressing concern is not surprising considering that Renaissance erotic magic was phallocentric in nature: as imagery of male genitalia were the preferred vehicle to signify power, it follows that such a society would be particularly anxious about the phallus's ability to perform. An analysis of a few select images of Leonardi's astral magic will argue that rings engraved with erotic imagery or imagery meant to address the sexual sphere may be conceived of as fetishes used as transitional objects to allay sexual as well as social anxieties of the masculine subject. Admittedly a psychoanalytic methodology focused on the function of the fetish is not the only possible approach that may be used in examining this material, and I certainly believe that this subject deserves to be further explored by using a "positive" model of analysis according to which sixteenth-century masculinity stepped into the realm of the mythological not out of fear or anxiety, allayed by the use of talismans and fetishes, but out of entitlement. I also believe that a Lacanian model of analysis, with its emphasis on the scopic order, promises to yield interesting results in exploring a gem's ambiguous and oppositional qualities of mirroring and occluding in relationship to identity formation, as recently discussed by Marcia's Pointon in her *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewelry.*[4] Mediations of femininity via jewelry, and rings in particular, have been well-analyzed in contemporary scholarly literature, yet a similar exploration of the mediation of masculinity via jewelry is still lacking.[5] This essay, then, is an effort to

[4] Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

[5] On questions of female identity via jewelry see Pamela Hammons, *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665–1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Karen Raber, "Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity," in *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, ed. Bella Mirabella (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 159–82. Questions of masculine identity via jewelry are usually seen through the filter of political power; see *Princely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1650, 15th October 1980—1st February 1981, ed.* Anna Sommers-Cocks, (London: Debrett's Peerage Limited & Victoria and Albert Museum, 1980); G. Gregorietti, *Jewelry Through the Ages* (New York: American Heritage, 1969). For a more innovative and insightful approach to the appearance of jewels in paintings, see Pointon, *Brilliant Effects*.

Fig. 1: Leonardi, C. *Speculum Lapidum*. Venetia: 1610 ed. (Photo by the author).

expand the discourse on the construction of sixteenth-century learned masculinity by exploring Leonardi's aforementioned treatise. Yet, prior to analyzing how the use of engraved images on rings functioned to ensure sexual potency and virility, it is first necessary to briefly outline the content of the *Speculum Lapidum,* as well as its position within the long tradition of manuals on lithotherapy.

The author and its text

Camillo Leonardi was a physician and astrologer about whom very little is known. He was born in Pesaro in the second half of the fifteenth-century, and died sometime after 1532. He studied in Padua and was present at the court of Costanzo Sforza and his son Giovanni.[6] In 1502, he published the *Speculum Lapidum*, an ambitious compendium on more than 250 precious and semi-precious stones and their occult virtues, which he astutely dedicated to Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, son of Pope Alexander VI, and newly minted lord of Pesaro, suggesting Leonardi was also living in that city.

In the last decade of the fifteenth century, the city's lord had been Giovanni Sforza, then married to Lucrezia Borgia. In 1497, Giovanni made the unwise decision of resisting the Borgias' politically motivated request for a marriage annulment on the fictitious grounds of his impotence. The marriage was annulled despite his protestations, which in 1500 earned him, in quick succession, an excommunication, a series of assassination attempts against his person, and finally, the expulsion from the city of Pesaro at the hands of Lucrezia's brother, Cesare Borgia. Dedicating the work to Cesare Borgia was certainly a wise step on the part of a court physician intent onto ingratiating himself with his new master, particularly one who enjoyed owning expensive gems and who might have had a special interest in the use of astral magic for the preservation of his virility, particularly in light of the accusations of impotence that his family had moved against the previous lord.[7]

The subject chosen, in fact, acted not only as a calling card for the author's own skills and knowledge, but was of great interest to the noble classes of the period who collected gems and stones not only as signifiers of wealth, power, and luxury, but also because they were believed to possess powerful thaumaturgical and talismanic

[6] Baffioni Venturi, L. "Lo Specchio della Città" last modified February 2012, and accessed February 23, 2012, under *Lettere e Arti:* http://www.lospecchiodellacitta.it/

[7] Legends on Cesare's debauchery abound, even though it is rather difficult to assess to truth found in such sources considering the hatred that the Borgia engendered. Even Johann Burchard's tale of the ballet of the chestnuts might have been greatly embellished. The protonotary apostolic and master of ceremony of the Pope, described in his *Liber Notarum* the infamous party as featuring orgiastic scenes between courtesans and invited guests in the presence of the Pope, a detail today doubted by modern scholars; Johann Burchard, *At the court of the Borgia: Being an account of the reign of Pope Alexander VI—1506 (*London: Folio Society, 2002) 194

properties. Gems had long been used in treating physical and mental illnesses with debatable degrees of success since antiquity.[8] The most illustrious Florentine family of the Medici owned an important collection of precious and semi-precious stones, which were also used as ingredients for potions made to treat a variety of illnesses; Clemente VII was said to have ingested forty thousand ducats worth of stones prior to his death.[9] Similar treatments were administered to both Lorenzo de Medici and Pope Leo X. Catherine de' Medici was an assiduous user of talismanic magic; she personally employed the renowned magus and apothecary Nostradamus and the infamous Ruggieri, probably more appreciated for his knowledge of poisons rather then astrology (though the two were not unrelated). Numerous sources attest to her ownership of a variety of talismans, including. one with engraved images of Jupiter, the eagle of Ganymede, Anubis, and Venus,[10] and another "rumored to be made of human blood, the blood of a goat and the metals that corresponded with her birth chart."[11] A copy of the latter may now be found at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

[8] On gems and magic in antiquity see *Gems of Heaven: Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity c. AD 200–600*, ed. Christ Entwistle and Noël Adams. (London: the British Museum, 2011)

[9] "We are told when Pope Clement VII was seized by his last illness, in 1534, his physicians resorted to powders composed of various precious stones. In the space of fourteen days they are asserted to have given the pope forty thousand ducats' worth of these stones, a single dose costing as much as three thousand ducats. The most costly remedy of all was a diamond administered to him at Marseilles. Unfortunately, this lavish expenditure was of no avail; indeed, according to our modern science, the remedies might have sufficed to end the pope's life, without the help of his disease" George Frederick Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones (*Philadelphia and London: Lippincott Company, 1913) 378–9, quoting from Friedrich von Raumer, *Historisches Taschenbuch*, I, Ser. Vol. VI (Leipzig, 1835) 370. Michaele Paschali, a sixteenth century physician believed to have cured dysentery in his patient Juan de Mondoza with an emerald, George Frederick Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones (*Philadelphia and London: Lippincott Company, 1913) 380; a virtue that Wolfgang Gabelchover also asserts to have tested in his commentary to Andrea Baccio's De Gemmis et Lapidibus Pretiosis. Andreae Baccii, *De Gemmis et Lapidibus pretiosis,* ed. and transl. Wolfgang Gabelchover (Francufurti, 1603) 63–64. The Medici interest in magic and magic rings in particular may also have been strengthened by the fact that Florence held a relic believed to possess miraculous healing powers, the episcopal ring of St. Zenobius; see Sally J. Cornelison "A French King and a Magic Ring: the Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly,* 55, No.2, (Summer 2002): 434–469.

[10] Gordon Strong, *The Way of Magic (*Cheltenham: Skylight press, 2012) 89.

[11] Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003) 83. Voltaire is possibly referring to this talisman when he asserted that "the famous talisman of Catherine de Medici still exists" under the Talisman entry in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, 1764. A copy of the talisman can now be found at the Bibliotheque National de France.

That this subject was of particular interest to the educated classes is significantly corroborated by the numerous editions of the *Speculum Lapidum* published after its initial run in 1502. Today, we have examples for editions of 1516, 1533, 1610, 1611, 1617, 1716–17, and 1750.[12] The *Speculum* was translated into Italian by Ludovico Dolce in 1565, albeit with a number of modifications, including ellipses and a number of additional passages. Dolce actually published the work under his own name as *Libri Tre di Messere Lodovico Dolce nei quali si tratta delle diverse sorti delle Gemme che produce la natura e della qualità, grandezza, bellezza e virtú loro.*[13] He changed the title from the medieval "Speculum" to the humanist "Trattato," thereby further substantiating the claim that the subject was worthy of careful study by his contemporaries. The translation enjoyed as wide a fortune as the original text did.

The *Speculum* was partially translated in English in 1750 under the title of *The Mirror of Stones;* yet by this date all references to magic were no longer of interest to the educated public, and the book, divested of any magic, erotic and otherwise, contained in the third tome, was considered to be an example of an early effort towards the development of the geological sciences. Typical of texts edited in the Enlightenment period, all mention of superstitions and the less-than-scientific past of the prior centuries was erased or dismissed outright.

In the sixteenth century, though, Leonardi's text was certainly not at all unusual; in fact, it may be considered not only the culmination of a long medieval tradition whose roots may be traced to antiquity, but the most accomplished manual to have been published on the subject of the *vis naturalis* of stones.[14] Leonardi's sources included a wide range of classical and medieval sources: Pliny's *Naturalis Historiae*; Damigeron's *De Virtutibus Lapidem*; the *Lithica,* ascribed to a disciple of Hermes Trismegistos, by the pseudonym of Orpheus; the *Etymologiae De Gemmis*

[12] The 1502 edition was published in Venice per Ioannem Baptistam Sessam, the 1516, also in Venice, per Melchiorem Sessam et Petrum de Rauanis socii; the 1533 in Augustae Vindelicorum, Augsburg, per Henricus Siliceus; the 1610, 1611, and 1617 in Paris per Carolum Suestre et Davidem Gillum; Dolce's Italian 'translation' was published in 1565 and again in 1617, both in Venice per Sessa. The English partial translation (it omits all of book three) in London per J. Freeman. Copies of each edition are still extant in various European Libraries. A full list may be found in Leandro Cantalamessa, *Astrologia: opera a stampa (1472–1900)* (Vol. 1, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2007) 532.

[13] This type of intellectual appropriation was not unusual for the Venetian writer, who appropriated ca. two hundred and fifty compositions during his literary career.

[14] Other significant contributions to the study of gems in this century were Scipione Vasolo *Le Miracolose virtù delle pietre pretiose* (1577), Costanti, *Questo è il librio lapidario* (1587), Agostino del Riccio, *Istoria delle Pietre* (1597). None of these were published, thus still leaving the *Speculum Lapidum,* and its Italian popularization at the hands of Dolce, as the most significant source of that century. See Annibale Mottana "'Le Miracolose Virtù delle Pietre Pretiose Per Salute Del Vivere Humano' di Scipione Vasolo: un trattatello rinascimental sulle gemme come mezzi per mantenersi in salute senza ricorrere a medicine," *Rendiconti Fisici Accademia dei Lincei*, no. 9. Vol. 16 (2005): 19–73.

by the seventh-century archbishop Isidore of Seville; the eleventh-century *Picatrix* (translated from the Arab into Spanish and Latin under the aegis of Alphonse X); the Latin poem *De Lapidibus praetiosis* by the bishop of Rennes, Marbode (eleventh century); and Albertus Magnus' *Libri Secretorum* and *Libri Mineralium* (twelfth century), just to name a few.

The classical tradition of manuals on lithotherapy had survived throughout the Middle Ages because knowledge of the occult virtues of stones was considered fundamental to the education of men of the cloth, as long as one adopted William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas's clear distinction between ceremonial and natural magic: only the first, ceremonial magic, was considered blasphemous and demonic.[15] Natural magic, in this case understood as knowledge of the occult virtues of precious and semi-precious stones, but not limited to it, found its justification in the most hallowed of sources: the Bible. In Exodus 28:17–20, Aaron is charged with a gem encrusted pectoral—also known as the *rationale of judgement*—worn as part of the ceremonial priestly garb (Fig. 2), and in Exodus 28:9–11, he is asked to engrave the names of the sons of Israel on two stones, six on one and six on the other. In Apocalypse 21:18–21, Jerusalem's walls and foundations are said to rest on precious gems, as shown in the detailed illumination of the *Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem* from the tenth-century *Morgan Beatus*.[16] Thus, medieval treatises syncretically fused Biblical and classical tradition with gnostic sources, according to which gems were natural talismans that preserved the energy of the planets, and thus divine energy, often embodied by angels' names incised on the stones.

Distinguishing between black and white magic was fundamental in matters of Eros. Marsilio Ficino in his *De Amore* had pronounced "the whole power of magic [to be] founded on Eros. The way Magic works is to bring things together through their inherent similarity."[17] Whilst Ficino's conception of *Eros* was meant to be seen as a spiritual energy that pervaded the universe, his clerical critics could easily argue that the *Eros* he spoke of was base and illicit sexuality, which had been traditionally associated with black magic. Love magic or erotic magic, then, presented the inherent and real danger of drawing accusations of exercising or enjoying transgressive desires. Yet, despite this danger, books of astral magic all delve into aspects of love or sexual magic in a manner that directly addressed the male body—that is, it affected its potency and virility and thus its ability to successfully possess a female body—suggesting the pressing urgency the issue must have had in the lives of Renaissance men. Masculinity as a category, may, after all, be said to be inherently

[15] It is very likely that the knowledge was the province of monastic women as well, even though we have only one manual authored by a woman. In the twelfth century Hildegard von Bingen wrote a manual entitled *De Lapidibus,* which discussed the healing virtues of various stones and the manner in which they had to be treated to potentiate their healing virtue.

[16] *Morgan Beatus*, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MS 644, vol. II (fol.222v).

[17] Marsilio Ficino, *De Amore*, VI, p.106, as quoted in Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 87.*

Fig. 2: Frontispiece of Marbode's *De Lapidibus praetiosis* in Kunz, G. F. *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*. Philadelphia and London: Lippincott Company, 1913 (Photo by the author).

unstable and thus in need of being publically displayed and affirmed through social interactions amongst male peers.[18] The frequent use of erotic language and the promotion of one's own sexual exploits is a feature often found in epistolary writing betwixt men; Pandolfo Collenuccio, a humanist and Gonzaga diplomat, in writing to the Marquis of Mantua, Francesco II, on March 12, 1495, regaled him with details of the sexual adventures he and three friends had recently enjoyed: "for a little while I gave it to her da grigolvia, that is in the ass, to speak honestly. The other [prostitute], having enjoyed Roberto's venerable prick, came up to him and made him shed a few tears during these holy days [of] the Passion of that poor man Christ. I think that Zoanfrancesco gave it to the third [prostitute] and the 'Fencing

[18] Cfr. John Tosh "What Should Historians do with Masculinity" *History Workshop Journal, 38 (1994) 184–192*

Master' to the fourth."[19] This scholarly man's behavior was certainly not an aberration; rather, it was a confirmation of the societal norms that required men to continually prove their masculinity in order to maintain their social importance. Erotic magic was just one of the tools at men's disposal to achieve such a goal.

Wishing to see the Renaissance as a rational endeavor, neatly packaged in the geometric grid of an Albertian perspective, we often dismiss the seriousness with which Renaissance thinkers like Poliziano, Pico della Mirandola, and Ficino engaged in magic. Sixteenth-century intellectuals, imbued in humanist doctrine, would have found the notion of gems and images impregnated with the superior powers of gods and planets essential to understanding the correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm, as well as to understanding the workings of their biological and emotional lives. Thus, they conceived the occult properties of engraved gems, today considered mere material culture, as an integral component of Neoplatonic philosophy. In Ficino's Neoplatonic[20] conception, the earthly world was a receptacle of macrocosmic energy: the human soul was apt to receive the influx of higher sources just like a mirror[21] and just like such hard materials as gems and metals, "although they seem too hard for accepting a celestial influence, nevertheless retain it longer if they receive it. . .that is to say their hardness also retains the vestiges and fits of the life of the world, which they had once possessed while embedded in the earth, for a very long time after being rooted out. . . also it is probable that things so beautiful cannot be fused under the earth without a consummate effort of the heavens, and the power impressed in them once and for all from that effort remains."[22] That energy could then be absorbed by men. It is this notion of planetary energies and their influence on human life that is at the root of well-known Renaissance astrological frescos such as Agostino Chigi's impressive and monumental birth chart on the ceiling of his villa, *la Farnesina*, and the more discreet one of Julius II in the ceiling of the *Stanza della Segnatura*.

The paintings in Francesco de' Medici's[23] singular studiolo—also known as the *Stanzino* or *Scrittoio*—are a visual *tour de force* of the man's interest in alchemy

[19] As quoted in Molly Bourne, "Male humor and male sociability: sexual innuendo in the epistolary domain of Francesco II Gonzaga," in *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy,* ed. Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) 206.

[20] Marsilio Ficino, *De Vita Libri Tres,* was originally published in 1489; the third book, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda,* specifically treats the subject of the *vis naturalis* of stones. CFR. Marsilio Ficino, *Three books on life*, Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark ed. (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance Society of America,1998).

[21] Marsilio Ficino, *Three books on life*, Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark ed. (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance Society of America, 1998) 380.

[22] Marsilio Ficino, *Three books on life*, (1998) 320.

[23] Francesco was not the first Medici to have been interested in Alchemy, documents clearly show that his most illustrious father, Cosimo I was himself a connoisseur; cfr. Alfredo Perifano, *L'Alchimie à la Cour de Come I de Médicis: saviors, culture et politique* (Paris: Etudes et essais sur la

and his belief in the occult virtues of precious and semi-precious stones. Painted scenes of the fishing of corals and pearls, the mining of various precious stones and the preparation of gold and jewelry were all conceived of as records of the nexus between nature and art, where art was represented by Prometheus and thus also understood as *invenzione*.[24]

Vincenzo Borghini, the designer of the decorative *programme* of the studiolo, described a plan that envisioned Prometheus as the inventor of precious stones and rings: "Thus Natura is to be painted in the middle of the vault that corresponds to Heaven, her companion being Prometheus, the inventor of precious stones and rings, for as Pliny reports, when Prometheus was chained to a rock in the Caucasus, he made every possible effort, notwithstanding the suffering to apply himself to his work with diamonds and other precious stones".[25] While Prometheus is here presented as the embodiment of a masculinity able to rise above its limitation through his work on gems, Francesco, like most intellectuals interested in alchemy and the occult, also saw the Titan as directly connected to art through Marsilio Ficino's theory of the absorption of occult virtues. Stones absorbed celestial influences, which were in turn absorbed by men when they wore or carried the stones on their person:

> It is for just this reason that emerald, jacinth, sapphire, topaz, ruby, unicorn's horn, but especially the stone which the Arabs call bezoar, are endowed with occult properties of the Graces. And therefore, not only if they are taken internally, but even if they touch the flesh, and warmthed thereby, put forth

Renaissance, Honoré Champion, 1997); Giulio Lensi Orlandi, *L'arte segreta. Cosimo e Francesco de' Medici alchimisti (Firenze: Convivio Nardini,* 1991). Their forefather, Cosimo the Elder had himself commissioned Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

[24] Prometheus was seen as a key mythological figure in alchemical circles, as witnessed by two texts certainly owned by the Medici, Giovanni Augurello's Latin poem of the *Chrisopoeia*, first published in 1515 and Antonio Allegretti's poem in vulgate, *Transmutazione de' Metalli,* dedicated to Cosimo I published around 1550 circa. Vincenzo Percolla's treatise, *Auriloquio (ca. 1560),* interpreted all mythology in alchemical key, cfr Carlo Alberto Anzuini, "Alchimie et mythologie dans un traité manuscrit du XVI siècle: L'*Auriloquio* de Vincenzo Percolla," *Chrysopoeia 5* (1992–1996) 493– 528.

[25] As related in Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: the Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art and Technology* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995) 21. For further information and interpretations on the nexus between art and myth in alchemical circles as well as Borghini's interpretation of the studiolo cfr. Valentina Conticelli, "Lo studiolo di Francesco I e l'alchimia: nuovi contribute storici e iconologici, con un carteggio in appendice (1563–1581)," in *L'Art de la Renaissance entre science et magie* (Rome: Académie de France à Rome, 2006) 207–269; *La transmission de savoirs au Moyen Age et á la Renaissance, ed.* Frank La Brasca, F. and Alfredo Perifano. Vol. 2 Besançon Cedex: Université de Franche-Comté, 2005); and Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006) 266ff.

> their power, they introduce celestial force into the spirits by which the spirits preserve themselves from plague and poison. . . .By a similar power from Jupiter and Venus in particular, coral and calchedony are good against the delusions of black bile.[26]

To further clarify the manner in which stones and images could be effective, Ficino resorted to comparing the process to the generation of birthmarks: when a pregnant woman craved a particular food, she could cause a birthmark in her child by mere touch. Her desire became embodied directly onto her child. Hence, emeralds were believed to be beneficial to sight and to halt lascivious thoughts by strengthening chastity; carbuncles placated lust, drove away evil thoughts, increased prosperity and drove away all manner of pestilential airs; rock crystals were believed to lessen thirst if held in the mouth, as well as dispelling bad dreams and freeing men from charms. Pearls were a renowned remedy to ensure chastity, and thus were one of the preferred stones of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I.[27] Lust and chastity seem to have been a prominent preoccupation and a great number of stones could be used to maintain chastity and check lust: androdamas, carbuncle, chalcedonius, galatide, jasper, and sapphire were all believed to halt lust when worn; cimedia had a similar effect when ground and drunk in water.

---

[26] Ficino, *Three Books on Life*. (1998) 312. Ficino's theory of absorption is naturally based on the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, well developed in the Hippocratic-Galenic tradition, according to which astral elements govern and influence specific parts of the human body. The author will struggle throughout the book to stay within the bounds set by Thomas Aquinus in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, whereby engraved images may be acceptable vessels of celestial influences as long as they did not bear inscriptions of any kind, which were identified as one of the hallmarks of ceremonial magic.

[27] Such healing properties may at first appear wholly ridiculous, but their supposed healing properties often held a grain of truth. "Pearls are approximately ninety percent calcium carbonate. Similar chemical compounds are found in modern antacids and other stomach remedies. early physicians, without the benefit of modern chemistry, found a natural source for this remedy. . . . Egyptian physicians also used green crystals to treat eye diseases. They used copper oxides mixed with boric acid as an eye wash. Known as Lapis Armenus, this astringent has been shown by modern medical research to be effective and is still prescribed. The prescribing of powdered emeralds in eye washes may be traced to the Romans. The copper oxides used are green or blue in color. The Romans had a practice of referring to all green gems as *smaragdos*, a word that later became commonly associated with emeralds. It is likely that the Latin physicians, when translating Egyptian prescriptions, mistakenly substituted emeralds for the effective copper oxide crystals. These same explanation may apply to the use of sapphire and lapis lazuli as eye remedies. Other Egyptians texts describe the copper oxides as blue crystals. The name lapis lazuli translates literally from its Latin roots as "blue stone". The same problem of transcription may be the reason many blue stones are recommended for eye treatments." Bruce G. Knuth, *Gems in Myth: Legend and Lore (*Parachute, Colorado: Jewelers Press, 2007) 6–7.

Rings and Engraved Images

Magic practices concerned with erotic symbolism are often centered on the female body and the use of female body's secretions: menstrual blood, milk, vaginal fluids, saliva, tears. By comparison, the male body was rather poor in secretions, being limited to sperm, saliva, and tears. Of these, the most magical was the sperm, though it came as a poor second compared to menstrual blood or breast milk; thus in discussion of magic, the male body and its construction often take a secondary role.[28] When the male body is imaged, love magic or binding magic usually seem to be used to negatively affect the phallus, yet a close analysis of few select images found in lapidaries such as Leonardi's suggest that the male body was just as prominent as a locus of power rather than an object that suffered magic's negative consequences. Guido Ruggiero's research suggests that love magic, as exercised by women, often aimed at crossing social boundaries and ensuring the love of a male of a superior class. Leonardi's descriptions, though, are not concerned with love, but rather a type of magic that is mainly sexual or erotic in nature and whose purpose is that of ensuring phallic power over the other, mostly conceptualized in the image of a female nude.

In his treatise, Leonardi listed 250 stones and more than 290 possible images that could be found engraved upon them.[29] Just as in Ficino, in Leonardi's text, a gem's virtue stemmed from the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, whereby each astral body had its analogical equivalent on earth. And while the *Speculum Lapidum* is not illustrated, it is possible to ascertain that the author's descriptions of various engraved gems do coincide with surviving gems as well as with gems illustrated in later texts such as that of Leonardo Augustino's *Gemmae et Sculpturae antiquae* (Fig. 3). In Augustino's 1657 text, each illustration is accompanied by a legend specifying the type of material that it was carved on, thus indicating the importance that it played in the identity and value of the object (Fig. 4, 5). Leonardi clearly stated that these engraved images were worn as rings and often paid attention to the type of setting that the ring was to have. Rings with images similar to those described by Leonardi and illustrated in Leonardo Augustino's text may be found in Abraham van Gorle's seventeenth-century *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium* (Fig. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), where each engraved image is clearly shown to be a ring. The eighteenth-century *Atlante Farnesiano* by Antonio Francesco Gori (Fig. 11) further clarifies the magical nature of certain rings by carefully labeling the image with the legend *Gemma Magica* (Fig. 12, 13). That the preferred mode of wearing magic stones was as rings is also testified to by the illustrations of the fifteenth-century health manual, the *Ortus Sanitatis* (Fig. 14), in which a number of

[28] Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 117ff.

[29] The stones are listed and described in Book II, while the images are discussed in Book III. Within the one hundred ninety three description of images there occur a number of repetitions.

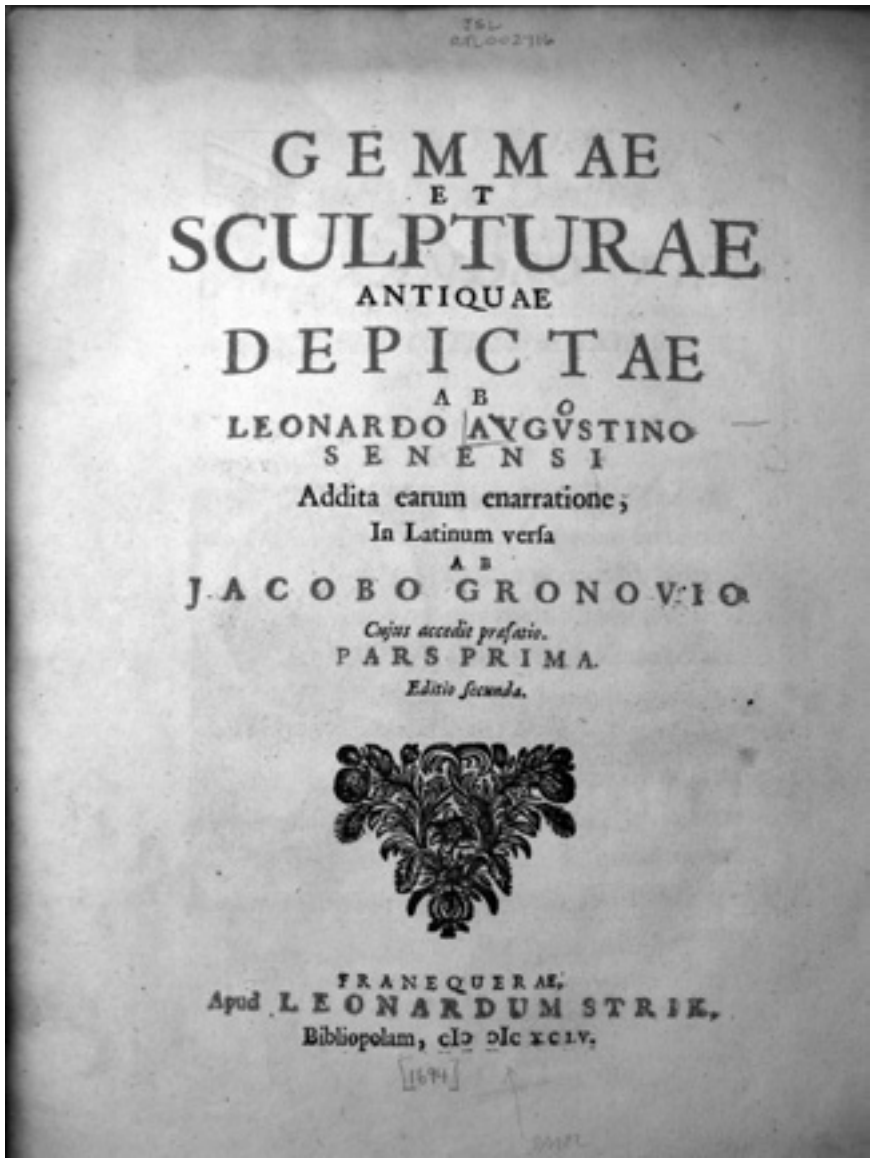
GEMMAE
ET
SCULPTURAE
ANTIQUAE
DEPICTAE
A B
LEONARDO AVGVSTINO
SENENSI
Addita earum enarratione;
In Latinum versa
A B
JACOBO GRONOVIO
Cujus accedit præfatio.
PARS PRIMA.
Editio secunda.
FRANEQUERAE,
Apud LEONARDUM STRIK,
Bibliopolam, cIↃ ↃIc xcIV.

Fig. 3: Leonardo Augustino. *Gemmae et Sculpturae Antiquae*. 1694 ed. (Photo by the author).

Fig. 4: Abraxas/Chimera illustrated in Leonardo Augustino. *Gemmae et Sculpturae Antiquae*. 1694 ed. (Photo by the author).

Fig. 5: Abraxas as illustrated in Leonardo Augustino. *Gemmae et Sculpturae Antiquae*. 1694 ed. (Photo by the author).

Fig. 6: Frontispiece of Abraham van Gorle, *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium*. 1601 ed. (Photo by the author).

Fig. 7: Abraxas ring as illustrated in Abraham van Gorle's *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium*. 1601 ed. (photo by the author).

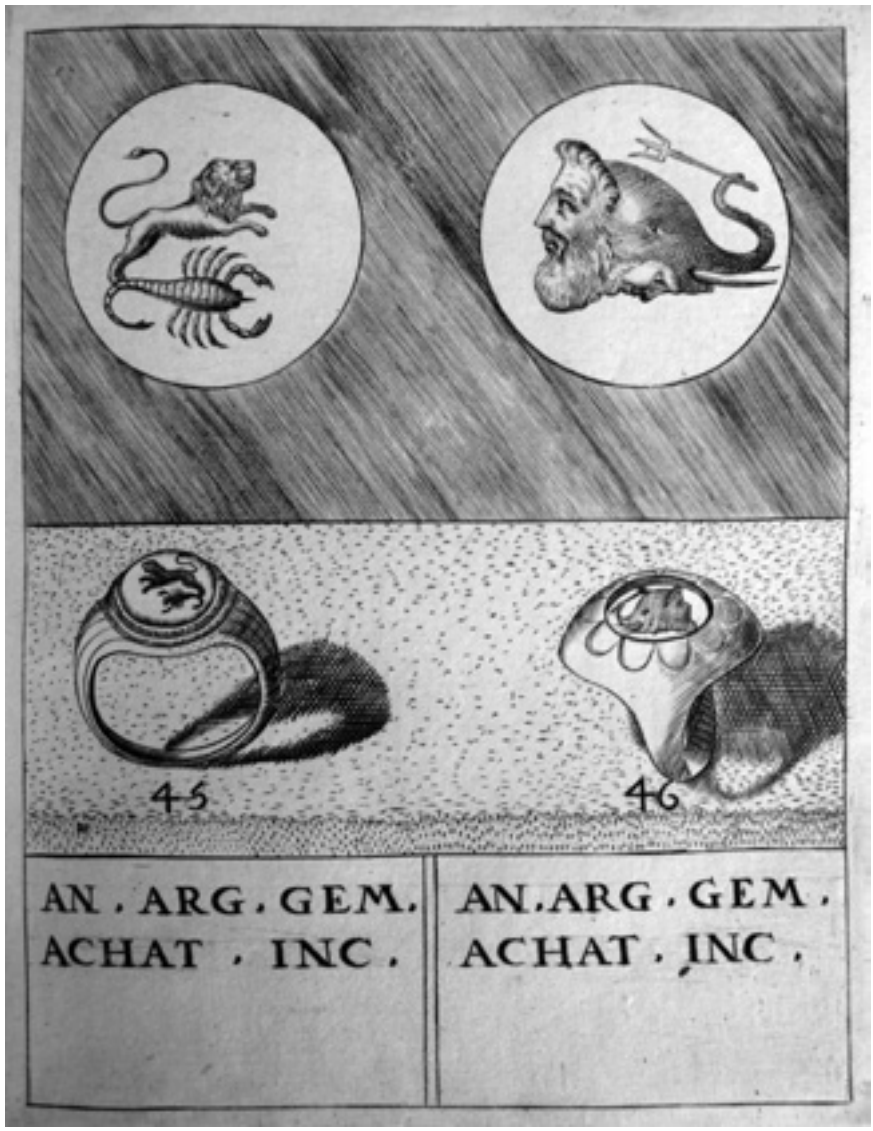

Fig. 8: Magic rings as illustrated in Abraham van Gorle. *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium*. 1601 ed. (photo by the author).

Fig. 9: Magic rings as illustrated in Abraham van Gorle. *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium*. 1601ed. (photo by the author).

Fig. 10: Mythological/Erotic rings as illustrated in Abraham van Gorle. *Dactyliotheca seu Annulorum sigillarium*. 1601 ed. (photo the author).

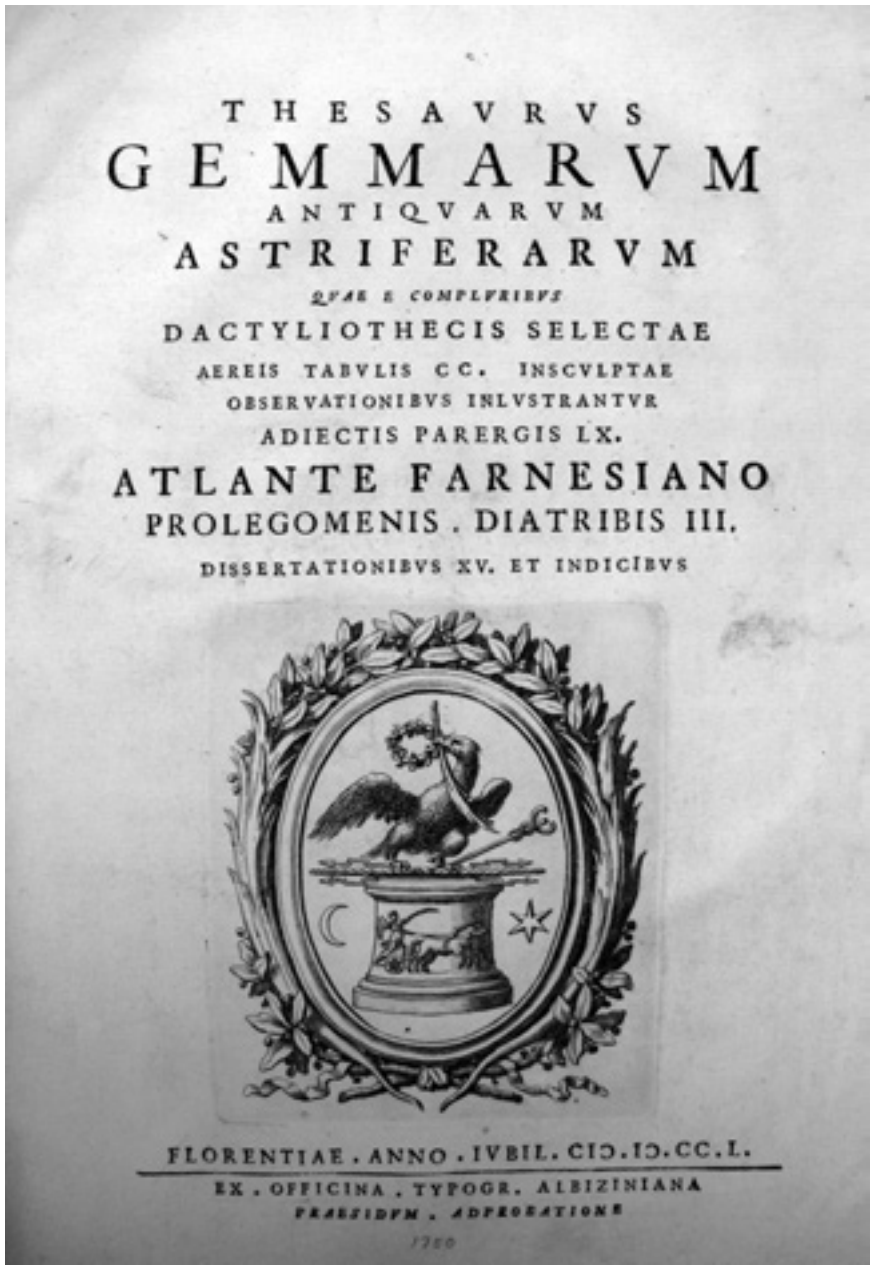

Fig. 11: Antonio Francesco Gori. *Atlante Farnesiano*. 1750 ed. (photo the author).

Fig. 12: Magic ring as illustrated in Antonio Francesco Gori. *Atlante Farnesiano*. 1750 ed. (photo the author).

Fig. 13: Magic ring as illustrated in Antonio Francesco Gori. *Atlante Farnesiano*. 1750 ed. (photo the author).

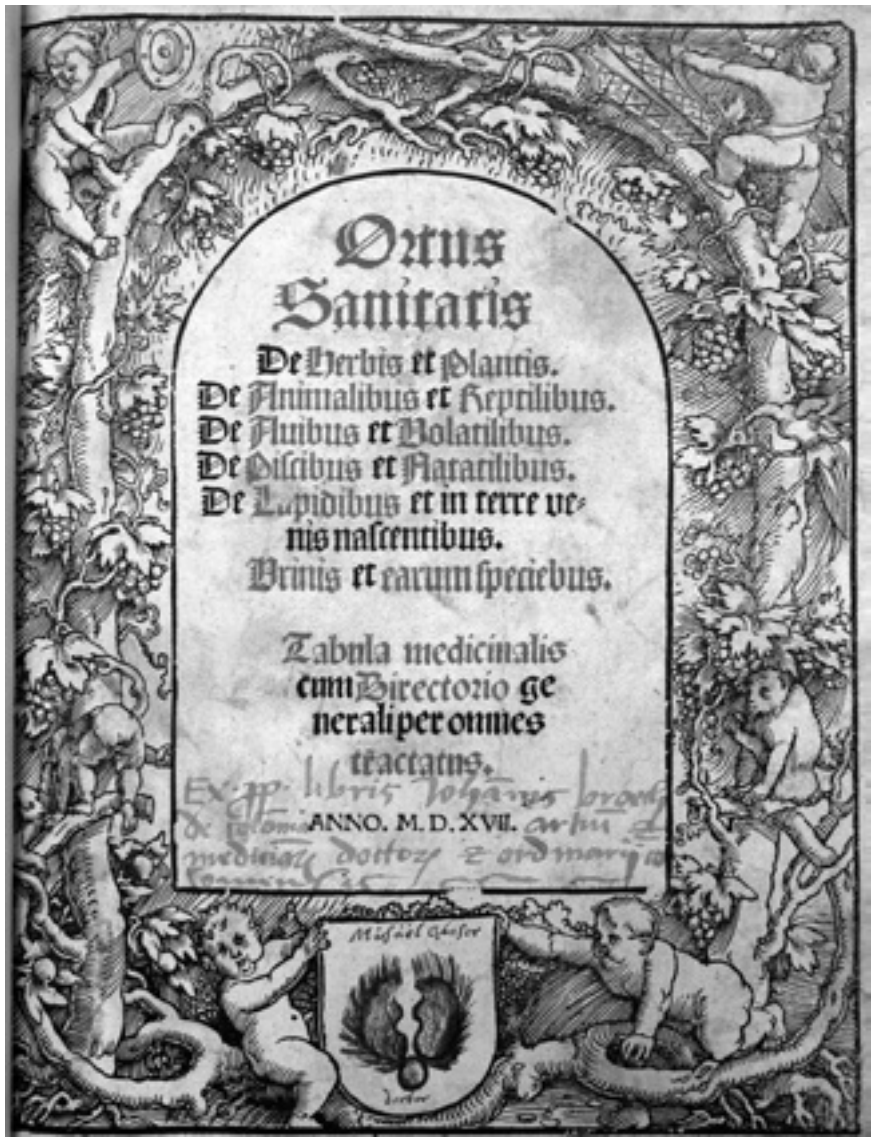

Fig. 14: *Hortus Sanitatis*. 1516 ed. (photo by the author).

entries on specific precious or semi-precious stones are accompanied by the image of a man selling rings (Fig. 15, 16, 17).

Unfortunately, many of these gems are now known only through prints or plaquettes or calchi in ceralacca, even though, ironically enough, the value of such gems was believed to be superior to gold and silver. As Leonardi stated, stones could not be liquefied, unlike gold and precious metals; hence, their power was seen as unchanging, permanent. Contravening the dictates of natural magic, he also stated that this power came from engraved images: "We must place great faith in Thebit when he says that the images the ancients sculpted on gems, were no simple ornament, as many strange images were sculpted on rough stones; but it is to believed that the stones receive their virtues from the images carved as well as from the celestial planets."[30] He reiterates this idea when discussing the three categories of image production: images could be naturally generated; produced through superimposition of one stone over the other, either naturally or by art — that is, by human intervention, as is the case in cameos; and wholly produced by human hands.[31]

The insistence on the power of the image was a dangerous departure from the accepted wisdom that the image solely reflected the stone's powers, which Leonardi attempted to mitigate by asserting at the beginning of Book III that his work was not meant to undermine the Christian doctrine of free will, for a man could not become what he was not. Engraved stones would only influence the wearer to the extent that a man was meant to achieve that potential. Leonardi's contradictions and self-defense were certainly prompted by the difficulty to clearly distinguish natural and ceremonial magic, and by Ficino's own difficult experience. While insisting he was discussing nothing other than natural magic, Ficino had also detailed the specific hours and times of days that engraved images had to be carved by, which the Church interpreted as evidence of ceremonial magic, and thus, a mere six months after the *De Vita*'s publication, he was forced to recant his own writing.[32] Leonardi, in fact, never discusses how the images were to be made; on the contrary, he suggests that these images were merely "found." Descriptions of specific images

[30] Camillo Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum* (Venetiis: per Ioannem Baptistam Sessam,1502) Book III, 44. All translations from the *Speculum Lapidum* are my own. Thebit is most certainly Thabit Ibn Qurra, astrologer to the caliph of Bagdad in the ninth century.

[31] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum* (1502) Book III, 46.

[32] While Ficino had to recant his publication in an effort to avoid accusations of heresy, it is important to note that even in the Renaissance period the line of demarcation between magic and religion was often a fine one. As pointed out by Musacchio in her analysis of the use of *Agnus Dei* wax plaquettes and the presence of coral and animal teeth in such devotional images like the *Madonna della Pergola,* 1523 (Pistoia, Museo Civico) by Bernardino di Antonio Detti. Cfr. Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "Lambs, Coral, Teeth, and the Intimate Intersection of Religion and Magic in Renaissance Tuscany" in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy, ed. Sally J.* Cornelison and Scott Bradford Montgomery (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005) 139–156.

Figs. 15 and 16: Illustration from the *Hortus Sanitatis*. 1516 ed. (photo by the author).

Fig. 17: Illustration from the *Hortus Sanitatis*. 1516 ed. (photo by the author).

are often introduced by the preamble of *si in lapide sculpta inveniatur* implying that the images were merely found already carved.[33] He thus eschewed any question of production even though he had earlier stated that images were also made by men's hands; the solution was to pinpoint the moment of creation to an unspecified time in antiquity. Anxiety about image-making and its implicit power might also have been intensified in the case of images that addressed sexual anxiety, for, as mentioned before, sexual concerns could be seen as illicit and therefore implicitly tied to black magic.

With regards to the engraved stones' power, Leonardi presents us with a further interpretative problem. While the list of stones discussed in Book II seems to indicate that they could be used by both men and women, in Book III, Leonardi asserts rather laconically that magic stones would have no effect in the hands of an *ignobilis persona aut foemina*, or literally, an unworthy person or a woman.[34] Given the use of the *aut* to create a strong juxtaposition between *persona* and *foemina*, it is likely that *persona* was being used to indicate a man. The sentence then would suggest that the images would have no power in the hands of an unworthy man or in the hands of women, all women. On the other hand, in his 1565 translation, Lodovico Dolce translated this particular sentence by simply stating that the engraved stones would not work in the hands of *vil femmina*, thereby focusing solely on the idea of an unworthy women. Since neither Leonardi nor Dolce further qualified the statement, it is difficult to fully capture its import and to fully understand if the adjective is being used to qualify all women as unworthy and base or rather to indicate only a certain class of women. Even Dolce's translation is unclear as to whether he considers all women unworthy and vile or if he is merely attempting to indicate a certain class of women. Considering, though, that Book III continuously addresses a hypothetical male reader, it is quite feasible to surmise that Leonardi, influenced by the sources he was using, was here giving voice to the common medieval trope of natural magic as a body of knowledge meant for men alone.[35]

Leonardi's 193 entries described both the engraved image as well as its function: some would let men acquire grace, love, riches, wisdom, others would repel lightning, quell sea tempests, and protect them from poisons, all manners of illnesses, and even from cheating wives. Some of the images appear to be erotic in nature, some have an erotic function, and others used veiled erotic imagery to suggest power and life. Given the scope of this article, I will here focus only on those images that appear to have a nexus between sexual magic and masculinity.

The image of "a nude woman with her hair down to the her breasts in front of man who showed signs of love" gave the wearer the power to make everyone obey,

[33] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum*, (1502) Book III, 53.

[34] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum*, (1502) Book III, 49.

[35] On magic as a masculine pursuit see Frank Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance" *Sixteenth Century Journal* Vol. 38, issue 1 *(*Spring 2007): 49–76.

and if he touched with it a woman "she would do his every wish."[36] This type of imagery is distinguished by an interaction or exchange between a male and female figure, where the female is clearly identified as nude and thus as an object capable of eliciting desire. While the male is not said to be nude, it is quite possible that *aliquod amoris signum* or "signs of love" is a euphemism for an erection, as some extant gems would indicate, though elsewhere, Leonardi is much more precise in describing the ithyphallic state of the male figure. In the case of an ithyphallic figure, we might deduce that the power of the phallus pointed towards the female effigy would, by sympathetic magic, extend over a flesh and blood woman touched by that ring, for she too, then, would be touched by the magical potency of the phallus.

If the latter example specifically addressed the power that the wearer would have over women, other similar images were used to obtain love from all and power over all in general: "the image of a nude woman standing with her hair down towards the small of her back and a seated men gazing upon her, carved on cornelian, gave men the power to impose his will and to make anyone obey him and to gain the love of all."[37] In this particular case, we are given no idea as to the appearance of the male body, though the female body is still represented nude, suggesting that nudity was an important aspect in the dynamic relationship between the male and the female principle, which seems to be imagined in both cases within the parameters of power: the vulnerable and open female nude presented to the power of the masculine phallus or to the phallic gaze. The lack of a reference to a phallus might explain why the author suggests that the image's power had to potentiated by having the stone set in a ring with amber and terebinth resin underneath it.[38] The magical essence of the phallus's implicit excretion is there supplemented by natural materials instead.[39]

In some cases, the necessary dyad between male and female principles is imagined as taking place between an image and the astral influence under which it was carved: "the image of a man holding flowers in the hand is carved on cornelian and made into a ring on a day governed by Venus or the Moon, all he touches will

[36] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum*. (1502) Book III, 57.

[37] The Latin original reads: "ducetur ad voluntatem ac obedientiam tangentis, et ex omnibus benevolentiam acquiret", Dolce translates as: "e acquistera' l'amor di tutti." Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum* (1502): Book III, 55; 59.

[38] The detail indicates that even jewels without open backing were used for their magical and thaumaturgical powers.

[39] Amber, and its fumes when burned, were used in a variety of pharmaceutical remedies. The scent serves the same purpose as camphor or menthol inhalants. A mixture known as oil-of-amber consists of powdered amber and alcohol or mineral spirits. This concoction has maintained its reputation as a cure for gout, whooping cough and bronchitis and as an antispasmodic for asthma. As recently as 1935, official publications of the United States government suggested oil-of-amber as a viable pharmaceutical product. Bruce G. Knuth, *Gems in Myth: Legend and Lore* (Parachute, Colorado: Jewelers Press, 2007) 6–7.

obey him."[40] In other cases, it seems that a nude male figure leading a woman by the hand was sufficient enough to express the concept of invincibility and power over all: "a nude man standing on his feet with a young woman on his right, her hair bound and tied around her head, with the man holding her by the right hand, while the left is placed on the chest and he gazes on her face, while she looks to the ground, carved on any stone and set in an iron ring with the tongue of a hen sparrow or of a hoopoe, with some myrrh and allume, mixed with a bit of blood from the wearer, he will be invincible and no one will be able to resist him or harm him."[41] Here, the power relationship between male and female principles is made manifest in the direction of the gaze, which as custom required, saw the female gaze as chaste and thus pointed downwards, while the male gaze is openly directed at the young woman's face. As in the preceding case, the lack of openly phallic imagery may be supplanted by the use of materials believed to have magic powers, such as blood or an animal's body part. Interestingly, the wax seal of such a ring, placed around a dog's collar, would have deprived the dog of its bark, suggesting that the image alone could carry magical powers and not just the material on which it was inscribed. The idea is further evidence of the types of contradictions Leonardi is apt to fall into: it reflected the typical use of waxen images that occurred in ceremonial magic. Evidence of this is recorded when the author states that a specific ring may only work if the wearer wore white clothes and abstained from eating dove's flesh, thus ensuring the purity of his intent.

In some cases, the images more generally associated phallic power with life and virility, rather than being specifically aimed at gaining power of another person. The figure of nude turgid man (*inflati* in Latin, *enfiato* in Italian) accompanied by the figure of a well dressed man holding a cup in one hand and a blade of grass, if carved on Gagate and worn for three days, chased all fevers away.[42] The ithyphallic figure was here used for its apothropaic power to preserve life and remove any threat to it.

In all the above examples, the engraved rings exert their influence through sympathetic magic: the physical possession of the image gave power to the wearer. In this sense, we may also argue that the objects were used as fetishes that protected, allayed anxiety and gave power. In numerous cases, the idea of exerting control over the other was conceptualized in the image of man accompanied by a woman. Possession of the represented female body, then, gave the ring wearer power over the actual physical body of another (whether male or female) and functioned as a social signifier of importance.

[40] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum* (1502) Book III, 61.
[41] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum* (1502) Book III, 61.
[42] Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum*, (1502) Book III 60.

Rings as Fetishes

According to the *Etymological Dictionary*, the word "fetish" derives from the Portuguese *fetiço*, a word derived from the Latin *factitius, facere* ("to do, to make, as in made by art or by artificial means").[43] The word "talisman," on the other hand, derives "in part via Arabic *tilsam* (pl. tilsaman), a Greek loan word; in part directly from Byzantine Greek, *telesma* 'talisman, religious rite, payment' earlier 'consecration, ceremony,' originally 'completion,' from *telein* 'perform (religious rites,) pay (tax), fulfill,' from *telos* 'completion, end, tax.'" From a technical point of view, then, engraved gems should be considered fetishes rather than talismans. Merriam-Webster defines a fetish as an "object [. . .] believed to have magical power to protect or aid its owner; broadly: a material object regarded with superstition or extravagant trust or reverence,"[44] while a talisman is defined as "an object held to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune; something producing apparently magical or miraculous effects." In this case, the words may be interchangeable, and are often used as such. Jungian psychotherapist Joy Schaverien suggests a distinction that may be more useful for the purposes of this paper, as she states that an image functions as a fetish when it results from an unconscious identification of the individual with the image: magical thought processes dominate this relationship.[45] The full implications of the image are, therefore, not fully acknowledged. A talisman, instead, is produced only by a fully conscious set of identification processes.[46] Thus,

[43] "Fetishism", *Online Etymology Dictionary,* accessed on August 5, 2014, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=fetishism&searchmode=none.

[44] Merriam-Webster also provides a Freudian definition of Fetish as "an object or bodily part whose real or fantasied presence is psychologically necessary for sexual gratification and that is an object of fixation to the extent that it may interfere with complete sexual expression"; yet, this is not the only possible psychoanalytic definition. "Fetishism", Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed on August 5, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fetishism.

[45] While Schaverien analyzes fetish and talismans in the context of psychosis and art therapy, her borrowings from Lacan's theories of identity formation make it possible to use her definitions outside of the confines she sets out to analyze: "In association with the Lacanian mirror phase, the fetish might be understood to be an example of the state of identification where 'two identify as one'. The fetish art object is experienced as 'live' and associated with some form of private or unconscious rite." J. Schaverien, "Transference and transactional objects in the treatment of psychosis" in *Art, Psychotherapy and Psychosis, ed. Katherine* Killick and Joy Schaverien (London and New York: Routledge; 2007) 20–21. In this way, the term fetish is taken out of its narrow association with sexual perversion, whereby "a sexual fetish is either an inanimate object or a non-sexual part of a person in the absence of which the fetishist is incapable of sexual excitement. [. . .] Fetishists can be said to regard their fetish as being "inhabited by a spirit." Its "magical powers" give the person potency that otherwise lack." Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin,1968) 50–51.

[46] Joy Schaverien "Transference and transactional objects in the treatment of psychosis" in *Art, Psychotherapy and Psychosis, ed. Katherine* Killick and Joy Schaverien (London and New York:

though an object may be called a talisman by its holder/creator, it may indeed function as fetish from a psychoanalytic point of view. As may be deduced from the examples here considered, some of the gems were meant to address an unconscious set of associations: the need to gain control over the female body, or the body of an another, stemming from an unconscious fear of and anxiety about the erotic female body, or of the other in general. The rings, then, act as fetishes used to bridge between the self (unmediated experience) and the Other, or, in other words, the fetish acts as a transitional object, an object that mediates the relationship of the individual to the external world. The fetish makes the anxiety of the unknowable knowable. Moving beyond sexual anxiety, these engraved images addressed also unconscious anxieties about social power and social status: the female nude body come to stand, by extension, for the experience of all categories of "Other."

In Levi-Strauss's *Elementary Structure of Kinship*, the exchange of women between groups reinforces kinship.[47] Having power over women means having the power to reinforce important exchanges between men. The application of Levi-Strauss's observation on the exchange of actual bodies for "represented" bodies can here be further elaborated through Lacan, who famously noted that in such exchanges, *la femme n'existe pas* (she does not exist). Yet, it can be argued that the anxiety about power of Leonardi's *Speculum Lapidum* manifestly admits that *l'homme n'existe pas*: in such exchanges, even men do not exist as independent individualities. Rather, masculinity is constructed by gaining power over the Other, which on the one hand is an act of identity affirmation and on the other also reveals the anxiety of identity of the controlling agent.[48] The need to construct a masculinity, even a learned masculinity, through phallic power might also explain why these images were all worn on rings. Considering that rings were often associated with female genitalia, or at least literary examples indicate that a ring could be metaphorically be used to indicate a vagina, it is not too farfetched to suggest that the wearing of a ring may be interpreted as a phallic performance of penetration: the phallic finger wore the vaginal ring. It might be worth suggesting, then, though Leonardi does not specify it, that the wearing of images as rings was in and of itself an act of erotic magic and potentiated the images by sympathetic processes. Remarkably, a survey of sixteenth-century English wills shows distinct patterns of bequests for both men and women with regards to rings. As Catherine Richardson's study shows, women bequeathed rings to distant relatives, while men bequeathed

Routledge; 2007) 24–25.

[47] Claude Levi Strauss, *Elementary Structure of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, originally published in 1949).

[48] Though outside of the scope of this article, jewelry giving from husband to wife should also be analyzed in this light, as pearls were often the gem of choice, and considering the pearl's virtue in ensuring chastity, one must question whether this was a signifier of male anxiety over the chastity of the female body, or whether the pearl publicly advertised the intimate and erotic connection between bride and groom.

them to their closest relatives.[49] In 22 percent of the cases, men bequeathed rings to their sons: the exchange of rings then came to signify a solidification of the bond between father and son as well as a kin relationship, and the image on the ring came to stand for that very same relationship. In 18 percent of the cases, the rings were passed on to other male relatives. The passing of jewelry was a vital signifier of social masculine status and a marker of external identity that could be literally seen passing from the hand of the father to that of the son. In the early Middle Ages, for example, women were forbidden from wearing diamond rings, as these gems were associated with the noble male body. Throughout the early modern period, across the whole of Europe, a number of dukes and princes were avid collectors of gems that bore names proclaiming the jewels' as well the possessors' identities. But perhaps most importantly, since it has escaped notice, the jewel bestowed an identity on its wearer by virtue of its occult powers, for it ensured the wearer's power over the other and acted as a signifier of identity affirmation of a masculinity constructed as a performance to be worn on the hand. The visibility of a ring broadcast to all the occult meaning of a gem and its effectiveness, and while it may be argued that "belief" on the part of the wearer as well as of the observer would have been a necessary presupposition for magic to work, a psychoanalytic approach suggests that even when the observer might have been skeptical, he still would have understood a ring bearing a phallic image of erotic magic as symbolic of a certain idea of masculinity. To that extent, then, the ring may be said to have worked its magic!

[49] Catherine Richardson, "'As my whole trust is in him': Jewelry and the Quality of Early Modern Relationships" in *Ornamentalism: the Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2011) 182–201.

Figuring Marital Queerness in Shakespeare's Sonnets

David L. Orvis
Appalachian State University

> Gays and Lesbians have a right to live as they choose,
> they don't have the right to redefine marriage for all of us.
> National Organization for Marriage[1]

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments.
> William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116[2]

I want to begin with the lie self-proclaimed marriage protectors continue to peddle in defense of holy matrimony. Really, it is a rather impressive lie, repeated ad nauseam even though the very book upon which it is founded contradicts it at every turn. Presumably, the crusaders associated with the National Organization for Marriage (NOM) trace their transhistorical, transcultural definition of marriage back to Adam and Eve, the original parents who in the opening chapters of Genesis "become one flesh."[3] That God never explicitly decrees that marriage is for straight couples only—for Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve—seems not to trouble those who are otherwise preoccupied with living and legislating precisely according

[1] "Marriage Talking Points," National Organization for Marriage, accessed 25 September 2012, http://www.nationformarriage.org/site/c.omL2KeN0LzH/b.4475595/k.566A/Marriage_Talking_Points.htm.

[2] I have used Stephen Booth's Yale Nota Bene edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000) for citation and reference. Citations hereafter appear in the text.

[3] Genesis 2:24, Geneva Bible. The first appearance of specifically marital terms appears earlier in the same passage: "Therefore shall man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh."

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery, ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 131–150.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.5.111059

to His eternal and infallible Word. Of course, Adam and Eve represent the first, rather than the definitive or final, married couple in scripture, and as Frances Dolan has brilliantly argued, the contradictions inherent in the two accounts of creation "have provided a rich ground for contestation but a very unstable foundation for gender roles and relations."[4] Attempts to proffer a static definition of biblical marriage are further undermined by the diverse marital arrangements that come after Adam and Eve. It is perhaps unsurprising that marriage defenders have become particularly adept at refusing to see anything but the definition that best suits their worldview, but this recalcitrance has not deterred biblical scholars such as Joseph Marchal from delineating the strikingly different examples of biblical marriage that, taken together, illustrate just "how much (or really how little) insight the Bible provides . . . when people who cite or otherwise use it fail to take accountability for how they do so."[5] Paradoxically, in the face of staggering evidence to the contrary, marriage protectors' insistence on a single, immutable definition of biblical marriage throws light on the very ruptures such defenses have been designed to conceal.

Perhaps it is a tad unfair to pit NOM against Shakespeare, but the juxtaposition of their sentiments in this essay's epigraphs suggests that marriage's definition has always been debated—certainly long before homosexuals began implementing their diabolical plan to destroy the family. Dolan has made the compelling case that marriage's "history is one of constant, constitutive crisis and conflict . . . between incompatible models and irreconcilable expectations."[6] Yet, whereas marriage crusaders cling to a fantasy of naturalized marriage grounded in a coherent biblical narrative that does not in fact exist, Shakespeare punctures this fantasy by exploding marriage's meanings. This interest in interrogating marriage and its constituent parts runs through much of Shakespeare's *oeuvre*, but in the space of this essay, I would like to focus primarily on a cluster of sonnets that deploy marital conceits to ponder the speaker's relationship with the fair youth. In troping marriage, Shakespeare denaturalizes it, subjecting it to figurative processes that generate a multiplicity of marital meanings and possibilities. As these meanings and possibilities expand far beyond the poet's control, they overwhelm and thus

[4] Frances E. Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 33. As Dolan points out, Genesis 1 and 2 offer conflicting accounts of the creation: in chapter 1, God creates flora, fauna, and then, in a single gesture, humankind, i.e., "the man in his image, in the image of God created he him; he created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27, Geneva Bible); in chapter 2, God creates Adam first, then flora, then fauna, and then finally Eve, who "shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23). "When considered together," writes Dolan, "they have always been read as grounding gender relations in both equality and hierarchy, in a tension between difference and sameness" (33).

[5] Joseph Marchal, "Who's Getting (Some) Biblical Marriage?" *Feminist Studies in Religion*, May 11, 2012, http://www.fsrinc.org/blog/whos-getting-some-biblical-marriage.

[6] Dolan, *Marriage and Violence*, 1–2.

problematize any fixed definition of marriage. In this way, troping marriage is an ineluctably queer(ing) enterprise, one that denaturalizes dominant paradigms at the same time that it posits new, potentially subversive configurations. In exploring both the deconstructive and generative aspects of queerness, I am, of course, drawing upon Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's capacious definition of "queer" as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excess of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically."[7] The tropological program Shakespeare implements and develops in his sonnets works to similar ends, opening up seemingly naturalized concepts such as love and marriage to a panoply of counternormative possibilities.

Indeed, tropes themselves are very queer things: derived from the Greek τρόπος ("a turn") and related to the root of τρέπειν ("to turn"), "trope" signifies a twisting or turning of meaning. Although he does not use the term "queer," Shakespeare's contemporary Abraham Fraunce offers a similar definition of "Tropes, or turnings" in *The Arcadian rhetorike* (1588):

> A Trope or turning is when a word is turned from his naturall signification, to some other, so conuenientlie, as that it seeme rather willinglie ledd, than driuen by force to that other signification. This was first inuented of necessitie for want of words, but afterwards continued and frequented by reason of the delight and pleasant grace thereof. Sometimes these Tropes bee excessiue, signifying in word, more than can bee true in deed, and then are they tearmed Hyperboles. The excellencie of tropes is then most apparant, when either manie be fitlie included in one word, or one so continued in manie, as that with what thing it begin, with the same it also end: and then it is called an Allegorie or Inuersion.[8]

Fraunce opens with the premise that words have "naturall signification[s]," but these fixed meanings are "willinglie led, [rather] than driuen by force to . . . other signification[s]." Tropes, in other words, betray "naturall signification[s]," exposing them as pretense masquerading as essence. Indeed, "the excellencie of tropes" is most on display when they reveal a word's capacity to carry diverse, even contradictory significations — that is, "when either manie be fitlie included in one word, or one so continued in manie, as that with what thing it begin, with the same it also end." For Fraunce, these tropological processes are exhilarating, a source of "delight and pleasant grace." In taking pleasure in the perversion of "naturall

[7] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8.

[8] Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian rhetorike: or The praecepts of rhetorike made plaine by examples Greeke, Latin, English, Italian, French, Spanish*, STC 11338 (London: Printed by Thomas Orwin, 1588), sig. A2^{v}.

signification," Fraunce, like Shakespeare, engages in what I want to call a queer project, destabilizing dominant social paradigms by deconstructing the language through which these paradigms find expression.

Most obviously, Shakespeare's marital conceits propose a homoerotic instantiation that challenges conventional understandings of marriage's gender dynamics, but this difference merely inaugurates a tropological process that subverts the institution of marriage from within, dismantling and then reimagining virtually every aspect of a social arrangement designed to organize social relations in very specific ways, according to the dominant culture's ideals. But if Shakespeare's sonnets exemplify the "Tropes, or turnings" Fraunce revels in, where might we find the "naturall signification" that figurative language unravels? Perhaps the best place to look is the wedding service outlined in the Book of Common Prayer, a text that is itself ripe for deconstruction. First issued in 1549, a mere fifteen years before Shakespeare's birth, the Prayer Book was a relatively new liturgical text whose early history was beset by controversy: upon acceding the throne in 1553, Mary I suppressed the Prayer Book and restored Catholic worship; six years later, the newly crowned Elizabeth I reintroduced the book in the form Shakespeare would have known best. Although this edition had the monarch's support, it did not escape criticism. As Ramie Targoff has shown, Anglican clerics continued to complain about what they perceived to be the vestiges of Catholicism adulterating the liturgy.[9] What's more, while the Prayer Book grew increasingly popular over the course of the early modern period, the wedding service never became compulsory for couples who wanted to marry. As David Cressy observes, "In principle, a marriage existed if the man and the woman committed themselves to each other by words of consent expressed in the present tense. It would be enough to say, 'I, N. *do* take thee, N, to be my wedded wife/husband.' A marriage was technically made valid in law by this contract or spousals *per verba de presenti*, providing there were no overriding impediments."[10] Although "an extensive body of matrimonial law addressed the ambiguities, insufficiencies, and irregularities of poorly worded, inadequately witnessed, or contested contracts," spousals *per verba de presenti* remained legally binding throughout the early modern period.[11] Indeed, "the law remained essentially unchanged until the passage of Lord Hardwicke's marriage act in 1753."[12] Thus, while the Prayer Book presented itself as the definitive text on Anglican liturgical practices, a text Shakespeare doubtless used in his own wedding service,

[9] Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 36–56.

[10] David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 317.

[11] Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 267. See also B.J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13–29.

[12] Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132.

it was nevertheless a recent — and for a time contentious — contribution to religious discourse in England.[13]

In this context, it is perhaps best to think of the Prayer Book's wedding service as part of an early effort to impart to parishioners a vision of marriage that had not yet been assimilated into the dominant ideology and that, as Dolan has shown, was contradictory from its inception.[14] According to the book's wedding service, "holy matrimonie" consists of one woman and one man who "joyne together" in accordance with "the causes for which matrimonye was ordeined": "One was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the feare and nurtoure of the Lorde, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordeined for a remedy agaynste synne and to avoide fornication, that suche persones as have not the gifte of continencie might marrye, and kepe themselves undefiled members of Christes body. Thirdly, for the mutual societie, helpe, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, bothe in prosperitye, and adversitye."[15] Critics have debated this tripartite list of "causes for which matrimonye was ordeined." For example, to what extent is the ordering significant? Does it matter that procreation appears first and companionship last? And do the "causes" constitute a checklist imposed in its totality upon a married couple? Or are they an array of possible justifications for marriage? For my purposes, the crucial point is that the list is simultaneously too precise and too vague. That is, the list opens with, and perhaps prioritizes, the procreative function of marriage, but this specific function gives way to much less clearly defined justifications that stray farther from the provenance of matrimony. Indeed, the third justification — "for . . . mutual societie, helpe, and comfort," or companionship — also served as a defining feature of *amicitia*, a homonormative institution Renaissance humanists took such pains to distinguish from marriage (and also sodomy), with varying degrees of success.[16] Slipping from the overly specific (marriage requires "the procreation of

[13] On the reception of the Prayer Book in early modern England, see Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[14] According to Dolan, "[W]e have inherited three models of marriage from early modern England (1550–1700): marriage as hierarchy, as fusion, and as contract. These three models are incompatible and, to make matters worse, each is riddled with internal contradictions." Attempts to reconcile these models reveal what Dolan calls an "economy of scarcity" where "there is only room for one full person" (2–3).

[15] *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157.

[16] On the homonormativity of *amicitia*, see Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 28-62; and Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Cf. Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the similarities between signs of friendship and of sodomy, see Alan Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of

children") to the overly general (marriage is "for . . . mutual societie"), the Prayer Book's wedding service provides the conditions of its own subversion.

Following Slavoj Žižek, I would argue that the Prayer Book's articulation of the causes or reasons for marriage evinces the wedding ceremony's "inherent transgression." As Žižek observes, "[I]n so far as power relies on its "inherent transgression," then — sometimes, at least — *overidentifying* with the explicit power discourse — *ignoring* this inherent obscene underside and simply taking the power discourse at its (public) word, acting as if it really means what it explicitly says (and promises) — can be the most effective way of disturbing its smooth functioning."[17] In taking marriage "at its (public) word," we glimpse not a monolith of heteronormativity but rather a fraught discursive formation parading itself as a naturalized organizing principle of society. If the radical potential of the Prayer Book's justifications stops short of inviting the queer figurations undertaken in Shakespeare's sonnets, then one might note the wedding service's own tropological formulations. In fact, the Anglican liturgy foregrounds marriage's status as a metonym for a "mystical union . . . betwixt Christ and his Church": "DEARELY beloved frendes, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregacion, to joyne together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instytuted of God in Paradise, in the time of mannes innocencie, signifying unto us the mistical union that is betwixt Christ and his Churche: which holy state Christe adourned and beautified with his presence and firste myracle that he wrought in Cana of Galile, and is commended of sainct Paul to be honourable emong all men."[18] Though the liturgy suggests one marriage "signif[ies]" the other, the significations developed through metonymy are not unidirectional; rather, they vacillate between concepts, putting into discourse countless, often unpredictable associations. As Kathryn Schwarz writes, "Yet even as artificially closed metonyms instantiate ideology in material form, referential shifts undermine the idea of a fixed presence that can be known or owned. . . . The momentum that pushes words across things forms attachments only to discredit and discard them; substitution escapes the restricted space of complement, and implicates a potentially infinite series of terms."[19] Hence, Elizabeth I responded to growing concerns about her

Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," *History Workshop Journal* 20, no. 1 (1990): 1–19; and Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 21–59.

[17] Slavoj Žižek, "*Da Capo senza Fine*," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000), 220, emphasis in original.

[18] *Book of Common Prayer*, 157.

[19] Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 60.

refusal to marry by claiming to be "married already to the realm of England."[20] Initially, this mystical marriage may have placated Parliament, but as Elizabeth's reign drew on it became increasingly clear that this marriage had taken the place of any earthly nuptials. If we take Elizabeth at her (public) word, then her marriage to England is queer from multiple vantage points: if by "England" she means all her subjects, then the union is polyamorous; if, however, Elizabeth means her realm, then her union is paraphilic, not unlike Erika Eiffel's marriage to the Eiffel Tower in 2007.[21] However one interprets Elizabeth's union with England, it is notable that the Prayer Book, in attempting to define so-called biblical marriage, provides the liturgical foundations for its own perversion.

Tellingly, the Prayer Book, like the National Organization for Marriage, demonstrates at least some awareness of marriage's radical potential through its selective quotation of scripture. Although Paul does draw a correlation between earthly and mystical marriage in Ephesians, he privileges the latter over the former, rereading Genesis 2:24 as "concerning Christ, and concerning the Church" (5:32). And in 1 Corinthians, Paul famously refers to marriage as a last resort: "But if they cannot abstain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn" (7:9). For all their differences, therefore, NOM and the Anglican Church are similarly engrossed in protecting marriage from its "inherent transgression." Whereas NOM chooses one married couple from the entire Bible to represent biblical marriage, the Prayer Book quotes Paul selectively, leaving out those passages where he denigrates the institution of earthly marriage.

That Shakespeare recognized the central importance of the Prayer Book is evident in the opening lines of Sonnet 116—"Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments" (1–2)—which, as critics have pointed out, closely resemble a passage from the wedding service: "I require and charge you (as you wil aunswere at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secretes of all hartes shalbe disclosed) that if either of you doe knowe any impedyment, why ye may not be lawfully joyned together in Matrimony, that ye confesse it. For be ye well assured, that so many as be coupled together, otherwyse then Goddes worde doeth allowe, are not joyned together by God, neither is their Matrimonye lawful."[22] It has become commonplace in criticism of Sonnet 116 to understand its marital language as conveying the speaker's hopes of a lifelong bond with his friend, the fair youth. In this reading, the speaker quotes the Prayer Book to proclaim, however anxiously,

[20] Elizabeth I, "Queen Elizabeth's Conversations with the Scottish Ambassador, William Maitland, Laird of Lethington, September and October 1561," in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 65.

[21] Kate Snow and Jonann Brady, "Woman Proves Love for Eiffel Tower With Commitment Ceremony," *ABC News*, April 8, 2009, http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=7283494&page=1#.UGYFW03A9IE.

[22] *Book of Common Prayer*, 158.

his desire for a friendship that rivals the matrimonial commitment solemnized by the Church of England. One of the assumptions behind this interpretation is that the dynamic between speaker and addressee is best described as a form of friendship. Indeed, many critics refer to the fair youth as the speaker's friend and insist that the discourse of noble friendship informs those sonnets addressed to him.[23] However, while it is clear that Shakespeare's works exhibit a sustained interest in this language, I would argue that the sonnets resist, even as they might elicit, the kind of narrative coherence that would carry the thread of friendship through the entire sequence.[24] Although Shakespeare's speaker calls his beloved "dear friend" (30.13), "fair friend" (104.1), and even "sweetest friend" (133.4), to quote just three instances, and although at least a few of these sonnets summon the rhetoric of *amicitia*, as in Sonnet 42, when the speaker announces, "[M]y friend and I are one" (13), numerous other sonnets hinge on different conceits exemplifying different relationalities that may or may not have anything to do with friendship. To adduce only a few examples, elsewhere in the sonnets the speaker refers to the fair youth as his patron (15, 17), his son (37), his lord (26), his lover (63), his slave master (57, 58), and, of course, his spouse (93, 116). Rather than make the *a priori* assumption that all of these relational terms reflect the vicissitudes of friendship, I submit that the multiplicity of terms reveals an insecure speaker's ongoing attempts to refigure and refashion his bond with the beloved. In a sense, I am drawing on Paul Hammond's excellent discussion of what he calls the "over-delineation" of Shakespeare's sonnets: "It is not that his expressions are ambiguous; rather that in the *Sonnets* he seems addicted to multiple definitions which by their sheer proliferation over-delineate, perpetually redescribing the young man, the poet, and their relationship. Indirections and refusals to disclose are intrinsic to the mode of the *Sonnets*, and it would be a fundamental misreading to impose a clarity upon the careful obscurities of Shakespeare's text."[25] In building upon Hammond's analysis, I do not mean to insist that one cannot assemble a narrative out of Shakespeare's sonnets; countless readers and critics have done precisely that. My more modest point, rather, is that

[23] For a few notable examples, see Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 176; MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 46; and Robert Matz, *The World of Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Introduction* (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland and Company, 2008), 6.

[24] Rather than try to summarize here what remains a lively scholarly debate about the material conditions and formal qualities of Shakespeare's sonnets and the sequence they constitute, I recommend, as a starting point, the excellent précis provided in James Schiffer, "Rereading New Life into Shakespeare's Sonnets: A Survey of Criticism," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 1999), 3–71.

[25] Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 63.

such narratives are inescapability heuristic—a quality, Katherine Duncan Jones, reminds us, that "is not cause for despair, but for rejoicing."[26]

While Shakespeare's sonnets may indeed lend themselves to critical interpretations that explore consonances between friendship and marriage, consonance does not equal correlation or causation, and one cannot assume that homoerotic instantiations of marriage are predicated upon expressions of likeness associated with humanist discourses of *amicitia*. If we examine Sonnet 116's "marriage of true minds" on its own terms, we discover a conceit that in mimicking the Prayer Book's wedding ceremony poses a series of direct challenges to the "naturall signification" it expounds. That is, in the sonnet's first two lines, the speaker posits a disembodied "marriage of true minds" that he then places in confrontation with the heterosocial marriage service. From its opening lines, then, the poem implies an antagonism between the speaker's marriage and the state's definition thereof. This antagonism becomes all the more intriguing when we ponder what Helen Vendler has labeled the sonnet's "impersonal" tone.[27] Except, perhaps, for the speaker's gendering male the "star to every wand'ring bark" (7), Sonnet 116 provides little evidence of the address circuit, crucially leaving open the possibility that the dynamic between speaker and addressee might be homo- or heteroerotic. The efficacy of this ambiguity, whether or not it was Shakespeare's intention, is borne out in the sonnet's enduring popularity at wedding celebrations—though, as we see shall see, people who perform the poem at traditional ceremonies may have missed the queer work the poem is enacting.

Given the speaker's emphasis on minds rather than bodies, one might argue that the gender dynamic in Sonnet 116 matters little, but I would contend that any gender one might assign the speaker and/or addressee proves subversive vis-à-vis the Prayer Book's marriage service. Because most critics accept the by-now familiar division that places Sonnet 116 among the fair youth sonnets, I shall first consider the possibility of a male homoerotic address circuit. Most obviously, a male same-sex union violates the primary justification for marriage: "the procreation of children, to be brought up in the feare and nurtoure of the Lorde, and praise of God." A same-sex marriage also defies the gendered language of the wedding ceremony, which includes specific passages for the bride and the groom to deliver. Although the Prayer Book does accommodate non-procreative couples—but only when "the woman is past childe birth"—no such provisions are made for same-sex couples.[28] The locution "marriage of true minds" might suggest that the speaker's union with the beloved fulfills the second and third justifications in the Prayer Book—"to avoide fornication . . . and kepe themselves undefiled membres of Christes body"

[26] Katherine Duncan Jones, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd Series (London: Thomson Learning, 1997), 97.

[27] Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 488.

[28] *Book of Common Prayer*, 161.

and "for . . . mutual societie, helpe, and comfort"—but any assurance of a non-sexual relationship is undermined by the sonnet's eroticism. Pointing to the speaker's synecdochical incantation of the youth's "rosy lips and cheeks" (9) as evidence of an erotic attachment, Joseph Pequigney states, "The flesh plays an essential part in this marriage as in others."[29] For Bruce Smith, hints at sexual consummation derive from the speaker's playing upon the Prayer Book's comments on impediments to marriage: "Like the marriage of man and wife in the *Book of Common Prayer*, 'The marriage of true minds' in sonnet 116 may have a physical as well as a spiritual aspect. 'True minds' can mean not only true 'affections' (OED II.15.b) that readers conventionally find in the phrase, but the true 'intentions' (OED II.14) of two people who present themselves for marriage before a priest."[30] Although minds are not in themselves organs, they play a key role in determining whether and how one chooses to use (or not use) one's body. In this sense, the mind is implicated in, rather than distinct from, marital sexuality. In marrying "true minds," therefore, Shakespeare sets up an intriguing paradox that unsettles the "naturall signification" of matrimony, simultaneously untethering it from bodies and the biological difference that inheres in the husband/wife dichotomy and enjoining the couples it solemnizes to consummate their love. In the context of this marital figuration, the heterosocial coupling of husband and wife ceases to be essential; instead, this coupling represents just one possible configuration that constitutes a marriage.

As it trivializes both the justifications for and constituent parts of matrimony, Sonnet 116 implicitly asks, what makes a marriage? If the husband/wife dichotomy and the act of procreation are not essential components of a marital relationship, then what is? In raising these questions, the poem evacuates marriage's meaning, leaving an empty signifier that has the capacity to register disparate relationalities. Significantly, this critique takes aim at marriage not just as a social arrangement, but as an ideological state apparatus, insofar as the Anglican Church is the state church that considers all English subjects its parishioners. In the wedding service, the priest assumes an authoritative role, officiating and performing the nuptial ceremony. As I noted above, during this ceremony the priest "require[s] and charge[s]" the bride and groom to disclose "any impedyment, why ye may not be lawfully joyned together in Matrimony." At this point, the priest acts as both confessor and adjudicator, exhorting the couple to admit publicly to any transgressions that might impede their ability to wed and then, based on those confessions, judging whether the groom and bride may lawfully become husband and wife. In this respect, the minister operates as a conduit for of the confessorial power that Michel Foucault identifies as both producing and subjugating the subject:

[29] Joseph Pequigney, *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 181.

[30] Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 264.

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resonances it has to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.[31]

Although we tend not to think of the minister's commanding the bride and groom to divulge any impediments to marriage as a genuine attempt at extracting a public confession, the incorporation of this seemingly *pro forma* statement into the liturgy produces spousal subjects who are subjected to the state's conceptualization of spousality. Or to put it another way, in granting the liturgy's confessorial power, husband and wife submit themselves to the state's authority. In fact, this subjection occurs several weeks before the ceremony, since "the bannes must be asked thre severall Sondaies or holy daies, in the tyme of service, the people beyng present, after the accustomed maner. . . . And yf the persons that would be maryed dwell in diverse Paryshes, the bannes must be asked in both Parishes and the Curate of the one Paryshe shall not solempnyze matrimony betwyxt them, wythout a certifycate of the bannes beyng thryse asked, from the Curate of the other Parysh."[32] Even if we accept that the bride and groom were not inclined to acknowledge impediments to their marriage, historians have documented numerous cases where concerned members of the community offered up their own objections.[33] To participate in the Anglican liturgy, then, was to subject oneself both to the confessorial power of the church and state and to the surveillance of the community.

In ventriloquizing the minister, the speaker of Sonnet 116 appropriates state power and acts as its agent. With this gesture, he usurps the minister's prerogative and, in so doing, demystifies the Anglican service, revealing it to be merely a series of speech acts that anyone might rehearse. This revelation does not in itself dismantle state power, but it does call into question, in proto-Butlerian fashion, the significance of state recognition. As Judith Butler points out, "[T]he demand to be recognized, which is a very powerful political demand, can lead to new and invidious forms of social hierarchy, to a precipitous foreclosure of the sexual field, and to new ways of supporting and extending state power, if it does not institute

[31] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. and ed. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 61–62.

[32] *Book of Common Prayer*, 157.

[33] See Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 305–13.

a critical challenge to the very norms of recognition supplied and required by state legitimation."[34] Shakespeare's marriage of true minds enacts precisely such a challenge: if a priest need not perform the wedding service for that service to signify, and if a marital relationship is intelligible *as a marriage* even when its participants do not seek state recognition, then the legitimacy of a marriage is not, in fact, contingent upon state intervention and recognition. In Sonnet 116, this point is made brilliantly, as the "marriage of true minds" becomes legible through the language of the service whose prescriptions and proscriptions it flouts. Ironically, one could add the wedding service's passages on impediments to the list of impediments Shakespeare's speaker endeavors not to admit to his marriage of true minds. More importantly, in spurning the state, the speaker also spurns God's Word as mediated by the Prayer Book's service, which dictates that "so many as be coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God." This rejection of Anglican liturgy might seem radical, but it is also of a piece with the more pervasive view that spousals expressed in *verba de presenti* should remain legally binding.

There are, of course, impediments to this marriage of true minds, as critics have shown through explications of the series of negations that structure the sonnet. I maintain, however, that these negations, no less than the deconstruction of the nuptial ceremony, figure into the poem's representation of marital queerness, specifically the queering of temporality. At this point, it is worth quoting the sonnet in full:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments. Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove:
> O no! it is an ever-fixéd mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> It is the star to every wandering bark,
> Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come:
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
> If this be error and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Vendler's close reading "springs from a line of difference: the quatrains differ powerfully from one another. Also, there are too many *no*'s, and *nor*'s, *never*'s, and *not*'s in this poem—one *nor*, two *no*'s, two *never*'s, and four *not*'s—for it to seem

[34] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 115.

a serene one."[35] Compounding such negations as "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds" (2–3) and "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks" (11) is the image of the sickle, which Shakespeare uses elsewhere (see Sonnets 12, 60, 100, 123, and 126) to explore anxieties about aging and death. In Sonnet 116, the speaker insists, "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come" (9–10). Stephen Booth hears in these lines echoes of Ephesians 5:14-16: "Christ shall give thee light. / Take heed therefore that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, / Redeeming the time, for the days are evil."[36] This passage immediately precedes a longer section of Ephesians that appears in the Prayer Book's wedding service. That the Anglican liturgy excludes verses anticipating the eschaton is hardly surprising; that Shakespeare, in the form of an allusion, reinserts those verses back into marital discourse is illuminating. Though the speaker may wish to believe that love does not succumb to the ravages of time, the subtle invocation of the eschatological tenor of Ephesians belies such optimism. At the same time, then, the speaker mocks the Prayer Book's curious elision and ponders what this material portends for his marriage of true minds. As if trying to find another, less ominous image, the speaker restarts, only to arrive once again at the end times: "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom" (11–12). Given that the sonnet's third quatrain tries and fails not once but twice to figure love's immortality, one cannot help but hear in the concluding couplet the histrionics of desperation: "If this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved" (13–14). The demand for evidence of something that exceeds human understanding bespeaks a profoundly insecure speaker, one who asks a question his beloved cannot answer perhaps in order to avoid another, more personal exchange he suspects is forthcoming.

The negativity and eschatology subtending the poem call forth a marriage that, to paraphrase Lee Edelman, has no future.[37] In stark contrast to the Prayer Book's wedding service, which blesses the bride and groom in hopes that they "may please him [i.e., God] bothe in bodye and soule; and live together in holy love unto your lives ende," the termination of the marriage of true minds is apparent at its inception. Notably, this figuration of marriage differs sharply from other sonnets in the fair youth sequence where, as Valerie Traub has shown, "tropes of getting, increase, tillage, husbandry, engrafting, printing, copying, and issue . . . appropriat[e] the rhetoric of biological and mechanical reproduction for male-male love."[38] In Sonnet 116, the speaker's bond with the beloved is marked by its

[35] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 488.

[36] Ephesians 5:14–16, Geneva Bible. See Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 386.

[37] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[38] Valerie Traub, "Sex without Issue: Sodomy, Reproduction, and Signification in Shakespeare's Sonnets," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 1999), 436.

lack of futurity. Metonymically, the scythe has replaced the "sweet issue" (13.8) of sexual and/or textual reproductive futurity. This impulse toward (marital) death is also formal, in that the always-already beleaguered marriage exists only to the extent that readers engage it. In Lacanian terms, one might say that the marriage evidences the death drive inherent in the Symbolic: for however many times one rereads Sonnet 116, the marriage never progresses beyond the speaker's final plea, never escapes the annihilation to which it is continually subjected.[39] Of course, as Žižek has argued, the death drive does not culminate in death but persists beyond it, and so the annihilation of the marriage of true minds endures despite, or rather because of, its death.[40] This appeal to Lacanian and Žižekian notions of the death drive might seem overdetermined, in part because if we subscribe to a structural death drive, then one could say all of Shakespeare's sonnets—indeed, all literary works—exemplify it. Yet, as I noted earlier, Shakespeare's sonnets display a veritable obsession with shifting relationalities and power dynamics, picking up and troping, only to discard, diverse designations. Shakespeare's sonnets, in other words, trope their schemes, in a maneuver that foregrounds the vicissitudes of the speaker's relationship with the fair youth.

In wrenching marriage away from the futurism and linearity of heterosocial temporality—or "straight time," as Tom Boellstorff puts it—Sonnet 116 proffers what J. Jack Halberstam has called "a queer time and place."[41] Freed from the constraints of conventional nuptials, this marriage diverges from the heterosocial, heterotemporal trajectory to which spouses following the Anglican liturgy subject themselves. Repudiating the progress narrative and domestic arrangements

[39] Jacques Lacan, "Position of the Unconscious," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 719–21.

[40] In *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003), Slavoj Žižek writes, "On the philosophico-ontological level, this is what Lacan is aiming at when he emphasizes the difference between the Freudian death drive and the so-called 'nirvana principle' according to which every life system tends toward the lowest level of tension, ultimately toward death: 'nothingness' (the void, being deprived of all substance) and the lowest level of energy paradoxically no longer coincide, that is, it is 'cheaper' (it costs the system less energy) to persist in 'something' than to dwell in 'nothing,' at the lowest level of tension, or in the void, the dissolution of all order. It is this distance that sustains the death drive: far from being the same as the nirvana principle (the striving toward the dissolution of all life tension, the longing for the return to original nothingness), the death drive is the tension which persists and insists beyond and against the nirvana principle. In other words, far from being opposed to the pleasure principle, the nirvana principle is its highest and most radical expression. In this precise sense, the death drive stands for its exact opposite, for the dimension of the 'undead,' of a spectral life which insists beyond (biological) death" (93).

[41] Tom Boellstorff, "When Marriage Falls: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 227–48; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

of straight time and space, the queer marriage between the speaker and beloved obtains in unpredictable, inassimilable ways. Hence, while one instantiation of the marital arrangement remains consigned to the experience of reading Sonnet 116 in part or in whole, other instantiations appear elsewhere, sounding tropological echoes and engendering tropological connections that posit and problematize marriage in other, irreducibly queer ways. Despite, or perhaps because of, its distance from Sonnet 116, Sonnet 36 makes several intriguing connections:

> Let me confess that we two must be twain,
> Although our undivided loves are one:
> So shall those blots that do with me remain,
> Without thy help by me be borne alone.
> In our two loves there is but one respect,
> Though in our lives a separable spite,
> Which though it alter not love's sole effect,
> Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.
> I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
> Lest my bewailèd guilt should do thee shame;
> Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
> Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
> But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
> As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

Although we do not know when Shakespeare composed these sonnets or in what order—he may have composed them separately or in tandem—or perhaps he wrote one and then returned to the other and refashioned it accordingly—what closes the gulf between them, if only momentarily, is a shared vocabulary of marital queerness. Both poems open with the speaker supplicating the beloved ("Let me. . ."); both maintain that hardship "alter[s] not" the love they share; both employ negations that undercut this declaration of constancy. Like Sonnet 116, Sonnet 36 quotes the Anglican liturgy only to expose its superficial and inadequate articulation of marriage. In this sonnet, the speaker perverts Paul, transforming the Prayer Book's reiteration that "a man [shall] leave father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" into an event that is not only homoerotic but also paradoxical: even after they are joined, they "must be twain" despite the fact that their "undivided loves are one."[42] Indeed, the speaker co-opts Paul to illustrate the impossibility of "one flesh," whether sexual or textual.

The concluding couplet of Sonnet 36 might appear less vexed than that of Sonnet 116, but it nevertheless enacts a queering of time and space that extends beyond the poem's *terminus*. More specifically, the couplet appears again as the concluding couplet of Sonnet 96. For Joseph Pequigney, the repetition suggests

[42] In Ephesians 5:31, Paul states, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

psychological continuity: "The lover demonstrates his devotion in Sonnet 36 by a selfless resolve to remove himself rather than dishonor the beloved; the verbal repetition in Sonnet 96 may remind him of that resolve and thereby dissuade him from a shameful course that would be harmful to them both."[43] Where Pequigney perceives evidence of a coherent selfhood across the sequence, I see in Sonnet 96 a disruptive utterance that emerges out of queer time and space, following several failed attempts by the speaker to trope the beloved's betrayal in other ways. Here is the sonnet in full:

> Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness,
> Some say thy grace is youth and gentle sport;
> Both grace and faults are loved of more and less;
> Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort.
> As on the finger of a thronèd queen
> The basest jewel will be well esteemed,
> So are those errors that in thee are seen,
> To truths translated, and for true things deemed.
> How many lambs might the stern wolf betray,
> If like a lamb he could his looks translate;
> How many gazers mightst thou lead away,
> If thou wouldst use the strength of all thy state!
> But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
> As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

As Vendler has noted, "[T]he comparisons appearing in Q_2 and Q_3 epitomize the speaker's own conflict about the young man: Is he a thronèd queen or a stern wolf? Is his baseness an extrinsic addition, like a queen's ring, or an intrinsic viciousness like that of the wolf in lamb's clothing?"[44] In recalling the couplet from Sonnet 36—a couplet, Vendler adds, that "fits 96 less well, especially since it repeats the rhyme in *–ort* in Q_1 of 96"—the speaker makes yet another attempt to figure his dynamic with the beloved.[45] This attempt, however, points in multiple directions at once: back to the sonnet's beginning, where the marital trope recontextualizes the figurations that precede it; all the way back to Sonnet 36, where the verse first appears as part of a rumination on the paradoxes of Paul; forward to Sonnet 116, where the marriage of true minds is postulated and then discarded.

It also gestures forward to Sonnet 97, where the speaker's claim that his absence from youth has made a winter out of summer occasions a meditation on fertility:

> What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
> What old December's bareness everywhere!

[43] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, 132.

[44] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 411.

[45] Ibid,.

> And yet this time removed was summer's time,
> The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
> Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
> Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease.
> Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
> But hope of orphans, and unfathered fruit. (3–10)

The juxtaposition of seasons—from winter's "freezings" and "dark days," to "summer's time," to "teeming autumn," to spring's "abundant issue"—both creates and confounds distinctions between agricultural and human reproduction. About lines 9 and 10, Booth writes, "[I]n these lines it becomes practically impossible to remember whether one is thinking about harvest in terms of childbirth or childbirth in terms of agricultural harvest."[46] Either way, the speaker's identification with "widowed wombs" announces a spousal subjectivity founded upon loss and located firmly in the past: she was a wife, but is now a widow; her womb had utility, but is no longer in use. Though the speaker's widowhood does not impede seasonal (re) production of "abundant issue," as markers of futurity "orphans" and "unfathered fruit" serve only to alienate her—to perpetuate her winter amidst the spring and summer.

Glancing backward from Sonnet 97's widowed wombs to Sonnet 116's marriage of true minds, we witness the time and space marital tropes wander via an ever-expanding range of signifiers. Although I have been following several tropes along a trajectory that makes sense to me—a trajectory, it is worth noting, that extends well beyond the space of this essay—it should be obvious that the pathway I have chosen represents only one such possibility. In fact, one could just as easily shuttle from Sonnet 97's widowed wombs to Sonnet 93's "deceivèd husband" (2), a move that reverses the gender dynamic of the speaker/addressee marital arrangement. Calling upon the misogynist legacy of Eve, the speaker quips, "How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow, / If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show" (93.13-14). Here, the speaker aims to consolidate patriarchal privilege, acting as both subject/speaker and Ur-husband. Of course, like all other marital relationalities portrayed in the sonnets, this permutation of marriage is consigned to the poem in which it appears, inevitably succumbing to the termination of the reading experience.

And if one happens to peek at the sonnet that follows Sonnet 93, yet another transfiguration takes place: no longer associated with wifely insubordination, the beloved "husband[s] nature's riches from expense" (94.6). For Smith, this sonnet effects a reversal of the previous sonnet's gender dynamic: "As a gesture of submission, as an act of obeisance spoken in third person, as a return to the argument of the earliest sonnets in urging the poet's love to 'husband natures ritches from experience,' sonnet 94 implicitly casts the *love* as husband and the *poet* as wife."[47] This

[46] Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 316.

[47] Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, 262.

interpretation strikes me as wholly plausible, especially if one follows the trajectory Smith has mapped out. My reading, however, departs from Smith's in that I do not think the dynamic must be heterosocial. Or monogamous. Or marriage-like in any recognizable way. In Sonnet 8, for instance, Shakespeare fashions a marital trope that violates virtually every tenet of conventional wedlock:

> Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
> Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
> Resembling sire and child and happy mother,
> Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing. (9–12)

This tropological manifestation troubles spousal gender dynamics in multiple ways: it begins with a male same-sex marriage; in line 10, it becomes a polyamorous same-sex marriage; in line 11, a heterosocial nuclear family that may or may not be polyamorous; in line 12, a single, polymorphous entity whose formerly discrete components contribute to its "one pleasing note." In the span of four lines, the marriage is put into discourse, radically revised not once but several times, and then annihilated in a harmonious collapse. Adding this marital trope to the others I have been examining in this essay, I would argue that the marriage in Sonnet 94 does not simply flip the script. Rather, it colludes with other figurations of matrimonial and spousal queerness to assail the script: to interrogate its "naturall significations" and scrutinize its constituent parts; to destabilize its scriptural foundations by rereading and reinterpreting signal biblical passages and forcing them to confront other, contradictory passages; to travesty its ceremony, reduce it to an empty ritual, and obviate the authority of church and state; to take it at its (public) word and bear witness to its subversion from within; to exploit its inherent transgression and overwhelm the signifier until it signifies everything and nothing. And these are just a few means by which the sonnets figure marital queerness.

Taken collectively or individually, Shakespeare's sonnets short-circuit marital discourse, uncovering and then inhabiting its fault lines—but only momentarily. Mobilized by and through tropes and schemes that work toward their own ends, the sonnets insist upon queer presence in both senses of the term. Writing about the legibility of same-sex marriage in Shakespearean comedy, Arthur Little states, "Queer marriage in Shakespeare is a question of the present, of presentism, but it is not . . . only about the present (the temporal) but the ontological (as opposed to what is absent)."[48] In the sonnets, marriage's ontological status is bound up in figurative

[48] Arthur L. Little Jr., "'A Local Habitation and a Name': Presence, Witnessing, and Queer Marriage in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies," in *Presentism, Gender, and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 209–10. See also Little, "The Rites of Queer Marriage in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 216–24.

processes that, as we have seen, manufacture an excess of meaning, unsettling any fixed relationship between tenor and vehicle or between signifier and signified. This proliferation of meaning makes a multiplicity of marital arrangements intelligible *as marriages*, even as they push the concept of matrimony to its breaking point. Renouncing "heterosexual marriage, dominated as it is by discursive strokes to tradition and children, . . . situated in the past and future, respectively," the sonnets' marriages evince a queer presence manifest in the queer present.[49] As discursive formations, then, the sonnets' marriages perform a work of negation that Edelman ascribes to queerness itself: "Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form."[50] Tropologically and schematically, the sonnets deploy marriage in its multifarious manifestations only to unmoor them from the futurity that marriage ostensibly signifies.

And yet, while the sonnets' marriages have no future, the sonnets themselves have had a rather vibrant one. This persistent presence of negation, of depicting (marriage's) non-future, allies the sonnets with what Halberstam has called "the queer art of failure." Observing that "success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation," Halberstam argues, "Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[51] Within this conceptual framework, the sonnets' portrayal of marriage's failures registers, both politically and aesthetically, the generative power of negation. For in the act of unpacking marriage, the sonnets envisage diverse queer relations that traverse and transgress the strictures of the dominant discourse.

Same-sex marriage is perhaps a salient example. In contemporary discourse, critics have rightly noted that gay marriage has served a normalizing function, participating in a "new homonormativity" that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[52] Although Dolan has demonstrated several important ways in which contemporary views of marriage pay homage to the early modern legacy, one crucial difference is that early modern culture lacked the sexological terminology that has enabled the cultivation of lesbian and gay identities and subcultures. This might seem an obvious

[49] Little, "Presence, Witnessing, and Queer Marriage," 209.

[50] Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

[51] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2–3.

[52] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

difference, but in the absence of a visible gay constituency advocating for so-called marriage equality, the prospect of same-sex marriage seems far less normalizing. Indeed, as Laurie Shannon has shown, in elevating masculine friendship above heterosocial marriage, Renaissance humanists conceived of homonormativity rather differently than the modern neoliberal state does.[53] In this early modern milieu, what does it mean for same-sex couples to imagine themselves not as friends but as spouses, as Shakespeare's speaker does in several sonnets? It means, paradoxically, that what we now refer to as "gay marriage" predates gay people and the identity politics that have mobilized current marriage equality movements. It also means, therefore, that same-sex marriage has not always functioned as a normalizing social arrangement. In Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance, homoerotic instantiations of marriage do not legitimate the institution as an organizing principle of early modern society; rather, they subvert the institution from within, exposing the gaps and contradictions that then become the fractured grounds on which new marital possibilities are pondered, interrogated, and then abandoned for other queer marriages.

[53] See Laurie Shannon, "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98, no. 2 (2000): 183–210; and Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*.

Sexual Education and Erotica in the Popular Midwifery Manuals of Thomas Raynalde and Nicholas Culpeper

Chantelle Thauvette
Siena College

Few records of any kind of English sexual education exist before the 1700s, leaving scholars to try to deduce cultural outlooks on sexual education from erotic fantasies like those of Pietro Aretino's whore dialogues, which present sexual education as one-on-one training between an experienced bawd and her protégé, as well as from other works of erotica. Turner's *Schooling Sex* provides a thorough analysis of educational fantasies in what Turner calls the "hard-core" canon of seventeenth-century literature, illuminating the place of education in works that are often classified as erotica. This paper builds on Turner's work, however, to ask what place erotica has in works typically classified as educational, like midwifery manuals.

The assumption that seventeenth-century individuals desired or required a formal, textual education in sexuality is a modern one, but seventeenth-century English works of erotica like *The Practical Part of Love* (1660) illustrate that sexual education did occupy an important place in the seventeenth-century sexual imagination and that books specifically were coming to play an increasingly important role in sexual education. The University of Love described in *The Practical Part of Love*, for instance, devotes considerable attention to pleasure, but alongside pleasure it provides the kind of access to anatomical, reproductive health information that defines modern sexual education. The library's gardens showcase educational "Statues representing both Sexes and mincing not a tittle of the truth of every part and member" as well as a "long Gallery full of amorous and lascivious pictures."[1] The library itself houses classic and continental works of erotica, such as Ovid's *Ars*

[1] *The Practical Part of Love, 39.*

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery, ed. by Ian Frederick Moulton, ASMAR 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 151–168.
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS DOI 10.1484 /M.ASMAR-EB.5.111060

Amatoria and Aretino's *Il modi* (a copy of which "stands alwayes open on a Desk"), alongside popular mid-seventeenth-century pamphlets like *The Crafty Whore* and *Venus her Cabinet Unlockt*.[2] But among these recognizable works of erotic fiction we also find "all sorts books of Midwifery, as *Culpepper's Midwife*, *the compleat midwife*, *the birth of Mankind, Child-birth,* &c."[3] *The Practical Part of Love*'s list illustrates that in the 1660s we might find educational works about human reproduction and erotic fiction on the same shelf in love's library, so to speak. Historians of sexuality typically mark the early eighteenth century as the site where socially enriching representations of sex designed to educate and morally corrupting representations of sex designed to arouse diverge to become the new and separate genres of sexual education literature and pornography respectively. Focusing on two of the manuals in *The Practical Part*'s list, Thomas Raynalde's *The Birth of Mankind* (1545) and Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* (1656), I contend that both Raynalde and Culpeper recognized distinctions between educational readings of their work and erotic ones. Further, I argue that the differences in the ways Raynalde and Culpeper conceive of their readerships illustrate the emerging genre boundaries between sexual education and erotica as well as the complex negotiations between authors and audiences in texts written for general, popular readerships. While Raynalde anxiously struggled to limit his readers and close off any possible erotic readings of *The Birth*, Culpeper, a century later, embraced the flexible boundaries between sexual education and erotica to appeal to as wide a market as possible with his respectable and pleasurable book, *A Directory for Midwives*.

In proposing that we view midwifery manuals as sexual education materials, I presume, perhaps anachronistically, that there was a general audience interested in learning about sexuality by reading about human reproduction. In *The Facts of Life,* Roy Porter and Leslie Hall trace the rise of sexual advice literature back to the late seventeenth century, but are interested in the centuries-long process through which Britain created "a literature and a discipline of sexual information and advice" between 1650 and 1950.[4] Culpeper's *Directory*, published in 1656 and reprinted through the eighteenth century, is a foundational text for this emerging literature and discipline that will come to shape modern sexual education. But *The Birth*, published in 1545, breaks very important ground for the sexual advice literature that will follow a century later by justifying the utility of educating everyday people (and especially women) in matters of reproductive health and negotiating terms by which such fraught, potentially corrupting information should be disseminated to a general, vernacular readership. Comparing Raynalde's 1540s reproductive health manual (that is to say, a manual which covers a range of topics in human reproduction

[2] *The Practical Part of Love*, 39.

[3] *The Practical Part of Love*, 40.

[4] Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3.

from anatomy to medical recipes) to Culpeper's 1650s midwifery manual (a manual ostensibly designed to be of practical use to a midwife in caring for expectant mothers and their children) will illuminate the sixteenth-century roots of sexual education aimed at a general readership and explore the ways such material may have been received. Sexual advice literature, of course, is only one form of sexual education, and clearly information about sexuality could and can be gleaned from a myriad of non-print sources, ranging from conversations with family, friends, and community members to public performances of ballads, accounts of trials, and plays.[5] The relative cheapness of print in the sixteenth century, however, made vernacular educational materials about human sexuality newly available to a general readership.

Although midwifery manuals like Culpeper's clearly target midwives as their implied readership, the high volume of midwifery manuals sold in the seventeenth century suggests that midwifery manuals reached a much wider audience and might well have been expected to reach that wider audience. The dedications and prologues to midwives in reproductive health manuals, for instance, might in part be informed by custom rather than by choice of readership, since classical and medieval gynecological manuals traditionally began with addresses to women and midwives even when no such readers were expected.[6] Monica Green provides compelling evidence that an educated readership of female practitioners did exist in ancient Europe but argues that by the twelfth century "the social milieu that had generated both literate midwives and texts to put in their hands had long disappeared."[7] Midwifery manuals, although putatively written for women, were often inaccessible to medieval female practitioners denied the educational background and technical literacy required to read them.[8] That midwives found themselves cut off from this textual community does not seem to have limited their training, as Doreen

[5] John Cannon's memoirs, which I will discuss in more detail later, recount for example that his first lessons in sexuality came from an older cousin, who taught him how to masturbate at the age of 12. Cannon later sought an education in the "secrets of nature" from anatomy texts and erotica, including *Aristotle's Master-piece* and Culpeper's *The Directory of Midwifery*, but as Tim Hitchcock argues, his peer group was the most influential in his sexual education. For a detailed account and analysis of Cannon's memoirs, see Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1997), esp. pages 28–39.

[6] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.

[7] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, 34.

[8] Green makes an important distinction between "literate" and "learned" medicine so as to better capture the range of literacies available to pre-modern European women. She defines "literate" medicine as "knowledge that has been committed to a textual and not simply oral mode for its transmission" and differentiates it from the narrower category of "learned" medicine, typically produced in a university context, which demands "competence not only with a large technical vocabulary but also with sophisticated philosophical concepts for its interpretation." While educated individuals would be able to operate in both the spheres of literate and learned

Evenden's study of seventeenth-century midwives demonstrates that midwives had effective networks of informal apprenticeship and practical training in place. Moreover, Evenden notes that even when "[l]iterate midwives and other female attendants were able to utilize written medical information . . . it is questionable to what extent this was either necessary or perceived as helpful when put to the test of the actual childbirth process."[9] Evenden challenges in particular Raynalde's idea that literate women might read from his manual when they attended births, noting that the book "would have had limited practical value in view of the traditionally darkened chamber" of the birthing room. Of Culpeper, Evenden remarks that although Culpeper expresses "genuine concern" about "the midwives' exclusion from formal education," he underestimates their practical knowledge and offers in his book "little or nothing by way of information which would be of use during child delivery."[10] Midwifery manuals, then, are not the ideal educational tools for someone who seeks to learn how to deliver a child. That Raynalde's and Culpeper's manuals were popular in spite of their limited practical use in teaching readers how to safely deliver children—and indeed, we know they were popular, as they were each reprinted multiple times over the course of a century—implies that they did satisfy a demand for educational materials on human sexuality, even if that demand did not come from midwives.

If midwives aren't the primary consumers of midwifery manuals, then, why do such manuals on reproductive health and reproductive anatomy continue to address midwives as their implied readers? Part of the answer to this question lies in the anxieties that surround the one vernacular reproductive health manual that does not market itself as a midwifery manual: Thomas Raynalde's *The Birth of Mankind*. Raynalde's *The Birth*, like many English reproductive health manuals, is a translation of a continental work (in this case a translation of the Latin *Du Partu Hominis*, which was itself a translation of Eucharius Rösslin's 1513 book, *Der Swangern Frauwen und hebammen Rosegarten*).[11] Although Rösslin's text addresses itself to midwives (its title translates to "The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives"), Raynalde's *Birth*, as Elaine Hobby points out, "targeted a general reader, amending and adding to the book in ways designed to promote its appeal" to non-practitioners.[12] As Hobby explains, the move to appeal to a general readership rather than to an audience of midwives may stem from England's "much

medicine, Green's distinction helpfully points out that women were not excluded from literate medicine altogether in medieval England. See *Making Women's Medicine*, 12.

[9] Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

[10] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 7–8.

[11] See Elaine Hobby, Introduction to *The Birth of Mankind*, by Thomas Reynalde (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), xvi-xviii.

[12] Hobby, Introduction, i.

less systematic" midwife licensing.[13] Midwives in sixteenth-century England were not routinely examined on questions of anatomy, as they were in Germany where the original source text was first sold, meaning that publishers in England might not be able to rely on a steady demand for the book from midwives alone.[14] If midwives alone cannot account for the popularity of *The Birth*, then it was one of the first English reference texts on the subject of reproductive health to find a general readership in print.

Raynalde's prologue, however, belies a deep-rooted cultural anxiety about what a general readership might do with the information about sexuality that his translation makes accessible. That the manuals which would succeed Raynalde's marketed themselves to midwives in their titles (if not always in their contents) suggests that they might be attempting to skirt the problems Raynalde raises in making explicit information about sexuality available to anyone with the resources to access and read the book. In England, the certification of midwives relied not only on the test of a midwife's knowledge but also on the test of her character.[15] A midwife, as a reader, is thus someone who can be trusted to absorb and use explicit information about sexuality in a discreet and morally responsible way to facilitate procreation within marriage. The same cannot be said of a general readership whose members are unknown to the author and moreover uncontrollable in how they read and use the information they glean from the book. Although Raynalde clearly states his intentions to write an educational text that will enhance procreative, marital sexuality among his general readership, his prologue demonstrates precisely how powerless he is as an author to prevent the erotic, obscene, and lascivious readings that his work will invite in its frank discussion of human reproduction.

Raynalde begins his "Prologue to the Women Readers" by explaining that his motivation to translate and publish *Du Partu Hominis* arose in response to a poor translation of the work that was then circulating indiscriminately in London. Raynalde admonishes this first translator, Richard Jonas, for "var[ying] or decl[ining] nothing at all from the steps of his Latin author, observing more fidelity in translating, than choice or discretion" and "allowing many things in the same book greatly needing admonition and wary advice or counsel to the readers which otherwise might sometimes use that for a help, the which should turn to a hindrance."[16] Hobby notes that Jonas's 1540 text "includes many

[13] Hobby, Introduction, xv.

[14] Hobby, Introduction, xv.

[15] Midwives from the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century were licensed by the Church of England, which, many scholars believe, "was primarily interested in the moral suitability and ability of midwives to carry out the ceremony of baptism," although other scholars believe that the church was more interested in ensuring the competence of midwives. See Evenden, *Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 27.

[16] Reynalde, *The Birth of Mankind*, 11–2. Subsequent references to this work are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

incorrect expressions and errors in translation" pertaining to medical terminology. Raynalde's 1545 edition corrects these mistakes, makes significant changes to the remedies after testing them himself, and adds a "Prologue to Women Readers" which delivers the "admonition and wary advice" lacking in first edition.[17] Having resolved the medical deficiencies of the first edition, however, Raynalde's prologue shifts away from the harm readers might do to themselves by following the remedies in the earlier book and onto the harm public knowledge of women's bodies and the "secrets" of sexual reproduction might pose to the community at large. *The Birth* is a landmark text in the history of sexual education in England, providing vernacular information about sexuality, anatomy, and conception to a general readership. But Raynalde's position in his prologue is not that of a scholar revealing previously hidden knowledge to the public (a position Culpeper takes in the mid-seventeenth century in his personal crusade to undermine the monopolistic College of Physicians). Raynalde instead portrays himself as a responsible scholar working to put the genie Jonas unleashed with the first edition of *Du Partu* back into its bottle by attempting to anticipate, limit, and control the dangerous knowledge of sex already set loose in his community. Despite, or perhaps because of, Raynalde's concerns to prevent the indiscriminate release of his book, it is Raynalde's 1545 text, not Jonas's, which becomes a Tudor bestseller.[18]

After positioning himself as a critic of Jonas's edition Raynalde builds a case for why his edition of *Du Partu Hominis* will improve women's health and benefit the community. He argues that the information within the book will help women better "understand how everything cometh to pass within your bodies. . .. And farther, by the perfect knowledge of this book, ye shall clearly perceive the reason of many diseases which happen peculiarly to women, and the causes thereof; by which perceiverance, again, ye shall have the readier understanding how to withstand and remedy the said infirmities or diseases"(12). Raynalde emphasizes further that women's knowledge will benefit their health outcomes, writing that a rudimentary education in reproductive health will help women to accurately describe their symptoms to their physicians and help them cope with their illnesses. "And truly, when a person is sick or diseased in any part, it is half a comfort, yea half his health, to understand in what part the disease is, and how that part lieth in the body," Raynalde writes, asserting also that female patients who understand the nature of their "infirmities," which had before been "obscure, dark and strange to be comprehended," will be better equipped to understand and follow their physicians advice (13). Sexual education, Raynalde argues, provides a clear, albeit heavily paternalistic, benefit to women and thus to family health in general.

As the preface continues, however, Raynalde finds himself increasingly entangled with Jonas's critics, who see accessible, vernacular sexual education as

[17] Hobby, Introduction, xix.

[18] See Hobby, Introduction, xvii n5.

an obscene enticement to lust. Raynalde anticipates with considerable acrimony the "bold pronouncers" who will "condemn and utterly reprove" his book's subject matter without reading it, "some alleging that it is shame, and other some that it is not meet ne fitting such matters to be entreated of so plainly in our mother and vulgar language, to the dishonour (as they say) of womanhood, and the derision of their wont secrets" (16). Towards the end of the prologue, Raynalde addresses specifically the midwives hostile to Jonas's translation, capturing something of how this early reproductive health manual was received by both practitioners and non-practitioners. Raynalde recounts that:

> at the first coming abroad of this present book, many of this sort of midwives, moved either of envy, or else of malice, or both, diligented and endeavoured them very earnestly by all ways possible to find the means to suppress and abrogate the same [Jonas's translation of *Du Partu Hominis*], making all women of their acquaintance (whom they thought to have any knowledge thereof) to believe that it was nothing worth, and that it should be a slander to women, forsomuch as therein was descried and set forth the secrets and privities of women, and that every boy and knave had of these books, reading them as openly as the tales of Robin Hood, etc. (22)

Envious female practitioners thus used their personal authority within their communities to discourage non-practitioners from reading the first edition of *The Birth*, with the result that the book attracted a predominantly pornographic readership of "boys" and "knaves" and failed to reach its target audience. Raynalde maintains that the midwives' critiques are "malicious allegations only of evil-hearted persons" who resented losing the power over their clients that their privileged information about reproduction afforded them (22). Raynalde is furthermore careful to distinguish "evil-hearted" midwives from "the better and more sober sort," who welcome the book (22). But his response to these anticipated criticisms – that the book's subject matter is too vulgar and inappropriate for a general audience, that it will harm women by putting their "secrets" on public display, and that young boys and knaves will consume the book's sensitive information seeking the same thrills they get from ribald adventure stories – can never be entirely reassuring because Raynalde's powers to control how his readers consume information about sexuality will always be limited. At stake in Raynalde's prologue is the broader question that still informs debate about sexual education in the present day, which is whether to trust vulnerable segments of the population — today children, and in Raynalde's day, a non-Latin reading audience composed of both children and adults — with explicit information about sexuality.

Although Raynalde mounts a convincing defense of his book and of sexual education in general as a social good, his impractical attempts to mitigate the risk that the book will become a bawdy entertainment for boys reveal his ultimate powerlessness as an author to control his book's reception. Raynalde's initial answer

to the argument that *The Birth* will harm women's decency and thereby harm the community is that a book in and of itself cannot harm a community if there are not already readers within that community conditioned to read it in a harmful manner. He underscores that any book, regardless of its content, could be read to corrupting and harmful ends, writing that "there is nothing under heaven so good, but that it may be perverted and turned to an evil use, by them that be evil and nought themselves, and do abuse it. Ne is there anything so absolute and perfect, but by the occasion of the abuse thereof, at one time or other, may and doth ensue great danger and damage to mankind" (17). There are no good or bad books, Raynalde argues, only good and bad readers. As for those who would read the book as lewd entertainment, Raynalde argues that books cannot corrupt because they only reaffirm what a reader already knows or believes, using scripture to support his argument that "to them that be good themselves, everything turneth to good, whatever it be. . .. And contrary, such as be of an ill disposition, in everything (be it neuer so good and salutary) picketh out matter of maintenance to their lewdness, turning matters of sadness and discretion to foolish and peevish prating contention" (18). He anticipates in the preface that no matter how discreet and well-intentioned *The Birth* may be, it could cause genuine harm to the community if "evil" or "lewd" readers were to use it to "the derision or ashaming of such women as should be [present]" (19). Unwilling perhaps to pervert innocent readers by explaining how his book might be used for such a purpose, Raynalde says only that "What I mean by lewd use. . . they that have understanding right soon will perceive" (19). Raynalde thus divides his readership into those already perverted enough to understand the "lewd use" his book might be put to and those unable to fill the gap he leaves. The vague construction of the gap allows readers to supply whatever use they consider to be the most lewd, creating a sliding scale of obscenity on which the reader can negotiate the distinction between educational and obscene, thereby setting their own boundary between sexual education and erotica. The reader can easily place him or herself as a "good" and innocent reader by these subjective standards and the book itself is absolved of any blame. To Raynalde, then, reading is a process which cannot be controlled and for which neither texts nor authors should be held responsible. The boundary between sexual education and erotica lies then quite explicitly and concretely within the mind of the reader rather than in the content or authorial intention of the work.

Raynalde's defense against Jonas's critics rests predominantly on placing responsibility for the book's potential to harm the community or the reader. Although he articulates his powerlessness as an author over *how* his book will be read, however, he cannot ultimately accept his powerless over *who* will read his book. Having only just argued that "there is nothing under heaven so good, but that it may be perverted and turned to an evil use, by them that be evil and nought themselves," Raynalde launches a genuine effort to keep the book out of the hands of these lewd readers (17). He assures his female readers that copies of *The Birth* "shall be so discreetly divided abroad that none of them shall fall in any such person's

handling," and that "if any do chance to them, I am sure they will as soon read this prologue as the rest of the book; the which thing when they shall do, here shall they hear of me" (19). But then he urges his potentially indiscreet male readers to heed his warnings that to discuss sexuality derisively, irreverently, and in public will harm their community and jeopardize their souls (19). To be on the safe side, and to appease his critics who believe that "neither honest ne unhonest men should see this book" (19), Raynalde urges his male readers "that they take not upon them to talk of any things therein contained, but only where it may edify and be assuredly well accepted. For women lightly will not gladly hear of such matters by any man, unless it be a physician of whom they require counsel, or of their discreet husbands" (20). Raynalde's faith in his ability to control the circulation, reception, and discussion of his book seems naïve, especially since the book outlived him considerably and was still in print a century later. Towards the end of the preface, Raynalde makes a final desperate attempt to control his readers by blatantly requiring them "to interpretate and construe herein contained according to the best, and to use everything herein entreated of the purpose wherefor it was written" (22). As impossible as it would be to enforce this requirement in the best of circumstances, Raynalde can no more limit the circulation of the text than he can limit how any text will be read. Raynalde's purpose is to facilitate procreative, marital sexuality. Although Sarah Toulalan demonstrates in *Imagining Sex* that "sexual pleasure is seen as intimately connected to the possibility of conception," so that an education in human reproduction need not be separate at all from an education in sexual pleasure, Raynalde erects a distinction between procreation and pleasure, attributing the former to the "good" readers and the latter to the "lewd" readers with little overlap between.[19] The harder Raynalde tries to assure his audience that he controls his text and can enforce this boundary between educational and erotic readings of it, the more he reveals how impossible that control is to maintain in the print marketplace of the mid-sixteenth-century. The purpose of *The Birth* may be sexual education, but as he himself demonstrates, there are no controls available to prevent erotic readings of educational materials.

But *did* midwifery manuals and other educational texts inspire erotic readings? Raynalde anticipates that "lewd" and "light" readers will misread *The Birth* but his unwillingness to elaborate on the kinds of lewd readings they will perform leaves us to speculate about exactly how a lewd reader might have construed the text. Past its preface, *The Birth* is a fairly straightforward reproductive health manual that explains reproductive anatomy, describes various diseases, and gives recipes for cures in a matter-of-fact tone that provides little room for bawdy innuendo or erotic fantasy. Porter writes that "an essential ingredient, even pleasure, of early sex manuals is controversy about the legitimacy of sex literature," and Raynalde

[19] Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32.

manufactures such controversy in spades in the prologue.[20] The pleasure to be gained from the controversy, however, seems reserved for male readers exhorted not to read or discuss the book. The male-centric heteronormativity of Raynalde's anxieties, visible in his conviction that male readers will use the text as a means of gaining access to women's "privaties," conveniently serves to displace sexual excitement onto a lewd male readership.

Gendering the prurient reader male effectively makes *The Birth* a safer text for a female reader who can be trusted to use it in the various ways Raynalde prescribes—as a means of understanding and obeying her male physicians and of supplying the "room and place of a good midwife" by educating herself and others about "sundry cases, chances, and remedies wherein, peradventure, right wise women and good midwives shall be full ignorant" (21). Raynalde's ideal reader, we ultimately learn by the end of his prologue, is a female pedant. Raynalde envisions that this reader will bring the book into the birthing room (a space Raynalde himself could not normally enter), and read the book to the midwife, the labouring mother, and the other female attendants present, adding to (if not outright supplanting) the midwife's practical experience with Raynalde's text. Raynalde's ideal reader is thus not a midwife—he presumes, perhaps correctly, that it is aristocratic women who have the literacy skills and disposable income required to purchase and disseminate his book—but she is not just any "good" person, either. She is an honourable woman distanced from her own sexuality who uses the book not to further her own understanding of her reproductive needs but to advise other women on theirs. As vague as Raynalde remains on the subject of male lewdness, his consideration of female sexuality in the preface is practically non-existent, which is striking given that many medical theories of the time asserted that women were far less capable of controlling their sexual urges than were men and were notoriously lustful and voracious consumers of sex-driven romance literature. Although *The Birth* provides information on fertility and reproduction that women might theoretically use in reverse as a means of enjoying sex without conception, Raynalde never comments on the possibility that his female readers might also join the ranks of his "lewd" readers.[21] In that respect, Raynalde's mobilization of the lewd reader is an effective marketing strategy. To find *The Birth* in male hands casts suspicions on its reader's character, but in female hands, or on a noblewoman's shelf, the book might seem harmless—a legitimate educational resource and nothing more. Although the book appears to target a general readership of non-practitioners, the only readership

[20] Roy Porter, "Forbidden Pleasures: Enlightenment Literature of Sexual Advice," in *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism,* ed. Paula Bennet and Vernon A. Rosario (New York: Routledge, 1995), 75–98, esp. 79.

[21] Porter remarks of late-seventeenth-century sexual advice literature for couples that "it may be argued that advice literature was meant to be read, or at least *was* read, via an exercise in reversal," providing couples with precisely the information they might use to avoid unwanted pregnancy"; see "Forbidden Pleasures," 90.

it is comfortable endorsing by the end of the prologue is an elite, female readership of pseudo-midwives. While we do not know who bought *The Birth* or who might have read it beyond its original purchaser, we do know that the text was printed at least thirteen times before 1700, suggesting that it did reach a very wide audience in the end.

Raynalde's problematic attempts to legitimize sexual education for non-practitioners explain in part why it was popular midwifery manuals that came to dominate the print market for sexual education in in the seventeenth-century, although we might not recognize these texts *as* sexual education materials. Texts that target broader readerships, like *The Birth*, conform to modern expectations that sexual education should be geared towards the non-practitioner. But the authors, publishers, and translators working a century after Raynalde might have productively learned from Raynalde that since sexual education earns a general readership of its own accord (whether you wish it to or not), a manual addressed to midwives might serve the same purpose and meet the same demand as a treatise designed to educate the general reader while sidestepping any accusations that the book is intended to be a popular erotic entertainment that might corrupt its readers or pose a threat to the community.

Raynalde's text was, from the 1540s to the 1650s, the single major manual written in English on the subject of reproductive health. Helkiah Crooke's Latin anatomy text, *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), provided thorough anatomical descriptions and images of the male and female reproductive systems, but as an anatomy text, it has a much larger scope than Raynalde's *The Birth* and its Latin text would have made it less accessible to a broad readership. Ambroise Paré, a sixteenth-century French surgeon, wrote treatises on obstetrics that were available in English translation in 1630, but Paré also treated childbirth as a single topic in a book far more likely to appeal to medical practitioners than to a general readership interested in reproductive health. That Paré and Crooke do not write exclusively on sexual topics does not mean that readers could not learn about reproductive health from reading their texts, but until the 1650s Raynalde's *The Birth*, with its attention to accessible sexual education, seems like an anomaly rather than the beginning of a trend. We might think that *The Birth* was a failure if it had not been so often reprinted, but since it was reprinted in every decade we might conclude instead that it was such an iconic text that no one bothered to compete with it, or that the emerging medical establishment did not develop sustained interest in educating a general readership and focused on disseminating discoveries among educated professionals despite a continued interest from the general public in purchasing educational materials like Raynalde's *The Birth*.

By the mid-seventeenth century, however, new reproductive health manuals like the anonymously co-authored *The Compleat Midwife* (1656) and Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* (1656) challenged the dominance of Raynalde's hundred-year-old *Birth* and did so by appealing (nominally) to a female readership of midwives with a new concern that their texts be perceived as simple and readable.

The increasing professionalization of midwifery may well have created a demand for midwifery texts in the 1650s, as over the course of the seventeenth century midwives struggled to respond to increasing competition from male practitioners whose education in anatomical theory and medical literacy was often construed as a considerable advantage.[22] Manuals like Culpeper's *Directory* and its rival, *The Compleat Midwife's Practice*, market themselves to midwives who are compelled to improve their theoretical knowledge and medical vocabulary in order to be of greater service to their communities (as both manuals frame the issue) or in order to survive in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing marketplace. To appeal to midwives, the *Directory* and the *Practice* both strive to attract readers by drawing attention to the lack of sophistication and complexity inherent in their prose—a marketing strategy the *For Dummies* brand of reference books continues to employ with great success in the twenty-first century. We do not know whether this marketing strategy was successful or whether midwives ever bought into the idea that they required the "theory" such books provided to remain competitive in their profession. As Jane Sharp, a practicing midwife, comments in the preface to her 1671 midwifery manual, "[i]t is not hard words that perform the work, as if none understood the Art that cannot understand Greek."[23] Midwives already know the reproductive system, Sharp asserts, even if they don't always know the technical terms for each organ. The demand for simplified vernacular accounts of reproductive anatomy might not necessarily have come from midwives themselves, but may instead have satisfied a general demand for information about sex from a class of readers whose literacy skills more or less matched those of a midwife in seventeenth-century London.

To discuss the literacy skills of midwives in the seventeenth century is to discuss the broader distribution of education in this period across class and gender lines. Critics continue to debate both the definition of literacy and the levels of literacy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but they agree that, in general, elite, urban-dwelling men had the greatest access to literacy and that non-elite, non-urban-dwelling women had the least. As Mary Fissell reports, "The best current estimates are that around 1700, roughly 50 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women could read," although she estimates that "in 1700 about half of all London women could read."[24] For members of the aristocracy and higher middle class, who could afford private education, Latin literacy appears to have been common for men and women. For women of the lower classes, especially the merchant classes,

[22] See chapter three of Elizabeth Harvey's *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. pages 82-93.

[23] Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

[24] Mary E. Fissell, "The Marketplace of Print," in *Medicine and Midwifery in England and its Colonies c. 1450 – c. 1580*, ed. Mark S.R. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 108–32, esp. 111.

basic reading ability was not uncommon although basic writing skills were less common.[25] To aim one's text at the reading level of a midwife (who might come from a middle to low class background) was therefore to simultaneously aim one's text at any reader who possessed basic reading ability, including young men and men of lesser means who may not have had the time or means to pursue a full education. The simplified vocabulary purported to make these texts accessible for midwives might in practice have been a way to open up such texts to as wide a readership—male and female—as possible. The emphasis on readability speaks perhaps not to the specific demands of a practicing midwife audience but acts as a way of legitimizing the accessibility of these texts to a general readership.

Where Raynalde seems anxious to have his non-practitioner audience read his book the way a practitioner would, for the edification and betterment of others' reproductive health, Culpeper seems unconcerned by the idea that the information in his *Directory* might be used to enhance sexual pleasure. By explicitly targeting midwives as his ideal readership, Culpeper borrows the medieval framework that gives the sexual information he shares a distinct moral purpose and application in assisting reproduction, perhaps making a defense like Raynalde's unnecessary. In the opening dedication, Culpeper addresses his midwife readers as professionals whose interest in reproductive medicine does not intersect with a personal interest in arousing sexual representation.[26] He flatters both the skills and experiential knowledge of midwives, telling them that the "practical part" of midwifery belongs to them.[27] At the very end of the dedication, Culpeper invites his implied midwife readers to contribute their expertise to future editions of the *Directory*, requesting "That if you by your own Experiences find any thing which I have written in this Book not to be according to Truth (for I am but a Man, and therefore subject to failings) First, Judge charitably of me. Secondly, Acquaint me with them, and

[25] For a thorough discussion of the gender and class barriers imposed by the sixteenth and seventeenth-century humanist education model, see Eve Rachele Sanders, *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. chap. 1.

[26] Culpeper insists that midwives must possess "Knowledge, Skil, Care, Industry, and Sincerity"; see *A Directory for Midwives* (London: printed by Peter Cole, 1656), sig. A3^{v}. Culpeper makes no mention of sexual pleasure in the dedication, although, as we will see, it features in his first chapter.

[27] As Culpeper writes to the midwives, "To whom should I dedicate it [the *Directory*], but to you? And though I confess the Theory of this be requisite, very requisite to al Women; yet to whom doth the Practical Part of it belong, but to your selves?" (sig. A4^{r}). However, since Culpeper also rants condescendingly on sig. A4^{v} that all midwives should be of above-average moral character and that their superior moral character should compel them to learn the anatomical theory ("Many of you are Ancient, but if you be too old to learn, you are as much too proud"), his earlier praises might be reserved for an ideal vision of a midwife he thinks *should* exist but does not.

they shal be both acknowledged, and amended."[28] That Culpeper genuinely saw midwives as his colleagues (or potential allies against the monopolistic College of Physicians) seems unlikely given the often haughty tone he adopts in the dedication, but the request works rhetorically to create the sense that the *Directory* is a conversation between professionals and aspiring professionals who do not need to be told how to interpret the information given (much of which they presumably know already, and know better than Culpeper from a practical standpoint).[29]

Once past the preface, however, Culpeper shifts his tone of address away from the experienced midwife to reconstitute a reader who might be at once embarrassed and excited by anatomical representations of reproductive organs, as if this information were novel. While Raynalde targeted a general audience interested in sexual education but established an implied readership of female pseudo-midwives, Culpeper does the reverse by targeting a readership of midwives but writing for an implied general readership of women and men interested in sexual education. Unlike Raynalde, Culpeper embraces the sexual curiosity that draws readers to his work while providing tools (illustrations and an English glossary of Latin anatomical terms) to educate readers in contemporary seventeenth-century theories of human reproduction. His ultimate popularity—for his work was reprinted far more frequently than *The Compleat Midwife's Practice*, his direct competition—may owe in part to his blending of educational credibility and erotic reading pleasure.[30]

Culpeper opens book one of *The Directory of Midwives,* on male anatomy, with a warning to female readers about potentially offensive material ahead. The warning, however, includes a sly parenthetical wink that hints at female reading pleasure. Culpeper writes that he will begin with "the Genitals of Men (for I hope good Women wil pardon me for serving mine own Sex first)," lists the organs of the male reproductive system in the sequence of their function in producing and ejaculating seed into the womb, and then comments that he

> would willingly speak a word or two of each of these a part, but lest kind Women (whom my intent is to please in this Treatise (if doing good to them wil please them) should be offended that I explain not those strange Names

[28] Culpeper, *Directory*, sig. A5^{v}. This paragraph might also be read more cynically as a challenge to midwives to prove Culpeper wrong and give up some of their expertise for free rather than slander or boycott his book.

[29] Culpeper likens himself to a prophet at one point in the dedication, reasoning that midwives should accept him as their teacher because "God speaks not now by voice to men and women as formerly he did; but he speaks in, and by Men, and tis no part of Wisdom for Men and Women to stop their Ear against it," adding that "I confess God hath given me some little spark of Knowledge" (*Directory*, sig. A4^{r}).

[30] Culpeper's *Directory* was published eleven times between its first publication and 1700, while *The Compleat Midwife* was printed only six times and was, from 1680 onwards, associated directly with male-authored texts by the Chamberlen family and the deceased Culpeper.

> which the *Rabbies* of our, and former Ages have used to muffle up our Eyes, lest we should see the Truth, and so break their yoke of bondage from off our Necks) lest (I say) they should be offended, I desire them to take notice, that they shall find them all explained in Alphabetical Order at the latter end of the Book.[31]

The sentence begins by vaguely referring to the offense that female readers might take at discussing the male reproductive system in its various parts, but before the sentence introduces the concept of offense it first parenthetically introduces the concept of reading pleasure. Culpeper proposes to "please" his female readers by "doing good to them" with his treatise on male anatomy. But what is this "good"? We might wonder how Culpeper expects knowledge of male reproductive anatomy to be of practical use to midwives, but in a later subsection concerning the yard he specifies that he has undertaken to anatomize this organ because "it conduceth to the teaching of Knowledge to my Country Men and Women, who have been too long reined in with the bridle of Ignorance by Physitians."[32] The "good" may represent the larger moral "good" of Culpeper's project to bring the medical knowledge of the educated elite to the literate masses in an accessible format. Since reproduction, and specifically the generation of legitimate male heirs, was a socially and religiously celebrated expression of sexuality, the "good" might refer to reproduction itself (if one assumes that the information in *A Directory* will benefit married couples). But Culpeper's doubly parenthetical "if doing good to them will please them" suggests a kind of teasing familiarity with his female audience which adds an element of pleasure to this "good." Does the "good" refer to information about sex or to sex itself? Culpeper's list of male reproductive organs, from *Vasa Praeparantia* to *Yard*, describes not only reproductive anatomy but anatomy in action. The narrative of male climax within a book on midwifery harnesses male sexual pleasure into a pro-social, reproductive framework that makes male anatomy morally "good" for English society, as ejaculation in the first chapter will move teleologically to conception and pregnancy in the later chapters. The "good" women might take in reading about male climax, however, is harder to classify. The conditional "if" suggests that not all of his female readers *want* to be done good to by representations of pro-social, procreative sex, hinting that women sometimes desire to have bad things done to them.

Where we might expect the "offense" of such suggestive descriptions to invoke concern for the reader's modesty, Culpeper directs the attention away from sexuality to textuality by explaining that the "offense" he anticipates refers to the use of Latin terms that his female readers will not understand. Here again, however, I suggest that in seeking to "please" his readers with an accessible, English text, he is also facilitating his reader's sexualized pleasure by providing a full glossary at the

[31] Culpeper, *Directory,* sig. B3^{r}.
[32] Culpeper, *Directory,* sig. C1^{r}.

back of his book. While Culpeper's *Directory* certainly affords readers the pleasure of the anatomical gaze through inserted images of the naked female form, this passage also offers non-Latinate readers the opportunity to gaze at bodies usually concealed from view by obscure terminology.[33] In this particular sentence, Culpeper also specifically shifts the gaze away from the female body to the male body his description reveals, making space for multiple avenues of sexual reading pleasure beyond male heterosexual pleasure.

While Culpeper writes his book as a directory for midwives, he offers his female audience reading pleasures that have little to do with the ways they practiced reproductive medicine. Since Culpeper does explicitly anticipate that his "Country Men and Women" will benefit from the information he prints, we can conclude that Culpeper did expect to reach a wider audience than midwives. The "boys" who read Jonas's translation of *Du Partu Hominis* as openly as the tales of Robin Hood may have had reading skills that were equal to or better than those of female midwives. The anatomical illustrations available in most manuals likewise provided those lacking the literacy skills to read the books in full with an opportunity to glean knowledge about the interior and (perhaps more titillating) exterior appearance of the human reproductive system.

Indeed, the most powerful limiting factor for potential readers interested in Raynalde's *The Birth of Mankind* or Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* might have been the price of these volumes. Mary Fissell estimates the median price of a vernacular medical book sold between 1640 and 1740 to be 1s 6d., a price roughly equivalent to one-twentieth of a lower-middle class household's weekly income and one-quarter of a labourer's weekly income.[34] Such prices put new medical books above the means of the middle and labouring classes, but Fissell notes that "the broader second-hand book market may have made such books available to artisans and above."[35] We have records of the numerous editions the *The Birth* went through between 1540 and 1700, but beyond the number of printings recorded, it is difficult to trace reading trends and to know who bought the book, who had access to this book beyond its original purchaser, and what the book's afterlife might have been once its original purchaser relinquished it. If we take Raynalde's anxieties about how to limit his readership as evidence of a cultural assumption that there was a general readership of both men and women of varying ages and marital statuses interested in consuming information about human sexuality, then *The Birth* may well have provided them with the information they sought. While Raynalde addresses a general readership only to try to narrow his audience down to midwives and birth-room attendants, Culpeper does the reverse, establishing a narrow readership of

[33] The images of a naked, pregnant woman dissected are inserted between pp. 40–41 of the 1656 edition.

[34] Fissell, "The Marketplace of Print," 122.

[35] Fissell, "The Marketplace of Print," 122.

practitioners in the title and prefatory material but offering a range of practical and less practical advice in the book itself that will appeal to a general reader.

Where Raynalde dismisses female reading pleasure, Culpeper playfully and enigmatically guides his female readers to what he perceives to be a satisfying reading experience (involving both education and pleasure). Yet while Raynalde openly expressed anxieties that his book would attract young, male, "lewd" readers, Culpeper's book is the one scholars can actually place in a young boy's hands with any certainty. That boy, John Cannon, reflected back as an adult on his sexual experiences as a youth at the turn of the seventeenth-century in his memoirs, recounting his introduction to masturbation at age twelve and his subsequent interest in reading more about sexuality.[36] As Tim Hitchcock writes of Cannon's memoirs, Cannon "was thrilled by reading *Aristotle's Master-piece* and Culpeper's *Midwifery* which he saw as allowing him insight into the 'secrets of nature', and which he avidly studied until his mother caught him masturbating with the latter and took away the book."[37] Though less infamous than Pepys, who notoriously masturbated to *L'éscholle des Filles* in 1668 and described it as "a lewd book, but what do no wrong once to read for information sake," Cannon provides us with rare proof that sexual education and erotica were linked in the seventeenth century, and that readers seeking information might also find pleasure in the information at the same time.[38]

Both Raynalde's *The Birth of Mankind* and Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* thus blend educational representations of sexuality with erotic ones, appealing to multiple readerships and allowing readers to choose and migrate between either interpretation when it suited them. Although Raynalde insists on a firm division between sexual education and erotica, such a division proves unfeasible in the popular print marketplace, where authors are powerless to limit or control circulation. Culpeper's bid to increase circulation in the 1650s and compete with Raynalde's text and others by giving his pleasurable book a legitimate, moral exterior seems to have paid off, as Culpeper's manual was reprinted well into the eighteenth-century. Playful and explicit gynecological reference texts like John Marten's *Gonosologium Novum* would be prosecuted in the eighteenth century,[39] but midwifery texts of the seventeenth century—which presume audiences of professionals possessing the moral character to use representations of sexuality for edification rather than pleasure—seem to have provided the perfect guise for

[36] For a detailed overview and analysis of sexuality in Cannon's memoirs, which exist in manuscript, see Hitchcock, *English Sexualities,* esp. 28–39.

[37] Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, 29.

[38] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 8 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1962), 3:291.

[39] See Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life*, 82, for a list of the accusations made against Marten's medical text, which imitated and borrowed from Venette's earlier erotic work, *Tableau de l'amour conjugal*.

works like Culpeper's, interested in affording general readerships *both* edification and pleasure. Given that midwifery manuals ultimately earned themselves a place in *The Practical Part of Love's* library of erotica, it is unlikely that an educational guise—if it was even a guise—fooled anyone. But the midwifery manual may have afforded readers a plausible deniability that enabled customers to purchase the book, keep it, and display it without shame. While Pepys destroys *L'éscholle des filles* once he has read it, judging that its educational value could not justify or excuse its arousing powers, readers might proudly keep a midwifery manual in the house even though both *A Directory* and *L'éscholle des filles* seek to simultaneously arouse and instruct their readers. In the crowded market of the 1650s, Culpeper's ability to harness both the legitimacy of sexual education and the pleasure of erotica explains perhaps why his manual surpassed the competition.

List of Contributors:

Albrecht Classen is University Distinguished Professor of German Studies at The University of Arizona, focusing on the Middle Ages and the early modern age. In his close to eighty books he has researched the history of women writers, history of mentality, history of everyday life, fundamentals of culture, ecocriticism, gender issues, and xenology. He is the editor of the Handbook of Medieval Studies (2010) and of the Handbook of Medieval Culture (2015), and the editor of the journals Mediaevistik and Humanities Open Access. He has also published books on Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Sex im Mittelalter. His latest monograph deals with The Forest in Medieval German Literature (2015).

Sharonah Fredrick completed her PhD in Hispanic language & Literature at SUNY Stony Brook, specializing in Native American and Sephardic resistance strategies in the Spanish New World empire during the colonial/Early Modern period. Prior to that she taught at Hebrew University for over ten years, and worked in archaeology in Latin America for another ten. She speaks, reads, and publishes in four languages: Spanish, English, Portuguese and Hebrew, and has worked on five continents. She has also published a full-length play, *La Mujer del pirate*, staged at the Julia de Burgos center in NY in 2007, dealing with the corsair past of the Caribbean.

Rosalind Kerr is Professor Emeritus of Drama at the University of Alberta and currently holds a fellowship at the Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, Victoria University, at the University of Toronto. Her book *The Rise of the Diva on the Sixteenth Century Commedia dell'Arte Stage* is now available from University of Toronto Press, March 2015. She has articles forthcoming in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Anglo-Italian Renaissance Literature and Culture, Italian Studies,* and *Quaderni d'Italianistica.* Her current project is a translation of Flaminio Scala's *Il finto marito.*

Asunción Lavrin is Professor Emerita of History, Arizona State University. She is a corresponding member of the Mexican Academy of History and has published books and articles on Spanish American and Mexican Colonial History, on topics such as religious historiography, economic issues related to confraternities and women's convents, sexuality and gender, women's conventual life, as well as

twentieth century women's issues, and feminism in the Southern Cone nations of South America. She is currently engaged in research on the mendicant orders in colonial Mexico.

Liliana Leopardi is Assistant Professor of Art History at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where she teaches courses on the Renaissance and Baroque period, as well as on Ancient Egyptian and Islamic art. Her dissertation focused on Carlo Crivelli. Her research interests lie in reframing the use of ornament in Renaissance paintings, and the intersection of magic and visual/material culture in the 15th and 16th centuries with a particular focus on gems and jewelry believed to have magical powers. Dr. Leopardi has presented her work at numerous conferences including, College Arts Association, Renaissance Society of America, Kalamazoo Medieval Conference, Cambridge University and Vienna University. She was the scholar in residence for the 2013 Exhibition "Gems of the Medici" held at the Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, CA. She is currently writing a book project on gems and magic as discussed in the 16th century manual the *Speculum Lapidum* by the Pesaro physician Camillo Leonardi.

Ian Frederick Moulton is Professor of English in the College of Letters and Sciences at Arizona State University. He is a cultural historian and literary scholar who has published widely on the representation of gender and sexuality in early modern European literature. He is the author of *Love in Print in the Sixteenth Century: The Popularization of Romance* (Palgrave, 2014) and *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), as well as editor and translator of Antonio Vignali's *La Cazzaria*, an erotic and political dialogue from Renaissance Italy (Routledge, 2003). He is also co-editor of *Teaching Early Modern English Literature from the Archives* (MLA, 2015).

David L. Orvis is Associate Professor of English at Appalachian State University. He is coeditor (with Linda Phyllis Austern and Kari Boyd McBride) of *Psalms in the Early Modern World* (Ashgate, 2011) and (with Ryan Singh Paul) of *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship* (Duquesne University Press, 2015). He has published articles in *The Journal of Homosexuality* and *Early Modern Culture* and contributed book chapters to *Shared Space: Reconsidering the Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature* (University of Delaware Press, 2008)*; Performing Pedagogy in Early Modern England: Gender, Instruction, and Performance* (Ashgate, 2011)*; Developments in the Histories of Sexualities: In Search of the Normal, 1600–1800* (Bucknell University Press, 2013)*;* and the *Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). He is currently working on a book-length study tentatively titled *Shakespeare's Queer Marriages*.

Chantelle Thauvette is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. Her work on early modern sexuality appears in *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* and *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. She is currently working on a book that explores female impersonation and erotics in seventeenth-century political satire.